

# Examining the Role of Education in National Development: A Case of Public Universities in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper explores the role of public university education in Nigeria's national development, with a focused case study on the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and University of Ibadan (UI). Through a qualitative analysis of their historical evolution and developmental mandate, the study demonstrates how public universities function as vital engines of human capital formation, knowledge generation, and socio-political transformation. It examines key questions: How does university education influence economic growth and contribute to national development? What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of UNN and UI for broader national progress? Grounded in human capital theory and institutionalism, the paper offers insights intended to inform educational policy and enrich discussions on the strategic significance of higher education in driving sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Education, Public University, National Development, UI, UNN, Nigeria.

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## 1. Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a catalyst for national development (Pal, 2023). It plays a transformative role by empowering individuals, cultivating skilled labor, and fostering social cohesion and political stability. Through education, nations cultivate human capital – developing the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for innovation, productivity, and civic participation. In both developing and developed societies, the quality and accessibility of education often correlate directly with national prosperity and resilience (Agbo, 2014). In developing societies, particularly, education assumes an even more critical role in addressing developmental challenges, with universities playing a crucial role in shaping the future of nations. As such, many countries view investment in university education as not merely a social good; it is a political imperative and a deliberate pathway to self-determined progress.

In Nigeria, just like other African countries, universities were established with the aim of training and supplying highly skilled manpower to direct, manage and order change in the technology industry, to produce political and administrative elites, contribute to the country's growth and development after independence (Ako and James, 2018; Obadara, 2012). Over the years, educational curriculum, academic programmes and administrative processes have gone through different changes, stages of growth, and evolution, responding to the needs of the society and nation at large, alongside growing numbers of public universities (Ako and James, 2018). Why is university education important and how does it impact economic growth and promote national development? What insights can be drawn from these universities to inform future educational policies aimed at national development? Albeit numerous public universities, this study focuses its gaze on the University of Ibadan (UI), the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) for their historical significance, academic reputation, strategic location, and contributions to national development as pioneering educational institutions in Nigeria. The concern is that focusing on these universities will provide valuable insights of the role of education in general, and how higher education institutions in particular, influence and impact the growths of a nation.

This study investigates the role of public universities in Nigeria's national development, focusing on their educational output, research innovations, and long-term impact on the economy; while education is widely recognized as a key driver of national progress, there is limited empirical evidence on how Nigerian public universities have fulfilled this role over time. To address this gap, the study sets out to examine how university education contributes to human capacity, and to identify practical insights that can inform future education policies aimed at enhancing national development. Following this introduction, the paper is structured into five

sections: the theoretical framework; a review of the relationship between education, human capacity, and national development; strategic education policies and national development in Nigeria; University of Ibadan (UI) and University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) in view; and a final section presenting key insights and conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Institutionalism and Human Capital Theory as theoretical guide to provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining the role of public universities in national development. The integration of these theories allows for a balanced understanding of universities as both institutional structures shaped by rules, norms, and power relations, and as sites for human agency where skills, knowledge, and capacities are produced for developmental outcomes.

Institutionalism has its intellectual origins in classical political economy and sociology, with later developments in new institutional economics and historical institutionalism, notably associated with scholars such as Thorstein Veblen, Douglass North, and March and Olsen. The theory emphasises the role of formal institutions (laws, policies, organisational structures) and informal institutions (norms, traditions, and practices) in shaping social and economic outcomes. Its central argument is that institutions structure behaviour, constrain choices, and influence performance over time (Almeida, 2015; Amenta and Ramsey, 2010). Institutionalism highlight how developmental outcomes are deeply influenced by governance quality, policy coherence, and institutional continuity, rather than by market forces alone (Almeida, 2015). These institutional elements help explain not only the continuity of their roles over time but also the challenges they face in terms of reform, policy compliance, and governance (Almeida, 2015; Amenta and Ramsey, 2010). In the context of public universities, Institutionalism assumes that universities operate within broader political, economic, and governance frameworks that condition their autonomy, funding patterns, accountability mechanisms, and developmental mandates. In this study, institutionalism explains how public universities such as the University of Ibadan (UI) and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) are not merely academic entities but deeply embedded formal institutions shaped by historical legacies, societal norms, and value systems. Institutionalism posits that organizations are governed not only by rational decision-making but also by the norms, rules, and expectations that evolve over time within their environments. As such, public universities reflect broader cultural, political, and economic forces and, in turn, help institutionalise ideals like meritocracy, civic responsibility, national identity, and public service.

