

Addressing Abscondment Problem of Academic Staff from the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions' through Effective Motivational Packages

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Abstract

This paper discusses the motivational strategies to address the problem of abscondment among sponsored foreign academic staff from Nigerian tertiary institutions after completing their training abroad. As a position paper, it relies on secondary data collected from both online publications and print resources. The content analysis method was adopted to distill the literature into key themes relevant to the study. The paper identifies several strategies to combat this issue, including increasing salaries and allowances for academic staff, developing infrastructure facilities, providing adequate research grants, granting autonomy to public universities, and ensuring a conducive work environment free from strike actions. Based on these findings, it is recommended that administrators and managers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria increase budgetary allocations for education to formulate motivational packages that will attract and retain academic staff. Furthermore, it is advised that administrators embrace public-private partnerships to enhance infrastructure development in these institutions. Additionally, both administrators and the government should increase research funding and establish dedicated departments in each institution to manage research grant programs for internal and foreign sources. Lastly, the government should grant autonomy to all universities to foster competition and innovation within the educational sector.

Key words: Abscondment, Academic staff, Motivation, Tertiary institutions, Infrastructural Facilities

Introduction

Tertiary education, often synonymous with higher education, plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals and driving societal progress. In Nigeria, tertiary education represents the third level in the educational hierarchy, following primary and secondary education, and is essential for producing the skilled professionals needed for national development (Okai & Botimi-Slaboh, 2019; Aiyedun, Olatunde-Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2021). It is a structured system aimed at fostering comprehensive individual development and societal transformation through teaching, research, and community service (Ogunode, Edinoh & Okolie, 2023). This level of education not only nurtures individual growth but also contributes significantly to addressing societal challenges. According to Schrader-King (2024), tertiary education benefits the wider community by promoting social, economic, and

technological advancement. Furthermore, it is instrumental in addressing local, national, and global issues, fulfilling an essential role in problem-solving at multiple levels (Ogunode & Musa, 2024).

Tertiary education in Nigeria serves as a foundation for national progress, centered on the core functions of teaching, research, and community service. This educational tier, as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2013), includes all post-secondary programs delivered by institutions such as universities, inter-university centers (e.g., Nigeria French Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages), Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and specialized institutions like Colleges of Agriculture and Schools of Health and Technology. Building upon secondary education, tertiary institutions equip students with advanced skills and knowledge across various fields, ensuring they are well-prepared for societal contributions (Alemu, 2018). Furthermore, tertiary institutions play an integral role in community service by addressing pressing societal issues and fostering sustainable development, as observed by Ogunode, Audu, and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022). Digital technologies are also increasingly being integrated into tertiary education to enhance specific areas, such as environmental geography, where digital tools and community projects, like those studied by Olatunde-Aiyedun, Daniels, and Olamoyegun (2024), significantly improve educational experiences and community engagement.

Nigerian tertiary institutions are plagued with many problems which includes abscondment of sponsored academic staff after their training in abroad. In 2021, amazingtimes reported that The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) has decried the growing cases of abscondment among academic staff of various Nigerian universities sponsored for training abroad. TETFund, has been intervening in the training of academic staff in Nigerian universities by sponsoring lecturers for further studies abroad. Speaking during an interactive session on training utilisation at the Gombe State University (GSU), TETFund's Director, Academic Staff Training and Development (AST&D), Muhammed Sulaiman, said some of the lecturers sponsored to foreign countries by TETFund for further, never returned to the country to serve their bond as they abscond. According to him, the foreign training programme was being abused and is slowly becoming a major problem affecting the education system.

In recent developments, Nigeria's Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) has expressed serious concerns over the increasing number of Nigerian university lecturers who, after receiving TETFund sponsorship for studies abroad, have chosen not to return. TETFund's Executive Secretary, Sonny Echono, highlighted this alarming trend, announcing that absconded lecturers would either be required to repay the funds used for their studies or face repatriation. Reports indicate that approximately 50% of TETFund-sponsored students abroad are reluctant to come back to Nigeria (Edema, 2024). Further, according to the ESUT Monitor (2024), no fewer than 137 academic staff have failed to return after completing their programs, sparking a nationwide concern. Addressing the House of Representatives' ad hoc committee in Abuja, Echono emphasized that this behavior is not only unpatriotic but has escalated into a critical crisis impacting Nigeria's tertiary institutions and the TETFund. The sponsorship agreement mandates that scholars return to contribute their acquired expertise to Nigerian institutions upon completion of their studies; however, non-compliance undermines the program's purpose and is now prompting TETFund to take legal action to recover expended funds.

