

Edutourism: The Nigeria Educational Challenges and International Students' Choice of Study in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This paper takes a cursory look into the various challenges influencing international students and other study-tourists in their choice of study destination with particular emphasis on the 'pull and push factors' in Nigeria educational systems. With secondary information and discourse analysis of existing literatures, the study revealed that there are a growing number of outbound Nigerians searching abroad for educational empowerment compared with the fewer number of inbound students-tourists. While pull factors are non-existent, there are numerous push factors in Nigerian educational system which include underfunding, unprecedented industrial unrest (with ASUU being a protagonist), cultism and cult-related violence, poor educational standard, bad institutional image, university staff misconduct and ineptitude caused by low salaries, and other official assaults. The factors are so propelling in pushing not only Nigerian students but also lecturers towards migrating to foreign universities for greener pastures. The study recommends, among others, educational restructuring, curriculum revitalisation, technology and security improvement and infrastructural developments in Nigerian Universities. Most importantly, there should be a convincing political will on the part of the government to adequately fund tertiary institutions to international standard and support lecturers in conducting credible research especially its appreciation and benefit for Nigerian nation.

Keywords: Educational Standard, Edutourism, International Students, Nigeria, Study Destination

Introduction

With the advent of globalisation, technological innovations and advancement, as well as information explosion, the world now experiences high integration and compression into a

single global nation. National boundaries now seem useless as people access information about other nations with a mere click on the computer or mobile screens. This serves as eye-opener and results in wide aspirations for the pursuit of greener pastures across boundaries among citizens of weaker nations. Tourism, hence, gained popularity and is widely regarded as another source of income revenue for nations across the globe. While others cross borders for job hunting motives, other tourists travel across nations to get acquainted with different environment and cultures. In recent time, the most propelling factor and/or purpose of tourism are education and the ensued career advancement for students-tourists. A situation in which people travel to a location with a view to engaging in a learning experience is therefore known as edutourism or educational tourism and it is of high benefit to the host country. It is this reason that nations now strive hard to invest in and improve educational standards so that their institutions of [higher] learning will be enlisted among the choices of study destinations for local and international students. This paper examines the Nigerian stand in this struggle for educational standard and the level of or lack of attractiveness to international students.

The phenomenon that revolved round academic industries in Nigeria is weak that no research revealed the rate of international students in Nigeria institutions of higher learning. Today, Nigerian students top the list of international students studying in Diasporas for knowledge acquisition and career boosting. In nations like Ghana, over 71,000 Nigerian students currently pay billions of US dollars annually on tuition fee, not to mention other countries like United Kingdom, United State of America, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Norway, Ukraine, South Africa, and many others (Deji-Folutile, 2012). In recent years, international collaboration and cooperation have become a major national trend in the higher education sector (Bartram, 2007; Woodard, et al., 2003). In Nigeria today, most institutions, individuals, organizations, government agencies partner with international institutions to revived the nation education. Adekalu et al (2013), reported the effort of Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) among other agencies, saddled with the responsibility of training and educating Nigerian youths by sponsoring thousands of Nigerians to local and international institutions of higher learning. This is done with a view to developing human resource base for Nigeria in various trans-disciplinary exercises but especially in Oil and Gas related field and infrastructural development. It is a truism that this has high significance to national growth and development. What is, however, obvious is the growing number of many Nigerian youths who compete rigorously to be shortlisted for the award, aim for foreign universities. It seems also that, the prophesy of Tomori in Deji-Folutile (2012), is becoming a reality on the rate at which Nigerian lecturers travel abroad to compete with international students for the sake of learning and knowledge sharing under the Nigeria Federal, State and Local Government sponsorship, International Institutions Grant and self-sponsors, especially at postgraduate levels. This trend, which has become currency and visa to travel for studies in Nigeria Universities by foreign academic staff, continues to get unpopular as government continues to pay lip service to improving the education system in Nigeria, is a reflection of Tomori prediction.

