

# The McDonaldization of Nigerian Universities: A Sociological Analysis and Critique of Engendering Policies

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## Abstract

This article examines the extent to which the deregulation of Nigerian higher education (HE) has facilitated the McDonaldization of the universities. University education in Nigeria commenced in 1948 with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan. After independence in 1960, subsequent governments expanded the number of universities, a policy based on a lack of quality manpower in leadership positions created by the exit of British officials and the need to grant access to an increasing number of prospective students. In the 1970s, the number of universities increased accompanied by a decline in infrastructure, funding, and working conditions. This resulted in several strikes and an exodus of academics to other countries. Instead of tackling the problems, the federal government shifted responsibilities by approving private ownership of universities in 1999 and by establishing the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2001. Against this backdrop, this article critically analyzes how some of these reforms facilitated the McDonaldization of Nigerian universities. The article reveals how this has resulted in an overloading of responsibilities on the faculty, erosion of academic autonomy, a prioritization of quantity over quality of publications, and an assumption of “customer” status by students. The article uses evidence from McDonaldized HE in Western countries to discuss the implications of these developments and suggests some remedial measures.

## Keywords

deregulation, higher education, McDonaldization, massification, Nigerian universities, privatization, student customers

## Introduction

University education in Nigeria began during the colonial era with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan, in 1948 (Akpotu & Akpochofo, 2009; Okebukola, 2010). Nigeria obtained its independence in 1960, and within two years, there were five universities (Okebukola, 2006). Subsequently as Erinosho (2007) and Geo-JaJa and Mangum (2003) argue, the number of universities began to increase in geometric progression as there was a need to produce quality manpower and to give the qualified candidates access to higher education (HE) (Saint, Hartnett, & Strassner, 2003). As of 2010, Nigeria had a total of 104 universities (Okebukola, 2010) and within two years, the numbers increased from 104 to 125 (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2012). Thus, to situate this discourse properly, an attempt will hereunder be made to examine how and why the establishment of universities and granting access to attain HE became a priority, not just in Nigeria but in other African states in the 1960s, which then led to the establishment of many government-owned and private universities (PUs) in the continent.

## The 1961 Addis Ababa Conference and Development of University Education

Historically, the Second World War that lasted between 1939 and 1945 in many ways retarded the world's social,

economic, educational, and human developments. After the war in 1945, the United Nations was formed, and one of its immediate concerns was the declaration of fundamental human rights. To this end, the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and one of its main priorities (as part of the declaration) was the promotion of rights to education, which according to Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) “shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages” (p. 22).

In line with this, a conference jointly sponsored by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) that was aimed at promoting the right to education in African subregion and setting targets on how to achieve it was held in 1961 at Addis Ababa (Lee, 1988; Obasi, 2000). After this conference, UNESCO and its affiliate organizations organized many other conferences and

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meetings (Sherman, 1990) with the aim of improving access to not just primary education in Africa but secondary and HE. Such meetings were held in Paris (1962), in Abidjan (March 1964), in Lagos between July and August 1964 (Resnik, 2006; Yates, 1964), and so on.

In the Addis Ababa's conference that was attended by 39 African ministers of education and five delegates (representing five European countries; Yolo, 1986) for instance, it was agreed to "set a goal for the achievement of 100% universal compulsory 6-year primary education in Africa in 1980" (Obasi, 2000, p. 189). Although this was central to the meeting, priority was also placed on the development of secondary and HE (Bray, 1986), and this can be authenticated by the fact that the African delegates averred that

some African countries have unduly neglected secondary and HE in proportion to primary education. Economic development is highly dependent on skills of the sort which are taught in institutions to students of 15 years of age and upwards. It is of the highest priority to ensure that an adequate proportion of the population receives secondary, post-secondary and university education; this should be put before the goal of universal primary education . . . (UNESCO, 1961, cited in Bray, 1986, p. 149)

In fact, it can be argued that one main reason for laying emphasis on the development of HE is to meet the human resource demands in most African countries orchestrated by not just the exit of foreign workforce following the attainment of independence in many African states, but need to accelerate social and economic development in the African continent that suffered many years of colonial intrusion, control, and deprivation. Thus, Sherman (1990) notes that "these circumstances set the tone, and markedly influenced the course of higher educational development on the continent" (p. 368).

In consonance with this immediate need to develop manpower, many African countries initiated the implementation of free and mandatory Universal Primary Education (UPE) after the 1961's conference, but it was not launched in Nigeria until September 1976 (Obasi, 1997). The funding in Nigeria was made possible following the boom in the economy that was orchestrated by the rise in price of crude oil in the global market (Obasi, 2000). The boom did not just affect primary education; it led to the establishment of many federal and state-owned universities in Nigeria.

This economic growth seemingly continued until the early 1980s that saw the beginning of decline following economic recession that affected many developing countries. According to Obasi (2000), the "recession was triggered off by the sudden collapse of the world market price for crude oil" (p. 192) that Nigeria mainly depended on, but another reason was due to the fact that the oil revenue derived during the oil windfall was mismanaged and embezzled due to hyper-corruption in the Nigerian polity. The result of this and how it affected education is hereunder examined.

## Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) and Education in Nigeria

In the late 1970s down to early 1980s, many developing countries witnessed severe economic hardship and this forced many of them to opt for the World Bank and/or International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) policy of Structural adjustment (Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). SAP is one of the World Bank and IMF's microeconomics policies mapped out for developing countries under debt to adopt and implement via loan facilities to remedy their ailing economy (Obasi, 2000; Vavrus, 2005). Some of the policy's characteristics include privatization and commercialization of government-owned assets and companies, drastic reduction in government expenditures and devaluation of the country's currency (Riddell, 1992; Vavrus, 2005).

In Nigeria, for instance, the distress in the economy in the 1980s forced the then democratic government headed by President Shagari to begin to negotiate for the World Bank/IMF loan (irrespective of the fact that stringent conditions were attached to the loan), but this was discontinued when the government was overthrown in 1983 by General Buhari-led military government (Obasi, 2000). Again, in 1985, Buhari's government was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida, who in 1986 adopted SAP with severe implication on the education (Hinchliffe, 1989). Just as Ilon (1994) notes that one main attribute of SAP globally is "a decrease in funds available for education as a component of social sector" (p. 97), the implementation of SAP meant a total withdrawal of scarcely given fund to the Nigerian universities.

