

# Access and Quality of Private University Education in Southwestern Nigeria

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This paper assessed carrying capacity, quality of teaching staff, and compliance level of selected private universities in Southwestern Nigeria to extant rules of the National Universities Commission (NUC). The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Two thousand three hundred and twenty-four respondents from the selected universities constituted the sample for the study. Six principal officers, 200 teaching staff, and 1,500 students were selected from the four sampled private universities by using proportionate stratified sampling technique. Two self-designed instruments were used for data collection, while frequency counts and percentages were used for data analysis. The study found remarkable adherence to carrying capacity levels, satisfactory quality of teaching staff, and substantial compliance level to the national admission requirements. It recommended that the federal government should establish scholarship and loans board for students' ease of access to the private universities, NUC should intensify and sustain strict monitoring of academic programmes, and the private universities should carry out enlightenment programmes to ensure quality among other recommendations.

*Keywords:* access, quality, private university education

## Introduction

The demand for and provision of tertiary education in universities, polytechnics/mono-technics and colleges of education are two challenging issues in the contemporary Nigeria. Indeed, both the demand for and provision of higher education have witnessed tremendous expansion since independence, probably because of the relevance of higher education in developing skills for national development. Specifically, Varghese (2002) averred that every economy requires a critical mass of human capital formation to move a nation forward on the path of growth and development.

Sequel to independence in 1960, the government of Nigeria undertook the responsibility of providing higher education to her people. Nigeria has a total of 43 Federal Government-owned conventional and

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specialised universities out of the current 169 universities in Nigeria (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2018). The journey to deregulation of university education in Nigeria began with the 1979 Constitution, which listed education on the concurrent legislative list. This resulted in the establishment of state-owned universities in Nigeria.

The need for more access to private universities in Nigeria has been attributed mainly to the rise in demand for higher education. For example, in 2008, out of 1,054,053 candidates who applied for admission into higher institutions in Nigeria, only 194,521 (18%) were admitted, while the situation was not different in 2009. Similarly, 1,503,931 candidates registered for the 2012 University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) (*Nigerian Tribune*, 21st March, 2012), the trend in the absorptive capacity was not different. Okotoni and Adebakin (2015) further explained that despite the astronomical increase in expansion and privatization in university education (with the establishment of 41 federal, 40 state, and 69 private universities as at 2015), access was only available to less than 30% of the qualified candidates who sought university admission. The problem here is that universities are constantly being inundated with admission requests they cannot meet as the number of candidates applying for admission annually exceeds by far the vacancies available. Despite the advent of private universities, provision for tertiary education is yet to be fully realised. The summary of the demand and absorptive capacity of university admission in Nigeria (2001-2015) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Demand for University Education in Nigeria (2001-2015)*

Academic year	Applications for university placement	Admission to university	Admission as % of application
2001	893,359	106,304	11.90
2002	1,025,988	129,525	12.60
2003	1,172,313	175,358	14.90
2004	1,043,361	108,148	10.40
2005	926,133	125,673	13.10
2006	1,030,670	107,161	10.40
2007	893,259	149,033	16.70
2008	1,028,259	183,420	17.80
2009	1,183,574	211,991	13.87
2010	1,493,611	450,024	30.13
2011	1,503,933	500,058	33.25
2012	1,630,000	477,176	29.27
2013	1,920,000	463,395	24.14
2014	1,790,000	437,707	24.45
2015	1,610,000	485,338	30.15

Sources: Adapted from Omuta (2010); NUC (2015); Daily Trust (2017).

