



INSTITUTIONAL ARROGANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AND NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The comparative qualitative study explores institutional arrogance in higher education in the United Kingdom and Nigeria. Based on an interpretivist and critical institutional approach, authors reviewed twenty-eight documents and four case studies (three from the UK and one from Nigeria). The reviewed focused on articles published between 2014-2024. A thematic content analysis reveals similar patterns in the UK and Nigeria, such as prioritization of reputation over transparency, defensive response to critique, hierarchical decision-making, and lack of transparent complaints and accountability mechanisms. However, the structural drivers of these conditions differ. In the UK, institutional arrogance is shaped by marketization, global ranking regimes, and managerial governance logics. Political interference, chronic underfunding, and weak regulatory and governance structures influence this practice in Nigeria. Underpinned by Institutional Theory and Epistemic Injustice Framework, the study conceptualizes institutional arrogance as a systemic condition that marginalizes stakeholder voices and erodes accountability, legitimacy, and trust. The study concludes with policy-relevant recommendations for reforms in governance, transparency, stakeholder participation, and the development of an institutional culture of humility to underpin more inclusive, adaptive, and socially responsive higher education systems.

Keywords: Accountability and transparency, Higher education governance, Institutional arrogance, Nigeria, United Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are repositories of knowledge and stimuli for innovation, with universities also serving as vehicles for social mobility. In the UK, HEIs boast of international prestige in research and teaching, while



in Nigeria, universities are known as sites for national and human capital development. However, in both countries, institutional arrogance, defined as organizational behaviors prioritizing prestige, image, or authority over responsiveness, transparency, and stakeholder well-being, persists. This is not a minor cultural anomaly; it has real consequences for student outcomes, staff morale, and societal trust in higher education. In the context of institutional branding and ranking, sometimes at the cost of inclusive decision-making, the alienation between universities and their stakeholders has grown. When institutions place image over accountability, evidence suggests that students become less satisfied and may be less engaged with their studies (Bernardo et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2022). A lack of transparency and responsiveness in governance, characterized by poor morale, is linked to high turnover rates among staff, which can undermine institutional capacity and performance (Kuuyelleh et al., 2025; Hofmann & Strobel, 2020). Public trust in higher education remains fragile, and when institutions fail to engage meaningfully with their communities, instead operating in a self-serving, top-down style, things do not improve.

Recent developments underscore the importance of this study. Universities in the UK have been publicly criticized for mishandling sexual misconduct complaints (Times Higher Education, 2024), suppressing free expression (Office for Students, 2025), and unilaterally closing programmes (Adams, 2025). In Nigeria, institutional arrogance manifests in management-union standoffs, non-transparent resource allocation, silencing whistleblowers (Agboola, 2019; Ewa & Eze, 2023) and resistance to embracing online teaching and remote work. These cases highlight the importance of a theoretically informed, comparative study of institutional arrogance. Despite an expanding scholarly commentary, comparative studies are scarce, limiting cross-contextual understanding (de Gayardon, 2022). Few juxtapose the neoliberal, marketized UK HE system with the resource-constrained, politicized model of Nigeria to explore how context mediates institutional arrogance. Yet, no study has jointly used Institutional Theory and the Epistemic Injustice Framework to comparatively analyze institutional arrogance in United Kingdom and Nigeria. This represents a significant gap in the literature, particularly given the contrasting structural conditions of a marketized, performance-driven system in the UK and a resource-constrained, politically influenced system in Nigeria. This paper fills this gap by



conducting a comparative thematic analysis, based on institutional theory and epistemic justice framework.

The purpose of the paper is to: 1) conceptualize institutional arrogance in HEIs using contemporary organizational and philosophical frameworks; 2) compare the manifestations of institutional arrogance in the UK and Nigeria; and 3) propose context-sensitive reforms that could help nurture institutional humility, accountability, and participatory governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Institutional Arrogance

Institutional arrogance has been explored in philosophy as intellectual arrogance. Tanesini (2023) posits that institutional arrogance is the disposition to overestimate one's knowledge and reasoning abilities and remain unwilling to acknowledge contrary evidence or voices of others, reinforcing defensive reasoning and sustaining unwarranted dominance. At the organizational level, institutional arrogance is embedded within governance cultures that are resistant to criticism, sustain hierarchical power dynamics, and place reputation management over truth-seeking. Medina's theory of epistemic injustice is particularly relevant in explaining institutional arrogance. Institutions can perpetuate harms by silencing and discrediting the concerns of marginalized stakeholders, restricting their knowledge in decision-making processes (Medina, 2013). At an institutional level, arrogance emerges when bureaucratic systems and leadership adopt practices that prioritize internal status, authority, and risk management over open accountability or stakeholder voice.

