

AFRICAN EXPERIENCE WITH HIGHER EDUCATION: CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

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**Augustus A. Adeyinka
Faculty of Education
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an outline of the development of university education in Africa, focusing on the earliest roles of the Christian missionaries. It highlights the process of transformation of the training colleges in Sierra Leone, Cape of Good Hope and Stellenboch to full-fledged universities – Fourah Bay College, UNISA and Fort Hare. Thereafter, the paper outlines the major issues in the growth and development of the African university system, with considerable emphasis on the emergence of private higher educational institutions and the opportunities, constraints and challenges for future development. An integral part of the paper was the analysis and presentation of ideas provided by staff of the University of Botswana, on the opportunities, constraints and challenges for future development of the University of Botswana.

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education covers all categories of formal instruction following secondary schooling. At the lowest level, tertiary education is provided in higher colleges (such as the Yaba Higher College,), technical colleges, colleges of technology, colleges of education (such as the six colleges of education in Botswana) and institutes of health sciences (as in Botswana) leading to the award of certificates or diplomas in various disciplines. At a higher level, tertiary education is provided in universities, leading to the award of bachelor's, masters, and doctoral degrees. Our emphasis in this paper is on university education.

The word university derives from the Latin word *universitas*, meaning a group of scholars or intellectuals, men and women from all parts of the world gathered together for the pursuit of research, the sharing of the findings of such research and the dissemination of knowledge to others outside the citadel of learning (Sinclair 2000; Boyd 1966). Part of the educational development of the late medieval period was the rise of universities, the earliest ones being at Bologna (in Northern Italy, founded in 1088) and Paris, followed by Oxford and Cambridge in the 12th and 13th centuries (Boyd, 1966).

THE EARLY UNIVERSITIES

Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone

The earliest university in Africa was the University of Timbuktu where Mansa Musa and Ali- Maghili were known to have taught Islamic Law and Literature. However, historians of higher education in Africa tend to refer to Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, as the earliest institution of higher education in Africa - apparently because it was the first university of the Western type. It was opened in 1827, but it did not acquire a university status until May 1876, when it was affiliated to the University of Durham (Ajayi, Goma and Johnson, 1996, p. 23). On the institution's curriculum, Ajayi, Goma and Johnson had this to say:

The curriculum was drawn up in Durham. Durham teachers were to set the papers and mark the scripts. For both the B.A. (pass) degree and the Licentiate of Theology, the needs of candidates for the Ministry of the Church of England dictated the contents of the course- Biblical Studies, the Classics, English History up to the Conquest, and Mathematics. The only adaptation that was possible was to supplement it with a non-examining course in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Proposals for Law, Medicine, Science, Agriculture, Economics, Engineering and Architecture, not to mention African Studies, were washed off:(Ajayi et al;1996, p. 23).

Fourah Bay remained the only university in West Africa until 1948 when the university college, Ibadan was founded. It was a product of Christian missionary efforts.

UNISA and Fort Hare

The opening of the UNISA and Fort Hare University were also the results of Christian missionary efforts. As a result of private initiatives, some of the high profile colleges in South Africa tried to push beyond secondary education. UNISA grew out of the University of Cape of Good Hope. It became the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 1916. Similarly, the Victoria College at Stellenboch became the University of Fort Hare in 1969. UNISA and Fort Hare provided the stimuli for the establishment of other universities in South Africa, to serve the varying needs of the white, coloured and black populations in South Africa. Today, there are 23 universities in South Africa, some of these being the products of merging two or more tertiary institutions, as part of the transformation process and government's cost-saving initiatives..

COLONIAL EXPERIENCE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

The success of Fourah Bay, UNISA and Fort Hare encouraged the Africans in West and Southern Africa to desire more institutions of higher learning. This prompted the colonial administrations in both regions to facilitate the opening of more universities. For West Africa, two commissions were set up concurrently in 1943. Elliot Commission was mandated to report on the number of higher educational institutions that could be established in West Africa, while the Asquith Commission would report on the type of relationship that should exist between the proposed colonial university colleges and the University of London. While the Elliot Commission recommended the establishment of a university college in West Africa, to be cited at Ibadan, the Asquith Commission recommended the implementation of a 'scheme of special relationship' with the University of London. The establishment of the university college, Ibadan, in 1948, was therefore the outcome of the Elliot Commission Report of 1945, while the scheme of special relationship with the University of London was the outcome of the Asquith Commission Report of the same year (Taiwo 1980; Ajayi *et al* 1996). The opening of the

University College, Ibadan influenced the growth and development of similar institutions in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa.