This is why Geo-Jaja and Mangum (2001) note that SAP contributed to the problems of the African and more precisely, the Nigerian society. To these scholars, this was because the "adjusters took the easy way out. Instead of insisting that corruption be ferreted out, or that military expenditures be cut, they slashed more visible expenditures on education or public health . . ." (p. 31). The introduction of SAP worsened the extant poor funding of education and general condition, and this created tension in the economy that resulted in several protests by different associations such as the National Association of Nigerian Students, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), and so on (Shettima, 1993), but the government remained adamant. This neglect in funding necessitated the introduction of fee paying programs in the universities as well as orchestrated several industrial actions in the Nigerian HE. Again, one of the ways the government of Nigeria tried to cushion the effect of recession was the encouragement of private participation in the ownership of universities in Nigeria (Okebukola, 2006).

## The Origin of PUs in Nigeria

As noted, the need for increased access necessitated the establishment of many universities in Nigeria after

independence. Presently, three categories of university exist: federal government universities (FGUs), state government universities (SGUs), and PUs. The first to set up universities was the federal government, but the constitutional amendment that placed HE “under the concurrent list in 1979” opened the doors for the state governments to own universities (Okebukola, 2006, p. 27). Again, private ownership of universities in Nigeria was initiated in the 1980s (during the economic recession), but due to irregularities, 24 operating PUs were closed down in 1984 (Okebukola, 2006). As noted, this was driven by a number of very practical issues such as the government’s inability to fund public universities in the light of economic recession (that led to SAP) and the government’s willingness to allow private enterprises in university education (and many other areas of the economy such as the banking sector; see Dumbili, 2013a) to meet the ever-growing demand for it, which was also a response to political expediency. As said, factors such as bad governance, corruption, and repression in Nigerian polity (and in many other African countries, especially military intervention in politics) made the universities remain sole institutions resisting such malpractices, and hence denied government funding as well as ever-growing willingness to privatize them by subsequent administrations.

In 1999, Nigeria democratically elected President Obasanjo, and one of the first policies his administration pursued was the reintroduction of PUs. Thus, three PUs commenced operation in that year (Akpotu & Akpochofo, 2009). The PUs in Nigeria are owned either by religious organizations or by entrepreneurs. In addition, the federal government established the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2001 (Okebukola, 2006) to run online distance learning degrees (ODL). PUs differ from public universities (FGUs and SGUs) in (a) the motive for the establishment, (b) ownership and administrative structure, (c) the admission process, (d) school fees, and so on. For example, while all FGUs and SGUs are established mainly to give access to the increasing Nigerian population seeking entrance to the universities as earlier noted, some PUs (especially those owned by religious bodies) are likely to give access to specific religious adherents while many (especially those owned by entrepreneurs) are established with profit motives (Erinosho, 2007). In terms of the administrative structures of the universities, there have always been government interferences (Teferra & Altbachl, 2004). In the FGUs, the President who is the Visitor<sup>1</sup> has the final say in the appointment of a Vice Chancellor. In the SGUs, the State Governor has the highest authority, while the entrepreneurs manage their PUs. Irrespective of the structure, it is worthy of note that the main reasons for initiating the privatization of Nigerian HE was due to the utterly dreadful character of Nigerian public HE (orchestrated by long neglect by the government) and the need to grant additional access to the increasing admission seekers.

Although university education as earlier noted commenced before Nigeria became politically independent, it

has in several ways received less attention than it deserved from the government. This negligence and underfunding by successive governments of Nigeria, especially in the light of era of SAP necessitated in 1990 that the then federal government initiated “the Longe Commission on the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria” to develop strategies to tackle the above problems (Okuwa, 2004, p. 2). The Commission made recommendations, but they were not implemented by the military government. The subsequent action is what Odebiyi and Aina (1999) summed as follows:

The Association of University Union (ASUU) embarked on a seven-month general strike in 1992 which paralyzed activities in the universities. Some of the ASUU’s agitations include funding, academic freedom, and university autonomy. ASUU’s strike actions attracted government intimidation and harassment with many of its national executives incarcerated. (pp. 67-68)

This was followed by another strike in 1993 because the government failed to implement the agreement with ASUU when the 1992 strike was suspended (Okuwa, 2004). In a bid to restore the lost glory in the Nigerian HE, the federal government introduced “the National Policy on Education of 1998” and Section 49 stated that

the internal organization and administration of each institution shall be its own responsibility; the traditional areas of academic freedom for the institutions are: selecting their students except where the law prescribes otherwise; appoint their staff, teach, select areas of research; and determine the content of the courses. (Arikewuyo, 2004, p. 129)

Although this brought a glimpse of hope, academic freedom was still far from being assured because of the clause contained in the same policy document: “Government shall continue to respect this freedom as long as these areas are in consonance with the national goal” (Arikewuyo, 2004, p. 129). Since the democratic government took over in 1999, many other reforms and policies have ensued in the Nigerian HE. Some of these reforms and policies include the Virtual (Digital) Library Project of 2004 (Okebukola, 2006, 2010, 2011) and the Quality Assurance (QA) Policy of the NUC that started following the creation of its department in 2005 (Okojie, 2008).

It is against this backdrop that this article uses Ritzer’s *McDonaldization* thesis to analyze the myriad of evidence that shows the extent to which the recent reforms have opened the doors for the McDonaldizing process in the Nigerian universities leading to erosion of the fragile academic autonomy. It is worthy of note that to my knowledge, this is the first attempt to examine the McDonaldization of Nigerian HE. The focus of this article is, therefore, to explore when, how, and why the McDonaldization of HE began in Nigeria; the implications of this McDonaldizing process; and possible remedies to the adverse consequences of McDonaldization of HE. Drawing on available secondary data and personal observation, the article makes explicit



sociological contributions to the ongoing debate on McDonaldization of HE. It is aimed at not just the Nigerian policy makers but to draw the attention of policy makers in other developing countries to urge caution when formulating HE policies, especially without proper feasibility studies and wide consultations with stakeholders. The article is divided into four sections: the following section lays out the theoretical framework guiding the article; the next explores McDonaldizing processes and the implications in the Nigerian universities while the last section contains concluding remarks regarding possible remedial measures.

