



Internationalisation of higher education and its implications for institutional ranking of universities

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Abstract

Universities are universal communities where knowledge is transmitted. It is expected that such knowledge should be globally relevant. Internationalisation of Higher Education is the integration of global dimensions into the delivery of higher education. One of the indicators of institutional rankings is internationalisation. Some indicators common to these institutions include online presence and visibility, research outputs available on the university's website, citations of scholars among others. Over the years, Nigerian universities have not been able to make the list of the first 1000 universities in the world. This may not be unconnected with the current state of internationalisation of universities. The study was hinged on internationalisation theory. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Two universities (one public and one private) were purposively selected for the study to be able to get the perspective of both public and private universities total of 300 participants were selected for the study comprising of students and lecturers. One hundred and fifty participants were selected from each university comprising of one hundred students and fifty members of academic staff across five faculties in each institution. Data collected were analysed using inferential statistics. The study found out that internationalisation has significant influence on institutional ranking in universities in Nigeria. The study however found out that Nigeria has no national policy on internationalisation, even though some universities have their own policy, the absence of a national policy makes the effort uncoordinated and ineffective. The study therefore recommended the need for Nigeria to develop a national policy on internationalisation of higher education.

Keywords: Internationalisation, higher education, institutional ranking, universities, policy

Introduction

Universities are knowledge hubs where high level manpower training is provided for human and national development. As one of the institutions of higher education, it has three core functions of teaching, research and community service. One of its purposes is the transmission of knowledge which aids understanding of the immediate and external environment. It is also concerned with the transfer of knowledge and training which is expected to enable them think critically and effectively and consequently make quality decisions, solve day to day problems and prepare recipients for the world of work [4]. The goal of higher education has long been identified as the process that helps develop the whole man physically, mentally, morally and technologically, to enable them function effectively in any environment in which they find themselves in order to become more productive, self-fulfilling and attain self-actualisation [1].

According to the Bulletin of Monday 19th June, 2023, a weekly publication from the Office of the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (NUC), there are 51 Federal Universities, 61 State Universities and 147 Private Universities in Nigeria making it a total of 259 universities in Nigeria which is reported as the country with the highest number of universities in Africa. However, there are rising concerns about the state of universities in Nigeria. These concerns are due to the many problems facing universities which have not positioned it well for global institutional rankings. The concerns include the poor state of facilities in universities, issue of incessant strike action leading to instability of academic calendar which is one of the reasons why many students now prefer to travel to other countries with stable academic calendar. Other issues of concern to the researcher are issues of staff remuneration

and welfare, proliferation of universities without consideration of sustainability and erosion of university autonomy among others.

Internationalisation simply refers to the introduction of global perspectives into domestic operations for the purpose of assuring quality and giving room for competitiveness and interconnectedness [4]. In the context of higher educational institutions (HEIs), internationalisation is the process of introducing global dimension into the processes involved in the delivery of higher education. There are various indicators of internationalisation which includes student mobility, exchange programmes, staff mobility, research and Development (International collaborative research, conferences and journals), institutional linkages, academic programmes, governance and autonomy, international presence/crossborder education, regional connectivity, harmonisation, social and cultural integration, curriculum/educational programme among others. [5]. [1] noted that it is not possible for higher education to opt out of the global environment as its effects are unavoidable.

Internationalisation of higher education has been described as a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers; international linkages, partnerships, and projects; new international academic programmes; and research initiatives [7]. It is viewed as a means of delivering education to other countries using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques and new types of arrangements such as branch campuses or franchises [9]. Although internationalisation is expressed in a diversity of ways, it is important it respects and be guided by local culture, values and needs which implies that it must take cognizance of the local context in its operations and activities. [10] gave a very neutral definition which has also been described as a widely accepted definition of

internationalisation of higher education as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. Knight further noted that internationalisation is not an ideology rather it is a process of change. [3] described internationalisation as the imparting of knowledge, skills and values which have universal appeal and application. By implication, the curriculum becomes cross-national and intercultural in nature.

Internationalisation of higher education has been seen as a contemporary process aiming to contribute to human, social, cultural and economic development of communities and nations [8]. The internationalisation process involves strengthening the international dimension of teaching, research, community outreach, and engagement with partners in the region and abroad because higher education is an important agent of change and development. [8].

One of the measures of internationalisation in higher education is the introduction of institutional rankings. This implies that institutional ranking tends to measure the extent at which HEIs operate in line with global best practices. Institutional ranking refers to the rating of institutions of higher learning based on their performance in the areas of research, teaching and service which constitute the three-core mandate of higher education. Its indicators include publications, citations and international collaboration. Other areas of interest in rankings include student access in terms of admission, the diversity of students and staff; faculty and curriculum; institutional culture; academic freedom and autonomy of the institution [13].

