

REPOSITIONING THE COLLASSAL FAILURE OF STANDARD OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES AS A HUB FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: THE PROFOUND CHALLENGE OF TEACHING, LEARNING, RESEARCH AND INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT AMIDST THE GOVERNMENT'S THRUST POLICY OF RENEWED HOPE AGENDA.

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Abstract: The Nigerian university system faces numerous challenges hindering its ability to provide quality education and conduct cutting-edge research. This study aimed to investigate these challenges and proffer solutions. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected from 12 universities in Nigeria, with 2 universities selected from each of the 6 geopolitical zones. The data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentary analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to analyze the data. The institutional theory was applied, which posits that organizations, including universities, are shaped by their institutional environment. The study revealed that Nigerian universities face challenges such as inadequate funding, poor governance, brain drain, lack of entrepreneurship training, and lack of internationalization. These challenges have far-reaching implications for the quality of education and research in Nigerian universities. The study recommends increased funding for Nigerian universities, autonomy for these institutions, and strategies to reverse the brain drain phenomenon. Additionally, Nigerian universities should develop entrepreneurship training programs and international partnerships and collaborations. By implementing these recommendations, Nigerian universities can be transformed into world-class institutions providing quality education and conducting cutting-edge research, driving national development and growth. The study's findings and recommendations are crucial for policymakers, university administrators, and other stakeholders seeking to revitalize the Nigerian university system.

Introduction

The Nigerian university system is grappling with a myriad of challenges that threaten its very existence. Despite being the largest and most populous country in Africa, Nigeria's universities have failed to live up to expectations, lagging behind their counterparts in other parts of the continent. This study seeks to examine the challenges facing Nigerian universities, with a focus on the prevailing challenges under investigation.

One of the most significant challenges facing Nigerian universities is inadequate funding. The Nigerian government has consistently failed to allocate sufficient funds to the education sector, resulting in a dearth of resources for universities (Tertiary Education Trust Fund, 2020). For instance, the University of Lagos, one of Nigeria's premier universities, has been struggling to maintain its infrastructure due to a lack of funding (Punch Newspapers, 2020).

Another challenge facing Nigerian universities is poor infrastructure. Many universities lack modern lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries, making it difficult for students to learn and for academics to conduct research (National Universities Commission, 2020). For example, the University of Abuja has been struggling to provide adequate accommodation for its students, resulting in a shortage of hostel spaces (Daily Trust Newspapers, 2020).

The brain drain is another challenge facing Nigerian universities. Many of Nigeria's best academics have migrated to other countries in

search of better opportunities, resulting in a shortage of qualified lecturers (International Organization for Migration, 2020). For instance, the University of Ibadan has lost several of its top academics to foreign universities in recent years (The Guardian Newspapers, 2020).

Lack of autonomy is also a significant challenge facing Nigerian universities. The Nigerian government has consistently interfered in the affairs of universities, resulting in a lack of autonomy for university administrators (National Universities Commission, 2020). For example, the University of Nigeria has been struggling to manage its affairs due to excessive government interference (Vanguard Newspapers, 2020).

Inadequate staff development is another challenge facing Nigerian universities. Many universities lack staff development programs, resulting in a lack of training and development opportunities for lecturers (Tertiary Education Trust Fund, 2020). For instance, the University of Benin has been struggling to provide adequate training for its lecturers, resulting in a lack of capacity for research and teaching (The Punch Newspapers, 2020).

Poor student-teacher ratio is also a challenge facing Nigerian universities. Many universities have a high student-teacher ratio, resulting in inadequate attention for students (National Universities Commission, 2020). For example, the University of Lagos has a student-teacher ratio of 50:1, making it difficult for students to

receive adequate attention from lecturers (Daily Trust Newspapers, 2020).

Lack of research funding is another challenge facing Nigerian universities. Many universities lack research funding, resulting in a lack of opportunities for academics to conduct research (Tertiary Education Trust Fund, 2020). For instance, the University of Ibadan has been struggling to secure research funding, resulting in a lack of research output (The Guardian Newspapers, 2020).

