

## **Internationalization of University Education in Nigeria: Responding to New Realities and Global Relevance**

ROBERT-OKAHI I. (Ph.D)

Department of Educational Foundations & Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni,  
Port Harcourt. e-mail: ibe.okoh@yahoo.com.

### **Abstract**

Internationalization of education has to do with the imparting of knowledge, skills and values associated with universal appeal and application. It is a strong instrument for diversification of goals and objectives of tertiary institutions. Presently, there is competition among tertiary institutions to internationalize. Nigeria should not be left behind. This paper reviewed recent literatures on the rationales and modes of university internationalization. Using Knights four generic dimensions which indicated the shortcomings inherent in the activities, competencies, ethos and processes in the internationalization of university education, the following strategies were used to guide Nigerian universities on the part to global relevance. They include, adequate funding, regular 'tune-up' of academic staff through seminars, workshops and conferences of international standard, encouraging 'classrooms without walls', open education resources, cross-campus research collaboration and developing partnership models where Nigerian academics can partner with their foreign world-class counterparts.

**Key words:** Internationalization, New realities, global relevance, university education.

### **Introduction/Background**

Internationalization is not a new nomenclature in higher education. Universities, though national entities, are recognized as most international institutions even in time of aggressive nationalism. Internationalization tends to address the increase in border crossing activities amidst national systems of education. Globalization, on the other hand, assumes that borders and national systems do not exist (Varghese, 2008). The university is mainly concerned with the production and dissemination of universal knowledge. Universities are institutions with dual characteristics, national and international. While the ownerships, structure and organization may always be national, the content and knowledge imparted is universal and international. According to Vaghese (2008), internationalization of education is the imparting of knowledge, skills and values which have universal appeal and application. It implies that a curriculum becomes cross-national and intercultural in nature. According to Uche & Ahunanya (2013), there are different models of internationalization of education, namely: - international student mobility, faculty exchange and development, research collaboration, foreign language study, building international perspectives, international networks, distance education, locally supported distance education, twinning programmes, articulation programmes, branch campuses, franchising agreements and international quality assurance systems. These have resulted to intensified mobility of ideas, students and academic staff in Nigerian universities, leading to brain drain and capital flight – twin disease plaguing the Nigeria academia.

Internationalization can also occur in such a way that students acquire international skills without having to leave the country. Sometimes, it involves a shift from producing for national markets to international markets. This implies changing the orientation of courses offered in the domestic universities, which sometimes is referred to as "internationalization at home" (Varghese, 2008). This may take place without the presence of any foreign provider at home. As distinguished from globalization with its emphasis on worldwide condition that influence perceptions of space, mobility of actions, the nature of communication and orientation to social interaction, internationalization focuses attention on the intentional actions of individuals, groups and social institutions to cross national borders in pursuit of social, economic, political or cultural benefits. From higher educational institution perspective, Knight (1999) cited in Douglas & Nielsen (2012) defined internationalization as a matter of integrating transnational elements into the 'purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. That is, colleges and universities are internationalizing their behavior when they reshape their purposes to attract international students, to deploy their programmes across national borders, concentrate on internationally advantageous educational programme niches, restructure work roles or compensation systems to recruit, retain or manage employees.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Higher education provides economic, social and political benefits, both to individuals and the public, produces qualified human capital and professional development, adapts and generates knowledge through research and innovation, brings about equitable opportunities and access provisions, supports other levels of

