ISSN: 2713 - 2822
Volume 13, Number 2, 2026
International Journal of Educational Research & Practice

DECOLONIZATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE CREATIVITY, INNOVATION AND GLOBAL COMPETIVENESS

Stella Ofor-Douglas Ph.D
Institute of Education, Faculty of Education
Rivers State University, Nkpolu, Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.
MOBILE NO: 08033097472, EMAIL: stellaofor031@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6855-2106.

Abstract
This paper examines decolonization of university education for sustainable creativity, innovation and global competitiveness**.** The abstract outlines on reshaping Nigerian university education by moving away from inherited Western models and toward a decolonized framework that fosters sustainable innovation and global competitiveness. The introduction establishes that current curricula often neglect indigenous knowledge systems, leaving graduates ill-equipped to solve local problems or compete meaningfully on global platforms. The literature review examines existing scholarship on colonial legacies in African education, highlighting how imported pedagogies suppress creativity and contextual relevance. Key issues identified include over-reliance on foreign theories, poor integration of local languages and technologies, limited research into indigenous solutions, and a disconnect between university outputs and Nigeria's developmental needs. The paper then suggests practical steps: redesigning core courses to include Nigerian case studies and traditional problem-solving methods; promoting research partnerships with local industries and communities; adopting flexible assessment systems that reward innovation over rote memorization and training lecturers in decolonial pedagogies. The conclusion affirms that decolonization does not mean rejecting global knowledge but rather balancing it with homegrown perspectives. When Nigerian universities lead with their own cultural and intellectual resources, they produce graduates who drive sustainable innovation , create solar alternatives to diesel generators, biomaterials from local plants and fintech solutions for unbanked populations. This approach enhances global competitiveness by offering unique, context-smart innovations rather than copying Western models. Ultimately, decolonizing the university is not symbolic; it is a strategic necessity for Nigeria to compete on its own terms while solving real local challenges sustainably.

Keywords: *Decolonization, University Education, Sustainable Creativity, Innovation, Global Competitiveness*

Introduction

For more than six decades, Nigerian universities have operated largely on intellectual foundations inherited from British colonial education systems. While these institutions have produced thousands of graduates across various disciplines, a persistent question remains: are our universities truly serving Nigerian society, or are they simply replicating Western models that do not fully address local realities? This paper arises from the growing recognition that the current structure of university education in Nigeria, though not entirely without merit, has significant limitations when it comes to fostering sustainable innovation and preparing graduates to compete globally on Nigeria's own terms.(Obimuyiwa &Salekhova , 2025 ; Anyanwu , 2011). The term "decolonization" in this context does not mean rejecting all external knowledge or isolating Nigerian universities from the rest of the world. Rather, it means critically examining which aspects of the current educational system were designed primarily to serve colonial interests, and then deliberately recentering African knowledge systems, local problems, and indigenous solutions within the curriculum. For too long, Nigerian students have learned more about European history, European philosophers, and Western economic theories than about pre-colonial African governance systems, indigenous agricultural practices, or local technological innovations. This imbalance has consequences. A graduate of mechanical engineering may know

the inner workings of a German engine but have no idea how to improve a locally fabricated cassava processing machine. A student of economics may recite Western development models but cannot explain the informal economy that keeps millions of Nigerian families alive.(John , 2025 ; Chrispo , 2025).

The problem is not simply about content. It is also about method. Colonial education prioritized rote learning, obedience, and abstract examinations over critical thinking, creativity, and hands-on problem solving. These methods were by design, they were meant to produce clerks and administrators for the colonial system, not innovators or entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, many Nigerian universities still unconsciously follow this same pattern today. Lectures remain largely theoretical. Research often focuses on publishing in foreign journals rather than solving community problems. And innovation, when it happens, tends to imitate foreign solutions rather than drawing from local materials, local knowledge, and local needs.(Udosen, 2024; Oseji , 2026 ; Dziva et al. , 2025).

Yet, the stakes have never been higher. Nigeria faces urgent challenges: energy poverty, food insecurity, unemployment among youth, environmental degradation, and a healthcare system under strain. At the same time, the global economy increasingly rewards innovation, adaptability, and unique value not imitation. If Nigerian universities continue to educate students using borrowed blueprints, they will neither solve Nigeria's problems nor produce globally competitive graduates. But if they can successfully decolonize blending local knowledge with global best practices, they can become engines of sustainable innovation that the world will want to learn from.(NUC Blueprint 2.0 , 2026 ; Asanre et al. , 2025).

