Taming the Turbulence? Leading Issues in the Emergence and Challenges of Private Universities

Professor Paul Omojo Omaji
Vice Chancellor Emeritus
pauoma@gmail.com
+2348070620605

Protocols
Acknowledgements
Outline
A. Introduction
B. Contextual Turbulence
C. Taming the Turbulence?
   – Private Intervention
D. Not Yet Uhuru
E. Going Forward
Introduction
Something about “turbulence”

- Notion (upheaval, disturbance, disorder, etc) = uniquely captivating
- Underneath the chaos, there is order!
Take-off point:

• Discourse of “turbulence in university education in Africa” takes on a unique resonance, considering the life of “The African Child”
Born into...

- Sub-Saharan Africa which harbours 33 of the first 50 poorest countries in the world (15 in West Africa)
- Food insecurity with 60 million Africans at risk and 37% of peers (children) stunted
- More than 50 percent of Africans who suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera and infant diarrhea.
• A land where:
  – every 30 seconds another African child dies of malaria—more than one million child deaths a year.
  – 1 child in 12 dies before fifth birthday
Unpredictability!

Noble Professor?

Political pain?

Educated to what level?

Died before 5?

Died from malaria?

Lived below poverty line?
"the Quality of Life of any Nation cannot be expected to be more than the Quality of the [Higher] Education of her Citizenry and the intentional investment in the Education System". (Oby Ezekwesili, 2013).
Higher education…

• The **most powerful instrument** for growing the wealth and harmony:
  – lays a foundation for sustained economic growth and development
  – generates and adapts knowledge
  – produces qualified human capital
  – promotes international cooperation, and
  – improves competitiveness in the global knowledge based economy.
Contextual Turbulence
Lack of appreciation

“A quick look at the world... shows that ALL the developed countries have massive and strong educational institutions while the under-developed [especially Africa] are bedevilled with perennial lack of the appreciation for the need to take Education serious” (Oby Ezekwesili, 2013).
Lack of appreciation

Several facets, particularly in the 1980s & 1990s. E.g.:

• Low political priority
• Disempowering political control
• Resource (public funding) starvation
Low political priority

• World Bank/UNESCO orthodoxies (in structural adjustment programmes era):
  — Avoid public funding of tertiary education
  — Focus on early childhood, primary and secondary education.

• Many Govts in Africa began to explore ‘cost-sharing schemes’ for tertiary education
• The orthodoxy changed in favour of tertiary education, more clearly from 2005.

World Bank has incorporated High Education within its Africa Action Plans: building capabilities for growth and competitiveness – particular, technological catch-up.
Disempowering political control (Nigerian example)

• Centralisation of authority
• Arbitrariness in decision without consultation
• Block funding through National Universities Commission
• Weakening of academic freedom
Resource starvation

“State funding: race to the bottom”
“Africa is the only region in the world that has experienced a disturbing decrease in the volume of current public expenditure per student”

(World Bank, 2010)
Africa: decline illustration

Public expenditure per tertiary student: % of GDP per capita (World Bank, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Amount</th>
<th>No of Countries</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>% Decline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3229.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>403.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3732.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>248.8</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3400.6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>188.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1371.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>124.7</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total % decline (2000-2013) = 69.1
Staffing:

• Universities - finding it increasingly difficult to maintain adequate teaching staff

“Across Africa and disciplines, on average, only 60-70% of the required faculty positions are filled, and in some departments this is only about 30-40%”
… mainly, because lecturers with PhDs (ideal capacity) are limited!

“About 60 % of lecturers don’t have PhDs and we reject it.”

2012
# Teaching staff-student ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sampled Universities</th>
<th>Ratios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagos State University</td>
<td>1:144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Abuja</td>
<td>1:122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyatta University</td>
<td>1:65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moi University</td>
<td>1:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nairobi</td>
<td>1:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
<td>1:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
<td>1:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Infrastructure

- Buildings are falling into disrepair
- Teaching equipment is not replenished
- Lecture halls are overcrowded

Time wasting

• Staff strikes distort academic years.
  - Nigeria: cumulatively, 33 months were lost in 10 years (2003-13) to strike action by university lecturers.
  - Malawi, Kenya and Swaziland: 10,000 lecturers went on strike in 2012.
Convergence of all these?