THE GROWTH OF THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The experience gained during the colonial period propelled the various governments and peoples in Africa to aspire to have institutions of higher learning in their respective countries. In Nigeria for example, the Ashby commission was set up in April 1959 to conduct investigations into Nigeria's need in the field of post school certificate and higher education over the next twenty years (Nigeria, 1960). Following government acceptance of the report on the eve of Nigerian independence in September 1960, the Nigerian government embarked an aggressive drive for the provision of higher education in Nigeria from the time of independence in October 1960. One of the first steps in this direction was the upgrading of the University College Ibadan, to the status of a full fledged university in September 1962. The present writer was one of the first products of the new institution in June 1965. This was the beginning of the birth of the so-called "Ashby Universities" popularly known as the first generation universities in Nigeria. The example of Nigeria was followed by other countries in English speaking Africa where the wind of change was blowing political independence and education for self-employment and responsible citizenship. Between 1960 and the year 2000, therefore, every independent country in Africa had its own university or universities. Table 1 below shows the growth of the African higher education system.

Table 1
The growth of the African University system, 1827-2006*

Countries	Periods				Total
	1827-1900	1901-1950	1951-2000	2001-2006	
Botswana	-	-	1+	-	1
Ghana	-	-	5	-	5
Kenya	-	2	7	-	9
Lesotho	-	-	1	-	1
Malawi	-	-	2	-	2
Mauritius	-	-	2	-	2
Namibia	-	-	1	-	1
Nigeria	-	1**	35	35	71
S-Leone	1	-	3	-	4

S-Africa	-	8	9	6	23++
Sudan	-	2	28	-	30
Swaziland	-	-	1	-	1
Tanzania	-	-	8	2	10
Uganda	-	-	11	-	11
Zambia	-	-	2	-	2
Zimbabwe	-	-	6	3	9

**Source:* Commonwealth universities year book. Anglophone Africa only

** University College, Ibadan, opened in 1948; became a full fledged university in 1962

+ University of Botswana started in January 1964 as a constituent part of the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland (UBBS); became part of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) in 1966; university of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS) in 1976; University of Botswana in July 1982.

++ As a result of the recent merging of tertiary institutions in South Africa, the total number was reduced from 32 to 23

EMERGENCE OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Privatisation of education

The role of every responsible government is to provide education for all its citizens from primary to university, but with dwindling resources most countries in Africa were unable to afford this luxury, particularly in the 1990s. One logical way out was to shift a considerable part of the education burden away from government with the Jomtien Declaration of Education for all in 1990, African governments committed itself to the provision of compulsory and free basic education for all children, but gradually evolved strategies gift for involving citizens in the financing of higher education. The most outstanding strategy was privatization. This has taken different forms, including: *Privatisation of services in cost sharing*. This is more related to academic programmes. Cost sharing could be of two forms – cost recovery and delayed payment. Cost recovery is effected mainly through levying fees from direct beneficiaries. The issue of delayed payment comes when students are supported through loan scholarship schemes, which they have to repay at a later date. In the 1990s, the levying of fees became a very common feature in many countries and student loans were embraced by many countries' including Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi, etc. Some countries, such as Uganda and Kenya (Court, 1999; Kiamba, 2003) have introduced a system of private sponsored students where the students pay a high rate of fees, while the government- sponsored students pay ow of fees.

Public financed privatization. The voucher system is an example of promoting competition and private sectors through public funding. It permits parents to choose schools and universities for their children. Some states in the USA, such as Florida, have already legislated on this issue. It is expected that the voucher be implanted in other states in the USA. New Zealand embraced a voucher system on a big scale in the 1990s, but realized after a decade that it led to the widening of educational disparities between groups.