Similarly, Human Capital Theory has significantly shaped development policy by underscoring the importance of education systems in promoting productivity, income growth, and social mobility. Human Capital Theory, emerged from neoclassical economics in the mid-twentieth century, most prominently through the works of Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker. The theory posits that investments in education, training, and health enhance individuals' productive capacities, thereby contributing to economic growth and social development. Its core assumption is that education is not merely a social good but a form of capital that yields returns at both individual and societal levels. For pioneering scholars such as Adam Smith (1776), human capital theory underscores the economic value of investing in education, viewing educated individuals as contributors to innovation and productivity. In the same vein, Emurullah (2014) argue that by educating a nation's workforce and fostering innovation through research, universities act as strategic drivers of both economic performance and social advancement. Thus, within this frame of understanding, public universities are viewed as critical institutions for producing skilled labor, fostering innovation, and enhancing national competitiveness through knowledge creation and dissemination.

When applied together, these theories move beyond narrow economic interpretations of development to account for both structural constraints and human agency, offering a more holistic explanation of how universities contribute to national development. In appropriating these theories, this study conceptualises public universities as developmental institutions embedded within specific institutional contexts, while simultaneously recognising their role in producing human capital essential for national progress. Institutionalism provides the lens to analyse how state policies, governance structures, and historical legacies shape university performance, whereas Human Capital Theory explains how university outputs – graduates, research, and innovation – translate into developmental outcomes. The combined theoretical approach therefore enables a nuanced understanding of the interaction between institutional structures and human capabilities in advancing national development. They illuminate how universities function as both agents of social reproduction and catalysts for transformation. Specifically, the combined framework allows us to examine not only the outputs (e.g., graduates, research, innovations) but also the internal dynamics and structural forces that shape these outcomes. It enables an

exploration of how institutional culture, policy alignment, governance mechanisms, and resource allocation impact the university's ability to develop human capital. Additionally, this theoretical integration helps explain the multifaceted role of UI and UNN in the Nigerian development landscape how their institutional history and strategic choices affect educational delivery, how their embedded values and leadership structures shape research priorities and innovation, and how their engagement with national policy frameworks influences developmental outcomes over time.

### 3. Education, Human Capital, and National Development

Scholarly discourse widely acknowledges that public universities play a pivotal role in national development through the development of human capital. As institutions of higher learning, public universities serve both as producers and reservoirs of skilled human resources that drive economic growth, social transformation, and institutional development. This section examines the interrelation between concepts such as education, human capital, and national development, with particular attention to how their interaction shapes developmental outcomes, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria.

Education is frequently conceptualized in the literature as a strategic instrument and foundational pillar of national development. Beyond being a formal process of instruction, education is understood as a comprehensive mechanism through which societies transmit knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for sustained progress. Jahantab (2021) argues that education constitutes a basic societal necessity rather than merely an institutionalized activity, as it underpins advancements in science, technology, governance, and economic productivity. In a similar vein, Kingdom and Maekae (2013) describe education as a major investment in human capital, emphasizing its long-term contribution to productivity, innovation, and economic growth. From a broader developmental perspective, education contributes across multiple dimensions. Economically, it produces a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of driving industrialization and innovation. Socially, education promotes equity, social inclusion, and civic responsibility by expanding access to opportunities and fostering social cohesion. Politically, it supports democratic governance by cultivating informed citizens and leadership capacity, while culturally, it preserves national identity and encourages tolerance and pluralism. This multidimensional contribution positions education, particularly tertiary education, as a central mechanism through which national development objectives are pursued.

Education systems operate across multiple levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-secondary – but the literature consistently highlights public universities as uniquely positioned within this hierarchy. According to Chankseliani, Qoraboyev, and Gimranov (2020), universities serve as central hubs for advanced human capital development, research production, and societal transformation. Their role extends beyond teaching to include knowledge creation, policy-relevant research, and engagement with societal challenges. In developing contexts, public universities are particularly significant because they are largely state-funded and mandated to serve national interests. They are tasked with providing accessible and quality higher education, producing an intelligent and skilled workforce, informing public policy through research, and promoting inclusive development by accommodating diverse social groups. As such, public universities function as institutional bridges between education systems and broader national development agendas, translating educational investments into tangible societal outcomes as human capital.