Many reasons have been listed by different scholars as responsible for why Nigerian sponsored foreign academic after their refuse to return rather pick another placement in the countries where they did their training. Nigerian academic staff are poorly motivated. Their salaries are not paid on time; various benefits allowances are not implemented. Ezenkiri Mamman, Ezeani, & Francis, (2021) and Blaskova and Blasko (2014), disclaimed all those privileges and claims people linked with the academic job that academic staff seemed to be enjoying by asserting that the motivation of academic staff is not as strong and smooth as it may seem at first glance. Also, a testimony is given in a report which states that "now I am inside the university system teaching, I can see clearly how exploitive it is unlike when I was not part of the system" (Academic Anonymous Universities, 2018). Tarver (2007), in his study, found that the youngest and smartest people are moving away from being lecturers due to the under-payment considered as a stressor among them. Ifeyinwa and Okemute, (2023); Ogunode, Kasimu, and Dahiru, (2023); Ogunode and Abayomi (2023) and Ezenkiri, Hamisu, Ugoma, and Francis, (2021) concluded that poor motivation and unconducive work environment are major factors responsible for brain-drain and abscondment in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. (VMT 2024) ascertained that there is no doubt that the refusal of the lecturers to return to Nigeria after benefiting from the TETFund is part of the erosion of values destroying in the universities and tertiary institutions today. Therefore, Nigerian universities and tertiary institutions are overdue for total cleansing or overhauling. It is based on this that this paper seek to critically discuss the motivational strategies that will be adopted to help address the problem of abscondment sponsored foreign academic staff from the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the motivational strategies and interventions that can be implemented to address the

issue of scholars sponsored by TETFund for advanced studies abroad who, upon completing their programs, choose not to return to Nigerian tertiary institutions. This study aims to explore effective approaches that can encourage these scholars to fulfill their commitment to contributing their expertise to the Nigerian education sector upon returning.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, also known as the motivator-hygiene theory, developed in 1959. Herzberg, a prominent behavioral scientist, proposed that job factors can be classified into two distinct categories: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators, such as recognition, achievement, and opportunities for personal growth, lead to job satisfaction when present. Hygiene factors, like salary, work conditions, and job security, do not necessarily increase satisfaction when they are present; however, their absence can lead to job dissatisfaction. Herzberg's theory suggests that the opposite of "satisfaction" is "no satisfaction," while the opposite of "dissatisfaction" is "no dissatisfaction." This framework is particularly relevant in analyzing the motivations behind scholars' decisions to remain abroad or return, helping to identify factors that can enhance job satisfaction and commitment within Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Hygiene factors- Hygiene factors are those job factors which are essential for existence of motivation at workplace. These do not lead to positive satisfaction for long-term. But if these factors are absent/if these factors are non-existent at workplace, then they lead to dissatisfaction.

In other words, hygiene factors are those factors which when adequate/reasonable in a job, pacify the employees and do not make them dissatisfied. These factors are extrinsic to work.

Hygiene factors are also called as dissatisfiers or maintenance factors as they are required to avoid dissatisfaction. These factors describe the job environment/scenario. The hygiene factors symbolized the physiological needs which the individuals wanted and expected to be fulfilled. Hygiene factors include:

- a) Pay: The pay or salary structure should be appropriate and reasonable. It must be equal and competitive to those in the same industry in the same domain.
- b) Company Policies and administrative policies: The company policies should not be too rigid. They should be fair and clear. It should include flexible working hours, dress code, breaks, vacation, etc.
- c) Fringe benefits: The employees should be offered health care plans (mediclaime), benefits for the family members, employee help programmes, etc.
- d) Physical Working conditions: The working conditions should be safe, clean and hygienic. The work equipments should be updated and well-maintained.
- e) Status: The employees' status within the organization should be familiar and retained.
- f) Interpersonal relations: The relationship of the employees with his peers, superiors and subordinates should be appropriate and acceptable. There should be no conflict or humiliation element present.
- g) Job Security: The organization must provide job security to the employees.

