



The Citadel Under Siege: A Philosophical Examination of Emerging Social Issues in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Original Research Article

While literature is rich, crises in Nigerian universities are not examined philosophically. This article discourses this opening by examining governance, moral degeneration, value disorientation, Japa syndrome, campus insecurity and epistemological marginalization as symptoms related to a fundamental crisis of institutional identicalness. The study focuses on conceptual psychoanalysis, phenomenological study and comparison with Ubuntu and critical hypothesis, and shows a dramatic reduction in intellectual space, where religious and social concerns distance critical scrutiny. The errors of the government violate the social treaty; the deficit of character reflects cognitive transmission without moral education; Japa personified the existential crisis in which self-maintenance outperforms communal committedness; and the epistemological crisis perpetuates colonial conditions and marginalized indigenous knowledge. This article reasons by assuming that the university has lost its soul as a community that has committed itself to truth, wisdom, and character formation requires the fundamental reorganization of its mission through holistic education based on Ubuntu, governance reforms, colonization programs, renewed community vision and restitution of the university as a refuge.

Keywords: Nigerian universities, Ubuntu philosophy, character formation, governance crisis, epistemological decolonization.

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Introduction

Once the intellectual pride of Africa, Nigerian universities are in deep social crises that require philosophical questioning beyond administrative solutions. Although considerable literature has been recorded on the inadequacies of funding, failure of governance, and brain drain, the analyses have not been accompanied by a long term philosophical scrutiny on the core values

informing these crises. This article fills this gap by suggesting that the symptoms of a deep-seated crisis of institutional identity are interrelated: governance dysfunction, moral degeneration, value disorientation, the Japa syndrome, campus insecurity and epistemological marginalization.

The change signifies the radical contraction of the intellectual space, with the decline of



religious, ethnic, and social interests on critical questioning (BusinessDay, 2025). The use of daddy instead of title by professors, the first lecture as a cheifthood ceremony, diversity instead of closed networks all beg the basic question: When intellectual space is disrupted, has an institution lost what a university is?

The crisis of governance is an illustration of this philosophical aspect. In warning about weak governance institutions being a cause of poor accountability, ASUU cites arbitrary council dissolution, political influence, and long-serving acting vice-chancellorship as violations of the social contract (News Agency of Nigeria, 2026). Professor Jibrin Ibrahim observes that the system has been used to systematically weaken autonomy by appointing people based on political considerations (Daily Trust, 2026).

Former INEC Chairman Prof. Attahiru Jega points out a character deficit, bewailing that universities teach graduates a person of unworthy character, and that the model graduate who is found worthy in learning and character is just a dream (The Sun Nigeria, 2025). This gets to the core of the difference between cognitive transmission and holistic formation- the Greek paideia and the Ubuntu, which perceives personhood as relationally constituted. This crisis is also exemplified by the ministerial certificate scandal, which Peter Obi called a revelation of the moral decadency in Nigeria (Ripples Nigeria, 2025).

Another dimension is the Japa syndrome. Reuben Abati claims that it is a symptom of larger systemic issues as a rational reaction to world opportunities in the face of increasing brain drain (Vanguard, 2026). ASUU documents the rising number of professors resigning (The Port City News, 2025), and UNILAG VC cites unparalleled transcript requests (Vanguard, 2026). As a kind of existential crisis, in which personal survival overrides collective devotion, the situation of Nigerians spending \$11.1 billion on foreign education between 2020 and 2025 (BusinessDay, 2025) is an abomination to the idea of Ubuntu of I am because we are.

The security crisis has also turned to be alarming. In January 2026, demonstration broke out at

Ambrose Alli University due to kidnappings (Global Upfront Newspapers, 2026). Sexual exploitation is considered to be one of the most harmful yet least challenged issues, as lecturers require favors in terms of marks (Daily Trust, 2026).

The epistemological aspect is gaining more and more importance. Professor AdeshinaAfolayan urges scholars to address the "enduring shadows of colonial knowledge systems (Premium Times, 2025). Professor OseniAfisi attributes the intellectual crisis and identity conflict to Western theories (BusinessDay, 2025). According to MahmoodMamdani, universities need to take indigenous knowledge seriously (Mamdani, 2019).

Using philosophical approach that incorporates the Ubuntu virtue theory and multidimensional legitimacy, this article exposes emerging issues as interrelated phenomena as one is deep-seated crisis; the university has lost its soul as a community that devotes itself to the truth, wisdom and character formation. Funding and policy reforms are not sufficient; basic rethinking of the purpose of the university based on philosophical clarity about the purpose of universities and on whose behalf they serve.