Human capital is a central concept linking education and national development. It is commonly defined as the stock of knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes acquired through education and training that enhance individuals' productive capacities. Rooted in Human Capital Theory, this concept views investment in education – especially higher education – as a critical driver of both individual earnings and national economic growth. Jahantab (2021) contends that the quality and quantity of a country's human capital are directly dependent on the quality of education provided by its institutions. In the context of public universities, human capital extends beyond formal academic credentials to include research skills, technical expertise, ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and civic responsibility. These attributes enable graduates to contribute effectively across sectors such as industry, governance, healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship. Human capital thus becomes the principal mechanism through which universities transform educational inputs into economic productivity, institutional effectiveness, and influence social progress through the instrumentality of national development.

National development is commonly framed as a dynamic and multidimensional process aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens while strengthening a nation's economic, social, political, and institutional capacities. Kingdom and Maekae (2013) identify key domains of national development to include economic growth, social development, political stability, and scientific and technological advancement. This perspective moves beyond

narrow economic indicators to incorporate broader measures of human well-being and institutional effectiveness. Within this study, national development is conceptualised both as a goal and an outcome of effective public university systems. Universities contribute to development not only by producing skilled graduates but also through knowledge generation, research innovation, and social transformation. Jahantab (2021) emphasises that education-driven development enhances health outcomes, reduces poverty, strengthens institutions, and promotes sustainable development. Consequently, national development is closely linked to the capacity of public universities to function effectively as engines of human capital formation and innovation. This way, education is itself conceptualised as a multidimensional tool for societal advancement, with public universities occupying a critical position within the human capital development pipeline (Jahantab, 2021; Kingdom and Maekae, 2013). And, national development is framed as a broad, interconnected process encompassing economic, social, political, and technological progress (Chankseiani et al., 2020). Accordingly, the contention here is that universities contribute to national development through three primary channels: human capital production, knowledge generation, and social transformation. This nexus underscores the centrality of public universities as developmental institutions and provides a strong analytical foundation for examining their role in national development.

#### **4. Strategic Education Policies and National Development in Nigeria**

There are several policies that contribute to the continuous shaping of the education sector in Nigeria, specifically the higher education, but two of these education policies stand out due to their direct impact on Nigeria's development through education (Onyeike and Eseyin, 2014; Ajayi, 2018; Tetfund, 2025; Eneh, 2011). Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Act, 1993: The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) traces its origins to the Education Trust Fund (ETF), which was established under the Education Tax Act No. 7 of 1993. TETFund is the brainchild of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), as a direct result of negotiations and agreements between the ASUU and the Federal Government, and stemming from the 1992 ASUU industrial strike over university underfunding. TETFund is therefore ASUU's envisioned non-budgetary funding sourced from company profits to address underfunding crisis in Nigerian university system. The Education Tax Act No. 7 of 1993 was introduced as a strategic response to the growing crisis of underfunding in Nigeria's education sector; it mandated that all registered companies in Nigeria contribute 2% of their assessable profits as education tax, which was then pooled and allocated to support educational development across all levels such as basic, secondary, and tertiary education. The Act was later amended by Act No. 40 of 1998 to strengthen the legal and operational framework of the Fund, enabling it to address more effectively the structural and infrastructural challenges affecting public education in the country (Tetfund, 2025; Ajayi, 2018; Jaja, 2013).

In 2011, the ETF was restructured and rebranded as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund through the enactment of the TETFund Act of 2011, this restructuring marked a major policy shift by limiting the scope of the Fund's intervention to only tertiary institutions universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. The TETFund Act retained the education tax, increasing it from 2% to a potential 3% of the assessable profits of registered companies; the aim of this reformation was to ensure more focused and impactful interventions in the areas of infrastructure development, academic staff training, research support, and learning resources in tertiary institutions. By targeting the specific needs of higher education, TETFund serves as a key instrument for addressing decades of neglect and enhancing the quality and competitiveness of Nigeria's tertiary education system (Tetfund, 2025; Ajayi, 2018; Jaja, 2013).

