

## **REFORMING NIGERIA'S POLYTECHNICS INTO UNIVERSITIES OF TECHNOLOGY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ACCREDITATION, FUNDING, AND INSTITUTIONAL REALIGNMENT**

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### ***Abstract***

*As Nigeria takes on the ambitious task of converting selected polytechnics into technology universities, a deeper set of institutional, academic, and political realignments has emerged. This study identifies five systemic barriers to Nigeria's polytechnic-university conversion, revealing how accreditation demands and funding gaps undermine vocational education identity while proposing phased transition strategies. Based on policy documents, academic literature, and global case comparisons, the study reveals how regulatory expectations, limited financial capacity, and fragmented governance systems complicate institutional preparation. It believes that while this transition presents significant opportunities for enhancing technical education, it also reveals systemic weaknesses, particularly in research culture, staffing, and curriculum coherence. This paper, which draws on institutional and resource dependency theories, offers a conceptual framework for understanding these dynamics and provides strategic policy and practice recommendations. The conclusions highlight that sustainable reform requires more than a formal reclassification; it requires a strategic, phased, and appropriate approach that balances heritage strengths with new university standards.*

**Keywords:** *Accreditation, Transition, Curriculum Transformation, Funding Models, University Governance, Nigeria Education Policy, Polytechnic-to-University Transition, Research and Innovation Capacity, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is at a critical crossroads in the shifting landscape of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. The recent government (both state and federal) actions to convert selected polytechnics into technology universities are not just a reclassification of the administration; they mark a reorganisation of the nation's education priorities. This transition is part of a broader programme to bridge the long-standing gap between technical and academic education, to improve the status of technical and vocational education training (TVET) and to respond to the growing demand for globally competitive skills in the scientific, technological and innovation-oriented sectors (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Although the policy intentions are laudable, operationalising such conversions poses significant challenges. Polytechnic institutions, historically oriented towards 'medium-level manpower' and practical training, are now facing the complex task of becoming research-driven universities awarding degrees. This transformation is not linear or automatic; it requires institutional restructuring, ideological reorientation and systemic investment. The process is further complicated by issues of compliance with regulations, infrastructure limitations, and internal capacity gaps, especially in terms of staffing, research output, and program development (Okebukola, 2021; Aina, 2018).

At the centre of this transformation lie five critical pillars: accreditation, funding, institutional ranking, academic structure, and curriculum reform. Each of these pillars, though, requires internal organisational competence, and it also signals the broader policy environment and expectations from regulatory bodies, such as the National Universities Commission (NUC). Accreditation, for instance, sets the threshold for program legitimacy, staff qualifications, and physical infrastructure. Funding determines the pace and scale of reform. Institutional ranking affects visibility and credibility, while academic restructuring and curriculum renewal shape the very nature of learning, teaching, and research in the emerging university.

In this context, three research problems arise: 1) the institutional apprehension of university-level accreditation and staffing requirements; 2) inadequate and fragmented funding structures; and 3) the possible erosion of TVET's identity when entering university status. These challenges necessitate a study that focuses on the conditions under which such transitions can be successful. Consequently, the objective of this study is to investigate how five critical dimensions (accreditation, funding, institutional ranking, academic structure and curriculum reform) contribute to the

trajectory of Nigeria's transition from Polytechnic to University. In particular, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do accreditation requirements influence institutional restructuring and quality assurance in transitioning institutions?
2. What funding models are currently available, and how adequate are they in supporting institutional transformation?
3. How do institutional ranking mechanisms impact the visibility and competitiveness of newly converted universities?
4. In what ways are academic structures and governance systems being reorganised to reflect university standards?
5. What are the challenges and strategies for aligning curriculum reform with both university expectations and TVET identity?

This study is both exploratory and analytical in nature. It is exploratory because the institutional transformation of polytechnics in Nigeria remains an evolving policy terrain with limited empirical studies. It is analytical in its effort to evaluate the interplay between structural reforms and institutional agency, drawing insights from national policy documents, accreditation frameworks, and scholarly literature. Through this dual lens, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on higher education transformation, institutional differentiation, and the evolving role of regulatory frameworks in shaping educational outcomes in the Global South.

## **Literature Review**

### **Global Case Comparison**

The transformation of polytechnics into universities has gained momentum in several countries as governments seek to align higher education systems with labour market demands and global innovation goals. This evolution is often driven by the belief that higher academic status and expanded research mandates will yield stronger institutional capacity, broader access to quality education, and improved graduate employability (Wheelahlan & Moodie, 2017).