This paper therefore examines the following: what decolonizing university education actually means in the Nigerian context, practical suggestions for change, and the ultimate relationship between decolonization, sustainable innovation, and global competitiveness. The goal is not to tear down existing structures completely, but to reimagine them so that Nigerian universities finally educate for Nigeria first and in doing so, become truly competitive on the global stage.(Voice of Nigeria , 2025).

How Was Nigerian Education Colonized?

Before colonial rule, learning in Nigeria happened naturally within daily life. Kids picked up farming, trades, and local histories by listening to elders, telling stories, and working alongside family. In the north, Qur'anic schools were already well established. Then came 1842, when missionaries launched the first Western-style classrooms in Badagry and Abeokuta. They pushed literacy and religion side by side, but the hidden price was identity , local customs, names, and beliefs got pushed aside for English ways.

By the late 1800s, British policies grew stricter. An 1882 rule made English the only language of instruction for government-funded schools. Indigenous knowledge was labeled backward. A later report in 1926 shaped schooling to train low-level helpers, translators, office boys who could support the colonial machine but never run it. Trade schools were encouraged, not to uplift Nigerians, but to box them into specific roles.

Ultimately, colonization did not just introduce new education it deliberately dismantled old ones. The real damage was mental: convincing Nigerians that knowing Shakespeare mattered more than understanding native herbs or crafting a traditional tent. The takeover was not just physical. It succeeded when people began to distrust their own ways of teaching.(History Rise, 2016).

The objectives of this paper are identified in this paper consist of the following:

1. Give African scholars and universities the power to define their own research goals and priorities, ensuring that outcomes are both practical and locally meaningful.

2. Promote teamwork across African institutions working in health, legal systems, and human rights to tackle major challenges like economic disparity, environmental shifts, and legal frameworks for public health.

3. Reshape African Studies as a discipline by confronting language and knowledge-based barriers, creating a field that truly reflects African societies and directly serves African people.

4. Blend a wide range of lived experiences and worldviews into the worldwide academic system, building a fairer and more inclusive future for global knowledge production.(Lazarus et al., 2025).

The aims of decolonizing university education for sustainable innovation and global competitiveness in Nigerian universities is as follows:
1. Position Indigenous Knowledge as a Core Pillar for Scientific and Technological Breakthroughs. Instead of treating Western frameworks as the default standard, this aim elevates Nigeria's native intellectual traditions like pre-colonial engineering, soil management, and ecological planning as legitimate bases for learning. The focus is on generating homegrown answers to local crises such as erosion control, food storage, and renewable energy access.

2. Shift Classroom Methods from Memorization to Real-World, Community-Led Problem Solving. This seeks to replace passive, exam-obsessed teaching with active, location-based learning. Graduates will emerge equipped to tackle tangible Nigerian challenges turning waste into resources or building off-grid power solutions through hands-on design and iterative testing, sparking genuine sustainable progress.

3. Redirect Research Focus from External Agendas to Nigeria's Most Pressing Environmental and Social Needs. Rather than chasing foreign research trends, universities will prioritize locally urgent issues like tropical disease prevention, affordable renewable materials, and native crop enhancement. This shift produces patent-worthy, context-driven innovations that make Nigerian institutions globally distinctive, not derivative.

4. Develop Nigerian Languages as Vessels for Teaching Technical and Scientific Disciplines
The goal is to create specialized terminology in Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and other local tongues for fields like medicine, engineering, and data science. This deepens comprehension and opens access, while producing graduates who can think and innovate multilingually , a rare edge in international markets.

5. Break Down Academic Elitism That Excludes Hands-On, Artistic, and Oral Knowledge Forms
This aim grants full academic recognition to areas such as indigenous weaving technology, oral record-keeping systems, and traditional water treatment methods. By merging time-tested practices with modern science, universities will spawn affordable, resilient innovations that compete globally on practicality and low cost.

6. Redesign International Collaborations So Nigerian Universities Lead and Own Their Research.
Decolonization here means flipping the power dynamic in global partnerships. This implies that Nigerian institutions should set the questions, retain raw data, and control intellectual property. This yields competitive outputs like locally developed drug patents or climate-resilient construction codes without the drain of extractive "helicopter research."