Nigeria Vision 20:2020, launched 2009: Nigeria Vision 20:2020 was a long-term national development plan launched in 2009 under President Umaru Musa Yar'adua. It was designed as a strategic response to Nigeria's continued economic underperformance despite its substantial human and natural resources; the central objective of the vision was to position Nigeria among the top 20 global economies by the year 2020. According to the official vision statement, the plan sought to consolidate Nigeria's position as a major player in the global economic and political landscape through a comprehensive and structured development strategy. (Sanubi and Akpotu, 2015; Eneh, 2011). To achieve this goal, the Vision 20:2020 blueprint was anchored on three key strategic pillars. The first was to enhance the productivity and wellbeing of the Nigerian people by improving access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social inclusion. This pillar placed strong emphasis on human capital development as a foundation for national progress. The second focused on optimizing Nigeria's sources of economic growth by diversifying the economy, revitalizing the agricultural and industrial sectors, and investing in critical infrastructure such as electricity, transportation, and technology. The

third pillar sought to promote sustainable social and economic development through good governance, environmental sustainability, institutional strengthening, and equitable regional development (Eneh, 2011; National planning commission, 2009).

Although Nigeria made some early progress, including moderate economic growth between 2010 and 2014, the overall outcomes of Vision 20:2020 fell short of its intended targets and goals. A major milestone was the 2014 rebasing of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which repositioned it as one of the largest economies in Africa; however, the Nigeria remained heavily dependent on oil revenues, exposing its economy to global oil price shocks. Persistent infrastructural deficits, particularly in power and transport, continued to hinder industrial growth additionally, insecurity, corruption, and weak institutional capacity undermined implementation. By 2020, Nigeria had not achieved its core objective of becoming one of the top 20 global economies, but the vision played a critical role in shaping future development policies and reaffirmed the centrality of education, human capital, and institutional reform in national transformation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Eneh, 2011).

## **5. University of Ibadan (UI) and University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) in view**

### *5.1 Origin and founding purpose of University of Ibadan (UI)*

The University of Ibadan (UI) has undergone significant transformation over the decades, evolving in step with Nigeria's socio-political and developmental changes. Its origins trace back to 1932 when the British colonial administration established the Yaba Higher College (YHC) in Lagos under the leadership of Eric Robert James Hussey, then Director of Education in Nigeria. The YHC was affiliated with the University of London and focused on vocational and technical training in education, agriculture, engineering, and health fields crucial to sustaining the colonial administration. UI, from its creation adopted rigorous admission standards and was envisioned as a continental institution, attracting top-tier students from across Africa not just within Nigeria (Udegbe and Ekhaguere 2017; Albach and salmi 2011). By 1948, the limitations of the YHC model became evident amid growing nationalist movements and rising demand for advanced academic education, consequently the college was relocated to Ibadan and upgraded to the University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948, an external college of the University of London. UCI maintained British academic standards while gradually enhancing local academic autonomy. After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, a significant milestone was reached in 1962 when UCI became the fully autonomous University of Ibadan (UI). This shift symbolized the country's efforts to assert sovereignty and develop indigenous academic and research capacity, making UI central to Nigeria's post-independence development agenda (Oladejo, 2021; Udegbe and Ekhaguere 2017; Jaja, 2013; Albach and salmi 2011).

However, the university's growth was not without challenges, the turbulent years during Nigeria's Second Republic were marked by political instability, military coups, and civil unrest, particularly due to the Igbo secessionist movement (Biafra). This period led to a mass exodus of staff both Igbos and foreign nationals due to safety concerns and government funding diminished sharply, though support from external partners helped sustain academic activity. In 1975, Decree No. 23 allowed the federal government to take over regional universities to ensure equitable distribution across the country, yet by assigning vice chancellor appointments to state governments without a robust financial framework, the reform created persistent management and funding challenges (Albach and salmi 2011). Presently, University of Ibadan remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's higher education system. Since the 1977 National Policy on Education, which emphasized expanding access to university education, UI has continuously evolved, enhancing academic standards, research capacity, and governance structures. Reforms during the 1980s and 1990s encouraged funding diversification through partnerships with international and private entities, while the 2000s focused on improving institutional autonomy, infrastructure, and curriculum modernization. These efforts have earned UI a consistent top-ranking status; in 2025, EduRank placed UI at 13<sup>th</sup> in Africa, 1<sup>st</sup> in Nigeria, and 1006<sup>th</sup> globally, while UniRanks ranked it 18<sup>th</sup> in Africa and top in Nigeria. This prestige reflects UI's enduring commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and national development (UniRanks 2025; EduRank 2025; Albach and salmi 2011).