Conceptual Clarifications

To conduct a philosophical analysis of the recent social problems within the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, there must be clarity when it comes to the underlying concepts that contextualizes this enquiry.

Idea of the University: The Greek term skhole, which means freedom, anti-instrumentalism and intellectual living is a spot of knowledge and understanding seeking, where human beings explore truth with wonder, and this is described as a symbol of actual freedom (Okolie, 2022). The liberal education proposed by Newman to the so-called multiversity suggested by Kerr as a multi-purpose institution, or, as he puts it, having multiple purposes but not one, the current trends of entrepreneurship are weakening the university as a community (Okolie, 2022). This work places greater emphasis on this university as a moral

and intellectual community rather than instrumental functions.

Intellectual Space: Preeminence of the critical inquiry as the ethos of university life. Erosion takes place when religious, ethnic, or social obsessions erode the culture of critical thought when professors address each other with titles of nobility, when the inaugural lecture becomes a chieftaincy ceremony, and when the variety of thinking is substituted with closed circles of friends (BusinessDay, 2025).

Ubuntu Philosophy: Ubuntu philosophy summarizes the African tradition, in the form of relationally and morally constituted personhood, as I am because we are. According to the Ubuntu Virtue Theory and Moral Character Formation (2024) by Kayange, there is a crisis of character education in contemporary Africa, which could be resolved through a critical reconstruction of ubuntu virtue theory, which suggests that universities have a role in holistic formation and not in the transmission of cognitive knowledge (Kayange, 2024).

Social Contract Theory: Legitimate institutions are based on unwritten agreements between the stakeholders. The multidimensional legitimacy includes functional, substantive, fairness, rule of law, communitarian, autonomy, consent, transmission, process, and decision-making dimensions, which give moral reasons to respect institutions (Breakey, 2015). The lack of governance involved the dissolution of councils arbitrarily, political interference weakens legitimacy on various levels (News Agency of Nigeria, 2026; Daily Trust, 2026).

Governance Crisis: Structured failure of institutions to provide effective, accountable management, politicization, extended acting appointment, ineffective accountability institutions that violate social contract underpinning institutional integrity (News Agency of Nigeria, 2026).

Japa Syndrome: Yoruba word meaning "flee" mass emigration of skilled professionals due to "abysmal performance of the government in delivery of basic essential needs" (Akinola, 2024). It is conceptualized in terms of Push-Pull Theory, World Systems Theory, Neoclassical

Economic Theory, and Dependency Theory as a symptom and result of structural underdevelopment and governance failures and an existential crisis of belonging between self-preservation and communal commitment.

Epistemological Decolonization: Challenging colonial facilities of knowledge production. Sambaiga posits that coloniality is a system of knowledge control on the global level and that it should be accompanied by epistemic pluralism based on reflexivity and institutional change (Sambaiga, 2023). It involves changing categories and hierarchies that face the shadow of colonial knowledge systems that persist and make universities recreate and reproduce inherited paradigms instead of creating new ones based on African realities (Premium Times, 2025; BusinessDay, 2025).

These concepts are used to frame the analysis: the concept of the university sets the normative standard; the intellectual space determines the threatened essence; Ubuntu proposes indigenous ethics; social contract theory identifies a failure of governance; governance crisis identifies institutional failure; Japa syndrome identifies existential response; epistemological decolonization identifies knowledge transformation.

Theoretical Framework

A mixed duo-level theoretical approach is adopted in this study to address two aspects of moral and existential (Ubuntu virtue theory), and governance and institutional (social contract theory) aspects of legitimacy (dimensions).

Ubuntu Virtue Theory

This framework is based on the Ubuntu Virtue Theory of Moral Character Formation by Kayange (2024) and critically reconstructs the concept of Ubuntu to solve the Character Education Crisis in Modern Africa (p. 15). Kayange constructs a holistic concept of virtue and moral character development based on the insights of the re-created idea of ubuntu and other theories inside and outside of the African

thought (p. 3). There are three important principles applicable:

Relational personhood: I am because we are highlights that ethical relationships make humans fully human (Kayange, 2024; Letseka, 2012), and offers a normative standard that stands in contrast to the Japa and transactional type of academic relationships based on an individualist ethos (Ndlovu, 2019).