In comparison with Ghana and South Africa, Nigerian universities face significant challenges in terms of funding, infrastructure, and governance. Ghanaian universities, for example, have made significant progress in terms of internationalization and industry-academia collaboration (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2020). South African universities, on the other hand, have made significant progress in terms of research output and global ranking (South African Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020).

Therefore, these challenges dictate that the critical issues need to be thoroughly investigated and addressed with a view to filling the gaps for sustenance of Nigeria's democratic polity.

Research Questions

1. What are the underlying factors contributing to the inadequate funding of Nigerian universities, and how have these factors impacted the quality of education?
2. To what extent has the poor infrastructure in Nigerian universities hindered teaching,

learning, and research, and what are the consequences of this neglect?

3. How has the brain drain affected the capacity of Nigerian universities to provide quality education and conduct research, and what strategies can be employed to reverse this trend?
4. What are the implications of the lack of autonomy and government interference in the management of Nigerian universities, and how can these challenges be addressed to promote academic excellence?

Objectives of the study

The broad objective is to critically examine the challenges facing Nigerian universities and propose strategies for repositioning them as hubs for academic excellence. Whereas the specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the impact of inadequate funding on the quality of education in Nigerian universities.
2. To assess the effects of poor infrastructure on teaching, learning, and research in Nigerian universities.
3. To examine the brain drain phenomenon in Nigerian universities and its implications for academic excellence.
4. To evaluate the implications of government interference and lack of autonomy on the management of Nigerian universities.

Significance of the study

This study is significant because it seeks to address the pressing challenges facing Nigerian universities, which have far-reaching implications for the country's development. The

study's findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the challenges facing Nigerian universities, providing valuable insights for policymakers, university administrators, and other stakeholders.

One of the significant challenges facing Nigerian universities is inadequate funding. For instance, the University of Lagos, one of Nigeria's premier universities, has been struggling to maintain its infrastructure due to a lack of funding (Punch Newspapers, 2020). This study will investigate the impact of inadequate funding on the quality of education in Nigerian universities, providing recommendations for sustainable funding models.

Another significant challenge facing Nigerian universities is poor infrastructure. Many universities lack modern lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries, making it difficult for students to learn and for academics to conduct research (National Universities Commission, 2020). For example, the University of Abuja has been struggling to provide adequate accommodation for its students, resulting in a shortage of hostel spaces (Daily Trust Newspapers, 2020). This study will assess the effects of poor infrastructure on teaching, learning, and research in Nigerian universities.

The brain drain phenomenon is another significant challenge facing Nigerian universities. Many of Nigeria's best academics have migrated to other countries in search of better opportunities, resulting in a shortage of qualified lecturers (International Organization for Migration, 2020). For instance, the

University of Ibadan has lost several of its top academics to foreign universities in recent years (The Guardian Newspapers, 2020). This study will examine the brain drain phenomenon in Nigerian universities and its implications for academic excellence.

Furthermore, the lack of autonomy and government interference in the management of Nigerian universities is a significant challenge that this study will address. Many universities lack the autonomy to make decisions on academic matters, including curriculum development and staff recruitment (National Universities Commission, 2020). For example, the University of Nigeria has been struggling to manage its affairs due to excessive government interference (Vanguard Newspapers, 2020). This study will evaluate the implications of government interference and lack of autonomy on the management of Nigerian universities.

The findings of this study will be significant for several reasons. Firstly, they will provide valuable insights for policymakers and university administrators on the challenges facing Nigerian universities. Secondly, they will inform the development of strategies for addressing these challenges and repositioning Nigerian universities as hubs for academic excellence. Finally, they will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the challenges facing universities in developing countries, providing a framework for comparative analysis and policy development.

Conceptual Issues

Inadequate Funding: This conceptual issue refers to the lack of sufficient financial resources to support the operations of Nigerian universities. For instance, the University of Lagos has been struggling to maintain its infrastructure due to a lack of funding (Punch Newspapers, 2020).

Poor Governance: This conceptual issue refers to the ineffective management and leadership of Nigerian universities. For example, the University of Nigeria has been struggling to manage its affairs due to excessive government interference (Vanguard Newspapers, 2020).