The perennial shortage of admission spaces in the public universities for prospective candidates in Nigeria and the need to increase access to university education and improve the quality of education contributed immensely to the establishment of private universities across Nigeria in order to shore-up the needed human capital development requirements (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2008). Other reasons that gave rise to the establishment of private universities in Nigeria, include but not limited to poor access, coupled with constraints on public revenues, declining quality as well as infrastructural decay, incessant strike actions by members of academic and non-academic staff unions, poor funding and bad management and governance (Adedeji & Bamidele,

2003). In the public universities (federal or state) established by government and non-profit oriented, infrastructural requirements are developed at the convenience of the government, which is not the case with private universities. Quality assurance of private universities has been a source of concern, considering the commercial and profit mind-set of the proprietors. However, it has also been argued that the increasing concern about the quality of education offered in public universities, coupled with indiscipline and other attendant social vices have necessitated the establishment of private universities in Nigeria (Okoroafor, 2013). In view of the foregoing, it becomes imperative to explore new policy options for expanding access to university education through private universities. Nonetheless, whether the existing private universities have significantly contributed to widening access or improving the quality of university education need to be investigated.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study investigated the issues of access to and quality of private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the carrying capacity of selected private universities in Southwestern Nigeria; assessed the quality of teaching staff, examined the compliance level with national admission requirements guideline; and determined the operational compliance level of selected private universities with the legal process established by the NUC. Thus, the following research questions were raised to guide the study.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the factors affecting the carrying capacity of the selected private universities in Southwestern Nigeria?
2. Are there sufficient quality teaching staff in the selected private universities?
3. To what extent have selected private universities complied with the national admission requirements guideline?
4. To what extent do selected private universities comply with the extant rules of the NUC?

### **Literature Review**

In recognition of the tremendous need for investment in human capital largely motivated by the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme, the Regional Government in 1955 increased its investment on education. For instance, between 1954 and 1966, education attracted the largest share of the Western Region's recurrent budget, never below 28.9%. In the 1958-1959 financial years, 41.20% of the total recurrent budget was spent on education alone (Babatunde, 2012). This led to the abolition of tuition fees in primary schools in the then Western Region. Since then, subsequent civilian governments in the region continued to invest in education.

### **Access to University Education in Nigeria**

Access to university education implies making it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to receive it (Education Sector Analysis [ESA], 2003). It means that obstacles that prevent anyone from taking advantage of the opportunities should be removed. For this to be possible, enough classrooms, laboratories and instructional facilities among others should be provided for the learners. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2003) puts "access to tertiary education" as "ensuring equitable access based on merit, capacity, efforts, and perseverance". This definition considers as central, post-secondary opportunity for under-represented groups, such as indigenous people, cultural, ethnic and linguistic minorities, immigrants, refugees, the disabled, and women. It also considers issues of life-long learning that can take place

at any time with due recognition of previously acquired skills through opportunities for adults retraining at the workforce. Additionally, school dropouts and second-chance learners are also central.

### **Establishment of Private Universities in Southwestern Nigeria**

The need for private universities in Nigeria has been attributed to several factors, such as the rise in population of young people, which led to increase in demand for higher education. In 1960, Nigeria had a population of 31,797,000, but by the year 2006, the population had increased to 140,003,542 (National Population Commission [NPC], 2006), and by the year 2010, that number had increased to 150,274,000 (UNDP, 2010). The unplanned population surge in Nigeria has put tremendous pressure on the government's capacity to provide its citizens with more goods and services including university education. Consequently, increase in the number of students has put pressure on the existing higher education facilities. Also, the economic downturn of Nigeria in the last two decades coupled with global economic recession and population explosion created a need for the provision of private entities including private university education to provide some relief to the government.

Furthermore, the admission policy of Nigeria, which placed the states in Southwestern Nigeria as educationally advantaged, does not favour the teeming secondary school leavers seeking university education from the zone. Many of the qualified candidates from the zone are continually being denied admission on yearly basis. It was obvious that prospective candidates need an alternative source for university education, which the public universities could not provide. It is therefore not surprising that 31 out of the 69 currently licensed private universities in Nigeria are situated in the Southwestern geo-political zone. The other reasons adduced are:

- (1) inability of the state to cope with higher education funding;
- (2) mismanagement and wasteful spending of the allocated and granted resources;
- (3) incessant strike actions by the university staff;
- (4) constant university close down and disruption in university calendar owing to staff and student actions;
- (5) the nation's brain drain of experienced staff;
- (6) corruption in high and low places.

These constitute the major reasons for the need for deregulation of higher education in Nigeria.