What is Decolonizing University Education?
Decolonizing university education is the deliberate process of identifying and uprooting the lingering colonial influences that still dictate what gets taught, whose knowledge counts, and how learning happens within higher education institutions.

The Federal Government additionally set up the Ashby Commission, tasked with assessing Nigeria's requirements in post-secondary and tertiary education for the subsequent two decades (Ashby, 1960). As a result, the "prudent and courageous" suggestions of this Commission led to the creation of six universities inspired by its report: Ibadan in 1962, Nsukka in 1960, Ife in 1961, Zaria in 1962, Lagos in 1962, and Benin in 1970.

However, similar to the Yaba Higher College, it was not long before prominent Nigerians started launching fierce criticisms against the university College's leadership. Specifically, these critiques targeted the colonial administration's discriminatory practices: employing more expatriates over qualified locals, establishing different employment terms for white versus Black personnel, designing academic curricula modelled after the University of London (which deemed subjects like Greek and Latin relevant), and enforcing a restrictive admission policy.

Beyond these early challenges, political factors also shaped where universities were sited during the 1970s military regime. For instance, in 1975, the Gowon administration established a total of six new universities in Calabar, Port Harcourt, Ilorin, Jos, Maiduguri, and Sokoto. Subsequently, Kano was added, bringing the total to seven. Nevertheless, Aminigo (1995) observed that "... the universities were not established to address areas of national priority, such as local technologies, industries, and commercial sectors that would boost the country's industrial and economic growth."

In response to these limitations, the creation of nineteen states in Nigeria in 1976 once again necessitated geopolitical balance in establishing federal universities across all nineteen states. Consequently, this decision led to the founding of technological universities in Owerri (now Imo State), Bauchi (Bauchi State), and Makurdi (now Benue State) in 1980, followed by Minna (now Niger State) and Abeokuta (now Ogun State) in 1982. Moreover, in 1987, the Universities of Technology in Makurdi and Abeokuta were converted into specialized Universities of Agriculture, while the University of Abuja was opened in 1988 (Nwideeduh, 2003).

On the philosophical foundations of education, Nwanosike and Onyije, as cited in Ojo, argued that traditional education is foundational in any Nigerian society for safeguarding the lives of its members and upholding the social structure. Turning to contemporary perspectives, Mawere (2015) contended that indigenous knowledge holds importance for African students and can only be fully grasped when situated within home-grown ideas. Furthermore, the colonization of the mind encompasses knowledge, language, culture, as well as the effects of colonization on personal and collective levels—physically, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, and intellectually (Yvonne, Dustin, Aubrey & Jacqueline, 2018).In the same vein, this is grounded in the rejection of modern colonial education, whose organizing principle was centered on molding the colonized into colonial subjects, thereby stripping them of their humanity and full potential (Aslam, 2018).
Similarly, Musitha and Mafukata (2018) asserted that the education system was deliberately designed to undermine the educational and skills development of the colonized.
As a complementary view, decolonizing education means moving away from a uniform and rigid approach to learning and instead embracing alternative, evolving, and ever-changing knowledge systems (Brean, 2016). Likewise, decolonizing education in Africa must be an ongoing, rigorous process of genuine engagement that does not perpetuate the notion that local or indigenous education is inferior (Adebisi, 2016). In light of these arguments, Consequently, the courses were designed to equip graduates with entrepreneurial skills, enabling young people to rediscover and dedicate themselves to building a strong and vibrant united Nigeria.

Education

To begin with, education serves as a means of enlightening and transforming the broader population (Ofor-Douglas, 2024). In a similar way, it has been characterized as the light that chases away ignorance, the spice that gives life its flavour, the cure that restores, and the instrument that opens doors (Proshare, 2018). As a result, education functions both as an essential tool and a potent driver of national progress. When a country builds itself on a foundation of illiteracy, it welcomes darkness, which in turn paves the way for catastrophic results (Ofor-Douglas, 2024).

Furthermore, education possesses the ability to change people's perspectives on the world and carries the potential to address sustainability challenges (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019). Additionally, Odimayo (2019) contended that education operates as a framework for developing individuals across social, intellectual, physical, emotional, moral, and psychological domains. In a similar vein, the original aim of education was to prepare an individual to function successfully within their community.