Brain Drain: This conceptual issue refers to the migration of highly skilled academics from Nigerian universities to other countries. For instance, the University of Ibadan has lost several of its top academics to foreign universities in recent years (The Guardian Newspapers, 2020).

Lack of Autonomy: This conceptual issue refers to the limited independence of Nigerian universities to make decisions on academic matters. For example, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has been criticized for its excessive control over university affairs (National Universities Commission, 2020).

Inadequate Infrastructure: This conceptual issue refers to the lack of modern facilities and equipment in Nigerian universities. For instance, many universities lack modern lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries, making it difficult for students to learn and for academics to conduct research (National Universities Commission, 2020).

Poor Quality of Education: This conceptual issue refers to the substandard quality of education provided by Nigerian universities. For example, many universities have been criticized for their outdated curricula and lack of emphasis on practical skills (Tertiary Education Trust Fund, 2020).

Theoretical foundation

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of institutional theory, which posits that organizations, including universities, are shaped by their institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The institutional environment of Nigerian universities is characterized by a lack of autonomy, inadequate funding, and poor governance, which have hindered their ability to provide quality education and conduct research.

The concept of institutional isomorphism, which refers to the tendency of organizations to conform to the norms and expectations of their institutional environment, is also relevant to this study (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Nigerian universities have conformed to the norms of their institutional environment, which has resulted in a lack of innovation and creativity in their academic programs and research activities. The resource dependence theory, which posits that organizations are dependent on their environment for resources, is also applicable to this study (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Nigerian universities are dependent on the government for funding, which has resulted in a lack of autonomy and independence.

The stakeholder theory, which posits that organizations have a responsibility to their stakeholders, including students, staff, and the wider community, is also relevant to this study (Freeman, 1984). Nigerian universities have a responsibility to their stakeholders to provide quality education and conduct research that is relevant to the needs of the country.

In the context of Nigerian universities, the theoretical framework of institutional theory, institutional isomorphism, resource dependence theory, and stakeholder theory provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing these institutions. For instance, the University of Lagos has been struggling to maintain its infrastructure due to a lack of funding, which is a result of its dependence on the government for resources (Punch Newspapers, 2020).

Similarly, the University of Nigeria has been struggling to manage its affairs due to excessive government interference, which is a result of the institutional environment of Nigerian universities (Vanguard Newspapers, 2020). The brain drain phenomenon in Nigerian universities is also a result of the institutional environment, which has resulted in a lack of opportunities for academics to conduct research and publish their work (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

Empirical Studies

Empirical studies have consistently shown that Nigerian universities face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to provide quality education and conduct cutting-edge research.

One of the major challenges is inadequate funding, which has resulted in a lack of modern facilities and equipment [1]. For instance, a survey report by the Nigerian Academy of Science (2020) found that 75% of Nigerian universities lack modern laboratories and equipment [6]. Similarly, a review report by the National Universities Commission (2020) noted that inadequate funding has hindered the ability of universities to provide quality education [2]. Another significant challenge facing Nigerian universities is poor governance. The lack of autonomy and excessive government interference have hindered the ability of universities to manage their affairs effectively [2]. For example, a report by the International Association of Universities (2020) found that government interference has resulted in a lack of accountability and transparency in university operations [7]. Similarly, a survey report by the Association of Nigerian Universities (2020) found that 80% of Nigerian universities lack autonomy to make decisions on academic matters [8].

The brain drain phenomenon is also a significant challenge facing Nigerian universities. Many of Nigeria's best academics have migrated to other countries in search of better opportunities, resulting in a shortage of qualified lecturers [3]. For instance, a report by the International Organization for Migration (2020) found that over 10,000 Nigerian academics have migrated to other countries in the past decade [9]. Similarly, a survey report by the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research

(2020) found that 70% of Nigerian universities lack qualified lecturers to teach critical courses [10].

In addition, Nigerian universities face challenges in terms of entrepreneurship and innovation. The lack of entrepreneurship training and innovation has hindered the ability of universities to produce graduates who can create jobs and stimulate economic growth [4]. For example, a report by the World Bank (2020) found that Nigerian universities lack entrepreneurship training programs, which has resulted in a lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates [11]. Similarly, a survey report by the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (2020) found that 60% of Nigerian universities lack innovation hubs to support entrepreneurship and innovation [12].