Moreover, Wong and Chiu (2019) observe how universities compel students to implicitly "swallow their pride and fear," a process that reinforces institutional authority and suppresses dissident and marginalized voices. Institutional arrogance is not necessarily manifest as overt hostility but can be presented subtly via governance practices, communication, and institutional culture. Institutional arrogance in higher education often intersects with broader, more established concepts of managerialism, academic capitalism, and reputation protectionism. All these have significant consequences in the working ethos of universities.

According to Deem (2004), managerialism transforms universities into corporations whose central concerns are efficiency and performance metrics. Such a business model undermines traditional forms of governance, collegial



decision-making, academic autonomy, and collective responsibility that were once foundational. Management in such a managerialist model may prioritize financial sustainability and institutional rankings above academic freedom, faculty engagement, and student welfare. Management, therefore, becomes centralized, and the voices of the faculty and staff, who are supposed to be core participants in the academic mission, may be marginalized or dismissed. Such organizational culture can cause alienation and distrust between university administrators and faculty, eventually weakening morale and cohesion at the institutional level.

The concept of academic capitalism by Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) reflects growing commodification in higher education. As institutions of learning become competitive, they pursue prestige and financial success through research outputs, world rankings, and the recruitment of students. These efforts often lead to reputations and financial returns, suppressing educational goals such as student welfare and social responsibility. Academic capitalism nurtures the pursuit of research funding and partnerships with the private sector at the expense of engaging with students and/or the larger community in meaningful ways. The hyper-competitive environment can therefore breed practices whereby student support and academic integrity are sacrificed for short-term prestige or financial gain.

Institutional arrogance disproportionately impacts marginalized groups. Marginalized groups include women, ethnic minority students, and other underrepresented populations within higher education. Drawing on the Epistemic Injustice Framework (José Medina, 2013; Miranda Fricker, 2007), these groups are often subjected to both testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice unjustly diminishes their credibility. In the context of hermeneutical injustice, the experiences of these groups are inadequately recognized or interpreted within institutional structures. Empirical research in higher education demonstrates that women and minority students frequently encounter institutional responses that minimize or dismiss complaints related to harassment, discrimination, and exclusion (Bhopal, 2018; Ahmed, 2012). Such patterns reflect broader power asymmetries embedded within governance systems, where dominant voices are privileged over marginalized perspectives.

In this context, institutional arrogance operates as a structural mechanism that reinforces epistemic exclusion by privileging institutional authority and reputation over stakeholder voice. For example, studies on sexual misconduct



and racial inequality in universities highlight how institutional processes often discourage reporting or fail to adequately address grievances raised by vulnerable groups (Phipps & Smith, 2012; Stevenson, 2012). Consequently, institutional decision-making becomes less inclusive, perpetuating inequalities and undermining trust among already marginalized stakeholders. This reinforces the argument that institutional arrogance is not merely an organizational disposition but a systemic condition that sustains inequities in knowledge production, recognition, and participation within higher education. Collectively, these three frameworks suggest that institutional arrogance is not a matter of individual behavior; rather, it is a systemic organizational state driven by governance structures, epistemic hierarchies, and economic competition. Managerialism facilitates institutional arrogance via the reduction of collegiality and concentration of power; epistemic injustice accounts for how institutional arrogance leads to the silencing and marginalization of stakeholder voices.

Academic capitalism entrenches institutional arrogance through the elevation of prestige and profit above accountability and inclusiveness. These three business and management perspectives form a comprehensive theoretical lens on which to analyze institutional arrogance in different university settings.