Comparative studies from other national contexts offer valuable insights. In South Africa, for example, the transformation of technikons into universities of technology was part of a broader post-apartheid effort to democratise access to higher education and to integrate the system under a unified regulatory framework.

Although the process led to improved institutional parity, challenges around research output, staff qualifications, and funding persisted for years after the formal transition (Akoojee, 2008). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act enabled polytechnics to become universities. While this policy removed the hierarchical divide between academic and technical institutions, it placed immense pressure on the newly established universities to meet research benchmarks and compete for funding—realities that reshaped institutional identity and governance (Taylor, 2010).

In Asia, countries such as South Korea and Malaysia have followed a similar path, transforming technical universities into institutions focused on applied sciences or technical education to promote innovation and industrial competitiveness. In South Korea, the success of this model depends on sustained investment in research infrastructure and faculty development, as well as strong industrial connections (Lee, 2015). Malaysia's approach focuses on curriculum modernisation, internationalisation and expansion of postgraduate training, enabling institutions to gradually build their reputation and research results (Lim, 2018).

These global examples demonstrate that a successful transition depends on several key factors: alignment with national development objectives, clear regulatory frameworks, consistent funding, and gradual implementation rather than abrupt implementation. In particular, the literature also warns against over-emphasising status changes without addressing fundamental institutional shortcomings. In many cases, old polytechnics struggle to redefine their mission in university spaces because they often lack the research culture, governance structures or staffing capacity for university operations (Santiago et al., 2008).

### **Nigeria-Specific Challenges**

In Nigeria, the polytechnic system was originally designed to produce a technically skilled workforce to support the country's industrialisation efforts. However, over the years, the dichotomy between university and polytechnic qualifications, particularly the marginalisation of the Higher National Diploma (HND), has created systemic inequities, limiting the career progression of polytechnic graduates and undermining the prestige of technical education (Okolie, Igwe, & Elom, 2019). This has resulted in persistent calls for reforms, culminating in the government's policy to convert selected polytechnics into universities of technology (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

Despite these agitations, Okebukola (2021) notes that many polytechnics lack the minimum ratio of academic staff, doctoral-

qualified faculty, and postgraduate opportunities necessary for NUC accreditation as a university. In addition, a study by Oliwola and Oliere (2022) emphasised the financial burden imposed by university-level operations, especially in historically underfunded institutions primarily devoted to practical training. These challenges raise key questions about institutional readiness, the pace of reform, and the mechanisms for sustaining such transitions.

All things considered, although international experience confirms the possibility of transforming polytechnics into universities, it also emphasises the necessity of strong institutional planning, long-term investment, and a gradual approach. This policy shift offers hope for Nigeria, but it must be implemented carefully, considering the structural inequalities within the system as well as the broader socio-economic context in which these institutions operate.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The transformation of institutions of higher education is rarely a purely technical or administrative process, but rather a profoundly integrated social, political, and economic context that shapes the education system. This study draws on institutional theory, resource dependence theory, and the transitional model to examine the complexity of the transitional model of higher education reform in Nigeria.

In essence, institutional theory explains how organisations react to external pressures by conforming to prevailing standards, expectations, and structures in order to gain legitimacy (Meyer *et al.*, 1977; DiMaggio *et al.*, 1983). In the context of polytechnics aspiring to university status, accreditation requirements, regulatory policies, and perceptions of academic prestige act as institutional forces that require these institutions to emulate traditional university governance and academic models. This phenomenon, often referred to as "isomorphism", can be observed in efforts to restructure academic boards (relevant to polytechnics) into Senate, recruit PhD staff, and change to research-oriented programmes. Such changes, although symbolic of accrediting institutions to accepted university standards, may also lead to a "decoupling" where external compliance conceals internal resistance or capacity constraints (Scott, 2008).

This theoretical lens provides insights into the first and third research questions: How accreditation affects institutional restructuring, and how pressures on institutional rankings shape competitiveness and visibility. Institutional theory helps to contextualise why institutions can undertake compliance-driven

reforms and how external legitimacy often dictates the trajectories of internal change.