Furthermore, Nigerian universities face challenges in terms of internationalization. The lack of international partnerships and collaborations has hindered the ability of universities to provide global education and conduct cutting-edge research [5]. For instance, a report by the International Association of Universities (2020) found that Nigerian universities lack international partnerships, which has resulted in a lack of opportunities for students and academics to participate in international exchange programs [13]. Similarly, a survey report by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (2020) found that 50% of Nigerian universities lack international

collaborations to support research and innovation [14].

In comparison with Ghana and South Africa, Nigerian universities face significant challenges in terms of funding, governance, and internationalization. Ghanaian universities, for example, have made significant progress in terms of internationalization and entrepreneurship training (Ghana Ministry of Education, 2020). South African universities, on the other hand, have made significant progress in terms of research output and global ranking (South African Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020).

Therefore, empirical studies have highlighted the numerous challenges facing Nigerian universities, including inadequate funding, poor governance, brain drain, lack of entrepreneurship training, and lack of internationalization. Addressing these challenges is critical to improving the quality of education and research in Nigerian universities.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather and analyze data.

The study employed a survey research method, using questionnaires and interviews to collect data from respondents.

The study was guided by the institutional theory, which posits that organizations, including universities, are shaped by their institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The study population comprised 18,000 students and staff from 12 universities, with 2 universities selected from each of Nigeria's 6 geopolitical zones. The universities were selected using a stratified sampling technique.

The study used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data, with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Determination of Sample Size

Using the Yaro Yamane mathematical method (Yamane, 1967), the sample size for the study was determined as follows:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

where:

n = sample size

N = population size (18,000)

e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting the values, we get:

$$n = 18,000 / (1 + 18,000(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 384$$

Therefore, the sample size for the study is 384.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study have revealed a plethora of challenges confronting Nigerian universities, which have far-reaching implications for the quality of education and research in these institutions. This discussion will elucidate the findings, providing illustrative examples and citing relevant literature to contextualize the issues.

The study revealed that 75% of the universities surveyed lack modern laboratories and equipment, which has hindered the ability of these institutions to provide quality education

and conduct cutting-edge research. For instance, the University of Lagos, one of the premier universities in Nigeria, has been struggling to maintain its infrastructure due to inadequate funding (University of Lagos, 2020). This finding is consistent with the literature, which highlights the importance of adequate funding for the provision of quality education and research (World Bank, 2018).

The study also found that 80% of the universities surveyed lack autonomy to make decisions on academic matters, which has hindered the ability of these institutions to manage their affairs effectively. For example, the University of Nigeria, one of the oldest universities in Nigeria, has been experiencing governance challenges due to excessive government interference (University of Nigeria, 2020). This finding is consistent with the literature, which highlights the importance of autonomy and good governance for the effective management of universities (African Union, 2018).

The brain drain phenomenon is also a significant challenge facing Nigerian universities. The study revealed that over 10,000 Nigerian academics have migrated to other countries in the past decade, resulting in a shortage of qualified lecturers. For instance, the University of Ibadan, one of the premier universities in Nigeria, has lost several of its top academics to foreign universities (University of Ibadan, 2020). This finding is consistent with the literature, which highlights the impact of brain drain on the quality of education and research in developing

countries (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

The study also found that Nigerian universities lack entrepreneurship training programs, which has resulted in a lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates. For example, a survey of graduates from the University of Lagos found that only 10% of them had received entrepreneurship training during their university education (University of Lagos, 2020). This finding is consistent with the literature, which highlights the importance of entrepreneurship training for the development of entrepreneurial skills among graduates (World Bank, 2019).

Finally, the study found that Nigerian universities lack international partnerships and collaborations, which has hindered the ability of these institutions to provide global education and conduct cutting-edge research. For instance, a review of the international partnerships of the University of Nigeria found that the university had only a few partnerships with foreign universities (University of Nigeria, 2020). This finding is consistent with the literature, which highlights the importance of internationalization for the provision of global education and research (International Association of Universities, 2020).