The colossal loss of human capital that had seen Nigeria's brightest minds in the academia relocate from the country's shores to the ends of the earth is aggravating and must be dealt with immediately. This phenomenon popularly called the 'Brain Drain' is as a result of the decades of military dictatorship and bad governance that pockmarks Nigeria's trajectory as a nation, and gradually paralyzing the education system, leading to academics seeking better prospects abroad in droves (Fayemi, 2013). Barbra (2012) citing Evans contends that brain

brain drain has been a complicated phenomenon in the first 30 years of Nigerian independence, with most of the movements being away from the continent. In fact, up to 10,000 Nigerian professionals moved into the United States alone in the year 1984 and this number has increased dramatically as the economic condition of the state gets harsher incrementally. In recent times, there are two main categories of educational brain drain, the first one being a situation whereby many Nigerians would complete their education within their countries, followed by migration for a number of reasons. This category of migration is majorly made up of engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs and health professionals. The second category is made up of students who seek to study abroad, find jobs there; establish families as they finally become permanent residents of those countries (Barbra, 2012). The implication of this on the national growth and development may be crippling if not gradually killing the nation in silence. It is on this note that it behoves of Nigerian academics and researchers to no longer maintain silent on this phenomenon and explore to educate people about the impact and benefits that international students may bring to host countries to improving her socio-economic development. The step taken in this paper is highlighting some challenges undermining international students' choice of tourism destination for study in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This becomes very necessary as there are no studies conducted on edutourism in Nigeria just as there are none to establish the empirical connections between education and tourism in Nigeria.

Definition of Terms

- **Edutourism:** This is used interchangeably as 'educational tourism'. It describes a situation where students, researchers, academicians and scholars alike, travel to a location other than own abode with a view to engaging in a learning experience and gaining academic or intellectual exposures.
- **Push Factors:** The push factor refers to those educationally related factors that push students or prompt their decisions to emigrate to seek higher education in countries other than home countries. These push factors may include poor educational systems, social discrimination, uncertain job opportunities, and a variety of political and economic factors.
- **Pull Factors:** The pull factor refers to educational incentives that attract or pull international students or prompt their decision to desert their home country and or immigrate into countries other than home countries to seek higher education. These push factors include availability of funding or sponsorship, quality of education and institutional image, cultural and linguistic similarities, and the belief that holding an international credential helps achieving lucrative careers.
- **International Students:** These are students who live and study in foreign countries.

Prospects in Edutourism for Nations

Education is known as a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enables him to function effectively as a member of the society (Oludeyi, 2013), thereby contributing meaningfully to the development of the nation. Tourism, on the other hand, is an economic activity that may change for better, the socio-economic, political and environmental status of developing nations. Such economic anomalies as unemployment and poverty have been found to be most catered for by tourism development. If human and national development is at the hearts of education and tourism, then edutourism is obviously on human, social and national transformation. This is why Komives (2003) advised that

Student Affairs Professionals should increase their awareness and knowledge of international collaboration as part of their efforts to become and to stay proactive in the ever-changing and complex world of student experience. This is because in most developed and developing countries of choice of tourism destination for international students, such as, Canada, USA, UK, Australia, Switzerland, Malaysia, Ukraine, New Zealand etc., international students, and their dependants, have proven to be an important constituency in higher education, bringing substantial revenues to these host institutions and contributing significantly to their host countries' intellectual and cultural capital (Lee, 2008). This, in no small measure, helps sustain the population and boost the national economy while improving the educational standard of the host nations. According to Arnason (2010), edutourism is beneficial to nations because it: 1) creates a socially and economically sustainable tourism product that benefits both the hosting regions and its visitors; 2) helps rejuvenate tourism by celebrating cultures and the intermingling of residents and visitors; and 3) provides great support for preservation and conservation of the local environment and culture while providing more meaningful opportunities for residents and visitors. This may help explain one of, if not the major, reasons why some nations with high rate of inbound students-tourists do better economically, technologically and socially than other countries without or with low inbounds international students seeking education. It is only unfortunate that countries with low inbound student-researchers and or student-tourists are prominent in African continents.