education (through training and development), promotes international cooperation and improves competitiveness in the global knowledge-based economy (Uche & Ahunanya, 2013). There is competition the world over, therefore, among institutions of higher education to enhance their internationalism. This would be a real advantage not only for these institutions but for their home country. Nigeria should not be left behind for there is need for her to work together with other parts of the world to address global challenges such as sustainable development, renewable energy, climate changes and security or migration issues. One way this can be achieved is through internationalization for research and teaching capacity and knowledge transfer. Also the recent reforms towards increased capacity of university education in Nigeria have not resulted in the attraction of measurable foreign faculty and students into the Nigerian university system, instead, there is increased number of students studying abroad. The problem of strikes, poor funding, access and dilapidated infrastructure in Nigerian public universities and those of high cost and inadequate staffing in private universities have contributed to Nigerians seeking cross border education. Also, the habit of firms hiring Nigerians abroad as they have no confidence in indigenously produced graduates is another factor. This paper therefore evaluated and analyzed the strategic constraints and challenges that prevent Nigerian universities from becoming internationalized, denying them the capacity to attract foreign students and intellectuals.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of internationalization connotes putting in place a multinational institution with universal goals, vision and objectives that transcend the original boundaries with relevant human and material resources to function across borders. This theory propounded by Buckley and Cason (2007) cited in Uche & Ahunanya (2013) insisted that higher education institutions should adopt 'international strategic management model' (ISMM) in order to understand and control the dictate of the expanded boundaries to be in deep contact with the external environment without disregard to the growth of her internal organizational structure. The emphasis is on the establishment of several resourceful factors that would stimulate the institution to transcend domestic borders but still remain operationally intact by making use of well established extensions with wide decisional or planned perspectives and networks. This theory of internationalization was originally linked to business thinking as an international requirement to reach most parts of the world with the same business, similar products and services. This led to the establishment of multinational corporations, stores and services. This could be the original global conceptions as the ideological and philosophical thinking did not have clear cut demarcations from today's internationalization and incontinentalisation or cross-breeding of resources, human labour, capital/fiscal efforts, transfer of technology, multi-tasking of roles and specializations, extension of programmes as in organized study tours, all types of exchange programmes as well as networking of both ideas, goods and relevant factors. Education is recognized as 'fee riders' product and service. The university sells her public goods which is learning and knowledge to those who become committed to it for private use, for public purposes and for national development. Nigerian higher institutions should therefore embrace internationalization as a strategic model which involves having a critical corporate perception of our institutions with a perfect conceptual key for doing business abroad in order to survive at home. In other words, universities should reach out to gain more in order to attain subsistent and sustainable heights.

### **An Overview of Rationale for Internationalization of University Education**

To attain world class status is no doubt the ultimate goal of every higher institution since it is the only way to strategically compete among overseas counterpart. Some categorical rationales have been advanced as likely under-tones for internationalization of certain university programmes, projects and activities. This is often expressed with laudable pronouncements such as 'to be a top class institution for the pursuit of excellence in knowledge through learning and research, as well as in character and service to humanity' (university of Lagos press, 2011). Beside such universalized vision and mission, internationalization according to Babalola & Adepoju (1991) in Onyene (2013) is a reform process that takes into account the future orientation, current global actions to be tackled for improvement, maximization of resource output leading to attainment of goals and objectives. This change indispensability brings about reforms and innovations in the areas of curriculum development, structural and teaching method upturn, resulting in standard improvement, meeting future expectations, organizational effectiveness in goal accomplishment as well as increasing desire for more creativity and innovations.

Tertiary institutions would have internationalized her activities, personnel, programmes and programmes by adopting school-wide reforms which when implemented will result in cross-border growth. This can be done by conducting regular standardized tests targeted beyond the national boundaries. Internationalization is a strong instrument for diversification of goals and objectives. No one individual can afford to live with his or her service in isolation, which implies that any nations tertiary, formal, open and

dynamic system of learning cannot grow beyond her primary locality. According to Onyene (2013), goal internationalization widens and redefines institutional boundaries, creates proper understanding of the boundaries as a multinational institution (MNI) and demands more sophisticated stewardship and management. Proper goal definition forces the university to examine her philosophy, her structural requirements and sets her on common but critical direction. With internationalized engagements, tertiary institutions will serve better economic purpose to beneficiaries, enrich stakeholders and spur national growth and development. From the internationalization theory, Onyene (2013) claimed that institutional efficiency and effectiveness are comparatively open for any type of assessment and accreditation. As a result, institutions will tend to have accurate boundary definition, properly established linkages with other foreign institutions and firms while remaining relevant in her specific local environment. There is therefore a continuous effort directed at keeping the institution open, with enlarged responsibility, decentralized power and authority, clearly stipulated policy formation, free forms of designed structured elements which may include having matrix departments that would stand as both production and or sales depots simultaneously.