Motivational factors- According to Herzberg, the hygiene factors cannot be regarded as motivators. The motivational factors yield positive satisfaction. These factors are inherent to work. These factors motivate the employees for a superior performance. These factors are called satisfiers. These are factors involved in performing the job. Employees find these factors intrinsically rewarding. The motivators symbolized the psychological needs that were perceived as an additional benefit. Motivational factors include:

- a) Recognition: The employees should be praised and recognized for their accomplishments by the managers.
- b) Sense of achievement: The employees must have a sense of achievement. This depends on the job. There must be a fruit of some sort in the job.
- c) Growth and promotional opportunities: There must be growth and advancement opportunities in an organization to motivate the employees to perform well.
- d) Responsibility: The employees must hold themselves responsible for the work. The managers should give them ownership of the work. They should minimize control but retain accountability.
- e) Meaningfulness of the work: The work itself should be meaningful, interesting and challenging for the employee to perform and to get motivated.

This theory is applicable to this paper because of the issue on point is motivation. The theory stated that in order to reposition

educational institutions like the tertiary institutions in Nigeria that is been faced with the problem of academic staff abscondment after foreign training, Manager and administrators of the Nigerian institutions must implement motivational policies that will motivate the academic staff to come back or return to Nigeria after their training. The implication of the theory is that managers of tertiary institutions should provide hygiene factors to prevent academic staff from staying back in foreign countries after their training avoid employee dissatisfaction which is responsible abscondment. Administrator in the Nigerian tertiary institutions should ensure to design welfares policies that is stimulating and rewarding to attract academic staff to work and stay in Nigeria. This theory advocated for a job-enrichment policies so as to motivate the academic staff of Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Concept of Abscondment

Abscondment refers to a situation when an employee does not report to work for consecutive days without authorization. If the employee has not informed managers, peers, or anyone in the organization for more than 3 consecutive days. Once the employee is considered as an absconder, the company can ethically decide to terminate the employee without notice and proper exit formalities (Kaka 2020)

Motivational Strategies

Motivational strategies or techniques are styles or methods that can be used to induce, encourage and stir employees in any organization to put in their very best in the discharge of their duties. Motivational strategies are employed to get the best of staff in an institutions. Motivational strategies are ways and means of deploy visible and invisible resources to influence an individual or groups of people within an institutions to carry out tasks with their commitment (Josiah, Audu, & Ogunode, 2023). Motivation can come in form of monetary and non-monetary. Monetary incentives may offer short-term benefits but involve significant downsides. Non-monetary incentives, on the other hand, can shift your company culture, especially if the benefits package is constructed with your employees in mind. Monetary incentives can help you recruit and reward employees, to an extent (Inproma undated).

Effective Motivational Strategies

Effective motivational strategies are methods designed to boost the employer moral to be more committed to an institutions by improving their service to the institutions and the methods are realizing their objectives. Effective motivational strategies are programmes and policies of motivation that are achieving their objectives and goals as formulated.

Materials and Methods

The paper is a position paper. The paper depends on secondary data that were collected from both online publications and print resources. The paper adopted content analysis to reduce the literatures to the theme of the paper.

Results and Discussion

Motivational Strategies to address Abscondment Problem of Academic Staff of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions.

There are many motivational strategies that the administrators of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria can used to solve the pressing problems of sponsored absconded academic staff from the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of these motivational strategies includes; increment in salaries and allowances of academic staff, development of infrastructure facilities, provision of adequate research grant, granting autonomy to public universities and provision of conducive work environment that is devoid of strikes actions.