At the institutional level, ranking helps individual institutions to know how they fare and enable them to strengthen their reputation and thus allow for more patronage. On the other hand, it helps government to understand institutional capacity and make sound investment decisions and policies. Reports from rankings equally help to guide governments, businesses and foundations in decision-making on the investment of funds, award of research grants and the provision of endowments. Ranking reports also help students and parents to make informed decisions on choice of institutions for the pursuit of academic programmes either at undergraduate or graduate level. Hence, institutions with good ranking status are likely to record a larger patronage especially at the graduate level [4]. There are various international ranking organisations which rank universities across the world with different methodologies. They include; Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE), World University Rankings and Webometrics Ranking of World Universities (Webometrics). Others are UniRank, Taiwan National University (NTU) Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities (up to 2011 the acronym used was HEEACT), The Multidimensional Ranking of Higher Education Institutions (U-Multirank), the CWTS Leiden Ranking, the rankings are compiled by the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (Centrum voor Wetenschap en Technologische Studies, CWTS) at Leiden University in the Netherlands. There is also the University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP) and Scimago Institutions Rankings a science evaluation resource which assesses worldwide universities and research-focused institutions [4].

One major reason for higher education rankings is the need to monitor and assess the quality of training offered in public and private universities in Nigeria. Nigeria has

witnessed the introduction of new public and private universities. Between 2020 and 2023, eighty-eight (88) new universities (8 Federal, 12 State and 68 Private) were established (NUC, 2023). The justification provided for this continuous increase is the need to widen access to higher education. However, it has been argued that a more effective way of widening access to higher education is not by establishing new universities which requires a lot of money to start up and to maintain but expanding and strengthening the existing ones in order to increase their carrying capacity and as such widen access to university education. The practice of proliferating universities appears to be the current situation in Nigeria as governments at the Federal and State levels keep establishing new universities for political accolades while most of these new institutions suffer from underfunding as applicable to the older and existing universities. For example, the past two Presidents in Nigeria were “rewarded” with the establishment of one university each in their hometowns. Most State Governors also end up establishing at least a university, polytechnic or college of education in their hometown in their respective states before the end of the tenure. Legislators at national and state levels have equally turned establishment of universities as a constituency project with a view to scoring political points and to make up their campaign agenda for re-election. Private universities are currently more than Federal and State universities in Nigeria. Wealthy individuals and organisations now establish universities in their numbers with expensive fees that an average Nigerian cannot afford. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the umbrella body for academic staff in public universities has continuously cautioned the Nigerian government at all levels against this proliferation of universities which is weakening the existing public universities as there are no increased funding allocation to universities even though there is continuous increase in the number of universities on regular basis.

These developments have become worrisome as the quality of some of these emerging universities has been a source of concern to stakeholders as the task of running a university is serious than just politicizing its establishment without counting the cost of its sustainability. There have been instances when NUC, which is the regulatory agency for universities had to withdraw the license of some universities while in some other cases, it had to disaccredit some programmes because of failure to meet up with the stipulated benchmark for operation.

Theoretical Framework: Internationalisation Theory

The study was hinged on the theory of internationalisation of Buckley and Cason (1976). The theory of internationalisation emphasis creating an institution with universal goals that goes beyond the local context with necessary machineries to operate at a global level. This theory propounded by Buckley and Cason (1976) cited in [16] proposed the ‘International Strategic Management Model’ (ISMM) which will enable them to understand workings of the expanded boundaries and by so doing maintain a good contact with the external environment without neglecting or disconnecting from its local structure and context. The substances of the theory are summarised hereafter. It illustrates how different international organisations interact. In a similar sense, universities as it names implies are considered to be organisations which are expected to be universal in the pursuit of its mandate for quality higher education delivery.

The theory emphasized that the institution of certain factors would enable the institution to interact with the international community and practices without disregarding its local context. This theory of internationalisation was earlier used in the business sector as a means by which countries and nations with business orientation interact at both national and international levels. This informed the introduction of multi-national corporations and parastatals aimed at promoting interactions among nations. Such interactions involved exchange of resources, labour, technology transfer, networking of ideas, provision of expertise support among others. The theory equally maintained that in order for institutions to operate to the optimal level, there is the need to maintain a good working and business relationship with institutions within and outside its borders and such relationship should be reciprocal. The theory provided a caveat that institutions must remain operationally intact while ensuring good interaction with international partners and associates.