There will also be continuous need to expand, enhance and extend lines of communication between individuals, groups, teams, institutions with enriched multi-directional patterns in order to ensure fast-tracked results, intermittent adjustments and or change introduction. Internationalization is therefore, a living process born out of paradigmatic pressure which has become imperatively compelling. Since education is a primary factor of development through which changes are brought about, entrenched and perpetuated, in the wake of global competitiveness, the internal efficiency of any university in Nigeria should show evidence of her sufficiency components in terms of admission, registration, study assessment techniques and processes. According to Onyene (2013), admission into all programmes offered by University of Lagos, at post-graduate level, is through online applications by a visit to spgs website [www.unilagspgs.edu.ng](http://www.unilagspgs.edu.ng). A click on the session of 'application' for example, 2012/2013 application likes one up. One can equally log in with payment reference numbers as username and provide surname in lowercases as password, and there you go, very simple. Only institutions that are electronically connected can confidently portray her process as UNILAG, School of Post-Graduate Studies. This does not end at e-admission but e-registration form, use of data capturing for issuance of student identity card (ID cards) all backed up with adequate support services available to students with log-in problems. Any student elsewhere in the world can apply.

The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), has long expanded her operations to include polytechnics and colleges as her bunch of service beneficiaries' particularly for undergraduate admission. This implies expanded stake-holding. Right now, JAMB examines candidates electronically. There is the need to reach Nigerians in diaspora whose children would prefer to school in Nigeria as a means of being integrated into our culture, knowledge orientations, her leadership and people. This may call for certificate harmonization as done for America by the International Board of Evaluation. A secondary school in New York and Manchester may easily produce learners as feeders who will be eligible for admission in University of Lagos (UNILAG). In the same vein, many secondary schools in Nigeria have been subscribing to the services of American, South African and Ghanian higher institutions of learning through online information thereby using the internet as an unbeatable globalization tool for internationalization of education, skill acquisition and general exchange of items of value. Hicks & Gullet in Onyene (2013) noted that internationalization is a democratic approach that can be regarded as property of modern organization requiring conscious and careful entrenchment to make local institutions to reach out to the outside world. This occurs through exchange programmes for learners, having collaborated study scheme, foreign research supervision, and collaborated research conduct by scholars, exchange of course teachers such as visiting professorship as well as sharing of administrative models, personnel and facilities. With internationalization, institutional planning and decision-making will take integrative pattern with each networked institution involved in the creation, coordination, stimulation of ideas, values, technical specialties and resourcing.

### **Approaches to Internationalization of University Education in Nigeria**

Using the four generic perspectives of activity, competency, ethos and process, Knight in Delgado-Marquez, Hurtado-Torres & Bonder (2011) explained the different approaches to internationalization by different researchers, practitioners and higher education institutions. The approaches and descriptions are as shown in table 1.

**Table 1:** Approaches to Internationalization

S/N	Approach	Description
1	Activity	Categories or types of activities used to describe internationalization such as curriculum, student/faculty exchanges, technical assistance, international students.
2	Competency	Development of new skills, knowledge, attitudes and values in students, faculty and staff. As the emphasis on outcomes of education grows, there is increasing interest in identifying and defining global international competencies.
3	Ethos	Emphasis is on creating a culture or climate on campus which promotes and supports international/intercultural initiatives.
4	Process	Integration or infusion of an international or intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service through a combination of a wide range of activities, policies and procedures.

**Source:** Delgado-Marquez, B.L, Hurtado-Torres, N.E, Bondar, Y. (2011). Internationalization of higher education: Theoretical and empirical investigation of its influence on university institution rankings in globalization and internationalization of higher education *Revista da Universidad Sociedad Delconocimiento (RUSC)*. 8(2), 14-24.

### Activity Approach

This is apparently the most prevalent approach to internationalization of university education in the last century and it is still relevant as the incorporation of international dimension into specific educational activities determines how far the products of the system is globally acceptable. The most prevalent type of activities include international students, development assistance and academic mobility. Some activities of higher education constitute obstacles to internationalization especially in the area of attracting foreign students and faculty. The admission process is the most unfavourable. For instance, the central examination system by JAMB and other sets of exam by individual universities have become obstacles for accessing higher education in Nigeria. A situation where a qualified candidate does the JAMB examination four or five times before qualification does not augur well for internationalization of higher education as foreign students will not be encouraged to go through the registration hurdles not to talk about unorganized nature of other exam processes associated with the administration of Post JAMB matriculation exams. Most West African countries according to Ahunanya & Igot (2013) do not have such hurdles for entrance into tertiary institutions. Once one qualifies with the regional West African Examination Council (WAEC) certificates, ones entry into ones university of choice in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia is assured.