Corporatisation of universities. Some universities have established cost units, companies or corporations with operational autonomy. The corporation of public universities allows them to borrow money, acquire investment shares and enter into business ventures to meet a major share of operating expenses. Many universities in Africa have established cost centres either at department or university levels to regulate income generated from various sources. For example, the dar-es-Salaam University Tanzania has created for-profit companies within the university. These units/centres enjoy a high degree of operational autonomy as in the case of private companies and corporations. (Varghese, 2004, P7)

The role of the private sector in higher education

There are three distinct types of private higher education.

i) State-supported Private institutions

These are the institutions that receive some financial support from government. In return, their activities are regulated by government and its agents. Activities so regulated include fees payable by pupils and curricular offerings, this type is common where federal government supports state owned or individual owned private institutions.

ii) Not-for-profit institutions

Private institutions that have no profit making motives are owned and operated by trusts that rely heavily on endowments and fees collected from students. They are mostly self financing institutions, common with religious organizations

iii) *Profit making higher institutions*

These are established with the main objective of making money. For-profit institutions are the most common in Africa, in countries where the demand for education is higher than the supply, for example Nigeria.

Growth and expansion of higher education in Africa

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education shows that they are the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa. These countries had a low base in 1980. Despite the progress made, the enrolment ratio still remains at 3.9 percent compared with a GER of 51.6 percent in the developed world.

Table 2
Gross enrolment ratios (GER) higher education

	1980	1997
World total	12.3	17.4
Developed countries	36.2	51.6
Least developed countries	1.8	3.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.7	3.9
Arab States	9.6	14.9
Latin America and Caribbean	13.7	19.4
East Asia and Oceania	3.8	10.8
<u>South Asia</u>	<u>4.3</u>	<u>7.2</u>

Source: UIS 2003

The Sub-Saharan African countries have one of the lowest GERs in tertiary education. In 2000, the GER in higher education in SSA was 3.5% only. In 1970, a majority of the countries in SSA had an enrolment ratio less than one percent. The situation has changed considerably in the past three decades. No country (or which data are available) has reported an enrolment ratio of less than one percent in 2000 (Table 2). A majority of the African countries in 2000 have an enrolment ratio of less than five percent. This, no doubt, is positive development and indicates the progress of higher education. In this

region. However, the distance between African countries and countries in other regions have widened due to the slow progress made in this region. This is reflected in terms of variation in GER. A more detailed analysis will indicate that most of the countries in Africa have enrolment ratios of less than five percent.

Table 3
Gross enrolment ratio for higher for high education for higher Saharan Africa

	1980	1990	2000
Botswana	1,2	3,2	5,0
Ghana	1,6	1,4	3,0
Kenya	0,9	1,6	3,0
Lesotho	1,0	1,3	3,0
Malawi	0,5	0,6	...
Mauritius	1,0	3,5	11,0
Namibia	...	3,3	6,0
Nigeria	2,7	4,1	...
Sierra Leone	0,8	1,3	2,0
South Africa	...	13,2	15,0
Sudan	1,7	3,0	7,0
Swaziland	3,6	4,1	5,0
Uganda	0,5	1,2	3,0
Zambia	1,5	2,3	2,0
Zimbabwe	1,3	5,2	4,0

Sources: (UNESCO, 1999)

The GER in higher education remains low in most of the sampled countries. In a majority of the countries, only two countries (South Africa and Mauritius) have GERs higher than 10 percent. This clearly shows the urgent need for these countries to bridge the gap in enrolment between developed and developing countries. UNESCO data on higher education show that there is an urgent need for countries in the African region to expand their enrolment in higher education. The growth of the private sector is seen as one of the viable alternatives.

Private higher education is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing segments of post-secondary education in early at the turn of the 21st century (Altbach, 1999). There are numerous reasons for their emergence on a large scale (Varghese, 2004):

1. The inability of the public sector to satisfy the growing social demand for higher education has necessitated the entry of the private sector in order to expand access conditions.
2. The changing political view of large scale public subsidies to social sectors will reduce investment possibilities in the 'productive sectors' and hence the overall growth potentials of the economy.
3. In many countries, the demand for courses and subjects of study had changed and public universities were thus unable to respond to this phenomenon.
4. In countries where the public sector is criticised for inefficiency, the private sector is increasingly promoted for its efficiency in operation.
5. In many centrally planned economies, the transition from state planning to market forces was associated with the expansion of the private sector in higher education. In fact, privatization of education – especially higher education - was an integral part of the reform measures and, at times, of the conditionality for receiving external funding support during the transition period.

Kenya is one of the few countries where private universities have a longer history and co-existed with public universities. In Kenya, the *Kamunge Report* (Presidential Working Party on Education, 1988) recommended cost sharing in education and the establishment of private and *Harambe* institutions. In 1991, the World Bank, in advancing credit assistance, prevailed upon the government to restrict the growth of public universities to no more than three percent per annum up to the 2017. These developments encouraged the development of a large number of private universities and institutions in Kenya..