## Theoretical Framework

### *The McDonaldization Thesis*

McDonaldization is a sociological concept Ritzer (2000) used to explore the increasing rationalization of postmodern society (Smart, 1999). Ritzer drew on Weber's bureaucratization/rationalization theory to examine the rationalization of McDonald's food industry (Ritzer, 2000). To Max Weber, the upsurge of "two great forces of modernity—which he claimed are capitalism and bureaucracy" in Western society, created social change that affected every facet of social life (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2003, pp. 134-135). Although he believed that human society has experienced rationality (in different forms and in different stages), none of them has experienced what he called "formal rationality," which he defined as "the search by people for the optimum means to a given end" which is "shaped by rules, regulations, and large social structures" (Ritzer, 2000, p. 23).

This structure is what he called bureaucratic organization, and according to Smart (1999), this was the "most prominent expression of the institutionalization of formal rationality: a form of organization, of rules and regulations, which was considered to constitute an optimum means for realizing pre-ordained ends" (p. 3). As noted, his argument was that the rationalization process that he believed has inevitably infested modern Western world will forever transform not just the Western world but all human society even though he believed the latter will be in the future (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2003). Weber noted that bureaucratization of human organization, which makes it superior to, as well as dominates other types of organizations (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2003), is necessary. Although important due to its efficiency, he added that this will in turn create "uncheckable dynamics of rationalization . . . which locks the actors it involves into the iron cage, leaving them no way out" (Bender, Poggi, & Smart, 1999, p. 26), and thus, culminates in disenchantment of these social actors (Lee, 2010).

Drawing largely on this theory, Ritzer (2000) succinctly states that McDonaldization is "the process by which the principles of fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (p. 1). Although of American origin, Ritzer

(2001) avers that this McDonaldization process is gradually spreading to other parts of the globe and is dominating every sphere of the social milieu. These principles are fourfold: "efficiency, calculability, predictability and control" (Ritzer, 2000, pp. 12-14). He further pointed out that this process often engenders unintended consequences, which can be likened, to "the fifth dimension of McDonaldization," or irrationality of rationality because "rational systems are often unreasonable" (p. 16).

*Efficiency* is "the optimum method for getting from one point to another" (Ritzer, 2000, p. 12). McDonald's provides customers with the best and the quickest ways of moving "from being hungry to being full," and the workforce is equally trained to follow the "predesigned process" efficiently (p. 12). To achieve this, customers are indirectly recruited to the workforce by making them serve themselves, eat, and clean up the rubbish afterward (Ritzer, 2001). In HE, Ritzer (2000) points out that the quest for efficiency has led to the machine-graded examination that makes it possible for even a "graduate assistant" to grade students (p. 49). The aim of efficiency according to Hartley (1995) "is the optimisation of resources, but this, in turn, implies that the product itself is definable, precisely without ambiguity" (p. 411).

In terms of *calculability or quantification*, McDonald's prefers quantity to quality. For example, Ritzer (2001) posits that McDonald's lays "emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products sold (portion, size, cost) and service offered (the time it takes to get the product)" (p. 199). What matters most in a typical McDonald's restaurant is the *number* and *size* of food produced in the shortest time while the quality is inconsequential, and this is because profit is determined by the number of items sold (Ritzer, 2000). In HE, Ritzer points to evidence of this quantification such as the rating or ranking of universities which helps students to choose from a *menu*, the grading of students, the emphasis on credentials, the number of hours people work weekly, and the number of publications (as against its quality). Furthermore, he posited that "the focus seems to be on how many students ('the product') that can be herded through the system and what grades they earn rather than the quality of what they have learned" (Ritzer, 2000, p. 66). Similarly, Hartley (1995) argues that "quantification allows for comparability and, therefore, for competition, which rewards the winners and shows up the losers" (p. 411).

*Predictability* is the third dimension of McDonaldization, and this is "the assurance that products and services will be the same over time and in all locales" (Ritzer, 2000, p. 13). Because of homogenization of the processes of food production, the size, taste, color, and so on are predictable in all McDonald's restaurants (Ritzer, 2000). Ritzer (2000) therefore notes that this has infested HE, and it is evident in the similarity of courses, textbooks, uniformity of syllabuses, multiple questions, grading system, and so on. Finally, there is an emphasis on *control*. Here, Ritzer (2001) argues that because humans are highly unpredictable, control becomes

inevitable, which necessitates the “substitution of nonhuman for human technology” (p. 200). This is why machines are involved in food production while only a few humans are employed (Ritzer, 2001). In HE, Ritzer (2001) also argues that “universities have developed a variety of nonhuman technologies to exert control over professors” (p. 108). Academics are meant to work under pressure to teach, examine, and submit students’ grade at a specified time. Furthermore, he argues that students are also controlled in various ways. For example, they are given “little leeway in the courses they may take” and “because of the tyranny of the clock, a class must end at the sound of the bell, even if the students are just about to comprehend something important,” especially in high schools (Ritzer, 2001, pp. 114-115).

## McDonaldization and Nigerian Universities: Evidence and Implications

### *Privatization of HE*

Suffice it to say that the privatization of Nigerian HE in 1999, the reintroduction of NOUN in 2001, and the creation of the QA department in NUC in 2005 marked the point of departure for the massification, commercialization, and the McDonaldizing process in Nigerian universities. Although George Ritzer’s analysis of the McDonaldization of HE was originally based on the American universities, it has become difficult to ignore the fact that McDonaldization principles driven by capitalism and technology are spreading across the entire globe though the impact may not be exactly the same. To appropriately situate this discourse in this section, it is noteworthy to mention that privatization and marketization of HE is not a Nigerian reserve. In fact, it can be argued to have been an international trend since World War II. Thus, it became exigencies in many African countries (after independence) such as Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Uganda, and so on due to increasing demand for HE, the inability of public schools to admit ever-growing number of qualified candidates, and most importantly, lack of proper funding, most especially at the wake of economic recession that necessitated the adoption of adjustment policies in these countries (see Eisemon & Salmi, 1993; Munene, 2008; Munene & Otieno, 2008; Samoff, 1990).