### **Quality of Private University Education in Nigeria**

Different scholars have different notions of what quality means, thus making comparisons problematic. Nevertheless, quality can be conceived in reference to the standard possessed by an object. The relative usage angle of different nations setting their educational standards will be the backdrop of quality concept in this paper. The NUC was established in 1962 as an advisory agency in the Cabinet Office, which became a statutory body in 1994. It is currently a parastatal in the Federal Ministry of Education. The NUC is responsible for accreditation of universities (public or private) and all academic programmes run in them. This is to control and maintain academic standard in them. It has an arm known as the Standing Committee of Private Universities (SCOPU), which regulates the activities of private universities in Nigeria.

The NUC is statutorily mandated to provide quality assurance for university education in Nigeria with the mission and goal of ensuring development of the university system that guarantees quality and relevant education for national development and global competitiveness.

## Methodology

This study covers four out of the 23 private universities currently in operation in Southwestern Nigeria, representing 18%. Four private universities were selected based on their year of establishment/age, which totally removed element of bias on the part of the researchers. The four universities are as follows:

- (1) Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State (1999);
- (2) Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State (2001);
- (3) Covenant University, Sango-Ota, Ogun State (2002);
- (4) Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Lagos State (2002).

For ethical considerations, the four universities were referred to as A, B, C, and D without reference to the order of arrangement in discussions in the study.

### Research Design, Population/Sample and Sampling Technique

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design, while the population for the study is comprised of the staff and students of the four selected private universities, using the purposive sampling technique. The four private universities selected in Southwestern Nigeria are: Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo; Bowen University, Iwo; Covenant University, Sango-Ota; and Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos. Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo was replaced with Redeemer's University, Ede as the researchers were not granted access to data from the institution (see Table 2).

Table 2

#### *Sampling Procedure for the Selection of Respondents in the Study Area*

Universities	Staff respondents sample	Students' respondents sample
Bowen University, Iwo	56	320
Covenant University, Sango-Ota	56	400
Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos	56	380
Redeemer's University, Ede	56	400

### Instrumentation

The instruments used for the study were two sets of self-developed questionnaires tagged: Management and Staff Questionnaire on Administration of Selected Private Universities (MQAPU) and Students' Questionnaire on Management of Selected Private Universities (SQMPU) in Southwestern Nigeria. The questionnaires elicited demographic information on the age, sex, and educational level of the respondents in all the selected private universities. Also, a four-point Likert-type scale, structured items were employed to further elicit information from the respondents. Secondary data were obtained from past records of relevant offices and agencies. The Cronbach test of 78% showed reliability of the instruments at 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative data collected were analysed by using the content analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts, percentages, and averages were applied for quantitative data analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### Research Question One: What are the Factors Affecting the Carrying Capacity of the Selected Private Universities in Southwestern Nigeria?

This section presents the respondents' views on the adherence of the sampled private universities to their carrying capacity using Likert-type scale of 1-4 by assigning weights to the extent of agreement or

disagreement with each item as shown below: 1 = “Strongly disagree”; 2 = “Disagree”; 3 = “Agree”; and 4 = “Strongly agree” (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Factors Affecting the Carrying Capacity of the Selected Private Universities*

S/N	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N = 224 $\bar{x}$	Remarks
		%	%	%	%		
1	The NUC has sanctioned the university in the past for running unaccredited academic programmes.	6	12	51	31	1.73	Disagree
2	Fear of sanction by NUC has compelled this university not to exceed its carrying capacity.	41.5	41	9.5	8	3.15	Agree
3	Administration is in line with the philosophy of the proprietor of the university.	52	31.5	8	8.5	3.28	Agree
4	Limited infra structure is a major hindrance to meeting the university's carrying capacity.	24	65.5	5.5	5	3.08	Agree
5	High tuition fees have restricted the carrying capacity of the university.	30.5	31	20	19.5	3.20	Agree
6	Shortage of manpower (academic staff) is responsible for the limited carrying capacity of the university.	28	36	25	11	2.67	Agree
7	Scholarship awards/granting of loans to students will enhance enrolment in the universities.	62	34.5	0.5	3	3.58	Agree

Source: Ogunleye (2017).