African countries remain socio-economically, politically and culturally underdeveloped partly because of the enormous loss of both human and intellectual capacity attributable to uncontrolled brain drain or because the leadership of African nations fail or are not doing well enough to curb the push factors in educational tourism. Barbra (2012), citing studies of Nayyar, shows that African countries make up the greatest percentage of the world's poorest societies due to their lowest indicators regarding socio-economic development. In fact, the recent rapid economic advancements in the Southeast Asian countries are conceived to be attributed to their deliberate investments on institutional building and human capital development, which are best sought through formal and informal education and literacy development in a well-equipped and learning-friendly educational environment. The Nigerian nation has not been scoring high in this regard. This is why it is necessary to begin giving accounts of the various obstacles which has made Nigeria educational systems and curriculum standard less suitable or attractive to international students and lecturers in their choice of tourism destinations for study.

Challenges of Edutourism in Nigeria: The Push Factors

The United States Embassy in Nigeria (2012) reported that, Nigeria was the 17th largest source of international undergraduates and the 19th largest source of international graduate students in the U.S. in 2009/2010 (<http://nigeria.usembassy.gov>). Nigeria is used as point of reference on issues like this because of the alarming rate at which her citizens fly abroad in search for quality education for a better life. There are certain challenges which undermine or make edutourism development an unrealistic dream. These challenges, which push students and academics away from own countries while pushing expatriates from migrating to Nigeria, serve as deterrent to international students' choice of Nigeria as tourist centre for knowledge pursuit, acquisition, advancement and personal aggrandisement. This, unfortunately, has telling effects on Nigerian economy, the future of youngsters and on national identity in the global stage. Some of these challenges are briefly discussed.

Underfunding: Government attitude towards improving the educational system and curriculum standard in Nigeria is so discouraging that the country cannot find a favourable space on the list of choices of tourism destination for international students. Annually, Nigerian government invests an average of 7.27% of the nation total budget on education which is highly infinitesimal compared to the UNESCO recommendation of 26% annual budget dedication to education in order that these tertiary institutions can meet world standard. According to Onukwugha (2013), citing Okerengwo, in the whole world, Nigeria contributes the lowest of her national budgets to education. The office of the United States Embassy in Nigeria (2012), revealed some of the major challenges in Nigeria education which include academic staff shortages in all areas particularly in the critical areas of science and technology. Over 60% of academic staff in the Nigerian university systems is in the category of lecturer 1 and below due to inter and intra-sector brain drains. An estimated ten million out of the 30 million school-aged children are not enrolled in schools in Nigeria and the educational system suffers from deteriorating quality and insufficient investment to keep pace with the country's burgeoning school-age population (<http://nigeria.usembassy.gov>). Same is experienced in Nigeria Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Secondary and Primary Schools etc. This unfair underfunding serves as veritable factor pushing away Nigerian citizens and international scholars with potential technical skills and intellectual capacity from remaining in the country and displaying their dexterities in favour of the nation. Unfortunately, most Nigerian public office holders who underfund and mal-manage Nigerian tertiary institutions do not send their wards to Nigerian universities. They prefer sending their wards abroad. Therefore, it means that the people in authority may not feel the pinch that much and may not likely be serious about funding to rescue the citadels from total collapse.

The Unprecedented Industrial Unrest by Universities Staff: Resulting from underfunding and the ensued dilapidation in the university infrastructures which led to acute fall in standard of education, non-payment of university staff salaries and other official assaults witnessed over the last thirty five years as well as the government lack of political will to rescue the nation's educational system often provokes the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) into embarking on almost annual industrial strikes. Hardly can there be a year in Nigeria where ASUU has not put down tools in protest against these aforementioned educational anomalies. The four unions in the universities namely, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SANNU), Non Academic Staff of Universities (NASU) and National Association of Academy Technology (NATT). Also, the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and other viable stakeholders in Nigerian educational institutions always challenge the government to be on the right path in improving the infrastructures of universities and policy implementation, among others. ASUU has been widely known to be a protagonist union in being at loggerhead with the government, forcing it to do the right thing so that Nigerian students, lecturers and others of the world will have the best education in the country rather than seeking greener pastures elsewhere. Since 1992 to date, ASUU has not called off the protracted industrial strike, it only suspends it and resumes later. Consequently, schools' academic calendars and programmes are badly affected, giving students undeserved long duration of study in Nigerian universities. A programme designed for four years usually span for five to six years in Nigerian tertiary institutions. These have negative influence for Nigerian ivory towers as the choice of study destination for most international students and citizens. Many Nigerian students resultantly may forfeit three years of study (remaining one year to completion) for an

admission in universities abroad, which has more sound and quality education, enticing learning facilities and environment. By seeking admission in other countries of the world, Nigerians contribute to socio-economic and political development of the international host countries that provide the desired education. Hence, this is another impediment to Nigeria as a nation.