Moreover, education is the only mechanism for instilling appropriate values and norms in youth and citizens, thereby encouraging political, cultural, and socio-economic advancement (Ofor-Douglas, 2021). Along the same lines, it is essential that values be incorporated alongside the regular university curriculum, since the lack of these values can negatively affect students' lives and impede societal progress (Ofor-Douglas, 2021). Likewise, Moses-Promise and Ahiakwo (2018) describe education as the vehicle for fostering growth and development, as it allows individuals to integrate into their societies, exhibit their cultural heritage, and adjust it to fit contemporary beliefs, ideological expansion, and reform.

Additionally, education is a globally valued asset because it drives learners' advancement and plays a key role in a nation's international standing (Ofor-Douglas, 2024). According to Garba (as cited in Ojo, Babalola & Omotosho, 2023), education is a foundational element in the holistic development of any country or community. Education experts viewed schools as a microcosm of society, designed to produce a workforce capable of tackling social issues. Hence, learners must be educated in a manner that aligns with their society's needs, aspirations, and values (Ofor-Douglas, 2024).

Turning specifically to tertiary education, university education functions as a knowledge production centre, where the raw material of humanity is processed, improved, trained, and moulded into leaders across every field of human activity (Nwachukwu & Okoli, 2015). In addition, Idoko (2015) noted that a university is a recognized centre of excellence where intellectual cross-pollination of ideas systematically occurs, all aimed at developing the individual's intellectual capacity, resourcefulness, and character formation for overall societal progress in all fields of inquiry. Furthermore, university education supplies graduates with the highly skilled labour force that society requires for long-term viability (Nwakoby, 2024). A crucial component of education involves building knowledge and delivering it to students, so that upon finishing their studies, individuals acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise to grow personally and contribute meaningfully to national advancement (Akpan, 2015).

Moreover, as observed by Okolie (in Ofor-Douglas, 2024), university education is a purposeful and methodical instructional process focused on the all-round development of individuals and societal change through intensive teaching, research, and community engagement. Additionally, the education system serves as the primary means of developing students into professionals ready to excel in the employment market. University education can also be defined as an

organized formal learning experience that encourages critical thinking, innovation, civic duty, intellectual growth, and personal development (Ofor-Douglas, 2024).

At its core, high-quality university education seeks to enhance creativity, competence, and productivity while also fostering a supportive academic environment. Such an atmosphere should promote effective teaching and significant learning experiences for both faculty and students, thereby strengthening overall institutional performance (Ofor-Douglas, 2022). Finally, a genuinely impactful university education provides students with the skills, knowledge, and values needed for both individual and collective societal growth. Institutions must embed quality assurance processes throughout their operations to guarantee that graduates are capable and competitively viable on an international scale (Ofor-Douglas, 2024).

In addition to these foundational purposes, what distinguishes university education is the calibre of its physical infrastructure, which helps project a high institutional standard in the view of the community. (Ofor-Douglas, 2024). Furthermore, Akinyemi (2022), drawing on Cui and Martins (2020), argued that university education yields a social return, whereby successful completion allows the graduate to benefit personally and also contribute to their community and the wider society. Similarly, university education provides the recipient with the high-level skilled manpower that society needs for sustainability (Nwakoby, 2024). Ultimately, a truly effective university education equips students with the skills, knowledge, and values essential for personal and societal development. Institutions must integrate quality assurance mechanisms into every facet of their operations to ensure graduates are competent and globally competitive as a priority (Ofor-Douglas, 2024).

Sustainable Creativity and Innovation

To begin with, innovation refers to the transformation of concepts into actionable solutions, technologies, products, or services that generate value. Within university education system, innovation appears through the commercialization of research, entrepreneurial activities, and the transfer of knowledge. Sustainability refers to meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In university education, it includes sustainable research funding, environmentally responsible campuses, and long-term innovation ecosystems. Moreover, within the educational sphere, innovation might manifest as a fresh pedagogical framework, an original methodological strategy, a novel classroom technique, or an updated structural design for instruction (Serdyukov, 2017). Similarly, innovation pertains to the ways in which institutions enhance their delivery of goods or services (Baskaran & Mehta, 2016).