The theory is considered relevant to this study because universities are universal communities and as such they are not expected to be limited to its local boundaries. Practices and activities that are deemed to be globally relevant should be incorporated. Education which is provided in the university in form of training is recognised as a public good [11]. The university provides services which include training and knowledge transfer to make its recipient responsible to themselves and the society and also for national development. Universities can also embrace internationalisation as an intervention which involves building a good working relationship with the international community and creating better chances for its products by way of providing globally relevant training for its recipients. Universities must regularly update itself and this can be achieved by incorporating international practices, bringing in international faculty members as well as sending its own members out for the purpose of cross-fertilisation of ideas and knowledge which will add value to their existing practices by in the area of teaching, research as well as quality of its products.

Research Objective

The main objective of the research is to determine the influence of internationalisation on institutional ranking of universities in Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant influence of internationalisation on institutional ranking of universities in Nigeria.

Material and Methods

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the study. Two universities (one public and one private) were purposively selected for the study to be able to get the perspective of both public and private universities which are both subjected to the institutional ranking processes. The selected universities were Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State. A total of 300 participants were selected for the study comprising of students and lecturers. One hundred and fifty participants were selected from each university comprising of one hundred students and fifty members of academic staff across five faculties in each institution. Data collected were analysed using inferential statistics. The hypothesis generated to guide the study was analysed using a multivariable linear regression in order to establish the influence of internationalisation and institutional ranking of public and private universities in the study area.

Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of internationalisation on institutional ranking of universities in Nigeria.

To test this hypothesis, a multivariable linear regression was done in order to establish the influence of internationalisation (independent variable) and institutional ranking (dependent variable) of universities in the study area.

Regression Model

$$Y = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + b_4 X_4 + b_5 X_5 + b_6 X_6 + \dots + b_{13} X_{13}$$

Where: Y= institutional ranking of public and private universities; b_0 is the intercept, b_i 's are the slopes; X_1 is 'international student exchanges'; X_2 is 'enhanced internationalisation of the curriculum'; X_3 is 'developed institutional strategic partnerships'; X_4 is 'developed joint and multiple degree programmes with foreign partner institutions'; X_5 is 'international development and capacity building projects'; X_6 is 'international research collaboration'; X_7 is 'marketing and promoting the institution internationally'; X_8 is 'outgoing mobility opportunities and learning experiences for students'; X_9 is 'outgoing mobility opportunities for faculty'; X_{10} is 'participation in international associations'; X_{11} is 'participation in international conferences'; X_{12} is 'recruiting foreign faculty'; X_{13} is 'transnational education provision'; $n = 13$. This regression analysis results for the influence of internationalisation on institutional ranking of public and private universities in presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Simple multivariable regression analysis results for the influence of internationalisation on institutional ranking of public and private universities

Model	β	Std. Error	T	Sig.
International student exchanges	-0.004	0.018	-0.19	0.846
Enhanced internationalisation of the curriculum	0.281	0.025	11.4	0.000***
Developed institutional strategic partnerships	-0.015	0.029	-0.52	0.602
Developed joint and multiple degree programmes with foreign partner institutions	-0.113	0.026	-4.29	0.000***
International development and capacity building projects	0.194	0.022	8.90	0.000***
International research collaboration	-0.004	0.018	-0.23	0.818
Marketing and promoting the institution internationally	-0.019	0.019	-0.97	0.331
Outgoing mobility opportunities and learning experiences for students	0.008	0.025	0.32	0.746
Outgoing mobility opportunities for faculty	0.006	0.0222	0.28	0.780
Participation in international associations	0.160	0.021	7.61	0.000***

Participation in international conferences	0.040	0.018	2.25	0.025*
Recruiting foreign faculty	0.070	0.018	3.82	0.000***
Transnational education provision	-0.009	0.020	-0.45	0.650
(Constant)	1.463	0.073	20.00	0.000
R = 0.357; R ² = 0.127; F (13, 1331) = 56.92				
Dependent Variable: Ranking of Universities				

Note: *Significant at p<0.05, **Significant at p<0.01, ***Significant at p<0.001

Table 1 presents the results of the simple multivariable regression analysis predicting the influence of internationalisation on the ranking of public and private universities in Nigeria. The results showed that the presence of internationalisation activities such as enhanced internationalisation of university curriculum, developed joint and multiple degree programmes with foreign partner institutions, international development and capacity building projects, participation in international associations, participation in international conferences, and recruiting of foreign faculty staff had significant influence on institutional ranking of public and private universities in Nigeria. This is in line with the position of [5] that the status internationalisation is one of the major determinants of the performance of universities in global institutional ranking.