For example, in 1980 before SAP was adopted in Nigeria according to Hoffman (1995), the total enrollment of students in the Nigerian universities was 70,000 while 6.4% of public fund was budgeted for education. In 1990 (post-SAP era), the number increased to 160,767, while the sector received only 1% of government expenditure, and government spending continued to decrease in subsequent years (Dabalen, Oni, & Adekola, 2001). Similarly, Aluede, Idogho, and Imonikhe’s (2012) statistics show that of 537,226 candidates who applied to the 39 existing universities in 1998-1999 session, only 64,176 (11.9%) were admitted leaving the rest 473,050 to their fate. Again, in 2002-2003 session, 53

existing universities in Nigeria received 994,381 applications but were only able to admit 51,843 (5.2%) students, while 123,626 (15.3%) students of 806,089 who applied in 2006-2007 session got admitted (Aluede et al., 2012). Against this backdrop, privatization of HE (to increase access) in Nigeria may seemingly be justified, but as the analysis below will reveal, it can be argued to be not just a shift in government responsibilities but a policy designed without proper feasibility study, wide consultation with stakeholders, or any cushion effect.

References will now be made to United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries that have McDonaldized HE. The aim is not for comparison, but to draw lessons from them so as to show Nigerian policy makers in particular and other countries in general the consequences of McDonaldizing HE in a fragile economy such as Nigeria. Again, the article is not to argue that the privatization of Nigerian HE and other related policies the government pursued are bad because some of them have begun to yield positive results (Moruku, 2013). My focus is to highlight and critique the negative impact of these policies that policy makers may have not taken into consideration before the implementation of the policies so as to avoid such mistakes in future policies formulation and implementation. This is because Ritzer (2000) argues that the four principles of McDonaldization (efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control) often engender unintended consequences (irrationalities).

As noted, the Nigerian government in 1999 approved private ownership of universities (Akpota & Akpochofo, 2009) and introduced the NOUN in 2001 (Okebukola, 2006). This was instead of improving the poor state of government universities, and this led to the establishment of three PUs in that year. To further strengthen privatization, the government approved more PUs, and as of November 2013, the numbers of PUs in Nigeria have reached 51 while FGUs total 40 (NUC, 2013). The Nigerian privatization system is characterized by capitalism and its principles of too much emphasis on profit at the shortest time, while quality is arguably immaterial. Thus, this emphasis of capitalism on profit has the tendency to homogenize and degrade everything in its path, and this happened when the Nigeria government introduced similar reforms in the banking sector in 2005 (see Dumbili, 2013c). Following the introduction of private ownership of universities, emphasis has begun to be laid on the “market-driven degrees and diplomas” (Erinosho, 2007, p. 50) and the number of students who are produced yearly. Another recent phenomenon is the increasing emphasis on *missions and visions* of each school, arguably aimed to make its *product* attractive to potential customers. Each school’s website displays how effectively they graduate students, how conducive or stable their programs are, and how competitive their cost is compared with *others* (public universities). The NOUN is not left out in this competition because it vividly advertises its courseware, fees, and other academic activities.

Although the massification of education (through PUs) in quest for *efficiency* may increase access as noted, studies have shown that it may not be the only or best means of achieving this. For instance, it makes room for market-driven certification where results are measured according to “performance indicators and efficiency” rather than “educated graduates” (Mok, 1999, p. 118). In addition, it is likely to “perpetuate inequality than eradicate it” (Gouthro, 2002, p. 30) because of its high cost (Adeogun, Subair, & Osifila, 2009; Alani, 2006; Geo-Jaja, 2004; Omoleke, 2011). For example, one of the PUs in Nigeria (Igbinedion University) placed its fee for 2012-2013 session at 643,350 naira (US\$4,106; Igbinedion University Okada, 2012), whereas government universities (GUs) charged about 50,000 naira (US\$309). This makes it more difficult for the poor to pay and opens up wider doors for the elites. This is because a majority of Nigerians live below US\$1 per day, and the minimum wage for workers is 18,000 naira (US\$115). This leads to irrationality because the quest for efficiency (more access through PUs) is leading to inefficiency as it excludes a large number because of the high cost (Ritzer, 2000).

Another consequence of this McDonaldizing process is that it has arguably begun to engender unhealthy competitions between GUs and PUs. Because the latter are arguably profit-oriented (Adeogun et al., 2009; Erinosh, 2007), there tend to be a larger number of students in a class than facilities can accommodate (Erinosh, 2007). This massification of students arguably is becoming one of the criteria for judging the faculty in GUs by policy makers (Bryson, 2004). This lends support to Margolis’s (2004) argument that “faculty are pressurised to recruit and retain students . . . and to compete with private for-profit universities” (pp. 368-369). In addition, the policy of privatization of HE in Nigeria will further perpetuate the perennial low government funding of university education in Nigeria (Odebiyi & Aina, 1999; Saint et al., 2003).

Another implication of this deregulation of HE in Nigeria is that it has opened doors for increasing illicit universities in Nigeria. Because PUs are run “on franchise basis” (Healey, 2008, p. 334), entrepreneurs come in to make profits. In 2009, NUC discovered that 41 illegal universities were operating in Nigeria (Adeogun et al., 2009). Further revelations show that 48 illegal universities exist in Nigeria in 2012, and “this list of illegal universities is not exhaustive” (NUC Bulletin, 2012, p. 16). This is likely to lead many students who are seeking university education to fall into the hands of swindlers. Just as Ritzer (2000) argues that a McDonaldized system is not always reasonable, the quest for more access and efficiency by privatizing HE in Nigeria rather than expanding, equipping, and funding existing ones has resulted in irrationalities.