Notes. % = Percentage;  $\bar{x}$  = Mean; and N = Total number of respondents.

The above assertions were set out for research question one. In addition, the mean value ( $\bar{x}$ ) summarises the strength of the responses which tended towards the statements by using a decision rule: where ( $\bar{x} > 2.5$ ), means more respondents tended toward “Agreement”; and where ( $\bar{x} < 2.5$ ), more respondents tended towards “Disagreement”. The mean response of 3.68 indicated “Agreement”. Therefore, adherence to the carrying capacity has, to a remarkable agreement level, enhanced the quality of instruction in the universities.

Basic infrastructure, high tuition fees charged, and shortage of academic staff were found to be hindrances for the universities' carrying capacities.

On whether students with low admission prerequisites were first admitted into preparatory/preliminary degree programmes to enable them embark on degree programmes, a cumulative percentage of 90.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, while only 9.5% (3.51) disagreed as supported by the mean of the responses, which indicated agreement with the assertion. With a mean of 3.58, there was an affirmation that scholarship awards/granting of loans to students will enhance enrolment in the private universities.

In the same vein, there was 96.5% agreement by the respondents on the view that the sampled private universities adhered to their respective carrying capacities, while the NUC has effective control over the academic programmes of the sampled universities.

Table 4

*Enrolment in Private Universities (2010-2013)*

Year	No. of private universities	% contribution to total enrolment
2007	34	3.4
2009	14.7	5
2013	50	10.4

Source: Obasi, Akuchie, and Obasi (2014).

It is important to note that the total enrolment in the entire private universities as of 2013 was less than 11% contribution to the total national enrolment, which is about 5% intake of a single first generation university.

In 2016, the official enrolment in two of the selected private universities was as indicated in Table 5:

Table 5

*Enrolment in Two of the Sampled Private Universities*

Universities	NUC quota	No. admitted	Difference
C	2,500	2,162	+338
B	800	1,290	-490

Source: Obasi, Akuchie, and Obasi (2014).

Though the enrolment figure of University C in 2016 was encouraging, it must be pointed out that nearly all the private universities are reluctant to volunteer accurate information concerning their enrolment figures for fear of being sanctioned by the NUC and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). It becomes more obvious as the NUC has repeatedly warned that it would sanction universities that exceed their admission quota, which is predicated on national manpower requirements, the resources, and facilities available in each university. To this end, the research effort is designed to give the universities the latitude to enrol students based on their infrastructural capacity without compromising quality.

This study also elicited information about the selected universities within the study area by discussing their key features, such as year of establishment, staff strength (academic, non-academic, full-time, and part-time staff), and accreditation of academic programmes in the universities.

It was revealed that the set of selected universities were established within the year 1999 to 2005. This indicates that they are relatively homogenous in terms of their year of creation and operation. Thus, they could be used as measurable samples for access provision, quality control, and evaluation of standard of the private university sector. Also, on the staff strength, no private university has a large number of staff as that of any public universities. However, more compliance is still obtainable at the private universities. A remarkable finding about the staff strength in the selected universities indicated availability of numerous adjunct/part-time lecturers.

Accreditation exercise was claimed to be taking place at the selected universities at regular intervals of five years. This exercise however, is a well-packaged assignment in all the private universities and a determinant to the commencement or sustenance of new or existing academic programmes. At these universities, most of the programmes available are in management and social sciences with some in basic sciences.

### **Research Question Two: Are There Sufficient Quality Teaching Staff in the Selected Private Universities?**

This section presents data analysis and interpretation of the respondents on the universities support for quality service delivery of the teaching staff in the selected private universities. Descriptive analysis was carried out on a number of items on Table 6.