In light of the above, institutional arrogance prioritization of external reputation and financial performance is likely to influence the focus and activities of HEIs in ways that will compromise their central educational mission. In a nutshell, institutional arrogance consists of a posture or culture in which the institution:

1. Places reputation, image, and internal authority over transparency and responsiveness.
2. Become defensive in response to criticism, failure, or opposition.
3. Centralizes decision-making at the expense of internal stakeholders (staff, students).
4. Employs opaque or adversarial complaint, governance, or accountability mechanisms.

Theoretical Lens: Institutional Theory and Epistemic Injustice

Institutional arrogance can be conceptualized as a deeply structurally situated phenomenon within the organization's structures, norms, and practices. Institutional theory may provide a lens to understand how such arrogance is maintained and reproduced. This theory suggests that organizations are confronted with a set of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive



pressures that influence their behavior (Scott, 2014). Governance structures, hierarchical decision-making, and reputational imperatives can institutionalize arrogance by privileging conformity, reinforcing authority, and discouraging dissent. Arrogant practices become situated not just as individual traits but as socially sanctioned organizational norms that resist external critique. This is evident in cases such as the LSE-Gaddafi, where financial gain and reputation took precedence over ethical considerations, and in elite institutions that have delayed decisions on allegations of misconduct to maintain a good reputation, demonstrating how institutional priorities can embed arrogance as an organizational norm.

Complementing this, Medina's (2013) epistemic injustice framework sheds light on how institutions can systematically silence or discredit the knowledge and concerns of marginalized stakeholders. Through practices such as selective consultation, opacity in decision-making, and defensiveness toward critique, institutions commit testimonial injustice, denying epistemic credibility to certain voices, and hermeneutical injustice, obstructing stakeholders' ability to interpret and challenge institutional practices. Together, these frameworks shed light on how institutional arrogance extends beyond pride and ego to structural, cultural, and epistemic mechanisms to maintain power, suppress accountability, and inhibit inclusive decision-making.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework that integrates structural, cultural, and epistemic explanations of how institutional arrogance manifests and is sustained in HEIs. The framework, demonstrates that arrogance is not an individual trait but has roots in organizational structures, such (e.g., hierarchical governance and decision-making), cultural norms (e.g., emphasis on reputation and conformity), and epistemic mechanisms of (e.g., control of knowledge, selective recognition of expertise). These mutually reinforcing elements reinforce power asymmetries, suppress accountability, and constrain inclusive participation, demonstrating how easily institutional priorities can overshadow core educational and ethical missions.