## Efficiency in the Nigerian Universities

The success of McDonald’s is hinged on efficiency, and this is the rationale for scripting jobs and interaction to eliminate

time wasting (Ritzer, 2000). This has infested HE in many Western countries (Halfond & Boyd, 1997; Hartley, 1995; Hayes, 2006). For example, Western universities in a quest for efficiency now run many online degrees, use courseware to teach, employ few lecturers whose tenures are not fixed, eliminate academic autonomy, and regard students as customers (Franz, 1998; Margolis, 2004; McIlvenny, Lassen, & Raudaskoski, 2002; Parker & Jary, 1995). This is why Bender et al. (1999) argue that McDonaldization tends to provide “a set of menacing and probably inescapable tendencies toward dehumanization” (p. 23). In Nigerian Universities, some of these features are beginning to surface. Following the reintroduction of NOUN in 2001, online studies are now possible (Okebukola, 2010), and many other universities have adopted this computer-based learning. The NOUN presently provides courseware and other e-learning facilities for students to study and acquire online degrees and diplomas. On its part, the NUC created the Department of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in September 2010 with the following vision and mission:

to facilitate the utilization of ICT for teaching, research, planning management and effective evaluation through the decision making package in the Nigeria university system; the department is to assist the NUC to carry out its mandate in the deregulated Nigeria university system . . . (NUC, 2014)

Although ICT innovation is germane to HE globally, it does not go without cost. It has been reported that, in many Nigerian universities, the ICT does not work efficiently due to improper maintenance (due to poor funding), erratic power supply (Ehikhamenor, 2003a, 2003b), and the high cost of using such technologies. In relation to learning, scholars have argued that e-learning homogenizes learning, kills diversity and creativity, and culminates in dehumanizing the learner (Quinn, 2000). One of the reasons for this is that “persuasive usage on internet technology does not guarantee positive gains in instructional objectives” (Etherington, 2008, p. 47). In addition, distance learning kills the opportunity of classroom criticism, widens the gap between the learner and the teacher, erases the civility of the classroom nurturing, and hinders “classroom interaction skills” (Grineski, 1999, p. 47). Thus, the students only “learn to do other than learning to know” (Grineski, 2000, p. 22) because “hands, not head,” do the learning (Hartley, 1995, p. 412).

On the part of the faculty, the pressure to teach and graduate students to satisfy market demand turns the former to what Halfond and Boyd (1997) call “teaching machines” (p. 208) who are overloaded with responsibilities that are expected to be performed efficiently and in the shortest time. For example, in 2008, a total of 1,096,312 students were reported to be studying in Nigerian universities, while a total of 1,644,110 candidates applied for the 2013 Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB; Vanguard, 2014). The increase in the number of students in geometric progression and lack of commensurate facilities, good working



conditions and few numbers of academic staff in Nigeria contribute to the dehumanization of available staff.

The academics are dehumanized because they are meant to teach these teeming numbers of students in the same space (with minimal facility) and are expected to produce quality graduates. Similarly, in universities where teaching technologies are used, they are meant to teach with courseware that they never designed, and grade students with machines that require little of their skills or input. In the same vein, the increasing emphasis on internal and external-driven efficiencies in all the Nigerian universities means that academics are meant to work longer hours than they used to do in the past, teach and graduate students *at record time* with remarkably few or no dropout (Ajadi, 2010). One of the implications is that little or no time will be dedicated to research, which is supposed to be the hub of universities—yet another irrationality.

### Students as Customers in Quest for Efficiency in the Nigerian Universities

The viewing of students as customers became widely known with the seminal work of Franz (1998), though its origin is in the United States, and began because students paid the greatest part of the cost of their education in the United States (Redding, 2005). This is not same in the United Kingdom where education is mainly funded via money derived from taxation (Redding, 2005). If this is so, in the Nigerian context students can be seen as customers. This is because the paying of fees has been a tradition in Nigerian universities, in that Education, in general, and HE in particular have always been underfunded (Erinosho, 2007; Nwaka, 2000; Odebiyi & Aina, 1999; Okebukola, 2006; Onwunli & Agho, 2004).

Irrespective of the fact that students hitherto paid school fees prior to the introduction of the current PUs in 1999 (Okojie, 2008), it can be argued that students in these PUs can be rightly called *customers*. This is, in part, because of the way students are beginning to be reified in these PUs. Although a dearth of published data exist in this debate, it is generating heated discussions among Nigerians that many students in most PUs do not attend classes regularly, and lecturers do not have the right to disallow such a group from writing examinations as it is done in most GUs where 75% attendance is compulsory. This is, arguably, because their high school fees in the PUs have bought them the privilege.

One of the implications of students being seen and treated as customers is that, in the quest for efficiency, there is pressure for the manipulation of academic grades. This lends credence to Franz's (1998) assertion that when students are customers, "the ultimate outcome is unrelenting grade inflation—keep the student-cum-customer happy and give him or her what they want" (pp. 63-64). In the Nigerian context, because students are becoming the customers in the PUs (due to high school fees and resultant reification), the proprietors of these schools, arguably, ensure that students get the best

value for their money because their satisfaction will guarantee continued patronage from them and other customers as *the customer is always right*. Softening the grading system, making it easier for students to pass to attract *more customers* to their schools, is arguably one of the ways this is done. This can be authenticated by the proportion of *first class honors* that graduate from these PUs yearly (unlike what FGUs and SGUs with better facilities produce), a factor that is beginning to generate debates among employers. This is because these graduates are said to be underperforming, and this as Erinosho (2007) argues may not be unrelated to the motive behind the founding of the schools, the qualities of teachers, and extant poor facilities.

As an example of the above, in a study that investigated three of the foremost PUs (Babcock, Bowen, and Igbinedion) in Nigeria, it was reported that "there are 1 doctorate degree holder to 46 students in Babcock, 1 to 49 in Bowen and 1 to 134 in Igbinedion" (Erinosho, 2007, p. 55), and this lends credence to the fact that they employed "more masters than doctorate degree teachers" against NUC rules (p. 64). Furthermore, this scholar revealed that "the academic programmes of private universities are circumscribed. The founders are inclined to mount courses that will attract students or money or both, and they may also be inclined to sacrifice quality" (p. 64). He further added that "the motive to establish a university might not necessarily be altruistic but driven by the desire to make money from the gullible and unsuspecting public" (p. 66). This is, in fact, one of the problems of massification of HE (Parker & Jary, 1995). However, the claim that students are customers means that "the provider's (teacher's) task is to spoon-feed bits of content *and* the customer's (student's) task is to assimilate, digest and regurgitate" on the examination day (De Vita & Case, 2003, pp. 391-392). It shifts the responsibilities of learning and places it on the teachers (Van Valey, 2001). Although this does no good to both the "consumers and sellers of learning" (De Vita & Case, 2003, p. 391), the fact remains that the former is losing more because of inactive participation in learning.