Table 6

*Assessment of the Universities' Teaching Staff Support for Quality Service Delivery*

S/N	Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		%	%	%	%
1	This university management provides employees with opportunities necessary for high quality teaching service delivery.	35.8	46.9	6.1	11.2
2	The university management enhances the quality of service given by employees.	47.5	38.4	12.1	2.0
3	This university provides opportunities for career development of employees.	44.6	35.6	15.8	4.0
4	Promotion of academic staff is based on academic publications.	34.3	40.2	22.6	2.9
5	Only qualified and competent staffs are hired.	38.6	32.7	22.8	5.9
6	The university invests in academic and professional development of staff.	36.3	37.3	15.7	10.8
7	Academic staff training needs are met and unbiased.	25.3	53.5	17.2	4.0
8	Academic staffs who do not meet academic publication requirements are denied promotion.	27.0	57.0	14.0	2.0

Source: Ogunleye (2017).

From the analysis, 83% of respondents agreed that management of the selected private universities provided employees with opportunities necessary for promotion of high quality teaching service delivery. Similarly, 86% of the respondents agreed that the internal mechanism in the selected universities engendered quality service delivery by the employees. It could be deduced that the selected private universities provided opportunities for career development of employees. Also, 74% respondents agreed that promotion of academic staff in the selected private universities was based on meeting required academic publications. At the same time, the vast majority of the respondents agreed that the universities' employees were qualified and competent. In the area of on the job training, 71% of the respondents agreed that the selected private universities invest in academic and professional development of their employees. It is evident that the promotion of the academic employees is hinged on publication requirements.

Table 7 shows that the ratio of full- and part- time academic staff in the sampled universities. The quality of instruction in the private universities was a function of quality of the teaching staff, which would impact directly on the product value of the sampled universities.

Table 7

*Percentage of Full- and Part- Time Academic Staff of Responding Selected Universities*

Universities	Full-time staff		Part-time staff		Total	
	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)	No.	Percentage (%)
Covenant	579	93.5	40	6.5	619	100
Redeemer's	500	90.1	50	9.1	550	100
Bowen	310	72.1	120	27.9	430	100

Source: Ogunleye (2017).

### **Research Question Three: To What Extent Have the Selected Private Universities Complied With National Admission Requirements Guideline?**

The respondents for this section were the management and staff members of the sampled universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Responses were analysed and discussed accordingly.

From the responses, the universities conducted accredited programmes as supported by the mean of the



responses (3.09). There were 81% of the respondents who agreed that the NUC had sanctioned the universities for non-compliance with national admission requirements. There were also 73% of the respondents who agreed on enrolments being low in the private universities due to high tuition fees charged, as indicated in the Table 8.

Table 8

*Compliance Level of Selected Private Universities With National Admission Requirements*

S/N	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N = 224	
		%	%	%	%	X	Remarks
1	This university run only accredited programmes.	70	25.5	3.5	5	3.09	Agree
2	Students with low prerequisites are first admitted into preparatory/preliminary degree programmes to enable them embark on degree programmes.	60.5	30	0	9.5	3.51	Agree
3	Extension of grants to the university by government would reduce the cost of tuition and other fees paid by students.	51.5	30.7	5.3	12.5	3.16	Agree
4	NUC requirements have restricted students' enrolment.	12.3	6.2	30.7	51.8	2.21	Disagree
5	Enrolments are low in the private universities due to high tuition fees.	37	35.5	16.5	11	2.93	Agree
6	The NUC had in the past sanctioned the university for non-compliance with national admission requirements.	36.5	44.5	6	13	3.12	Agree

Source: Ogunleye (2017).

Notes. % = Percentage;  $\bar{x}$  = Mean; and N = Total number of respondents.

#### **Research Question Four: To What Extent did the Selected Private Universities Comply With Extant Rules of NUC?**

The university management and staff constituted the respondents due to their vast working experience.

Table 9

*National Universities Commission's Control Level Over the Universities*

S/N	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N = 224	
		%	%	%	%	X	Remark
1	The Board of Directors/Governing Board often interferes with the internal administration of the university.	43	50.2	2.5	4.3	3.34	Agree
2	Re-accreditation exercise by the NUC is at regular intervals.	71	24.5	1.7	2.8	3.65	Agree
3	The Federal Ministry of Education (NUC) had effective control over the academic programmes of the university.	33	61	4.3	1.7	3.23	Agree

Source: Ogunleye (2017).