Institutional Arrogance in Higher Education

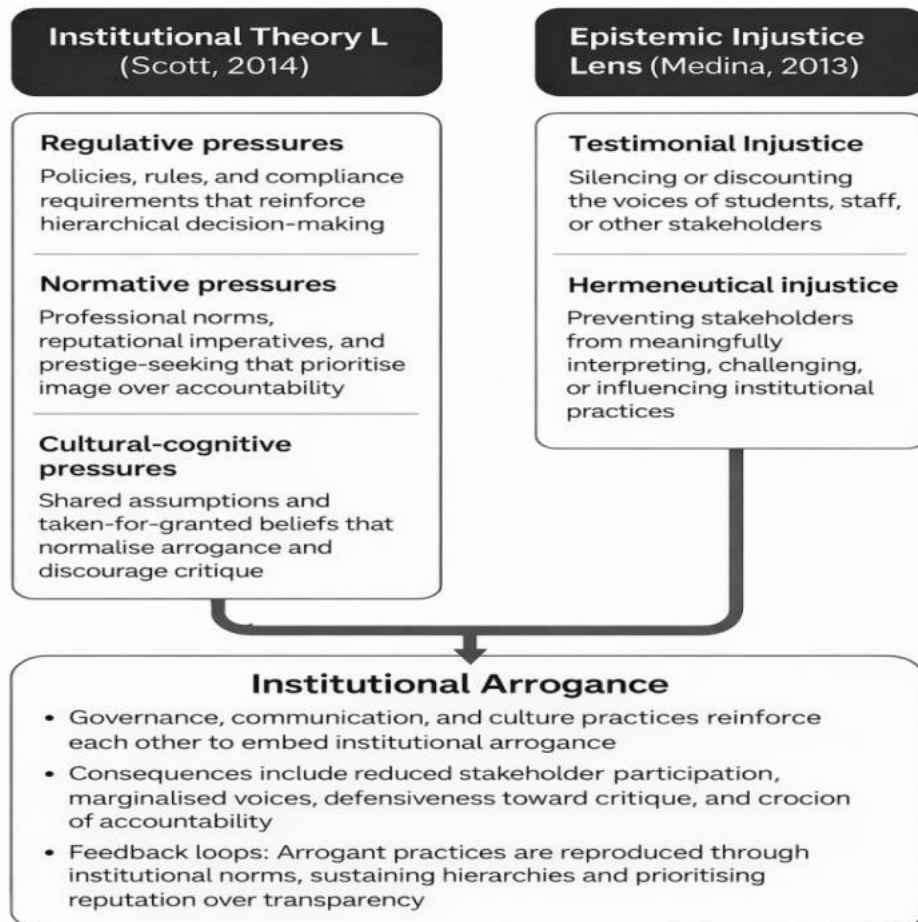


Figure 1. Integrated theoretical lens for understanding institutional arrogance in higher education

Source: Authors

Insights from the UK

UK HEIs have widely been criticized for lack of transparency and defensiveness. The Jarratt Report (1985) marked a turning point by emphasizing managerial efficiency and centralized decision-making, which scholars suggest weakened collegiality and therefore reinforced top-down control (Shattock, 2013). This change can be argued to have informed recent complaints of arrogance. The range of high-profile cases underlining



institutional arrogance in UK HEIs indicates an alarming trend. University governance is becoming increasingly divorced from student welfare. Some cases illustrate vividly how universities' interest in reputation, financial stability, and institutional image often overrides response to student complaints and upholding core values of fairness and transparency.

This has been the case at the University of Kent, when a group of students claimed that the institution botched the complaints of sexual misconduct by causing further trauma. Due to highly delayed reactions and the urge to save face instead of prioritizing the well-being of students, the institution faced public outcry, and eventually acknowledged that their approach to complaints "made things worse," apologizing for the distress it caused students (Times Higher Education, 2024). This admission reflects the broader issue whereby institutional priorities, often driven by a need to protect the image and standing of the university, sometimes directly harm the students they are meant to protect.

Similarly, in 2025, the Office for Students fined the University of Sussex £585,000 for breach of legal duties to protect free speech on campus. Rather than taking responsibility for its actions, the university's initial approach was to contest the findings, declaring that the investigation is politically motivated. The resistance to accepting responsibility demonstrates institutional arrogance, manifesting in the rejection of regulatory oversight and disowning of students' and faculty members' concerns over academic freedoms.

Another outstanding example is the University of Chichester, which abruptly terminated its African history master's degree midstream. The action was so severe that the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) intervened and partially supported the students' complaints, mandating compensation to be paid (Adams, 2025). This incident shows how universities' decision-making can be influenced by financial prerogatives at the expense of students' needs and educational integrity. These concerns are further corroborated by the data from the OIA. For the year 2024, 3,613 student complaints were lodged, representing a 15% increase on the preceding year, while compensation payouts more than doubled (OIA 2025). As academics such as Collini (2017) note, this emerging trend constitutes a crisis of legitimacy for higher education, where universities have emphasized financial viability, reputation, and league table positions over their core mission of providing an excellent education and a supportive experience to their students. These cases and trends suggest that institutional arrogance is not an isolated phenomenon but part of



a broader, systemic issue in higher education, where financial and reputational considerations are prioritized over student welfare and academic integrity. Collectively, these cases and corresponding trends reveal that institutional arrogance among UK HEIs is not episodic but systemic. In the modern-day governance framework such arrogance is evidenced by de-prioritizing transparency, accountability and interests of stakeholders and emphasizing reputation, authority and financial considerations.

Insights from Nigeria

The HEIs in Nigeria have a set of challenges that are different but similar to other institutions globally. Funding, government interference, and prolonged Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike actions have led to a lack of trust from the government (Dangara & Chinyere, 2021). The management is known to take rigid positions during trade disputes, perceiving the conditions demanded by ASUU as outrageous, as opposed to seeking constructive conversations (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021). This tough line position suggest arrogance on the part of the establishment, refusing to recognize a shared responsibility for the weakness of the establishment.