The activity of strike actions and incessant university closure is anti-internationalization. A situation where it takes an average of six sessions to complete a four session course does not augur well for the life strategic plan of students and their sponsors. Will an international student cope with such delay? The main reason Nigerian students favour cross-border education is to avoid the delay caused by strikes and interruption of academic sessions (Bashir, 2007). Cultism is another threat to internationalization. If the safety of Nigerian students is not guaranteed, what becomes the fate of foreigners? Cultism not only promotes violence, it equally institutes all forms of insecurity in all institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Cultists destroy facilities, torture, main and kill students, university staff as well as lecturers. Added to this are other types of brigandage such as kidnapping, gangsterism and terrorism which have extended from the micro Nigerian society to the academia. For instance, according to Ahunanya & Igot (2013), the terrorist bombing at the Bayero University, Kano in April, 2012 left fifteen people dead while at the Federal Polytechnic, Mubi in October, of the same year, 26 students were shot dead and uptill now, nobody has claimed responsibility. About five heads of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have suffered in the hands of kidnappers with the whereabouts of many lecturers unaccountable. Foreign students/faculties under this state of siege, may suffer 'culture shock' without adequate protection. This issue of improper utilization of fund, unaccountability and lack transparency in funding Nigerian universities has discouraged financial assistance from interested stakeholders according to Ahunanya, Okpara & Muraina (2010). The developmental assistance given by foreign and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has greatly contributed to infrastructural development in Nigerian universities. In assessing the McArthur foundations support to four Nigerian universities in 2001, Fine cited in Ahunanya & Igot (2013) noted that only two universities utilized the fund judiciously.

### **Competency Approach**

The competency approach is closely related to educational outcomes, values and attitudes of students. This approach focuses on generation and transfer of knowledge that will develop competencies in the personnel of higher education institutions to become more internationally knowledgeable and inter-culturally skilled (Knight in Delgado-Marquez, Hurtado-Terres & Bondur, 2011). Competency emphasizes the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are important for competition in the global market place. The FGN 20:2020 (2010) document noted that the declining quality of education, training and skill has posed serious impediment to the employability of Nigerian graduates and has grossly undermined the competitiveness of the Nigerian labour force nationally and globally. The document equally noted that education and health which is the foundation of lifelong learning and capacity building are currently constrained by underfunding, inadequate and poor infrastructural facilities. The decay of infrastructure has resulted to overcrowding in classrooms and hostels, teaching science without practicals, inadequate library space among others. Poor access to digital library or open education resources is a discouragement to internationalization.

### **Ethos Approach**

The ethos approach to internationalization according to Ahunanya & Igot (2013) is an attempt to make more explicit in the culture of the institution the international dimension to the delivery of higher education. This approach focuses on establishing an atmosphere, beliefs and distinguishing character that encourages and fosters the development of international and intercultural values and initiatives. The academic atmosphere of Nigerian universities so far does not encourage it to be addressed as the ivory tower where intellectual preoccupation will result to innovation. The incessant intra and inter conflicts and crisis within the universities various workers unions and between them has created a practical atmosphere of siege where practical survival instincts abound in decisions made as they are starved of funds. Also, the motivational relationship that encourages mentoring and capacity building among staff is hardly in existence as staff and faculty strive for survival. Using the research cultures as example, not many Nigerian university lecturers can afford to attend international conference from their salary expenditure without sponsorship. The intervention of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (Tertfund) sponsorship of researches, conferences and book publications have recently improved the culture of teaching and research in Nigerian universities even if it is like a trickle where an ocean is needed. According to Ahunanya & Igot (2013), recently key officers were appointed into Nigerian universities; it was only two universities that had non-indigenes among the appointees whereas only few that were appointed had the requisite qualifications. A case of quota or federal character policy which is inimical to national and international perspective to education has created an atmosphere inimical to nationalism, not to talk of internationalization.