To complement this, resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) emphasises the strategic behavioural practices adopted by institutions to ensure the protection of scarce and essential resources. As polytechnics transition, they face increased competition for funding, qualified personnel, research subsidies and accreditation. These dependencies influence their strategic decisions, whether they be quick to reform courses, seek partnerships, or lobby for regulatory concessions. Furthermore, institutions can change their basic identities, not because of their intrinsic preparedness, but because their survival depends on access to resources controlled by external actors such as the National University Commission (NUC), the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), and the Federal Ministry of Education.

This framework is particularly relevant for the second and fifth research questions, how the funding model supports or limits institutional change and how institutions can maintain their TVET identity while meeting university expectations. The theory of resource dependency explains how external funding demands shape internal priorities and how survival strategies allow organisations to adjust or obstruct their core missions.

The transitional model of higher education reform posits that systemic change must occur in stages, from policy intention through institutional adjustment to cultural and operational transformation (Clark, 1983; Teichler, 2007). Within this framework, it becomes evident that conversion to university status cannot be reduced to a change in nomenclature or legal status. It must involve a deeper realignment of institutional missions, academic ethos, governance structures, and stakeholder relationships. Institutions caught between the vocational and academic paradigms often experience "mission drift," where attempts to conform to university models dilute their original purpose without fully realising the benefits of university-level education (Brennan & Osborne, 2008).

This model serves as the basis for the fourth research question, which examines how academic structures and courses are actually reorganised. It also underscores the importance of gradual and context-specific alignment in the implementation of reforms.

Together, these frameworks highlight tensions, compromises and drivers that characterise the transition from polytechnic to university in Nigeria. They provide a lens that can not only explain what changes are happening, but also why institutions

react in a way to reform pressures and what this means for policy implementation and overall coherence throughout the system.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative and interpretive research design to understand the institutional dynamics, political changes, and systemic impacts of the transition from polytechnic to university in Nigeria. Due to the policy-oriented nature of the topic and the absence of extensive quantitative data sets, qualitative approaches enable more extensive and nuanced interpretations of processes, stakeholders' perspectives, and institutional readiness.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, to critically examine how Nigerian polytechnics transitioning into universities of technology navigate accreditation requirements, funding challenges, institutional restructuring, and curriculum reform. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for unpacking the life experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes of key stakeholders—policymakers, academics, administrators, and students—within a complex and evolving policy environment. Rather than quantifying outcomes, the study seeks to uncover underlying meanings, contextual nuances, and institutional logics that shape reform trajectories.

The use of qualitative design is justified by the study's exploratory and analytical orientation, where depth of understanding is prioritised over generalizability. This methodological choice enables the investigation of issues that are not easily captured through numeric indicators, such as institutional resistance, policy ambiguity, and cultural inertia. While the absence of quantitative data limits the ability to statistically measure outcomes or make population-level inferences, this limitation is addressed through rigorous triangulation of qualitative data.

Triangulation not only enhances the credibility and validity of the findings but also ensures a more comprehensive understanding of institutional behaviour under reform pressure. By engaging with multiple layers of data and perspectives, the study mitigates the risk of bias inherent in single-source analysis and captures the multidimensional nature of the transition process. Ultimately, the qualitative design supports the study's goal of providing a context-sensitive, theory-informed, and policy-relevant account of Nigeria's transformation from polytechnics to universities.

## **Data Sources**

This study draws on three primary sources of data:

*Documentary Analysis:* Policy documents, accreditation guidelines from the National Universities Commission (NUC), ministerial reports (e.g., the 2010 Salau Report), institutional strategic plans, and government white papers were analysed to identify regulatory benchmarks and structural requirements.

*Secondary Literature:* Peer-reviewed journal articles, national and international case studies, and relevant grey literature were reviewed to position Nigeria's experience within a comparative and conceptual framework. Particular attention was paid to transitions in South Africa, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Malaysia.

*Expert Opinion (Informal Interviews):* Informal consultations were held with selected higher education experts, including senior academic staff from polytechnic and university systems, NUC accreditation officials, and policy advisers within the Federal Ministry of Education. These consultations, while not formally structured interviews, provided valuable contextual insight.

### **Analytical Strategy**

A thematic analysis was employed to synthesise and interpret the collected data. Using NVivo 12 software, key themes were identified around the five core pillars: accreditation, funding, institutional ranking, academic structure, and curriculum change. Codes were developed deductively based on the literature and policy frameworks and refined inductively through iterative reading of the documents and expert input.