Furthermore, innovation, or demand management, refers to the individual or institutional process and endeavor aimed at creating novel products, fresh services, or alternative applications for existing goods or services. In any dynamic and shifting context, prioritizing innovation is essential, as it plays a critical role in generating and implementing original concepts. Consequently, any successful organization that relies solely on past achievements may eventually become stagnant, since rival entities are likely to attract its customer base away (Chikwe, 2022).

When Did Innovation Set in University Education in Nigeria?

Turning to the Nigerian context, innovation started gaining traction near the end of the 20th century, particularly following the economic reforms of the 1990s. The founding of private institutions like Covenant University in 2002 represented a shift toward entrepreneurship, technology-focused education, and competition for global rankings.

However, when the ideas conceived by educators to realize the intended aims and objectives of university education become unattainable, a knowledge gap emerges within the system for resolving issues in university education and society. By embedding innovation into the system, there arises a necessity for such innovation. Innovation involves introducing original new ideas, knowledge,

abilities, methodologies, and content into the educational framework (including university education) to fulfill the requirements of learners (as customers), stakeholders, and the wider community.

Why Is Innovation Essential for University Administrators?

Consequently, university leaders must also equip students with exposure to novel concepts, enabling them to engage in creative thinking, collaboration, and partnerships with other institutions familiar with innovative technology, thereby ensuring their relevance in the employment market (Ofor-Douglas, 2020). In addition, administrators of Nigerian universities must align themselves with contemporary trends in innovation within both society and the wider world, staying current in knowledge and abilities to fulfill the goals and objectives of university education as well as sustainable development (Ofor-Douglas, 2023). Furthermore, Nwideeduh and Adieme (2021) argued that school administrators, serving as agents of change, are entrusted with the considerable responsibilities of adapting to and implementing innovations aimed at fulfilling the demands of globalization and societal expectations of educational institutions.

The Role of Training and Human Resources in Innovation

In terms of human resource development, enhancing the innovative capabilities of personnel requires both instruction within a classroom setting and practical experience gained through on-the-job training (Dostie, 2018). Additionally, Natalicchio et al. (2018) emphasize that the effectiveness of innovation practices is determined not by recruiting exceptionally skilled staff, but rather by the capacity to execute employee training initiatives. Moreover, Seeck and Diehl (2017) noted that by both consolidating and refreshing the existing body of work, their objective was to foster scholarly advancement, offer clearer guidance, and present an exhaustive, methodical synthesis of this growing field of study. Similarly, Della Torre et al. (2020) emphasizes that, even though technological systems are crucial for achieving successful innovation outcomes, it remains vital to put motivational systems into practice.

The Impact of Technology and Digital Transformation

In the realm of technology, high-performing entities embrace radically distinct structures and increasingly transform themselves through digitalization and innovative practices (Delloitte, 2017). Currently, the incorporation of information and communication technology into service delivery is viewed as an innovative strategy to support the modernization of universities on a global scale (Misra & Maskeliunas, 2018). Practically speaking, Sahin (2016) critically outlined various approaches for integrating technology into university administration to effectively oversee student activities, including: distributing notices and announcements to students via email rather than through printouts; submitting lesson plans electronically; promoting technological growth by requesting parents to provide email addresses on medical forms; mandating that all teachers develop a class webpage; and participating in technology conferences.

The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Educational Innovation

More recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) stands at the leading edge of transforming education, driving innovations that reshape instructional methods, learning processes, and institutional functions (Agbo, Sanusi, & Onyeka, 2023). In addition, harnessing AI could provide creative answers to persistent challenges, allowing universities to improve educational delivery, close the skills gap, and enhance graduate employability (Agbo et al., 2023). Moreover, Odeh et al. (2020) stated that artificial intelligence boosts innovation, improves the learner experience, and facilitates greater access to information for students within university education. Specifically, creative thinking combined with the capabilities of AI enables learners to design innovative products, services, or business models capable of fueling economic growth and social progress (Kumar & Patel, 2022). Furthermore, both educators and learners are increasingly incorporating AI-driven innovations—

such as intelligent robots and adaptive learning platforms—into their educational activities (Chan & Zary, 2019). Finally, it is regarded as an emerging technology and a critical element with the potential to introduce new avenues for growth and to alter how work is conducted across institutions, organizations, and workplaces as well (Duggal, 2023).To conclude, students have the ability to enroll in global courses and study from any location, without concern for geographic constraints (Bordia, 2023; Borbajo et al., 2023).