Increment in salaries and allowances of academic staff

One of the strategies to employ to address the problem of abscondment of foreign trained academic staff from the Nigerian tertiary institutions to increase the salaries and allowances of the academic staff in the various tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The disparities between what an international academic earns in their respective countries and what a Nigerian academic earns annually is very high. The salaries structure used for salaries payment of academic staff in the Nigerian tertiary institutions since formulated and adopted for use have not gone through review for more than a decade. Roy-Omonigho (2023) submitted that many Nigerian academic after receiving their sponsored training by TETFund decided to stay back and pick new employment abroad because of the poor salaries they are been paid at their home institutions here in Nigeria. The poor salary is a push-pull factor for many Nigerian sponsored academic. Tolu-Kolawole, (2023); Abubakar, Soba, and Yusuf, (2022) and Ogunode, Jegede and Musa (2021) noted that Nigerian lecturers are among the worse paid in the world. The salaries of lecturers working in Nigerian universities are very poor. Ogunode (2020) submitted that Nigerian lecturers are poorly motivated financially and this is affecting their performance. Oludayo (2021) submitted that Assistant lecturer's monthly salary ranges from (N118,277 - N137, 334); Lecturer II with a doctorate degree (N129, 724 – N153, 563); Lecturer I with at least three years post-PhD experience on the job (N160, 809 – N203, 778); Senior Lecturer with at least six years' experience on the job (N222,229 –314, 159); Associate Professor

(with at least nine years' experience on the job: N277, 179 – N350, 169) and a full Professor with 12 and more years' experience on the job (N332, 833 – 416, 743). Oludayo opined that Nigerian lecturers get these after tax and other deductions. Before deductions, a newly appointed full Professor has N437, 499 and after deductions he is paid N332, 833 monthly. A Professor "at the bar", is one who has spent 10 years as a professor and that is when he/she can earn consolidated pay of N555, 351 and following deductions their net pay comes down to N416, 743 monthly!. In a comparison, Oludayo (2021) observed that in Ugandan public varsities, Assistant Lecturer earns \$1,631; Senior lecturer, \$2,432; Associate Professor, \$3,891 and Professor, \$4,054 per month, respectively. In University of South Africa, a Junior Lecturer earns N10, 453, 326 – N17,427,663; Lecturer, N12,547,744-N20,910,248; Senior Lecturer, N16,272,983 – N27,891,819; Associate Professor, N20,224,232 – N32,564,902) and Professor, N22,325,844 – N37,209,741 per annum. Allschool (2024) reported that Isyaku a Nigerian that was once offered a job in UK after his PhD programme but rejected the offer and came back to Nigeria now regretted his action after comparing his salary in Nigeria to the allowance he earned while studying abroad. The academic, who had been receiving a monthly stipend of £1,550 (equivalent to N3.4 million) as a PhD student in the UK, accepted a job in Nigeria that paid N250,000 per month. Reflecting on his decision, Isyaku noted that his initial motivation stemmed from a desire to give back to his home country. "My monthly allowance as a PhD student in the UK was 1,550 GBP per month (3,400,000 Naira)," he wrote on his Facebook page. "I finished and returned back to a job that pays today's equivalent of 250,000 Naira per month. I was patriotic until I realised how foolish I was and I left." This a one of the vital reason why many young academic stay back in developed countries. To address this ugly situation, Ohiare Udebu, Sarafadeen, and Abashi, (2022) have recommended an increment in tertiary education funding to enable institutions pay salaries that their counterpart are receiving in other countries. Adelem, (2023), and Chiemeka-Unogu, (2020) also remarked that to address the problem of abscondment of sponsored academic staff from the Nigerian tertiary institutions, the government should motivate the staff by increasing their salaries and allowances of academic staff in the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Development of infrastructure facilities