### **The Process Approach**

The process approach focuses on the integration of an international and/or intercultural dimension into academic programmes as well as the guiding policies and procedures of an institution. Process approach focuses on policies and procedures put in place to encourage internationalization. It often concerns itself with the international process that are reflected in the teaching, research and community service that go on in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning. Internationally, the processes of lecture delivery has become digitalized resulting in massive open online courses (MOOCs), yet it is only the National Open University of Nigeria that has introduced it on a minimal scale due to the challenges of technology adaptation and power problems. The processes of research in Nigerian universities have not resulted in any Nigerian university included among the first one thousand by the world's three ranking organizations of Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), London; the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) compiled the Shanghai Jiaotong University, China and the Webometrics ranking from Cyber-metrics Laboratory in Spain. This shows that most researches from Nigerian Universities are not of international standard, hence the urgent need to review the research process (Okojie, 2008).

### **Constraints to Internationalization of Nigerian Universities**

The following have been enumerated as the constraints to internationalization of universities in Nigeria.

- 1) Paucity of funds allocated to the education sector in the national budget has become a hydra-headed monster to growth and development of universities in Nigeria. This, with the increasing deplorable state of the university's carrying capacity regulation according to Oyene & Sola (2010) have impacted negatively on the university's services especially between 1981 and 1991.
- 2) There is often no periodic review of institutional structure, academic programmes, and facilities in line with the current global sophistication. At one of her meetings, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU, UNILAG Branch) according to Okebukola (2007), deliberated on the need for

- structural review after which it reasoned that when such criteria is designed and used for assessment of the organizational health of universities, a lot of adjustments will be carried out to ensure balance. Absence of such comparative assessment tool have rendered many universities unfit with obsolete and irrelevant programmes being sold to their immediate environment, and to the country as a whole.
- 3) Nigerian universities also battle the expensive incapability to align some courses of study with labour market demand. This is followed by the indiscriminate upsurge in several departments of new courses in a copy-and-paste manner, renaming of courses in various faculties without adjusting content and outlines, hasty floating of centres or boards for new programmes, total lack of conformity to international standard as well as unsellable nature of some courses.
  - 4) There is also the possibility of universities copying intervention innovations, not buoyed by having dedicated and qualified staff-a situation alleged to have combined to place the best Nigerian university behind the top sixteen universities in Africa (Adefuye, 2013). Adefuye (2012) further noted that such intervention or the so called innovations were not matched with knowledgeable and dedicated staff tend to place the university on a very slow growth ladder. He bemoaned this as the cause of poor ratings given to higher institutions in Nigeria, in Africa and the whole world. This has further worsened by the recent increase of work life of Nigerian university professor to 70 years, where in actual fact most of them are scholars who did not submit themselves to self development retreats and workshops while they were still very active. They tend not readily to meet up with knowledge growth even at local level, which hence affects internationalization gains negatively.
  - 5) There is pressure from recurrent paradigm shifts in the entire knowledge arena where the hitherto notable professional fields such as business and management studies, education, engineering, environmental studies, law, mass communication, medicine as well as other sciences are yearning for adequate bias with some elements in humanities and social sciences to enhance their technological bases and to render them completely versatile with dominant skill orientation.
  - 6) At independence, Nigeria needed human capital in order to have quality work force. As a result, emphasis was not placed on the production of well-educated and well-rounded graduates and most times they are churned out on large numbers which internalization prudence reverses drastically. The truth is that the resources needed to produce hugely sophisticated manpower are either non-existent or grossly inadequate.
  - 7) Without vivid understanding of the circumstances and environment in which they display and practice with acquired skills, globalization cannot empower institutions to indirectly peer-review each other.
  - 8) Most universities in Nigeria lack functional local and wide area networks and may therefore not be part of those dreaming of internationalization. Information-seeking activities of internationalized institutions of learning can be rewarding and enjoyable with such mega dimensional library with properly networked-services.
  - 9) The internationalization process requires in the present university staff with doctoral degrees in relevant areas of need, particularly in the novel areas, a strong challenge for governments and institutions to route more money and supports into staff development schemes and also project beyond local institutions to attract foreign collaborations.
  - 10) The most pervading of all the challenges to internationalization is the poor capacity of Nigerian tertiary institutions for basic and applied researches. Nigerian universities according to Oyene & Sola (2010) dangle between 16 and 24 percent of national research capacity, hence not contributing enough to national development. Research findings are data base for policy-making, raw materials for production functions of industries, information as feedback to practitioners and it provides the basis for advocacy, even for passing national bills.