Arguably, Nigerian universities lack the capacity to undertake synchronous learning due to infrastructure deficiencies and the university management's unwillingness to leverage digital technologies to facilitate teaching and learning. Evidence of arrogance within the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria manifests in different challenges that affect the mission as well as the welfare of students, academic, and non-academic staff. Such challenges include strikes, leadership controversies, cases of corruption, and a lack of responsiveness to changing demands within the industry. The ASUU strike is a notable instance, which has significantly impacted the academic schedule of Nigerian universities. The ASUU strike of 2022, lasted for eight months, during which the universities were closed nationwide. The claim of university arrogance is widespread, with university administrators accused of withholding critical information concerning allocations and making it irrelevant to address long-standing problems (Ogbeifun et al., 2025). The eight-month strike, which is a typical situation of management and staff disagreements in Nigerian universities, significantly impacted the academic schedules of students, thereby revealing a lack of trust on the part of the university staff toward university administrators, contributed to a pervasive feeling of powerlessness among staff and highlights broader governance challenges within the system (Ugwoke & Onyekachi, 2023).



In addition to strike actions, leadership crises have also become a regular phenomenon in the universities in Nigeria. The vice chancellor's appointment is sometimes marred by politics often lead to university unrest and instability in university governance. Perhaps even worse is the practice of university leadership circles overriding the decisions of university governing bodies, contrary to the ideal of collegiality, which is characteristic of universities (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019).

Additionally, there are claims of high-level corruption, which take the form of nepotism in employee recruitment and admissions racketeering. The matter is exacerbated by the fact that whistleblowers are subjected to punishment. Such cases of malpractices contribute significantly to weakening the moral fiber of universities.

Universities have been reluctant to adopt online teaching and remote work, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for an adaptable educational sector. The reluctance to learn how to teach online and work from home indicates a lack of adaptation, which is a form of arrogance within the entire sector. The arrogance, in this context, is the unwillingness to use technology to create a learn-from-anywhere environment that would have been relevant to students and faculty alike, thus making universities lag behind in the education revolution. Such instances suggest a culture in which the top management of the institutions has the potential to use the power that comes with hierarchy to shield itself from accountability.

The norm that doctoral thesis should have a specified page length, demonstrate how form is often equated with academic quality. While doctoral research must show depth, originality, and critical thinking, international scholarship suggests that they should be discipline-sensitive and purpose-driven rather than uniform (Lovitts, 2005; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004). In the Nigerian HEIs, rigid templates and length expectations most time are institutionalized norms, reinforcing legitimacy and ignoring supervisory capacity and infrastructural limitations. Such practices is consistent with institutional theory's concept of "myth and ceremony," where rules persist because they *appear* to represent quality, not because they actually deliver it (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Limiting postgraduate teaching and supervision to Senior Lecturers and above (NUC, 2011, 2020), further suggest institutional arrogance. Although, this is meant to be a quality assurance mechanism, these regulations become counterproductive when applied inflexibly without considering the peculiarity of each university, especially understaffed ones. Research suggest that



supervision quality is shaped by training, workload balance, and institutional support rather than academic rank (Aina, 2010; Olibie & Agu, 2014). Excluding competent early-career faculty members from supervisory roles amplifies staff shortages, increase student completion times, and concentrates power among few senior scholars, reinforcing hierarchical dominance rather than academic development.

In the same, promotion practice that prioritize journals led by full professors reflect exclusion based on rank and prestige. Studies on African scholarly publishing suggest that editorial quality and peer-review integrity are not connected to professorial rank, but to transparent governance and editorial competence (Nwagwu, 2013; Teferra, 2017). When institutions link legitimacy to senior titles, they marginalize emerging journals and early-career researchers, limiting local knowledge production.

The emergence of the above-named norms reflects the impact of managerialism, where standardization and reputation building dominate governance practices (Deem, 2004). In resource constrained systems, such inflexibility causes decoupling between policy and practice (Bromley & Powell, 2012) undermining equity, efficiency, and scholarly goals. Addressing institutional arrogance requires a shift toward capacity-based and context-sensitive governance that prioritize academic standards while responding to institutional conditions.