### *Institutional mandate of University of Ibadan*

University of Ibadan (2025) identifies its motto as "*Recte Sapere Fons*" which means "for knowledge and sound judgment". Its Vision is "Creating excellent academic and research environment for effective teaching, learning and researching in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria to make it a world class university," and the university's mission is listed as (a) to expand the frontiers of knowledge through the provision of excellent conditions for learning and research; (b) to contribute to the transformation of society through creativity and innovation; (c) to

produce graduates who are worthy in character and sound judgment; and (d) to serve as a dynamic custodian of society's salutary values and thus sustain its integrity. These statements collectively articulate the University of Ibadan's overarching mandate, which is to cultivate and uphold a tradition of academic excellence through rigorous scholarship and innovative research, to nurture ethical leadership by instilling values of integrity, responsibility, and service in its students and staff and to actively contribute to societal development by addressing pressing national and global challenges through impactful community engagement, policy-relevant research, and the production of knowledge that drives sustainable progress.

#### *5.1.2 The Impact of Policy Shifts on University of Ibadan*

Funding of University of Ibadan can be traced back to when it was still affiliated with University of London before it was awarded the status of a university in 1962; then it was called University College Ibadan and it received two sources of funding 70% from the Nigerian government and 30% from the University of London (Ajayi, 2018). Just after the amendment of the Education Act, UI received a cumulative allocation of ₦136 million for AST&D, aimed at exposing academic staff to diverse intellectual traditions and reducing inbreeding; subsequently, TETFund has been addressing infrastructural deficits and enhancing academic programs at UI through substantial financial allocations; in 2023 TETFund allocated ₦200 million for the renovation of the Department of Statistics building and the furnishing of the Department of Chemistry Laboratory at UI which has improved the learning environment and research capabilities within these departments etc. (University of Ibadan, 2025; TETFund, 2025).

The emergence of TETFund has significantly influenced the governance structure of the University of Ibadan by introducing a more structured and accountable framework for project implementation, the requirement for detailed proposals and strict adherence to project timelines has necessitated the establishment of dedicated units within the university to manage TETFund projects. This has led to improved transparency, better planning, and enhanced project execution, aligning the university's administrative processes with national standards (University of Ibadan, 2025; TETFund, 2025; Ajayi, 2018). Also, TETFund's support has had profound impact on both staff and students at the University of Ibadan; for academic staff, access to training and development grants has provided opportunities for advanced studies and research, both locally and internationally. This has not only enhanced academic qualifications but also improved teaching quality and research output. For students, the improved infrastructure and academic environment have translated into better learning experiences and outcome, the availability of modern facilities and resources has also contributed to increased student satisfaction and academic performance (University of Ibadan, 2025; TETFund, 2025; Ajayi, 2018).

Regarding skilled human capital, the University of Ibadan enhanced staff development through fellowships, international collaborations, and TETFund-supported training. Also, as part of the efforts to address the chronic underfunding of universities highlighted in Vision 20:2020, UI benefited significantly from intervention funds provided by TETFund, which were instrumental in supporting infrastructure development, research grants, and academic training programs. In line with the Vision's call for diversified funding, UI also sought to expand its revenue base through public-private partnerships, including alumni contributions, research commercialisation, and collaborations with industry, however these initiatives met with limited success due to persistent structural and economic challenges (Olayinka, Ojo and Adedeji, 2017; Halidu, 2015). Challenges such as poor working conditions, irregular pay, and limited incentives fueled brain drain. Frequent ASUU strikes further disrupted academic stability. On student development, UI introduced entrepreneurship education and expanded ICT use in admissions and learning, yet issues like overcrowded classrooms and inadequate housing continued to undermine academic quality (Olayinka, Adedeji, & Ojo, 2017).