Nigeria had a long history to legislate in favour of private higher education institutions. Although initiated in the 1980s, the aspirations for the establishment of private higher education institutions became legal and authorized only in the 1990s. When the law on

private higher education became effective in the 1990s, many private higher education institutions were established (Jibril, 2003).

In Uganda too, the legislative measures on private higher education institutions got momentum only in the 1990s.

Size and spread of Private Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE) in Africa

Today, the private sector is the fastest growing segment in higher education in many countries in Africa. This is more so in terms of number of institutions. In fact, the number of private universities outnumbers the public universities in many countries, particularly in Nigeria, where the resources are apparently unlimited.. However, in many instances, private universities continue to be small and they account for a relatively low share of total enrolment. Initially, Kenya led the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa. They were soon joined by Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Cameroon, etc. In general, Francophone African countries lagged behind their Anglophone counterparts in terms of a move towards the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa (Levy, 2003). As of now, the Sub-Saharan countries have more than 100 private universities, and more than half of them were established in the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1999, nearly 65 private universities were established in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2002). It is difficult to obtain information on private sector institutions in many countries. Table 4 below provides information on limited number of countries. The number of private higher education institutions is large in many countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Tanzania, etc. In many countries the private institutions outnumber the public universities and institutions of higher education. However, in terms of enrolment, the public institutions still dominate the scene in Africa.

Table 4
Private higher education institutions and universities in Africa

Country	Private
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Benin	27
Cameroon	17
Ghana	28
Nigeria	13
Kenya	14
Senegal	48
Tanzania	10
Uganda	15
<u>Zimbabwe</u>	<u>4</u>

Source : (Teferra and Altbach, 2003)

Ownership of institutions of private higher education

The ownership pattern of private institutions of higher education varies among countries.

Basically, there are six types, as follows: (Varghese, 2004):

- i) PIHEs operating like multinationals;
- ii) PIHEs operating in collaboration with foreign institutions;
- iii) Foreign collaborations established through the government or public universities;
- iv) Religious organizations;
- v) Private firms established by nationals and operating within the national confine;
- vi) Collaboration within institutions of the same country. (Varghese, 2004):

CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

Most countries in Africa are currently at peace, both internally, and with one another. Universities in Africa therefore have the needed peaceful social and political environment to develop as centers of excellence in a variety of disciplines. Countries like Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and Nigeria are also to a high degree economically stable. Universities in Africa have the opportunity to use this economic stability to develop and market their programmes. Human resources are also to a large extent available to push the universities forward. Further, the universities in Africa have the global market at hand to draw highly qualified academic and top management staff. With the steady growth in population and the consistent growth and development of the secondary school systems in Anglophone African Countries, the universities have the opportunity to search for and draw adequate number of students from a readily available pool of qualified candidates (World Bank 1994, 1995; Abagi and Nzomo, 2001; AAU 2004; Court 1999; Jibiri 2003)

CONSTRAINTS TO DEVELOPMENT

The continued disturbances in Sierra Leone, Niger Delta and Sudan have the potential to militate against the development of higher education in those areas. Also, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the infected and the affected is clearly a disturbing factor. In spite of the buoyant and stable economies, some of them remain poor, with populations living below the poverty level. In some cases, unstable political and unwholesome social environment have caused some able bodied Africans to migrate to other more politically more stable neighbouring countries. All these tend to threaten the survival of the university system in the affected countries, stalling the wheels of progress in the various universities (Kelly, 1971; Delors, 1998; Graham- Brown, 1991; The World Bank; 1994).

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The political class in English speaking African countries does recognize the importance of higher education, but tends to concentrate more on the provision of basic education, which is believed to have greater potential in alleviating or reducing poverty. In effect, there are challenges that the universities have to face for their future survival and development. These include the challenge of:

- Developing strategies to handle the declining capacity for teaching and research;
- Controlling the internal and external efficiency mechanisms in teaching and the assessment process;
- Adopting appropriate strategies that would enable respective countries achieve the goal of greater efficiency, standard, quality and equity in higher education;
- Differentiating institutional missions;
- Mobilising greater private financing, including cost sharing between the universities, parents, industry and the alumni associations;
- Providing financial support for needy students (e.g. fixed repayment loan schemes);
- Devising a more resource allocation and utilization formulae;

- Devising a sustainable staff recruitment and retention plan;
- Utilising a more effective and flawless staff appraisal and assessment technique.
- Making distance learning and Open University instruction available to all prospective learners who are unable to register for full time studies (World Bank, 1994, 1995)

INPUT FROM UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA STAFF

To add spices to the relish presented so far, some UB academic and top management staff were requested through an open- ended questionnaire, to provide some information on what they consider to be the opportunity currently available to African universities to develop their full potentials, the constraints to doing this and the challenges they believe their own university is facing as it looks to a future of high academic excellence. The tables below contain a short list of the categories of opportunities constraints and challenges provided by the UB staff.