Holistic formation: Ubuntu perceives education as the cultivation of intellect, character, and communal responsibility, rather than the transmission of cognition (Kayange, 2024; Letseka, 2013), which sheds light on the lack of moral development among graduates who are receiving certificates, but not moral education (The Sun Nigeria, 2025).

Shared morality: Ubuntu finds a moral responsibility in a system of mutual obligation (Murove, 2009), which considers community building, mutual respect, and collaboration a normative ideal in governing the university (Ndlovu, 2019, p. 47).

Multidimensional legality and Social Contract Theory.

Social contract theory explains that legitimate institutions are based on unofficial agreements by stakeholders (Boucher and Kelly, 1994; Hampton, 1986). According to Breakey, multidimensional legitimacy is the existence of particular qualities that give the subjects good moral grounds to respect and support the institution (2015, p. 3). The ten dimensions—functional, substantive, fairness, rule of law, communitarian, autonomy, consent, transmission, process, and decision-making diagnose ethical risk areas. Importantly, not all factors of legitimacy may be a victory; some of them can be defeaters in which severe failure of key dimensions cannot be counterbalanced by other advantages (Breakey, 2015, p. 15).

This model sheds light on how failures in governance have caused arbitrary disbandment of councils, political meddling, long-term acting leadership that have undermined legitimacy and the social contract (News Agency of Nigeria,

2026; Daily Trust, 2026). The framework facilitates examination of how the breakdown of governance facilitates the erosion of character formation, and how restoration should act both on the institutional frameworks and on the moral formation beyond the empirical description to philosophical insights based on African humanistic tradition.

Integration

Ubuntu offers the normative picture of universities as communities of character-building based on relational ethics; social contract theory diagnoses institutional failures that hinder this picture. Combining them allows examining how governance failures allow eroding character formation, necessitating their reconstruction that covers both institutional structures and moral formation.

Philosophical Analysis and Reasoning.

This section is a condensed philosophical reflection of the emerging social concerns in universities in Nigeria, using the Ubuntu virtue theory, and multidimensional legitimacy.

The loss of the Space of the Intellect.

The university, which is skhole "the place of seeking knowledge" as a free and intellectual being (Okolie, 2022) has an important nature. The institution experiences crisis when intellectual space is invaded by religious, ethnic and social spaces. Professors being called daddy instead of titles; first lectures like a chieftainship ceremony; diversity being substituted by in-group networks (BusinessDay, 2025) those are signs of having an institutional soul lost. The point: change should be placed in opposition to the criterion of the key purpose of the university.

Governance Crisis as Violation of Social Contract.

Failure of governance violates the social contract. Using Breakey multidimensional legitimacy (2015): arbitrary dissolution of

councils is a violation of legitimacy of the rule of law; political interference is a violation of autonomy legitimacy; the acting leadership is effective over a long period of time is a violation of the decision-making legitimacy. Critical failure on critical dimensions cannot be countered with support in other areas. In the event of systemic failure of governance, the stakeholders who have been emancipated between one another in the form of Japa. The relationship in the contract is two way; failure by one party compromises the performance of others.

The Character Deficit

The forging of certificates, malpractices in examinations, transactional relationships are forms of Character Education Crisis of modern Africa as depicted by Kayange (2024, p. 15). Ubuntu differentiates banking model (cognitive transmission) and holistic formation that builds intellect, character and community. Education creates individuals that manifest humanness, caring, sharing (Letseka, 2013, p. 340). The banking model is unsuccessful when Jega decries universities issuing certificates to those of unworthy character (The Sun Nigeria, 2025). Aristotle: habits which are learned. Instead of guiding by example, the universities should be guided by precept. Development of character is critical- technical ability but lack of moral uprightness is utter failure.

Value Disorientation

Commodification changes education: students are turned into customers, learning is turned into the exchange. Huge fees, refusal to access examination to those who cannot afford them (FRCN, 2025) - education becomes a privilege, not a right. Refutations by Ubuntu: self is created through relationships (Murove, 2009, p. 40); education is communal good. It is a kind of the destructive transvaluation of Nietzsche, the traditional values fall, and materialism takes their place. Universities cannot be value-neutral,

unless they are intentionally constructed, market values run over Ubuntu.

The Japa Syndrome

Existential questions of belonging are brought up by mass emigration raises. The question posed in Dasein by Heidegger is: what does origin claim? Nigerians had an outlay of \$11.1 billion on foreign education (BusinessDay, 2025); ASUU records resignations (The Port City News, 2025). Japa is "symptom of deeper systemic challenges" (Vanguard, 2026). Social contract: citizens are freed in each other by mutual obligations when institutions fail. Challenges with ubuntu: I am because we are: humanity, which exists in relationships. Ideated departure has social connotations. Liberal individualism considers freedom as being without restraint; Ubuntu considers freedom achieved through devotion. Leavers are mobile yet can lose strong sense of belonging.