Nevertheless, in line with the national reforms with emphasis on transparency, efficiency, and performance-based management in public institutions, the University of Ibadan (UI) implemented several governance reforms including strategic planning, internal quality assurance mechanisms, and increased automation in administrative processes. While the Vision encouraged greater institutional autonomy and accountability, the implementation at UI was uneven; Although, the university made progress in establishing research directorates and strategic units to enhance administrative independence, but continued federal oversight and bureaucratic bottlenecks limited the full realisation of these reforms (Olayinka, Ojo and Adedeji, 2017).

#### *5.2 Origin and founding purpose of University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

The establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) was closely linked to the Ashby commission and the broader educational reforms recommended. This also coincided with Nigeria's higher education needs in preparation for independence which included the establishment of more universities to meet the growing demand for higher education. The university was established in 1955 before independence but was formally opened in

1960, which is the year Nigeria gained its independence, hence its name “University of Nigeria” making it the first indigenous university in Nigeria, which was initiated by Nnamdi Azikiwe and was modeled after the American educational system. UNN surpassed UI in so many ways especially in the introduction of professional courses which were non-university courses in UI, such as law, education, management, mass communication, home economics, architecture, political science, sociology, animal production, agricultural economics etc., in its second year UNN admitted more than a thousand students, five (5) times the usual number admitted in UI (University of Nigeria, 2025; Albach and Salmi 2011). The University of Nigeria is situated in Enugu State, located in the southeastern region of Nigeria, it operates a multi-campus system comprising four campuses strategically distributed across the state to enhance accessibility for students and staff both within Enugu State and from across the country. The main campus is located in Nsukka, a historic town that serves as the academic and administrative hub of the University; this campus hosts several key faculties, including the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Agriculture, and the Faculty of Education, these faculties form the core of the university’s academic structure and support its mission of providing comprehensive, development-oriented education (University of Nigeria, 2025).

The second major campus is located in the city of Enugu, which is the capital of Enugu state; this urban campus accommodates important faculties such as the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Environmental Studies, and the Faculty of Medical Sciences, its central location in the state capital ensures that students can access legal, administrative, and healthcare-related disciplines in a more urbanized and resource-rich setting. Third is the Ituku-Ozalla campus, situated in a rural part of the state, is home to the Faculty of Dentistry and the Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology, this campus supports the university’s commitment to advancing medical and allied health education, providing specialized training facilities for students in the healthcare professions and lastly, the university maintains a campus in Aba, known as the Institute of Nigerian Languages; this campus is dedicated to the preservation, teaching, and promotion of Nigeria’s rich linguistic and cultural heritage, aligning with the university’s broader mission of national development through education. Together, these four campuses reflect the University of Nigeria’s commitment to geographical inclusivity, academic diversity, and national integration through higher education (University of Nigeria, 2025).

#### *Institutional Mandate of University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

The institutional mandate of UNN reflects its founding vision and legal responsibility to serve as a center of academic excellence, national development, and social transformation. This mandate is rooted in the philosophy of its founder, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, and is expressed through its motto: “To Restore the Dignity of Man” which reflects a commitment to human dignity, intellectual freedom and social responsibility (University of Nigeria, 2025). While its strategic vision is to create a functional, globally competitive and research focused university which is not just an Ivory Tower but responsive to the needs of the society while delivering world class education and knowledge (University of Nigeria, 2025). This means that the university places strong emphasis on interdisciplinary research that addresses African and global challenges, to tackle issues such as poverty, public health, climate change, education reform, technological innovation, and governance. In doing so, UNN aligns its scholarly efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global development frameworks, reinforcing its role as a catalyst for transformational change. Furthermore, to guide the establishment of its vision, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka has articulated a mission that reflects its commitment to academic excellence and social responsibility “forefront of research and the development, innovative, knowledge transfer and human resources development in the global academic terrain, while promoting the core values which will ensure the restoration of the dignity of man” (University of Nigeria, 2025). The university’s mission underscores its commitment to produce high quality work force who are not only grounded intellectually but also of good behaviour and socially responsible; Central to this mission is the enduring vision of restoring the dignity of man, which reflects a deep commitment to human empowerment, cultural identity, and the elevation of African perspectives within the global knowledge economy.