Table 5
Opportunities for development: UB Staff Members' Responses (N= 57)

	UB has opportunity to :	Proportion of responses		
		N	%	Rank Order
1	Increase access to university education	39	68.4	2
2	Adopt international HE accreditation standards to support quality assurance	12	21.1	9
3.	Forge closer and more beneficial link with various stakeholders and international universities	30	52.6	4
4.	Generate and disseminate indigenous knowledge through research.	1	1.8	12
5.	Embark more aggressively on revenue yielding projects	31	54.4	3
6.	Take advantage of the current political and economic stability to develop more rapidly	41	71.9	1
7.	Update its library acquisitions to stimulate research at all levels	28	49.1	5

8.	Develop further its information and communication technology systems	12	21.1	9
9.	Collaborate with Limkokwing University and Gaborone University of Law in relevant academic matters	2	3.5	11
10.	Double its present student enrolment within a short time	26	45.6	7
11.	Train, recruit and retain staff in sufficient numbers	27	47.4	6
12.	Expand its graduate programmes / prepare capable citizens for the global market	15	26.3	8

Table 6
Constraint to UB development: Responses from staff (N=57)

	Constraints	Proportion of responses		
		N	%	Rank and order
1	Restricted ICT provision	1	1.75	13
2	Too much emphasis on research at the expense of teaching and service	27	47.4	4
3	Resistance to change (e.g. semesterisation as on the part of some staff as for example	25	43.9	5
4	Competition with regional universities in student selection	22	38.6	7
5	Competition for staff on the global market	22	38.6	7
6	Short contract periods for expatriates/ international staff	2	3.5	12
7	PMS: too demanding / time consuming/ lack of clarity on what it is all about	11	19.3	9
8	Heavy workload	23	40.4	6
9	Localisation	1	1.75	13
10	Lack of adequate knowledge base(staff and students)	3	5.3	11
11	Negative attitude of some lecturers	6	10.5	10
12	Limited land for future expansion	1	1.75	13
13	Lack of private sector partnership	31	54.4	1
14	Limited funding source	28	49.1	3
15	Limited time for research	29	50.8	2

	(teaching commitment)			
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Table 7
Challenges for the future: Responses from UB staff (N=57)

S/N	Challenges	Proportion of responses		
		N	%	Rank and order
1	Maintaining the semesterisation policy	27	47.4	6
2	Fast tracking the quality assurance process	21	36.9	7
3	Making the Tertiary Education Council work	14	24.6	8
4	Operating the PMS as an alternative or supplementary staff appraisal process	12	21.1	9
5	Sourcing external funds for research and publications	10	17.5	10
6	Increasing access /maximizing capacity	39	68.4	3
7	Meeting international standards of excellence in various disciplines	40	70.2	1
8	Recruiting and retaining highly qualified expatriate staff	30	52.6	4
9	Intensifying the training and recruitment of citizen staff	30	52.6	4
10	Curbing student indiscipline and violence	7	12.3	11
11	Maintaining a good mixture of international staff and students	6	10.5	12
12	Maintaining high quality human resources and management personnel	40	70.2	1

CONCLUSION

Universities in Africa have the opportunities to grow and develop into centres of excellence in various disciplines, recruit and retain highly qualified staff; resolve the issues of access, quality and standard; forge closer link with regional and international institutions; engage in a variety of fund-raising activities and diversify its academic programmes so that products of the institution would be employable and take advantage of PMS to intensify its staff's research activity. But there are constraints they have to grapple with, such as the impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic and insufficient funds for research and conferences; PMS and the maintenance of a sustainable assessment practice. African universities have, *inter alia*, the challenge of developing their respective institutions to the level of centres of *excellence* in a variety of disciplines and producing graduates who would be able to compete for jobs with their counterparts at the international level

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