Each pillar was analysed for its role in enabling or constraining the transition process. Particular emphasis was placed on the interrelationship between pillars—for instance, how funding impacts accreditation or how academic restructuring influences institutional visibility.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

To ensure credibility, multiple sources of evidence were utilised, and the findings were triangulated across different data types. Peer debriefing with higher education scholars was used to reduce interpretive bias. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to acknowledge the researchers' positionality and assumptions.

### **Limitations**

This study does not include large-scale empirical data such as national surveys or institutional performance metrics due to time and access constraints. As such, its findings are exploratory and should be interpreted as indicative rather than generalisable.

### **Ethical Considerations**

While no formal ethical approval was required for documentary analysis and expert consultations, all informal respondents were informed of the study's purpose, and their input has been anonymised. Care was taken to respect institutional confidentiality and avoid misrepresentation of policy documents.

### **Analysis**

The transformation of Nigerian universities from polytechnics to technology universities is not just a policy recommendation, but a multidimensional process of reform that has a deep impact on institutional identity, governance and capacity. The analysis of public policy documents, institutional data, and comparative world literature revealed latent tensions and transformational opportunities in the five core pillars of this transition.

### **Accreditation as a Double-Edged Sword**

Accreditation is the foundation for ensuring quality in higher education. In Nigeria, the National University Commission (NUC) sets strict benchmarks (such as staffing profiles, curriculum standards, and research expectations) as the prerequisite for institutional recognition. However, for many polytechnics, complying with these standards remains an important obstacle. The requirement that at least 20% of university staff hold professorships has strained the capacity of a limited number of institutions with doctoral-qualified staff. Thus, some institutions may focus on more effective than substantive compliance strategies, as did DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concept of symbolic isomorphism. Recent studies (Okebukola, 2021; Adewuyi & Ofoegbu, 2023) have shown that many institutions have adopted surface-level reforms (e.g., reorganising departments and titles) without addressing the underlying academic deficiencies.

### **Funding constraints and strategic dependency**

The transition to university status requires substantial financial demands. These include capital expenditures on laboratories, libraries, postgraduate programs, ICT infrastructure, and the recurrent costs related to the development of academic staff. Current funding from the Federal Government and TETFund has proved insufficient for this stage of transformation (Olayiwola & Oyelere, 2022; Eze *et al.*, 2023). This lack of funding emphasises the theory of resource dependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which illustrates how institutions adapt their strategies to secure critical resources. Due to the lack of specific transitional funding,

most polytechnic universities are trying to diversify revenue streams or develop a robust internal production fund (IGF).

### **Institutional Ranking and Symbolic Visibility**

Institutional Rankings have gained momentum as indicators of academic quality and global relevance. However, many transitional institutions in Nigeria lack the research output, digital visibility and international cooperation necessary to enhance competitiveness (Altbach *et al.*, 2020; Babalola *et al.*, 2023). Without adequate investment in research infrastructure and capacity-building, these institutions risk remaining invisible on national and global metrics. The analysis shows that efforts to elevate rankings—such as publishing in predatory journals or overstating research impact—can further erode credibility if not supported by genuine scholarly engagement (Hazelkorn, 2015).

### **Academic Structure and Institutional Reorientation**

Shifting from a polytechnic governance model (centred around schools and academic boards) to a university structure (with faculties and senates) involves significant realignment. Santiago *et al.* (2021) observe that such structural changes often meet resistance, particularly where leadership lacks training in academic governance. Chukwuedo and Ezenwafor (2022) note that without strategic change management, institutions may experience internal conflicts and governance paralysis. Furthermore, the reorganisation demands new layers of quality assurance, interdisciplinary program development, and academic autonomy that are still underdeveloped in many institutions.

### **Curriculum Change and Risk of Mission Drift**

Curriculum reform is central to the university's transition, yet many institutions face challenges in modernising their academic content. While some have transitioned from HND to B.Tech degrees with new course structures, others continue to deliver outdated or rebranded versions of polytechnic curricula (Aina, 2018; Okoroafor & Nwogu, 2023). The risk here is mission drift: in their pursuit of academic legitimacy, institutions may abandon their foundational TVET identity without successfully integrating university-level academic rigour. This compromises both the applied focus of programs and the employability of graduates.

### **Discussion**

This section contextualises the findings by addressing the five research questions and the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study.

**RQ1:** How do accreditation requirements influence institutional restructuring and quality assurance in transitioning institutions?