- **Transparency and integrity deficits**
- Very weak development-oriented higher education in Africa
  - Low Science, Technology & Innovation
  - Mismatch/inadequate preparation of graduates for market/industry
  - High graduate unemployability, unemployment, underemployment
• Criminality and decadence = rife.

Criminals in the Temple of Learning!!!

“All [except a few?] have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Psalm 14:3)
• The high priests and guardians of our temples are crying out so loud about the desecration of the icons and the values they represent…

• They too, contribute to the malaise (adapted from Okigbo, 2001)
• Staff and students:
  – present forged certificates, commit admission/exam malpractices, steal, plagiarize, commit cultic racketeering and terrorism

• Administrators:
  – award inflated/phony contracts, rent hit-squads, secure false accreditations, etc)
• Universities in Africa ceased to be true to their own [purpose]
• They became an enclave for criminals (corruption-mongers, touts, terrorists, or miscreants) in academic garbs

Centres for the production of non-leaders and misfits.
They stultify growth and development!

There is TURBULENCE!!!
Taming the Turbulence

Private Intervention
• Private intervention in higher education is not new.
• Has long pedigree in most of the continents
  – Bologna, Oxford, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, etc
  – West Africa: Timbuktu University – started as Sankore Madrasah - funded by a wealthy Tuareg woman to breed leaders that are God fearing, just, honest, trustworthy and of excellent moral character
  – Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone by Christian Missionary Society
• But, lost momentum to the public system
  – E.g. in 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, of about 15,000 universities worldwide, only about 2070 (13.8\%) are private

• Post-Independence \textbf{Nigeria}: private intervention struggled for space.
  – 1\textsuperscript{st} generation – abolished by the Military Government in the 1980s
  – Prohibition legislation (Decree) passed
  – Supreme Court ruled in favour of private intervention (Dr Nkaegbu’s case); but the \textbf{body language} of the Govt was clearly \textbf{against} it.
Cinderella met Prince Charming

• Babangida Military Govt lifted the embargo of the previous Government

• Longe Commission Report favoured establishment of private universities under strict minimum standards
  – The first the private universities (Igbiedeon, Babcock and Madonna) took about 7 years to process for approval.

• 1998 National Policy on Education allowed “voluntary agencies, individuals and groups” to establish universities.

• Under President Obasanjo, number of private universities rose from 3 to 41. Today it is 61.
Performance re the driving forces

“We did not make a mistake” (Obasanjo, 2015)

• Quality: huge impact, generally
  – Beware of (mis)use of statistics

• Mentoring: reverse re-engineering especially with regard to moral rebirth

• Access: “minimal” but critical
Illustration

Salem University Under
My watch
Quality

• University driven by PURPOSE
• Dared to be Different: privileged QUALITY over QUANTITY
• 100 per cent accreditation (full & interim) in the first outing
Mentoring

• Indirect: Support of the National Universities Commission
• Intra-University: E.g. Senate participation for young Academics
• Encounter with a first generation public University
  — “You are to mentor us, not we mentoring you”
Access

• 1st year, admitted over 300 students
  – University College, Ibadan: 104
  – University of Nigeria Nsukka: 220
  – Ahmadu Bello University: 426 (most near graduation with London University degrees)
  – University of Ife (now OAU): 244

• Do not despise humble beginning!
Assessment during ICPC University Systems Review

“Highly impressed with the ‘A’ grade take-off and efforts to lower/eliminate corrupt practices ravaging other universities. We urge the Chancellor and the other officers of the University – Chairman BOT, Chairman Council, and VC to keep up the good work”

(Professor Peter Okebukola, 2012).
Private Intervention
Not Yet Uhuru
Challenges
• Aligning with regulatory regime
• Proprietary engagement
• ‘Publicanisation’
  – Trending towards public university malaise
• Resourcing (funding, faculty, equipment, etc)
• Production of industry-fit graduates
Going forward

• Regulation to be: more standardisation, less ‘uniformisation’

• Respect for basic university traditions in the context of private operation discipline

• Checkmate return to moral degeneration

• Political support:
  – tax breaks, mobile student grants, etc (e.g. Australia, Botswana)

• Foster University-Industry Linkages
Going forward

• The Turbulence is Tamable
• A Healthy Private University Sector is Definitely a Potent Factor
• It’s about complementing, not dysfunctionally competing efforts
Thank you for your attention!