Global Competitiveness

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017), competitiveness is defined as "the combination of institutions, policies, and factors that determine a country's competitiveness and productivity level." Similarly, Siudek and Zawji, Ska (2014) argued that competitiveness can determine whether an organization can survive amid increasingly stringent global conditions. When individuals, businesses, universities, or entire nations perform more effectively than their global counterparts, they are demonstrating competitiveness (Hamdi & Mohammed, 2012; Kordalska & Oluzyk, 2016, as cited in Ike & Obionu, 2022). What, then, is global competitiveness in the context of universities? It refers to their ability to compete on an international stage across several domains, including research output, academic standing, graduate employability, and technological advancement. Furthermore, global competitiveness has become imperative as it involves a broad range of multicultural skills that help individuals appreciate and understand intercultural issues, respect alternative value systems, and take responsibility for sustainability and the well-being of all (Ramos & Schlieicher, 2018). Notably, the level of support a national education system receives from its government is crucial to its ability to remain competitive, particularly when policymakers recognize that university education serves as a key driver of broader social progress (Onokerrkoraye, 2015). In fact, nations around the world are increasingly competing with one another to improve and strengthen their educational systems (Ahmed, 2015). Consequently, the quality of education, especially at the university level, directly determines the caliber of human resource a country can develop. These human resource, in turn, strengthen domestic capacity and enhance the nation's standing in global competitiveness.

For such outcomes to be achieved, universities must be fully funded and equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructural facilities, modern instructional resources, functional laboratories, and standard libraries. Moreover, they require specialized academic staff who work collaboratively within their disciplines and with other universities. One distinctive feature of university education is the level of infrastructural resources it holds, as these assets directly influence how the institution is perceived in terms of high standards by the wider community (Ofor-Douglas, 2024). One effective strategy to increase competitiveness, openness, and access in university education is to involve academic institutions in scientific collaboration and openness (Kurniasih et al., 2018). Additionally, innovative administrators who stay ahead of current trends and adhere to best practices are essential. Finally, dedicated students who are willing to learn play a critical role; without their engagement, even the most complete set of resources cannot magically produce the desired educational outcomes. After all, one way to assess the quality of a university's graduates is through the institution's level of competitiveness (Tri et al., 2021).

Issues

The issues include the following**:**

1. **Paucity of Funding for Indigenous Knowledge Documentation**

To begin with, although people often talk about general funding shortages, the real problem is the absence of specific money set aside to record, digitize, and protect local wisdom like traditional ways of working with metal, healing with plants, or managing soil. Consequently, this knowledge disappears before it can ever be added to the university curriculum. As a result, Nigerian universities keep paying for expensive foreign journals instead of creating their own free online collections of homegrown innovations. In support of this, Fatuzzo (2017) stated that the academic staff are

experiencing challenges in the attainment of educational goals due to inadequate or lack of teaching and research facilities among others.

2. **Epistemic Fragmentation Between Faculties and Local Communities**

Similarly, university departments like Engineering and Agriculture work in complete isolation from one another, and they rarely partner with local craftspeople, farmers, or traditional healers to design research together. Furthermore, the problem is not just neglect—there are actual bureaucratic roadblocks. For instance, there are no official ways for community elders to become part-time teachers, and rigid accreditation rules dismiss non-Western knowledge as "unscientific ."Although local communities already possess inherited wisdom and the ability to solve many of the problems in their own environments and social systems, top-down structures and institutions still impose Western-based policies and ways of knowing onto these local issues—often worsening the situation. As a result, local knowledge gets dismissed, trivialized, exploited, misappropriated, or outright taken. In essence, this erases their knowledge and transfers control away from their own ways of understanding the world (Kliemann, 2023).

3. **Colonial Grading Metrics That Penalize Contextual Problem-Solving**

In addition, current exam and project grading systems reward students who memorize foreign theories rather than those who build real, working solutions. For example, a student who creates a cheap water filter using local clay might get a lower score than someone who simply copies a Western-designed filter. This happens because grading rubrics still prioritize imported standards over sustainable innovation that actually helps Nigerian communities.