Also, the results showed that internationalisation activities such as enhanced internationalisation of the curriculum ($\beta=0.281$; $t = 11.4$; $p<0.05$), international development and capacity building projects ($\beta= 0.194$; $t = 8.9$; $p<0.05$), participation in international associations ($\beta= 0.16$; $t = 7.61$; $p<0.05$), participation in international conferences ($\beta= 0.040$, $t = 2.25$, $p<0.05$), recruiting foreign faculty staff ($\beta= 0.07$; $t = 3.82$; $p<0.05$) were positive, and significantly associated with institutional ranking of public and private universities. On the other hand, the results showed that an internationalisation activity such as developed joint and multiple degree programmes with foreign partner institutions ($\beta= -0.113$; $t = -4.29$; $p<0.05$) was negative, and significantly associated with the global and national ranking of public and private universities.

More so, as indicated in Table 1, internationalisation accounted for approximately 12.7% of the variation in the institutional ranking of public and private universities in Nigeria. Therefore, the other metrics used in the ranking of higher educational institutions account for the remaining 87.3% in the global and national ranking of public and private universities in Nigeria. Overall, the regression results showed that internationalisation has statistically significant influence on global and national ranking of the selected universities in Nigeria ($F (13,1331) = 56.92$). This result suggests that the Nigerian universities have not been doing well in institutional ranking due its level of internationalisation. [14] noted that some of the major challenges confronting internationalisation of higher education in Nigeria is the absence of a national policy on internationalisation and poor funding. It was noted that although some universities are making personal efforts in this direction but not as effective as when there is national guiding policy as well as support for the internationalisation process.

In addressing the issue of funding university education which is another challenge facing internationalisation of higher education and consequently institutional ranking performance of Nigerian universities, [6] opined that since education is both a private and public good and all the benefits of university education does not go to the

government alone, all the beneficiaries of university education should be involved in its funding. The beneficiaries were identified as students of universities who are the direct recipients, their parents/guardians, the university system, organisations within and outside the country, individuals/citizens of the country (through their taxes) and the government at all levels. Gambo and Fasanmi were of the opinion that if the burden of funding is jointly shared by all these identified stakeholders, the problem of funding will be addressed to a large extent. They further submitted that the Management of universities have a part to play in ensuring judicious use of available resources as other beneficiaries join efforts together in the funding of university education because no matter the amount of funds pulled together by concerned stakeholders, if the available funds are not judiciously administered, the university system will continue to complain of lack of funding due to lack of accountability and transparency on the part of the University management.

Conclusion

The study was aimed at determining the influence of internationalisation of higher education on institutional ranking of universities. The study showed that internationalisation has a significant influence on the performance of universities in global institutional ranking processes. The study found out that Nigeria has no national policy on internationalisation. However, some universities were found to be making individual efforts towards internationalisation. Some of such institutions have office of internationalisation where they try to coordinate efforts towards internationalisation. Although, such efforts were not coordinated because of the absence of a national policy on internationalisation. The study noted that a national policy on internationalisation will help to ensure coordination in the efforts of the universities in Internationalising and consequently an improvement in institutional ranking performance of universities. The study showed that internationalisation of higher education has significant influence on institutional ranking of universities. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that there is an urgent need for a national policy on internationalisation. This is to ensure to a coordinated and formidable efforts towards internationalisation among institutions of higher education. In developing this policy, various experts in the field of higher education must be involved as well as the institutions that have been making personal efforts towards internationalisation. As part of the policy statement on internationalisation at the national level, every university must have the office of internationalisation which will be responsible for coordinating international activities, programmes, interactions, partnerships, collaboration based on the guidelines provided in the national policy on internationalisation. The study further recommended the need for the government to be more committed to the funding of education as the present

budgetary allocation to the education section may not be able to drive internationalisation no matter the strength and quality of the policy. The implementation of such policy requires some financial commitments on the part of the government. The study further recommended the need for the improvement of the working conditions of academics so as to make the system attractive to foreign academics as it was noted in the study that there are currently no foreign lecturers in Nigerian public universities, instead a lot of Nigerian academics are moving out of the country because of their dissatisfaction with the system. As part of the national policy on internationalisation, measures must be put in place to ensure the stability of academic calendars in universities, this will enable the institutions to attract international students. The offices of internationalisation must be fully empowered and equipped to be able to make the universities attractive and habitable for both foreign academics and students. Universities must also ensure that their research output are visible on line while its website must be up to date to ensure its online visibility which is one of the key indicators of institutional rankings.

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