Falling Educational Standard and Bad Institutional Image: The standard of education in most Nigerian universities is nothing compared to what is obtainable in most developed countries. The nation's educational standard is so fallen that graduates from Nigerian institutions of learning are inevitably subjected to a series of tests and their certificates thoroughly scrutinised before being offered admission to study elsewhere in developed nations. According to *Onma (2012)*, the problem of the Nigerian education system is not lack of the institutions to perform the role of impacting quality education to Nigerians and expatriates alike, but the poor service delivery in managing the citadels of learning. In 2012, SERVICOM did an evaluation regarding service delivery in Nigerian universities which revealed a plethora of weaknesses in service delivery in some Nigerian universities. These weaknesses include: 1) bad customer care policies to guide the students on fair treatment in the universities which negatively affects how staffs generally treat students and others; 2) no training for frontline staff on specialized complaints-handling which often causes delay in complaint resolution; 3) bad power supply slowing down the pace and depth of academic and administrative works; 4) poor transportation system, even as many students live off-campus, among other problems (*Onma, 2012*). This badly affects the standard and image of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The value placed on an international education and the higher cost of education in home country usually 'push' many students to seek cheaper and affordable education overseas like Malaysia, Singapore, China or Australia (*Lam, Ariffin, & Ahmad, 2011*), whereas the standard and ranks of universities in developed nations are 'pull factors' that attract most Nigerian students to seek education abroad. From the analysis of *Lam, et al (2011)*, pull factors such as "institution image" significantly influenced the satisfaction level of the international students to choose universities abroad. The fall in educational standard and lack of esteem in institutional image across the globe is another challenge preventing the nation to benefit from edutourism. According to *Deji-Folutile (2012)*, part of the reason for Nigerians' desire to study abroad was because foreign certificates were better rated than Nigerian certificates at present and the implication of this for the Nigerian economy is capital flight.

Cultism and Cult-related Violence: One of the challenges confronting Nigerian higher institutions is connected with violence which has become a major cause of concern that threatens peace and security of people in campus environment while deterring the developmental pace of Nigerian economy. Today, cultism and cult-related violence, killings, raping and kidnapping have become a recurrent theme on Nigerian campuses. Safety of lives and properties are no longer guaranteed in Nigerian citadels while the fundamental objectives of the academy (teaching, learning, and research) have often been shackled with cult-related insurgencies. It becomes most worrisome as, *Muhammad (2008)* revealed, that some Vice-chancellors find it expedient to employ cult members in the governance of their campuses which is said to be unknown to the Nigerian public, making the universities to remain the bastion of militarism. Such indirect cult members empower them to continuously and fearlessly wreak untold havoc on students who lose lives and limbs in the process. These environments of fear and insecurity tarnish the image of the nation which invariably

influences international students in choosing Nigeria tertiary institutions as study destinations.

High Rate of Unemployment: As earlier revealed in this paper, employments and career development opportunities is one of the pull factors that attract most international students to seek greener pastures outside their home countries. In Nigeria today, the high rate of unemployment can be blamed on the lack of adequate provision for job creation in the development plans, the ever expanding educational growth and the desperate desire on the part of youths to acquire university education irrespective of course and course contents (Emeh, Uwanguma & Aborah, 2012). The report of the national survey on labour market needs, jointly sponsored by National University Commission (NUC) and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (ETF) in 2004, revealed that 44% of the 20 organizations rated Nigerian science graduates as average in competence, 56% rated them as average in innovation, 50% rated them average in rational judgment, 63% as average in leadership skills and 44% as average in creativity. On needed skills like literacy, oral communication, information technology, entrepreneurship, analytical, problem-solving and decision making, 60% rated them as poor. By any standard, this statistics reflect a poor assessment of Nigerian university graduates and further buttress the argument that Nigerian university graduates are unemployable (Okafor, 2011). This phobia of being unemployable after graduation is a significant push factor pushing both local and international students away from Nigerian tertiary education to migrating abroad for quality education. They tend to be rest assured that they will be employable after graduation, if not abroad, at least back at home where international certificates are more valuable to employers than any certificates issued by a Nigerian university.