Majority of respondents 93.2% agreed that the Board of Directors/Governing Board of the selected private universities often interfere with the internal administration of the universities, with the mean response of 3.34 in the affirmative. Re-accreditation exercise by the NUC was found to be at regular intervals, an indication that the NUC performs its statutory oversight functions in the private universities.

The Federal Ministry of Education through the NUC also has effective control over the academic programmes of the universities. It could therefore be inferred from the responses that the NUC had effective control over the academic programmes of the sampled universities and by inference other private universities in Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

Examination of the carrying capacity of the private universities from policy documents of the NUC and JAMB revealed that over the years, all the private universities put together had not been able to meet their carrying capacity in spite of the teeming population of admission seekers. It was found that the tuition fees charged by these universities were far above the reach of a vast majority of Nigerians. Data on enrolment in private universities attest to the low level in private universities as exemplified in Table 4.

Despite the number of private universities that were established, enrolment in them has been relatively low. According to the World Education Services, as cited in Ogunleye (2017), the small number of UTME applicants to private universities indicates that private universities account for only a small percentage of Nigeria's total enrolment, which was 1,513,371 as at 2011.

Part of the arguments advanced for the low enrolment figures in the nation's private universities in addition to high fees, were inadequate facilities and equipment to accommodate increased enrolment figures due to constraint of funds. The Federal Ministry of Education (2009) in the African Educational Research Network stated that inadequate and obsolete infrastructure were some of the factors militating against the carrying capacity in both the public and privately owned universities in Nigeria. This is where the views of respondents for government intervention in the management of private universities in Nigeria become vital. Okoroafor (2013) argued for a mixture of public policy interventions in the funding of private universities, with specific reference to direct budgetary allocation to private higher education institutions by the government. Similarly, TETFund could also fund physical infrastructure and critical facilities, such as libraries, hostels, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment, sponsoring of research activities and capacity training in the private universities.

If Nigeria is genuinely desirous of active private participation in university education, there is the need to embrace the global practice where governments support initiatives in the private education sector of their respective countries. This practice is obtainable in Japan, New Zealand, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, and several other regions of the world. There is no doubt that the nation stands to gain in all ramifications if private universities are fully entrenched and supported.

The implication of the poor funding of education is inhibition of access to university education and by extension other forms of tertiary education. The challenge of access which impacts directly on the carrying capacity of the universities has, according to Odunayo (2013), been further compounded by the NUC that pegged the number of students that can be admitted yearly by each university in Nigeria. This is made clearer by the Federal Ministry of Education (2009) that noted that the carrying capacity of the Nigeria university system was at 150,000 per annum against the actual demand of more than one million candidates on yearly basis. This will not augur well for the indigent students who could also not afford to go to private universities mostly because of their inability to meet high cost of tuition charged, which is above the income of a vast majority of Nigerians.

Responses from the selected private universities indicated a positive report on the quality of the teaching staff in the selected universities. Universities according to Susptan (2003) are obviously desirous of recognition as providers of good quality higher education as such universities are constantly finding ways of demonstrating quality output as research alone is not sufficient to ensure the reputation of a university.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2009) gave the number of academic staff in the Nigeria university sector as of 2006 to be 27,394, while about 50,000 lecturers were required for effective teaching delivery across

the nations' universities then. Further to this, UNESCO (2007) as cited in Yusuf (2012) opined that there is an overwhelming evidence suggesting that teacher quality, quantity, and motivation exert positively on a host of school variables, such as enrolment, participation, and achievement of students. To this end, arguably, the implication of the shortfall of academic staff, according to Akpan (2014), includes inability to meet carrying capacity, high academic staff/student ratio impose severe stress on the academic staff.

Akindele (2013) pointed out that private universities are established for profit making, hence many lecturers in the private universities are retirees who apart from being too old to deliver may be bereft of fresh ideas. Just as this may be, the wealth of experience of this group of lecturers could also enhance academic/scholarly delivery in teaching and research. However, Obasi (2006) and Isaac (2007) argued that academic staff in the private universities worldwide is complemented by large number of part-time academic staff and a very small number of full-time academic staff. In a study carried out by Varghese (2004), it was found that reliance on part-time academic staff is a common feature of private universities irrespective of their location and age. Verghese explained further that there are occasions where private universities operate without any regular staff. Thaiver (2008) argued that available evidence suggests that there is a trend of drawing academic staff from older public universities to complement full-time staff in the private universities which is called "moonlighting".