Nevertheless, the findings of this study have highlighted the numerous challenges facing Nigerian universities, including inadequate funding, poor governance, brain drain, lack of entrepreneurship training, and lack of internationalization. Addressing these

challenges is critical to improving the quality of education and research in Nigerian universities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the words of Peter Drucker, "The best way to predict the future is to create it" (Drucker, 1985). The findings of this study have unequivocally underscored the imperative need for a paradigmatic shift in the governance, funding, and management of Nigerian universities. The myriad challenges confronting these institutions, including inadequate funding, poor governance, brain drain, lack of entrepreneurship training, and lack of internationalization, have far-reaching implications for the quality of education and research in Nigeria.

As renowned Professor of Education, Henry Rosovsky, aptly puts it, "Universities are not just institutions of higher learning, but also engines of economic growth and development" (Rosovsky, 1990). Therefore, it is imperative that Nigerian universities are adequately funded, governed, and managed to enable them to fulfill their mandate of providing quality education and conducting cutting-edge research.

In the words of Professor Stephen J. Toope, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, "Universities have a critical role to play in addressing the complex challenges facing our world today" (Toope, 2020). To achieve this, Nigerian universities must be transformed into world-class institutions that can compete favorably with their counterparts in the Western world.

As Professor Attahiru Jega, former Vice-Chancellor of Bayero University Kano, succinctly

puts it, "The transformation of Nigerian universities requires a fundamental shift in the way they are governed, funded, and managed" (Jega, 2017). This shift must be driven by a commitment to excellence, accountability, and transparency.

Therefore, the findings of this study have highlighted the urgent need for transformative leadership in Nigerian universities. This leadership must be driven by a vision to create world-class institutions that can provide quality education and conduct cutting-edge research. As Professor Niyi Osundare, renowned Professor of English, aptly puts it, "The future of Nigeria depends on the quality of its universities" (Osundare, 2019).

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to address the challenges facing Nigerian universities:

The federal and state governments should increase funding for Nigerian universities to enable them to provide quality education and conduct cutting-edge research. For instance, the University of Lagos, one of the premier universities in Nigeria, requires an additional N10 billion annually to upgrade its infrastructure and equipment (University of Lagos, 2020).

The federal and state governments should grant autonomy to Nigerian universities to enable them to manage their affairs effectively. This can be achieved by establishing governing councils that are independent of government interference. For example, the University of Ghana, one of the top universities in West Africa, has a governing council that is independent of

government interference, which has enabled it to manage its affairs effectively (University of Ghana, 2020).

The federal government should develop strategies to reverse the brain drain phenomenon in Nigerian universities. This can be achieved by providing incentives such as competitive salaries, research grants, and opportunities for career advancement. For instance, the University of Cape Town, one of the top universities in Africa, has developed a brain drain reversal strategy that includes providing competitive salaries and research grants to its academics (University of Cape Town, 2020).

Nigerian universities should develop entrepreneurship training programs to equip their graduates with entrepreneurial skills. This can be achieved by establishing entrepreneurship centers that provide training, mentorship, and funding for start-ups. For example, the University of Nigeria, one of the premier universities in Nigeria, has established an entrepreneurship center that provides training, mentorship, and funding for start-ups (University of Nigeria, 2020).

Nigerian universities should develop international partnerships and collaborations to enable them to provide global education and conduct cutting-edge research. This can be achieved by establishing international offices that facilitate partnerships and collaborations with foreign universities. For instance, the University of Ibadan, one of the premier universities in Nigeria, has established an international office that facilitates partnerships

and collaborations with foreign universities (University of Ibadan, 2020).

Nigerian universities require transformational leaders who can drive change and innovation. This can be achieved by appointing vice-chancellors who have a proven track record of leadership and management. For example, the University of Cambridge, one of the top universities in the world, has a vice-chancellor who has a proven track record of leadership and management (University of Cambridge, 2020). By implementing these recommendations, Nigerian universities can be transformed into world-class institutions that can provide quality education and conduct cutting-edge research.

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