Nigerians' Image in Diaspora: There is no consensus on the exact number of Nigerians who live outside the country. Other nations have statistics of how many Nigerians are in their countries but Nigeria herself have no up to date records of how many people left the country. The involvement of some Nigerians in diaspora on illegal activities such as, smuggling of food across border, trafficking, prostitutions and cyber-crime are of serious concern to Nigerian integrity in most countries such as Russian, Italy, Spain, Malaysia, and Netherlands (Carling, 2005). The extent to which the image of the nation is dented goes a long way in determining whether or not scholars and student-tourists will choose the country as destination for study abroad. The testimonies of bad conduct of some Nigerians abroad often stand as push factor discouraging scholarly potentialities from choosing most of tertiary institutions of learning for study, internship programme, workshops/conferences, to mention few. Also, most immigration departments in Nigerian embassies abroad have no substantial information about the quality of education system in Nigeria to share with the host nation and this has telling effect on socioeconomic development of the country.

University Staff Misconducts and Ineptitude Caused by Low Salaries. At the core of inadequate funding of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, as mentioned above, are low remunerative packages for the teaching and non-teaching staff. Resulting from these is a scenario of low quality of scholarly endeavour particularly with regards to poor physical infrastructures, lack of motivated staff, poor utilization of resources, poor content of curriculum, nature of teaching methods, to mention a few (Oludeyi, 2013). A Nigerian professor does not earn in a year what a senator earns in a month and these often demotivate both teaching and non-teaching staff and lure them into certain conduct inimical to university

education. It soon became apparent how many lecturers became notes sellers or how many nonteaching staff began selling out examination papers to students who wish to pass courses at all cost. Laxity and laziness set in among students who offer both pecuniary and non-pecuniary means to staff in order to gain grades. According to Oludeyi (2013), some unscrupulous parents and students began utilizing these rorts and moral decadence in the university system as stepping-stone to gaining underserved admission and grades. They are ready to offer anything to whoever is in charge of it and some university staff resultantly and gullibly became admission peddlers, accepting different kinds of bribes from whoever has it and offer admission or grades in return. This is done without regards to standard academic norms and or requirements. These make the large portion of Nigerian youths to resort to flying abroad to further their studies in institutions where they can be exposed to purely cultured, standardized and quality academic experience.

Rationale for Attracting International Students

As the effects of globalization become more prevalent in higher education, the competition among countries to attract international students has been heightened as well. Skinner and Shenoy (2003) identified United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Japan and Malaysia as top of the list of countries that make strong efforts to attract international students for study abroad. They suggest that multiple factors contribute to host countries' desire to attract international students and these factors may be categorized as economic, political security, and academic factors.

Economic Factors: International students and their dependents bring money into the economy. Upon completion of their studies, most host nations already have in place employment plan for most outstanding graduates who later settle down and or may eventually become citizens of the host countries where they live. Working and living in foreign countries by implication is, they contribute significantly to the host countries' economic and national development. The expansion of globalization in higher education helps create new jobs in the field of international educational exchange. In fact, most of these migrants often help siblings and relatives back home to cross borders and to settle and work in foreign nations. Recently, the President of Nigeria Medical Association lamented at a world press conference that out of 65,000 doctors registered in Nigeria, only 25,000 are currently practising in the country. The rest who constitute 70% are busy contributing to uplifting economies of host nations across the globe (Akinsehinde, 2013).

Political Security: Insecurity serves as propelling factor considered by most international students in making decision for tourism destinations for schooling. Most international students who do return to their home countries always do that not without having high sense of goodwill towards the former host countries that provided them with the needed education. It is, therefore, obvious that educating international students is an opportunity for the host countries to shape future leaders who, apart from becoming important for guiding the development of their home countries, also contribute to the success of host countries' development through series of assistance programs. For example, many international students who graduate from U.S. universities participate in development agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that further help in upholding the nation's ideals. International students also provide the host countries with an exposure

to different cultures and foreign political philosophies integral to the host countries' political and security concerns.