Developing infrastructure across Nigerian tertiary institutions is crucial for retaining trained academic staff and preventing their migration to other opportunities. Infrastructure facilities, as defined by Lawinsider (2020), encompass structures and improvements on land or water that benefit the public or specific communities. This broad definition includes essential components such as government and staff offices, power generation and distribution systems, public education and health facilities, law enforcement and emergency services, and transport facilities like pedestrian paths and bus stops. Additionally, it covers sewage and waste treatment plants, water supply systems, but typically excludes certain forms of social housing. Osagie (2003) highlights the importance of infrastructure as both the aesthetic and functional core of an educational institution. The layout and condition of facilities play a significant role in creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Key elements of school infrastructure include landscapes, trees, lawns, pathways, playgrounds, buildings, security systems, and essential utilities. Together, these components support the educational mission of the institution. A well-equipped and maintained physical environment not only enhances the learning experience but also reduces dropout rates. Furthermore, it can attract high-quality educators, fostering an environment where academic excellence can thrive. Investing in infrastructure is therefore not merely about constructing buildings; it is a strategic imperative that directly influences the effectiveness and sustainability of education in Nigeria's tertiary institutions (Ogunode et al., 2022).

The importance of infrastructural facilities in the tertiary institutions according to Ogunode and Agwor (2021) include; it aids effective delivery of administrative functions in schools; it makes the delivery of services fast and reliable; it enables teachers to deliver lessons fast; infrastructural facilities provide a conducive working environment for both teachers and students; infrastructural facilities enable learners to learn at ease and learn well; infrastructural facilities enable the teachers to teach well, prepare their lessons, and deliver them online (ICT). There is need to invest heavily on infrastructure facilities in all the higher institutions. New modern research centers, libraries, laboratories, workshop and ICT centers should be provided. Constant internet services, electricity and modern information communication facilities should also be provided in all the higher institutions across Nigeria. Majorities of these facilities are not available in the public tertiary institutions and even when available, the facilities are not adequate or not working. The absent of these infrastructure facilities are among the reasons why many academic staff after receiving their foreign training decided to stay back to pick up another employment because the infrastructure facilities are available and they are not available in their home institutions here in Nigeria. Provision of modern infrastructure facilities in all the Nigerian tertiary institutions have been suggested as one of the ways to curtail the problem of abscondment of trained foreign scholars from the Nigerian tertiary institutions. With adequate facilities in place at their home institutions, academic staff will be more motivated to return, contributing valuable expertise and fostering institutional growth.

Developing infrastructure in Nigerian tertiary institutions can be significantly enhanced through public-private partnerships (PPP) (Lawal, 2023; Ogunode, Edinoh, & Okolie, 2023). Adopting the PPP model in Nigerian universities can effectively address infrastructure gaps, enabling sustainable improvements in educational facilities (Ogunode, Ugochukwu, & Iroegbu, 2022; Lawal, 2023; Mark, 2019).

Provision of Adequate Research Grant

Provision of adequate research grants is critical in addressing issues of brain drain and retention among Nigerian scholars. In foreign higher institutions, access to diverse and substantial research grants is often a key factor that encourages Nigerian scholars to remain abroad after completing their studies, as such opportunities are significantly limited in Nigeria. According to Ogunode and Gregory (2023), a research grant is a non-repayable fund awarded to researchers to conduct studies in areas of interest to the granting institution or individual. These grants, provided by individuals, organizations, or specialized institutions, are intended to advance public benefits across fields such as science, agriculture, education, and social innovation. By injecting resources into research, these grants stimulate economic growth. Research funding supports both undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as academic and non-academic staff across tertiary and research institutions, allowing for greater project scope and impact. However, as Adams, Zubair, and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) noted, research grant opportunities in Nigerian tertiary institutions are limited, with only a few academics successfully securing local or international grants. This scarcity is a major challenge for academic staff, who may be reluctant to return to Nigerian institutions with limited grant access after experiencing abundant research funding abroad. To address this, tertiary institution administrators in Nigeria should implement policies that increase grant accessibility for academic staff (Okolie, 2023; Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, & Ajape, 2020). Furthermore, boosting research funding, enhancing research facilities, and developing research programs could help mitigate issues like strike actions, brain drain, and the departure of trained academic staff from Nigerian tertiary institutions (Echono, 2023; Tomori, 2022; Echono, 2022).