### Students as Working Customers in Quest for Efficiency

In the quest for *efficiency* in a typical McDonald's, Ritzer (2000, 2001) notes that customers are co-opted into the labor process by making them serve themselves in so many ways without being paid. For example, those who will dare to eat in the restaurant are meant to queue up, collect food, eat, and *efficiently* clear up the rubbish. For others, the run-through makes it faster, and their "cars are the spaces" that make it easier for the rubbish to be cleared (Ritzer, 2000). Therefore, if students are becoming known as customers in Nigeria, they arguably will be working customers.

The introduction of a techno-based system of registration, the Virtual (Digital) Library Project (Okebukola, 2006), and

the creation of the ICT department in NUC marked the point of departure for using students as “manufacturing customers” (Zwick & Denegri Knott, 2009, p. 221) in Nigerian HE. As it is in McDonald’s, Nigerian students start *creating their own experience* before they are admitted into the universities. Following the introduction of online registration by the JAMB<sup>2</sup> in the late 2000s, students now do most of the jobs previously done by the JAMB’s officials and universities’ nonacademic staff. For example, students buy scratch cards from JAMB designated centers, go to a cybercafé to buy airtime, register online, and pay to print the documents before submitting the forms. If they make a mistake, this attracts extra cost. If they “pass the test,” they return to the cybercafé to check their results or buy airtime to check through their phones. If they are successful, they move to the Post-University Matriculation Examination<sup>3</sup> (PUME) and repeat similar processes.

Here, they buy another scratch card or form from the universities they chose, go to a cybercafé to register, print the form, and submit it. If they succeed in the PUME, they need to go back to the café to make and clear their payment before they do the online registration of modules (courses or subjects as they are called in the Nigerian HE). When they eventually start taking the university’s examinations, they will keep spending money to check their results and perform the other techno-based school activities because many Nigerian universities mostly do not have functional Internet facilities, while those that have do not offer students free access. This is why private cybercafés flood every Nigerian university campus.

In the universities that have digital libraries, students carry out online data searching and processing, photocopying, scanning, printing, and so on for themselves. Although the argument of this article is not that techno-based learning is useless, or that HE in Nigeria should go back to the state it was before deregulation that engendered privatization begun, what it argues is the fact that the negative impacts are often overlooked by Nigerian policy makers. For example, students end up paying for these services they do for themselves due to multiple fees (Moruku, 2013) and the high cost of Internet facilities in Nigeria (Salaam & Adegbore, 2010). This lends credence to what Ritzer (2000) notes that “rational systems are not less expensive, they force people to do unpaid work, and they are often inefficient” (p. 125). Because students perform these tasks without being paid, this leads to exploitation of the student (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Another consequence is that the deployment of technologies engenders job loss or insecurity (Dumbili, 2013c). This is because many tasks hitherto performed by the nonacademic staff are now being transferred to students and technologies, leading to control. Therefore, nonacademic staff that previously performed these tasks are often rendered redundantly or sacked and this will increase if HE in Nigeria is fully McDonaldized.

Another serious implication of McDonaldization is that it engenders malpractice. “Examination paper” leakages linked

to JAMB officials are common occurrences in Nigeria, while those desperate students who fail to get the questions pay some corrupt JAMB and university staff to alter their scores (Willott, 2011) in ICT centers, often by overturning a student “fail.” Again, a dearth of data is evident in this direction, but it was widely discussed in 2011 among staff and students of one of the eastern-Nigerian universities that a student who scored 37 was given 73 when she paid the large sum the ICT staff of that university demanded. This is a tip of the iceberg of the situation in Nigerian HE (for more on corruption and access to Nigerian HE, see Willott, 2011). This means that the quest for efficiency through ICT is leading to inefficiencies in many ways, that is, failed students are graduating, thereby undermining the employment market and ultimately the value of a Nigerian degree.

## Calculability in the Nigerian Universities

Calculability has to do with reification of quantity against quality, and this has infested the Nigerian HE. One aspect of this calculability is “target setting” (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 90) by Nigerian universities. This is evident in the number of students each university plans to admit yearly, teach, and most importantly, graduate. Presently, one of the criteria for ranking universities among the best (“calculability”) is the number of students they graduate annually (Okebukola, 2011; Okojie, 2008). Thus, universities strive to meet these targets to make more money from their fees (through turnover), be in the top list, and also have their course accredited by the “watchdog”—NUC or the “efficiency police” (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 93). Thus, the quantities of graduates come to matter most, and their qualities, arguably, are immaterial. Little wonder why many of the Nigerian graduates fail to meet the standard required for employment because they lack employable skills (Dabalen, Oni, & Adekola, 2001).

Another aspect of quantification is linked to the competition that occurs after the JAMB result is released. Many schools advertise for students who originally did not choose their institutions and those disqualified (due to low score) in other schools are encouraged to buy their forms and take their test. This is because the *number* of students who bought the form determines the profit of the school. It should be recalled that one of Ritzer’s assertions is that “material interests” is one main factor that drives McDonaldization (Smart, 1999, p. 6), but this has a serious implication because many of these students end up being refused admission, which leads to a loss of money and time on the part of students.

In addition, many universities admit more students than their facilities can sustain (Erinosho, 2007) because the number of students they have determines the amount of money they will receive because of variable fees. Many GUs like PUs currently run different market-based diplomas, certificates, and part-time programs with a growing number of students. In fact, it can be argued that these programs are created to make money and not to impart knowledge. This is because



the same number of academics is used to teach these courses, and this leads to overloading them with work, while others use less qualified contract or casual staff to run the programs (Erinosho, 2007).