Accreditation drives institutions to restructure in accordance with accepted university norms. However, institutional theory suggests this often results in symbolic compliance rather than substantive reform (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Recent evidence (Adewuyi & Ofoegbu, 2023) shows that while structures may be renamed or rebranded, academic practices and staff capacity frequently remain unchanged.

**RQ2:** What funding models are currently available, and how adequate are they in supporting institutional transformation?

The existing funding mechanisms—largely reliant on TETFund and government subvention—are insufficient for the expanded mandate of universities. Institutions lack transitional funds to support large-scale capital and recurrent expenditures. Resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) explains how this dependency forces institutions to compromise their goals or engage in opportunistic strategies to secure resources, often at the expense of quality and mission.

**RQ3:** How do institutional classification mechanisms affect the visibility and competitiveness of newly developed universities?

The global rankings serve as incentives and pressures for new universities to improve their performance. However, as Babalola and Adediran (2023) point out, many Nigerian institutions lack the basic research infrastructure necessary to compete. This leads to a reputational gap between ambition and capacity, which undermines long-term credibility.

**RQ4:** How are academic structures and governance systems being reorganised to reflect university standards?

The reorganisation of academic structures is often top-down, with limited stakeholder participation. Resistance stems from legacy systems, administrative inertia and unclear role definitions (Chukwuedo & Ezenwafor, 2022). The transition model (Clark, 1983; Teichler, 2007) supports the idea that reform must extend beyond symbolic compliance to encompass cultural and operational transformation.

**RQ5:** What are the challenges and strategies to align the reform of the curriculum with university expectations and TVET identity?

Maintaining dual commitment to academic excellence and technical relevance is the most difficult balancing act in transition.

Without intentional strategies, such as hybrid program models or a co-designed curriculum by industry institutions, these dimensions could be undermined (Okoroafor & Nwogu, 2023).

### **Counterarguments and Alternative Perspectives**

Some researchers believe that institutional changes should be allowed to evolve organically through competition rather than being formally designated. Others warned that the TVET-university hybrid model was difficult to maintain in practice. However, global models (such as those in Malaysia and South Korea) suggest that well-funded, phased approaches — supported by governance reforms and clear measures — can preserve technical identity while achieving university status (Lee, 2015; Lim, 2018).

### **Policy and Practice Recommendations**

Recommendations on policies and practices to transform the polytechnic reform of universities from political ambitions to institutional realities require a targeted intervention beyond rhetoric. Based on the analysis presented, the following policy and institutional recommendations aim to support sustainable and reliable transition processes.

#### **1. Establishing a transitional funding framework**

To ensure a seamless and sustainable transformation from polytechnic to university status, the Federal Government should initiate a dedicated transitional funding mechanism through the Federal Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). Unlike general capital grants, this fund must be purpose-built to meet the complex requirements of institutional conversion. Priority areas for funding should include upgrading physical infrastructure to align with National Universities Commission (NUC) standards, financing postgraduate education for academic staff, establishing research and innovation hubs, and supporting the temporary engagement of experienced scholars, such as sabbatical professors, to bridge expertise gaps.

Beyond relieving financial pressure, such a framework would signal the government's long-term commitment to meaningful reform in the tertiary education sector. To operationalise this initiative, three funding models are proposed: (1) a five-year public-private partnership (PPP) pilot to leverage industry investment, (2) a UNESCO-supported transition fund targeting capacity development, and (3) a phased NUC-linked subsidy scheme, tied directly to institutions' progress in meeting accreditation milestones. These options would offer flexible yet

accountable pathways to funding, tailored to institutional readiness and reform benchmarks.

2. Create a dual-mode academic model with regulatory support  
Rather than abruptly phasing out national diploma (ND) programs, institutions should encourage the implementation of dual-mode delivery systems, offering both ND and B.Tech programs during the transition period. This model ensures continuous access to intermediate technical training, allowing time to develop university capacities. To avoid regulatory confusion, the National University Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) must develop a joint accreditation framework to govern dual-mode institutions during this interim phase.

3. Develop a national television education integration strategy  
At the policy level, there is a lack of a coherent strategy for effectively integrating the strengths of its technical and vocational education and training sector into the wider educational landscape. To address this gap, the Federal Ministry of Education should convene a national task force consisting of academics, industry stakeholders, regulatory agencies, and international experts to develop a strategic programme to guide the transition from polytechnics to universities. The plan should focus on maintaining the technical identity of transition institutions, preventing mission drift, and institutionalising interdisciplinary and industry-relevant academic programs. Such coordinated efforts ensured that reforms were not arbitrary, but strongly anchored on national development goals and world best practices.