Granting Autonomy to Public Universities

Granting autonomy to tertiary institutions especially the public universities is another strategy to address the challenge of absconded sponsored foreign academic staff from the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Ajayi in Ogunode, and Ibrahim, (2023) looked at autonomy as the freedom of the institution to make its own decisions on broad complex issues without interference from external or non-university agencies. Autonomy in higher education especially in the universities according to NOUN (2009) implies that each institution must be governed according to the law that establishes it. Every institution has its law, edict or even decree which spells out the functions of the various organs, such as council, senate, congregation, faculty, department and institute etc. Autonomy in higher education relates to the protection of the institutions from interference by government officials in the day-to-day running of the institutions especially on the issues related to the selection of students; the appointment and removal of the academic staff; including the Vice- Chancellors/Rectors/Provost; the determination of contents of higher education and the control of standards. For the university to meet up with the global best practices there must be financial, academic, human resources and administrative autonomy in all aspects of the university's operations known as total or complete autonomy. Autonomy according Azenabor (2022) prevents forced loyalty to the party in power, and political consideration rather than concern for truth is a decisive factor in determining intellectual issues. It prevents job insecurity and rubber-stamping of government decisions. Autonomy is necessary to safeguard the highest standard of intellectual, social, moral and political performance of scholars. Autonomy facilitates the university's educational research, teaching and social responsibilities/services. Autonomy allow tertiary institutions managers to formulate policies that will attract and retent academic staff. Autonomy guarantee academic freedom that every academic staff appreciate. Ojo, (2022) and Ogunode, Cletus, and Christiana, (2024) concluded that the granting of autonomy to universities in Nigeria will aid development of teaching, research and community services. Autonomy will make universities in Nigeria attract the best academic across the World and it will help to solve numerous challenges facing nthe universities such as abscondment of sponsored academic staff.

Provision of conducive work environment devoid of strikes actions.

Creating a supportive and strike-free work environment in Nigerian tertiary institutions is essential for retaining academic staff trained abroad. Many scholars are reluctant to return to Nigerian institutions due to poor working conditions, which impact productivity and job satisfaction. In educational contexts, the work environment encompasses policies, culture, resources, relationships, and infrastructure that collectively create a productive atmosphere for teaching and learning (Kohun, 1992; Durotolu, 2000; Ollukkaran & Gunaseelan, 2012; Sadiku, 2017). An optimal work environment is crucial for educational success and directly influences the effective implementation of the curriculum. The work environment in any institution is a key determinant of productivity and performance, comprising visible and invisible resources, human relations, policies, and social

dynamics that shape institutional operations. However, as noted by Ogunode and Obiakor (2023) and Oyeniran (2023), the conditions in many Nigerian tertiary institutions are far from conducive, leading to brain drain and the absence of trained personnel returning from abroad. Addressing these issues involves not only improving physical conditions but also enhancing job satisfaction through promotion opportunities, performance appraisals, decision-making authority, recognition, salary increases, and welfare packages (Yahaya et al., 2019; Ogunode, Salman & Ayoko, 2023). Moreover, fostering a conducive and motivating work environment will aid in curtailing strikes, staff turnover, and abscondment, thereby strengthening the Nigerian higher education sector's sustainability. In addition, professional development programs, like AI training in science education, can foster educational entrepreneurship and innovation, as demonstrated in the research by Olatunde-Aiyedun, Ojelade, and Aregbesola (2024).

Conclusion

This paper discussed the strategies to address the problem of abscondment of sponsored foreign academic staff from Nigerian tertiary institutions after finishing their training abroad. The paper identified; increment in salaries and allowances of academic staff, development of infrastructure facilities, provision of adequate research grant, granting autonomy to public universities and ensure conducive work environment devoid of strikes actions as strategies to be adopted to address the problem of abscondment of sponsored foreign academic staff from Nigerian tertiary institutions after finishing their training abroad.

Based on the findings, the paper recommends

- I. Administrators and managers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should increase the budgetary allocation of tertiary education to aid formulation of motivational packages that will attract and help to retent academic staff in the various institutions across Nigeria.
- II. Administrators of tertiary institutions should embrace public private partnership to develop the various infrastructure facilities in the institutions across the country.
- III. Administrators of tertiary institutions and the government should increase the research funding in the tertiary institutions and department should be established in each institution to handle research grant programme for both internal and foreign.
- IV. Government should grant autonomy to all the universities to allow for competition.

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