### *Publish or Perish as an Aspect of Calculability*

Although in Nigeria academics have always been assessed by their research output, previously quality was considered more valuable than the quantity of publications. In many Nigerian universities presently, academics are promoted to senior positions without a single international publication leading many Nigerian lecturers to resort to *pay-as-you-publish* or “roadside journals” (Okebukola, 2010, p. 16). Some common emerging practices are self-publication, duplication of the same article with different titles, and arguably the worst—*plagiarizing other people’s work*. All these lead to the publication of inferior articles just to meet up with the “number” required for promotion (Olukoju, 2004), and this is leading to “the ever-growing number of professors appointed or promoted on doubtful research and publication output” (Okebukola, 2010, p. 17). Just as Ritzer (2000) notes that “McDonald’s has always emphasised on bigness” or quantity (p. 64), the number of publications is fast replacing the qualities in many of these Nigerian universities where academics get promoted irrespective of the poor quality of research and papers they produce. Little wonder why Ritzer (2000) notes that “any system that places much emphasis on quantity of publication will lead to the production of a great deal of mediocre work” (p. 69), but the implication of this is that the poor academic standard in Nigeria may continue because there are no new contributions to knowledge (Saint et al., 2003).

Although these malpractices are rife in Nigeria, it must be pointed out that some universities ensure the maintenance of high academic standard for both staff and students. For example, some universities such as the University of Ibadan have an established standard for appointing and promoting staff and still stick to such a standard to date (University of Ibadan, 2013). In the same vein, University of Benin in 2013 sacked 44 lecturers due to their involvement in illicit practices contrary to their call to duty (Ebegbulem, 2013). Although this can be regarded as a right step in the right direction, the magnitude of different malpractices in the Nigerian universities (public and private) contributes to increasing irrationality in the system.

Another aspect of this calculability is the growing number of Honorary Doctorate Degrees (HDD) universities award to people with questionable characters during convocations. Because the number of HDD any university awards determines the favor it will receive (monetary or otherwise) from those honored, each university awards HDD to those who have never affected the society positively or contributed to knowledge. This recently led to a call to suspend HDD in Nigeria, and the Lagos State Government brought it to a halt in its state’s university (Olufowobi, 2012).

Furthermore, the Nigerian government in 2011 established nine more FGUs, again an aspect of calculability because no effort was made to build the infrastructure before the commencement of the universities. As this is generating debate among Nigerians, and people are questioning the rationale behind the establishment of the schools rather than strengthening or expanding the existing ones (Olufowobi, 2012), the government announced the establishment of another three universities in December 2012 (“FEC Approves Three More Varsities,” 2014). Just as Ritzer (2000) contends that, in McDonald’s restaurants, the size of the food may not be commensurate with the quality, these new FGUs are worse than the former.

### **Predictability in the Nigerian Universities**

One of the predictabilities in Nigerian universities is the uniformity of “National Curriculum,” and a similar thing was informed in the United Kingdom via the introduction of “the Education Reform Acts, 1988” (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 91). In the Nigerian universities, courses, syllabuses, mode of grading, and so on are becoming the same. For example, courses are becoming standardized (through NUC) in Nigerian HE and this harmonized curriculum makes the faculty work with “invisible scripts” of which deviation, according to McDonald’s principles, will obstruct the smooth flow of production (Ritzer, 2000). This is arguably why most of the courses are turning into garbage-in-garbage-out situations. A Year 2 student in a typical Nigerian university, for example, can predict what he will be taught by merely glancing through the notes of any Year 3 student or by going through the departmental handbook. This monotonous system gives little or no room for innovation, suffocates skills of lecturers and students, and makes “accidental and spontaneous knowledge” or discovery unlikely.

Predictability is at play also in the NUC’s routine accreditation exercise that takes place every 4 years to ensure minimum academic standards (Okojie, 2008). The timing of accreditation can be predicted, thus universities prepare for the accreditation team at any cost when the exercise is near. *Borrowing* senior lecturers/professors from other schools as adjunct staff that may not retain their tenures after the accreditation and promoting staff (who may not be due) are some of the ways this can be done. In fact, the process of HE in Nigeria can be predicted from start to finish. For example, as one leaves secondary school, the predicted next step is to sit for JAMB, which will be followed by the Post-JAMB. After this first stage, there follows clearance, payment of school fees, online registration, orientation, beginning of lectures, and so on, in that order.

Another aspect is the recent introduction of universities’ branded uniforms such as T-shirts, caps, and so on, in some Nigerian universities. In Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), for instance, students can predict what their lecturers and nonacademic staff will wear to school every

Wednesday. This is because the management has made it compulsory for staff to buy and don the university's branded T-shirt and cap, with stiff penalties for defaulters. This may appear to promote the unity of the system, but according to Ritzer (2000), it is "false fraternization" (p. 130). This can be authenticated by the fact that UNIZIK's management outlawed the Labor Union for over 10 years before bowing to pressure in 2012 (UNIZIK, 2011).

### **Control in the Nigerian Universities**

#### *Governance and management interference:*

Ritzer (2000) claims that humans are most unpredictable, thus McDonald's replaces them with nonhuman technology that can be regulated at ease. In Nigerian universities, control is extant where different types of human and nonhuman technologies have been employed to control the faculty. From the inception of universities in Nigeria, academics enjoyed partial academic autonomy, but this was short-lived following the intervention of the military in the Nigerian politics in 1966. Successive military administrations in Nigeria gradually erased university autonomy both in the FGUs and in the SGUs, making the Vice Chancellors puppets (Erinosho, 2007).

In fact, Odebiyi and Aina (1999) report that many universities were previously run by the military Sole Administrators. With military in power, HE received little funding and there was a reckless abandon of universities' infrastructure (Okebukola, 2006) while research was neglected due to lack of research grants and funding (Odebiyi & Aina, 1999), leading to the exodus of academics in search of greener pastures overseas. The situation became bleak in the 1980s and 1990s to a point where academics were either incarcerated or sacked for striking against government neglect of HE (Odebiyi & Aina, 1999). A good example of lack of autonomy was the mass dismissal of 41 lecturers of the Obafemi Awolowo University Ife in 2001 because they were involved in ASUU's strike. To date, the situation has not changed, irrespective of the fact that the Federal Ministry of Education proposed a bill to ensure academic autonomy to the faculty in 2000 (Onwunli & Agho, 2004).