### **Strategies to New Realities and Global Relevance**

The following have been suggested as strategies for internationalization in answer to the question of what kind of internationalization will be appropriate to solve Nigerian university education problems.

- 1) In order to internationalize the entrance into Nigerian universities, a one-time, online examination programme of global standard should be put in place to encourage foreigners access Nigerian universities with the minimum required qualification.
- 2) The effect of incessant closure of Nigerian universities can be reduced if formal agreements are entered into for twinning model with foreign universities among MOOCs as advocated by the National Universities Commission Guideline (2010) such that as students are at home because of closure, they can be studying and running the programmes of the twin universities. However, the best is avoidance of closures at all such that unions devise alternative strategies to make demand on government.

- 3) The concept of 'classrooms without walls' can be futuristically considered if the security situation in Nigeria persists, as a way of internationalization of university education. This will involve the use of off-shore activities in faculty and student exchange with limited physical presence geared towards motivational mentoring. According to Bashir (2007), most countries deliberately encourage foreign collaborators to improve the quality of domestic higher education. Bashir (2007) further noted that the emerging regional and global market for skilled labour is fueling private demand for internationally accepted higher education.
- 4) In improving the training and skill acquisition of Nigerian students for internationalization, international cooperation should be exploited at institutional level using the partnership model where universities partner and network with foreign ones who are world class in known field of study to run e-workshops/conferences and seminars in the required fields.
- 5) Open Education Resources should be encouraged by the federal government of Nigeria with a policy back-up such that the curriculum content of courses in Nigerian universities should be in tandem with international standard. The virtual library of the NUC should be on 24/7 basis for Nigerian universities to be linked up internationally with current global researches made available to students and faculty.
- 6) The problem of power supply where there is solar resource should encourage partnership with Nordic Universities who have perfected the use of solar energy with the little sun they get as power sources. Every university should have a solar farm to meet its power needs. Faculty and students can be sent on exchange programme to achieve this.
- 7) Extra-curricular activities channeled towards global innovation should be adopted in tackling such ethos generic issues as atmosphere of siege and fight for survival. If an international mentoring network is setup and keyed into by university wide faculty and students, cultists among them will be globally informed of recent development in learning and may be discouraged from activities that are inimical to internationalization. Lecturers will become aware of what their colleagues are doing and become broadminded enough to look beyond survival but sustenance.
- 8) Cross campus research collaboration and joint research activities with foreign universities will help in fostering global standard research processes.
- 9) Universities should be adequately funded. At least, the UNESCO standard of 26% annual national budget should be strictly adhered to if the deplorable state of equipments, facilities and infrastructure can be stemmed.
- 10) Scholars should continuously submit themselves to self-development retreats, seminars, workshop and conferences in order to up-date themselves to international standard.
- 11) Funding is always a big agenda for restructuring. Hence capital base of any institution and sources of both internally and externally generated fund options according to Onyene (2000) affects the number of positions created in the course of structuring for internationalization.
- 12) Communication linkage is a critical factor in the internationalization of higher education as that opens every institution to the larger audience and the wider world. There is therefore the need for the re-designing of the communication lines. E-university will play the magic transformational wand for prompt reach to foreigners and their various forms of educational programmes.

### **Conclusion**

Virtually all institutions of higher education, public and private have evolved into global actors, following the trend in other industries. The influence of internationalization on the character and behavior of higher education institutions has become a major theme in recent research. There is competition among world class universities to embrace internationalism. Nigeria should not be left behind for there is need for her to work together with other parts of the world to address global challenges. This paper reviewed the rationales for internationalization of Nigerian universities, revealing in the process innovations and reforms that may take place in curriculum development, teaching and community service. Using the four generic perspectives of activity, competency, ethos and process, the different approaches to internationalization were explained. Strategies were suggested to overcome the constraints and challenges that prevent universities in Nigeria from becoming univertionalised.

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