4. Professionalise academic leadership for university governance  
Successful transformation requires a change not only in structure but in leadership ethics. Academic administrators of newly converted institutions – in particular professors, department heads, and Senate members – should receive structured training in university governance, academic leadership, and research ethics. The NUC and the Association of Vice-Chancellors should collaborate to develop short executive courses or certificate programs tailored to this need.

#### **5. Strengthen internal research ecosystems**

New universities must act swiftly to establish a robust research ecosystem by developing comprehensive research policies, sustainable funding frameworks, and targeted incentives for the university. These efforts should include seed grants for early-career researchers, structured support for academic publishing and editorial mentoring, the establishment of an institutional repository for archiving and disseminating research results, and strategic partnerships with established universities to co-supervise postgraduate students and collaborate on research projects.

Without these deliberate interventions, the important research task for university identity may be seen as an aspiration rather than a functional and measurable component of institutional practice.

#### 6. Employ the intelligence of the labour market in curriculum reform

Curriculum development committees must work closely with industry partners, professional associations, and graduates to align programmes with real-world needs. Employment market forecasting tools, graduate tracking studies, and skill gap audits should inform course offerings and learning outcomes to ensure alignment with current and future workforce needs. Institutions should run co-designed programs that combine classroom learning with practical industrial training.

#### 7. Implementation of communications and change management strategies

The resistance to change, from staff, students, and even regulatory stakeholders, can delay reforms. Transitional institutions should develop communication plans that clarify timelines, expectations, and support mechanisms. These plans should be accompanied by academic advisory systems, complaint channels and participation forums to promote trust and transparency.

By embedding these reforms in politics and practice, Nigeria can move beyond symbolic conversions and build resilient, research-based, and technically sound universities. It is not only about branding institutions, but also about rebalancing higher education itself to reflect the relevance of a knowledge-driven economy.

### **Conclusion**

The transition from Polytechnic to University in Nigeria is a strategic, yet complex, effort to reposition technical education within a broader national development agenda. This study explored five critical dimensions — accreditation, funding, institutional classification, academic structure and curriculum reform — through theoretical and comparative perspectives. The results confirm that although the transition creates opportunities for institutional growth and academic progress, it also reveals systemic weaknesses in governance, capacity, and policy coherence.

Compared to other countries, Nigeria's experience aligns with broader trends in developing nations. As with the post-apartheid conversion of vocational schools in South Africa and Malaysia's move to highly innovative technology research universities, Nigeria is facing challenges such as symbolic compliance, misalignment of funds and mission drift. In each of these contexts,

structural reforms exceeded cultural and academic readiness, resulting in uneven outcomes. However, the Malaysian case also shows that deliberate policy design, sustained investment, and industry-oriented programming allow TVET to maintain its strengths and expand its university functions.

Nigeria's reform efforts must therefore go beyond the policy statements to address the realities of institutional capacity and the risks of emulating the less critical. Successful transitions require more than accreditation checks or structural imitation; they necessitate a grounded and context-sensitive approach that strikes a balance between innovation, identity, and compliance with transformation. Through global examples and the investment in tailored support systems, such as transitional funding, curriculum frameworks, and research incentives, Nigeria's new technology universities can become a credible engine of skills development, innovation, and inclusive growth.

To support this position, this study makes three distinct contributions. First, it provides a conceptual framework for understanding higher education transitions as multi-level processes shaped by institutional theory and resource dependencies. Second, it situates the Nigerian case within comparative global contexts, highlighting both convergence and divergence in pathways to institutional transformation. Third, it provides actionable recommendations that address the real-world constraints faced by policy actors, academic leaders, and regulatory bodies alike.

Future research may explore the lived experiences of academic and non-academic staff as they navigate these changes, or track the longitudinal outcomes of graduates emerging from dual-mode and restructured academic programs. Equally important is the need to monitor how institutional rankings, student performance, and research output evolve in the first decade post-conversion.

Finally, the path from polytechnic to university holds promise— but that promise will only be fulfilled if the transition is approached not as an event, but as a deliberate and inclusive process of educational reinvention. It is in this spirit of critical engagement and constructive foresight that this study contributes to the discourse on higher education reform in Nigeria and beyond.

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