Autonomy was further eroded via the evolvement in 1974 of the NUC (NUC, 2012); a centralized body with government-backed power, charged with the duties of spearheading the universities' affairs. This according to Saint et al. (2003) was a reflection of the military structure that constituted it, but the structure remains to date. Furthermore, the establishment of the QA in the NUC (Okebukola, 2010) in 2005 saddled with the responsibilities of reforming and reviewing the universities' curriculum (Okogie, 2008), leading to the increasing managerial interference and other activities of the NUC such as curriculum harmonization and monitoring, further serious threats to academic freedom in Nigerian universities. This is because management makes decisions or implements government's policies with little or no

consultation with the faculty. In many Nigerian universities, academics are employed by management without any input from the faculty. Thus, those who would have had no business being in academia are employed by their friends or relatives and imposed on the faculty. Another part of this recent occurrence is that universities are beginning to prefer the employment of contract and adjunct staff to cut costs. This is likely to culminate in the preference for hourly paid lecturers because McDonaldized businesses require flexible workforce (Ritzer, 2000).

Even the President and the State Governors have the final say on the appointment of Vice Chancellors (Ekundayo & Adedokun, 2009) in the FGUs and SGUs while the entrepreneurs appoint and dismiss the Vice Chancellors and lecturers in the PUs. This increasing monitoring and managerial interference internally and externally where the faculty is striped of academic autonomy will soon turn Nigerian universities to what has been described as the "McUniversity" (Parker & Jary, 1995). In an academic environment where the faculties are regularized and overloaded with responsibilities (De Vita & Case, 2003) without commensurate salary, the result is outright "collective demoralization" of the workers (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 94). In fact, the civic and social losses implicated in this *nutritional starvation* offered by McDonaldization of HE in Nigeria are immense. For instance, this continuous interference, control, and neglect have often resulted in several conflicts and strikes (internal and external) in many Nigerian universities leading to the closure of such institutions for several months. This can be authenticated by the fact that due to government neglect and failure to fund infrastructural development in Nigerian HE or keep to its promise, ASUU recently embarked on strike in July 2013 that lasted for 5 months ("Nigeria University Lecturers ASUU Calls of Strike," 2013). This and other previous strikes have left the Nigerian HE to suffer intellectually (because of exodus of academics to other countries and other related reasons), morally, democratically and most importantly in international ranking (no Nigerian university at present ranks among the best 1,000 universities in the world).

### **Conclusion**

This article revealed evidence showing that Nigerian universities are becoming fully McDonaldized and that this has occurred since HE was deregulated in 1999. Although the import of privatization and rationalization of HE may be paramount to the government, this article has revealed that many shortcomings accompany a McDonaldized system and this may have been neglected by the policy makers. Therefore, the government should increase university funding instead of relying on the private sector to solve the problems in its HE because the latter may only seek profit without producing quality graduates. There should be strict monitoring of the PUs to ensure that they employ qualified

manpower to teach their students, and inflation of marks should be checked. This must be a matter of urgency because internationally, it has been reported that privatizing HE does not always produce quality. For example, Tilak (1991) notes that “the higher quality of private education compared with public higher education is exaggerated” because “private universities are found to employ more retired, part-time, and under-qualified teachers in Japan, Columbia, Brazil, Argentina and several other countries” (p. 230). Because privatization (a global phenomenon) itself is a brainchild of World Bank often imposed on countries to qualify for loan facilities (Patrinós, 1990), it should not be solely relied on to remedy the problems in the Nigerian HE.

The government should grant the autonomy it promised Nigerian universities in 2000, so that faculty can have input to the universities’ curriculum, be involved in the employment of academics and other affairs without fear of losing their tenures.

The QA in the NUC should not just carry out government’s directives without wide consultation with academics. This is because such may lead to resentment as it did in Europe in the 1990s (Redding, 2005). In addition, if the education policies are made without involving the faculty who will implement the policies, what happened in the McDonaldized Nigerian banking sector that engendered job insecurity (see Dumbili, 2013a) and other irrationalities may well occur in Nigerian academia (Dumbili, 2013c). Policy makers and other government allies interested in the Nigerian HE should understand that even though erosion of academic autonomy via government interference is becoming a global phenomenon, it must be noted that “global trends are promoted, resisted and negotiated differently in each national context and in each individual institution” (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 429). Thus, unification of policy, curriculum, and centralized control should be rethought by the NUC in a way that both the rationalizers and academics will benefit. One such way this can be done is to involve academics in policy formulation. Again, Nigerian policy makers should learn from countries such as Singapore that first of all equipped their people, especially academics “with creative and critical thinking so as to make them change-adaptive individuals . . . in order to prepare for the challenges of future” before implementing diverse policies in the HE (Mok, 2000, pp. 163-164).

More staff should be employed on a full-time basis rather than on contract terms. This will help reduce the stress most of the faculties currently experience due to the increasing workload. For its part, ASUU should begin to resist the casualization of academia, otherwise policy makers may soon introduce hourly paid lecturers in GUs because McDonaldization engenders labor commodification that leads to low pay, poor working conditions, and job insecurity.

The reification of technology and ODL should be reconsidered because most students do not actually acquire sound

knowledge (Miller, 2010), and most drop out due to the high cost. The increasing emphasis on the number of publications instead of their quality should be discouraged if the standard of research output is ever to increase in Nigeria. The emphasis on market-driven degrees should be reconsidered, and students should be discouraged from seeing themselves as customers because they may soon begin to decide who among the academics should be employed, retained, or dismissed.

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### Notes

1. Visitor: The President of Nigeria functions as the Visitor of the federal government university (FGU). The laws that established FGUs stipulate that he should visit each FGU at least once annually and grant him superior power to appoint the Vice Chancellor of each university.
2. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is a federal government agency established in 1978 to harmonize the higher education (HE) admission criteria and procedures.
3. The Post-University Matriculation Examination (PUME) is a post-JAMB entrance examination introduced by the federal government in 2005. Its aim is to allow each university to further screen all its prospective students that passed JAMB examination before offering them admission.

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