4. **Language Asymmetry in STEM Pedagogy**

Moreover, English remains the only language used for teaching, even though many students and local inventors think more naturally in their mother tongues like Yorùbá, Hausa, or Igbo. This creates a hidden mental barrier: complex ideas about sustainable innovation such as recycling concepts already found in traditional waste practices get lost when translated. Consequently, this slows down learning and hurts Nigeria's ability to compete globally in patenting local solutions. Also, a core issue of language asymmetry in STEM pedagogy is that teachers, untrained in mother-tongue instruction and lacking curricular support, face profound difficulties such as translating scientific terms and overcoming orthographic gaps which hinders effective STEM teaching despite students' better comprehension in their local language.(Motunrayo,2024)

5. **Intellectual Property Frameworks Incompatible with Communal Ownership**

Finally, Nigerian universities follow Western intellectual property rules that recognize only individual inventors, not shared or family knowledge passed down through generations. For instance, a student who develops a new bio-pesticide together with a village cannot easily patent or sell it without breaking local customs. As a result, this conflict discourages decolonized research partnerships and pushes talented young innovators to leave academia for informal, less competitive sectors.

Conclusion

Decolonizing Nigeria's university system is not about discarding Western education ;it is about Nigerian institutions finally thinking for themselves. For decades, our universities have acted like intellectual colonies, judging their worth by how well they copy foreign models instead of how effectively they address real problems in Lagos markets or Benue farmlands. This approach has stifled genuine innovation because it forces students to memorize distant theories while ignoring pressing local realities.

True change requires bold steps: building courses that blend indigenous soil science with modern agronomy, evaluating students on prototypes that solve neighborhood water shortages, and accepting research written in Igbo or Pidgin as rigorously as English. Once Nigerian universities fully embrace decolonization, they won not fall behind, they will stand apart. No other country shares our exact environmental pressures, our deep pre-colonial problem-solving traditions, or our natural multilingual adaptability.

Lasting innovation happens when people fix what they truly understand. Global edge comes from offering what no one else can copy. Decolonization delivers both. The real question is not whether Nigerian universities should transform, but whether we finally have the resolve to teach, discover, and compete using our own minds and methods.

Suggestions

The suggestions to combat the aforementioned issues include:

1. **Create Local Knowledge Savings Banks**
   Rather than simply asking for more money, every Nigerian university should launch a cheap, practical "Indigenous Knowledge Savings Bank" a mix of physical notebooks and a simple website. Students get small payments (using money already in department budgets) to visit nearby communities, write down or record local skills like traditional medicine or soil techniques, and upload them. This turns the lack of funds into a paid student job instead of an excuse.
2. **Compulsory Community Immersion Credits**
   All faculties including Engineering and Agriculture must make two "Community Immersion Credits" a graduation requirement. This means each student spends 40 hours working directly with local farmers, healers, or craftspeople on a real mini-project, not just watching from the sidelines. Universities should also create a simple one-page agreement that allows community elders to be recognized as temporary teachers, quietly bypassing the usual red tape.

3. **Problem-Solving Pass/Fail Exams**
   Some written exams should be replaced with "Local Solutions Labs" — a two-day challenge where students fix an actual problem on campus or in a nearby village using only what they can find locally, like clay, old plastic bottles, or bamboo. Grading is simply pass or fail based on whether it works, not on foreign standards. This removes the fear of bad grades and rewards clever, local thinking instead of just memorization.

4. **STEM Mother-Tongue Glossaries**
   Each department should work with students to make a free, printable "Mother-Tongue STEM Word List" in Yorùbá, Hausa, and Igbo. Teachers then allow students to write difficult ideas — like how plants make food or what a circular economy means — in their native language next to English on exam papers. This fixes the mental block without forcing the whole school to stop using English as the main teaching language.

5. **Communal IP Badges, Not Individual Patents**
   Instead of using Western-style patents, Nigerian universities should create a new "Community Innovation Badge" , a cheap, simple registration that lists the whole village, the student, and the supervisor as equal owners. This badge allows the group to share the idea freely or sign a fair business deal (for example, splitting any future profits 50-50 with the village). Students who earn this badge get automatic help starting their own small business, which keeps them in school rather than pushing them out.

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