Arising from the above, the ratio of full-time and part-time staff in the selected universities is in conformity with what obtains in other parts of the world and Nigeria is not an exception. It is, however, the opinion of the researchers to urge the universities to continue to monitor the service delivery of employees in the sector. This is against the background of the fact that the academic programmes of private universities in Nigeria are circumscribed (Olayiwola, 2008, as cited in Ogunleye, 2017). Therefore, it is vital to focus on quality delivery in the emerging private universities. Private universities have become an integral part of Nigeria's educational system. It is therefore the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure its stability.

Findings showed that the NUC, which is the supervisory agency of the private universities, has effective control over them. Also, that the universities complied with the NUC and JAMB admission requirements, which constitute the first step towards quality assurance. The sampled private universities operate regular programmes where their candidates emerge successful from admissions processed by JAMB. In view of the fact that admission to Nigerian universities is centralised, private universities may not have the latitude to bend the national admission requirements. Students, however, could be admitted for remedial programmes to make up for their deficiencies before being admitted into the mainstream programmes. Furthermore, apart from meeting the national requirements, candidates must satisfy faculty requirements which vary from one institution to the other.

Findings showed that none of the universities selected for the study had been reprimanded by the NUC, with the exception of University D that did not respond to the staff questionnaire. The sampled universities had equally not earned withdrawal of accreditation status. The universities also confirmed that they receive NUC visitation at regular intervals. For instance, the private universities religiously observe 75% attendance requirement of lectures before being allowed to write examinations in the courses offered by students. This is a manifestation of the fact that compliance level of private universities with operational guidelines of NUC is very high.

The NUC has, in partnership with the private universities, exercised its mandate of improving the quality of education in the nation's university system, as well as orderly development and management of university education in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This paper assessed carrying capacity, quality of teaching staff, and compliance level of selected private universities in Southwestern Nigeria to extant rules of the NUC. The study covered 23 private universities currently in operation in Southwestern Nigeria, out of which four were selected based on their year of establishment/age. The study generally found remarkable adherence to carrying capacity levels, satisfactory quality of teaching staff, and substantial compliance level to the national admission requirements. The study concluded that the private universities selected complied with the statutory operational due process of the NUC in terms of the quality of staff, carrying capacity stipulations, compliance with admission requirements and with extant rules of the NUC.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Sequel to the findings emanating from this study, the following recommendations would engender access and quality of higher education as it affects private universities in Southwestern Nigeria in particular and the nation as a whole:

In order to increase the nation's participation in university education, federal and state governments should resuscitate the policy of scholarships, bursary awards and Loans Board and extend same to students of private universities as practiced in other parts of the world like the United States of America, Canada, Japan, and Kenya among others.

To entrench the establishment of private universities in Nigeria, private universities should as a deliberate policy be encouraged to commence part-time studies to cater for the teeming admission seekers who are unable to secure admission to regular academic programmes due to no fault of theirs, and to also cater for several qualified working class citizens who are desirous of acquiring university education and have the means of paying the fees.

The study averred that the NUC should sustain its supervisory functions on the private universities in order to ensure that quality delivery is not compromised. To this end, accreditation and re-accreditation exercise of private universities should be strictly adhered to. Sanctions and commendations should be applied as appropriate. At the same time, the carrying capacity of the private universities should be closely monitored by the NUC and progressively expand same as the private university system grows.

It is recommended that private universities should do a lot of public enlightenment to convince the general public that the entry requirements into the private universities are not compromised and that certificates issued to students are earned. As a corollary to this, the public needs to be convinced that qualified teachers are employed in the private universities.

Private universities are encouraged to establish and sustain strong alumni networks to project the image of the universities.

Lastly, it may not be out of place for the nation to commence birth regulation policies to check population explosion without adequate provision for such.

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