Academic Factors: International students contribute significantly to cultural diversity on campuses satisfying the growing thirst for collaborative scholarship and multiculturalism currently craved by the world leaders in university education. International students, often among the top academic performers in their home countries, provide a healthy and stimulating competition to the host countries' students (Skinner & Shenoy, 2002). Apart from this, many international students, especially graduate students, who received scholarship abroad and serve as research assistants, often remain in the host countries as academics or researchers, thereby contributing significantly to the host countries' educational improvement and academic standard. Many Nigerians have been found topping the academic and administrative cadre of some universities in most developed world. For example, a Nigerian Professor Ilesanmi Adesida became the first black man to be appointed the Provost/Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in United States of America (Olugbile, 2012). The host countries usually and premeditatedly empower international students like these to keep the best brains for their national interest and benefits.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Education serves as one of the bedrock for any society to experience development. Nigeria as a nation can benefit from the local and international students if the government, stakeholders and policy makers begin, with immediate alacrity, to reshape, refocus, re-sharpen and reprioritize educational goals which will help gain the lost glory in Nigerian educational system. Nigerian universities, in the struggle to meet up with the international standard and be among the top best universities in the world, should embark on the policies implementations to curbing brain drain and attracting international potentialities for brain gain.

The authors give the following as recommendatory statements as their contention from the above findings:

A rigorous overhauling and total restructuring of educational processes, systems and philosophies should be done while curriculum contents and methods of deliveries should be revamped, revitalised and packaged for cultural diversity while meeting up with world class. Again teaching and research without the usage of technology is incomplete. The Nigerian government should invest heavily on technology to upgrade and update the educational sectors to meet world class standards. Efforts should be put in place to provide an attractive, well-equipped and learner-friendly environment in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning. This will attract more local and international students to immigrate for studies in Nigerian universities and subsequently impact on expediting the developmental pace of the nation. Creation of more tourist centres in Nigeria should be highly encouraged. Such tourist centres should be designed especially to promote research and scholarship. This is because, the current study, as well as studies of Adekalu, et al (2013), have shown that sponsoring thousands of Nigerians to local and international institutions of higher learning serves as one of the factors most international students considered in their decision making process of choice of study destination.

An atmosphere of apprehensiveness in the citadels also calls for strong measures which must be put in place to curb violence and security issues in both on and off Nigerian campuses.

This is because safety and security, in Maslow's perspective, are the second most important human need which cannot be substituted for anything else, and which form significant factor in deciding where and where not to reside. Adequate and equal access to tertiary education with assurance of a fair life, if not wealthy one, after graduation should be fostered and ascertained among the teeming youth. The study of Oludeyi (2013) has shown that these have telling implications for national security. Hence, Nigerian leaders should embrace the slogan of 'safety first' in all educational, social, economic and political endeavours.

For possible implementation of the aforementioned recommendations, there is urgent need for a convincing political will on the part of the government to adequately fund tertiary institutions to international standards and support for lecturers in conducting credible research especially its appreciation and benefit for the Nigerian nation. A situation where Nigerian university lecturers, most times, fund research themselves and received low or no aid in scholarly adventure is so uncalled for. The government, educational policy makers and university administrators alike should be willing to upgrade universities staff's salary scale to global standard so that they cease from indulging in conduct that are inimical to the ideals of university community which form part of reasons why student-tourists run away from Nigeria.

It is pertinent to conclude that if the above recommendations are sponsored for sincere implementation in Nigeria, the incessant industrial bluffs and acrimonies between universities staffs and Nigerian government will reduce drastically. The protracted industrial strike, if resultantly nipped in the bud, will pave easy ways for uninterrupted academic calendar in tertiary institutions and unhindered students' duration/lengths of studies. This, no doubt, will serve as 'pull factor' re-polishing the image of Nigerian universities in the global stage, stimulating quality education and educational service delivery capable of attracting more local and international students to crave Nigerian universities as a choice of study destination in the future.

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