The Security Crisis

The college as fortress fell. Normalization of kidnapping, cultism, rape (Global Upfront Newspapers, 2026). Hobbes: social contract of regression to state of nature fails when protection is not successful. Sexual exploitation" this category is the most harmful, yet least addressed (Daily Trust, 2026) is a breach of duty of care. Foucault: institutions have control over bodies; in the case of abuse, trust is turned to corruption. Ubuntu: the humanity of university joined with members; students who were not safe, university lost its worth.

Epistemological Crisis

Whose knowledge counts? Nigerian universities are still Western-system oriented, with marginalized indigenous philosophies (BusinessDay, 2025). The epistemic injustice of Fricker: hermeneutical exclusion denies students conceptual means. Afolayan: challenge the continuity of shadows of colonial regimes of knowledge (Premium Times, 2025). Sambaiga: it is called coloniality: the world of knowledge

control (2023). To decolonize, there is need to change categories, rather than merely to add content. Epistemic necessity is epistemological pluralism, exclusion is a beggar of all.

Systemic connection

Combining crises, governance failures permit the erosion of personality; value disorientation pushes japan; epistemological marginalization is foreign; insecurity destroys the community. Each concerns other violations of legitimacy that undermine trust, promote exit; limiting strengthens instrumental attitudes; alienation weakens local ties. Stray interventions fail; systemic transformation is necessary.

Towards reconstruction

From ubuntu: holistic education • cultivate the intellect, character, community together. Multidimensional legitimacy: government reforms with respect for autonomy, ascertaining equity, including stakeholders. Consolidation: reconstruction must be both institutional and moral. Ubuntu offers the sight of human flowering; the social contract offers the conditions for its realization. Nigerian universities can be rebuilt into communities of study, character, and responsibility based on african heritage and universal truth-seeking, which do not require technical corrections but redefine the university's somebody.

Results

The philosophical study shows that nigerian universities have experienced a systematic contraction of the rational space, where religious, ethnic, and societal concerns shake critical investigations and threaten the very nature of the university as an institution. Arbitrary dissolution of councils, political interference and long active governance are fundamental violations of the social treaty in various proportions of authenticity, which systematically free stakeholders from reciprocal commitments and fuel the japan syndrome. These crises are systemic: the merger leads to a orientation of

value, the banking model produces a deficit of ligament, epistemological marginalization perpetuate colonial structures and insecurity destroys diligence . . Together, manifests itself not as an administrative failure that favours technical fixation, but as a deep philosophical crisis of institutional identity, which requires a profound revival of the soul of the university.

Conclusion

This philosophical work shows that emerging social issues in nigerian universities are manifestations of a deep institutional identity crisis, not discrete administrative failures. The analysis shows, from the theory of ubuntu's virtue and multidimensional legitimacy that universities have lost their essential character as communities given to truth, wisdom, and character formation, due to the systematic contraction of the intellectual space, the infringement of the social contract, the task of holistic education, the modification and persistence of colonial knowledge structures. Reconstruction requires that we go beyond the banking model, restore legitimacy through government reforms, colonization of school syllabus and rebuilding local belonging, based on ubuntu "I am because it is us." The task is existential, courageous, and lasting to recreate the university's mission in the service of truthful human prosperity.

Recommendations

Based on philosophical analysis and conclusion, the following four recommendations are proposed for the reconstruction of nigerian universities:

First, nigerian universities must resume holistic education by integrating compulsory ubuntu-inspired preparation into all disciplines, ensuring that alum are truly worthy of acquisition and character, rather than simply certifying after cognitive assessment.

Secondly, governance reforms must restore institutional legitimacy by ending political interference in dates, respecting university liberty, eliminating long-term operational

governance and creating transparent accountability mechanisms guided by multidimensional legitimacy principles.

Third, curricula must be truly colonized by epistemological pluralism, which integrates indigenous philosophical traditions as legitimate systems of thesis, and not by the additions that students equip with conceptual tools rooted in their heritage.

Fourth, a comprehensive response to Japan syndrome must be made to both material conditions, ameliorated remuneration, promotion of research and working conditions and existential membership, and to rebuild universities as places where scientists choose to stay, as they are assessed, supported, and associated with a relevant national objective.

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