#### *5.2.2 Policy Shifts and Their Impact on University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka contributed to vision 20:2020 by promoting transparent, effective governance in the institutions to drive innovation and economic development under the leadership of vice chancellor Benjamin Ozumba, UNN emphasised innovation driven governance by establishing the first Nigeria's first university based science park “Lion science park” which led to the creation of Lion gadgets and technology Ltd, a laptop assembly line exemplifying the university's commitment to innovation and self-sustainability these initiatives aimed to contribute to national development by fostering technological advancement and entrepreneurship, these initiatives strategically aimed to generate revenue, reduce dependency on government allocations, and provide practical learning experiences for students (Nigeria communication week, 2018).

However, the full realisation of this was constrained by systematic national challenges including funding gaps, governance laps and infrastructure decay; issues with infrastructure specifically deteriorating hostel facilities and inconsistent power supply, consistent funding which affected the dignity of students and staff morale not aligning with the motto of the university and its operations to enhance national development and addressing these issues required a comprehensive funding strategy from both government and private sector sponsorship (Eneh, 2011).

TETFund has had considerable impacts on University of Nigeria, Nsukka, particularly in ways that align with Nigeria's aim to fill the gap of demand on higher education after independence. TETFund operates with strict rules and guidelines for proposal submission, project execution and financial reporting compelling UNN to adopt clear administrative procedures making departments seeking TETFund support to be more organized in planning and documentation etc. (Awolola, 2020). Aligning with its major establishment aim, TETFund has financed and renovated lecture halls, laboratories, and other key building infrastructure while simultaneously disbursing institution-based research grants making innovative research including publications in several UNN journals possible for staffs, students and intellectual minds aiming at national development. Many UNN staff improved their academic qualifications through TETFund scholarship grants, which enhanced teaching quality and morale; also, TETFund's investment in ICT tools (smart boards, projectors, and e-learning platforms) and modernized classrooms has significantly improved student engagement and access to resources (Awolola, 2020).

## 6. Insights and Conclusion

This study examined the pivotal role of public universities in national development through a focused analysis of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the University of Ibadan. Both universities were established with distinct historical and ideological foundations; UI as a colonial-era institution affiliated with the University of London, and UNN as the first indigenous university modeled after the American educational system. Despite these differences, they share a unifying vision, which is to produce skilled manpower, foster national unity, and support socioeconomic transformation (Jahantab, 2021; Kingdom and Maekae 2013). Their contributions to Nigeria's post-independence development have been evident in the cultivation of human capital, the production of research informing policy, and commitment to societal service through teaching, innovation, and civic engagement. Across decades, both universities have undergone various changes due to political change, policy reform, and financial instability, including underfunding, governance pressures, and the uneven implementation of educational policies – constraining performance and limited impact. Although strategic initiatives such as TETFund and Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 have provided critical support, systemic challenges such as underfunding, infrastructural decay, and political instability continue to constrain their full potential. Nevertheless, their continued relevance in regional and national development underscores the importance of understanding not only what universities contribute, but how institutional practices, strategic choices, and policy environments shape that contribution over time (Albach and salmi 2011; University of Nigeria, 2025).

Drawing from these insights, the study reinforces the argument that public universities must be viewed not merely as educational facilities but as development institutions with far-reaching societal impact. Strengthening their capacity requires more than infrastructure; it demands investment in academic freedom, institutional autonomy, equitable policy implementation, and research support systems. Policymakers need to adopt long-term vision for university education that aligns with national development goals while accounting for regional disparities and historical legacies. Also, there is need for further studies of other educational policies which are in line with national development since they go hand in hand. The downfall of a nation does not always manifest through overt acts of war or the deployment of advanced weaponry such as atomic bombs or long-range missiles; more often, the seeds of national collapse are sown quietly, through the gradual deterioration of its educational foundations. When the quality of education is compromised, and academic integrity is undermined, the long-term consequences are profound and far-reaching. Education is not merely a system for the transmission of knowledge; it is the bedrock upon which professional competence, civic responsibility, and ethical standards are built.

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