Collectively, these indicators suggest that systemic nature of institutional arrogance in Nigerian higher education is expressed in dictatorial decision-making, authoritative supervision, and conservative tendencies. This is supported by exclusionary search for authenticity and symbolic validation within the education system. This is counterproductive as managers prioritize power and prestige at the expense of the stakeholders' satisfaction, transparency, efficiency and accountability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A comparative qualitative research approach is used to explore institutional arrogance in HEIs in the UK and Nigeria. The application of a comparative analysis is considered a relevant research methodology to adequately addresses how similar conditions occur in diverse real-life sociocultural, political, and historical environments (Hantrais, 2009). The research is descriptive and analytical in nature, employing a desk research methodology



to review scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals, government publications, HEIs' policy statements, and reports from credible media sources. In terms of ethics and accessibility, the research is not dependent on primary interviews but uses a technique of triangulation involving a diverse set of publicly available findings (media reports, government communications, HEIs' statements, official government publications). We reviewed peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, HEIs' policy statements, and reports from credible media sources published between 2014 and 2024. The period between 2014 and 2024 is intentional and theoretically justified. It represents ten years of contemporary developments in governance at higher education, which have been characterized by marketization, digitalization, pressures of global rankings and calls for accountability and transparency. For the UK, this period captures pivotal policy and structural reforms such as the establishment of managerial governance, dominance of performance measures and league tables. For Nigeria, it captures the state of distress due to funding deficiencies, irregularities in policy reforms and political interference.

Case study Selection

The cases are purposefully chosen to identify instances of conflict that are publicly recognized as reflecting allegations of arrogance on the part of the institutions. In the UK, these cases include instances of misconduct, closure of courses, enforcement of free speech, and student complaints.

In Nigerian, cases were drawn from staff strike actions, mismanagement, lack of transparency in decision-making and government intervention. In the analysis, four cases (three cases from the UK and one case from Nigeria) were identified based on available evidence. The comparison of the two cases allows for a more nuanced analysis of the differences and similarities across cases, providing a lens through which to explore the variation in the expression of institutional arrogance in different institutional settings.

Coding and Thematic Analysis

The publicly available case files were coded inductively for themes that correspond to the types of institutional arrogance (reputation over transparency, defensiveness, hierarchical decision-making, unclear complaints, marginalization of stakeholders). Contextual themes have been used to identify particular types, such as political meddling in the Nigerian context and reputational pressures from international rankings in the UK context. The comparative matrices facilitate the interpretation of which types



are common, which are different, and on what conditions within the institution such differences are based. The coding process was conducted by the lead researcher, with a subset of the data independently reviewed by a second coder to enhance analytical rigor. To ensure consistency, a coding framework was developed and applied across all data sources. Inter-coder reliability was assessed by comparing coding outcomes and discrepancies discussed and resolved by the researchers. This process enhanced reliability and credibility of the thematic analysis.

Data Sources

Secondary data were collected from different sources to enhance credibility. We included peer-reviewed articles on governance, managerialism, accountability in HEIs, reports from the Office for Students (OfS), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), National Universities Commission (NUC), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), press coverage on governance issues, programme shutdowns, strikes, complaints from students, rulings from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), UK, and court decisions on university administration disputes in Nigeria. A systematic approach was used to identify the relevant academic literature. We searched Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar databases for relevant documents. The search terms and Boolean combinations used comprised ‘institutional arrogance’ AND higher education, ‘managerialism’ AND higher education, ‘academic capitalism’ AND ‘student complaints universities’, ‘ASUU strikes Nigeria’, AND ‘higher education governance Nigeria’. The decision was made to include a variety of sources according to sample selection criteria which such as: (a) relatedness to Higher Education Governance and accountability matter, (b) analytical or empirical depth and (c) source credibility. The triangulation of data was achieved through the collection from multiple sources and methodological approaches, which, further, backup the validity and reliability of the data while allowing comparison of contexts within the countries involved in the comparative study. The initial search yielded fifty-seven documents, which were screened using eligibility criteria and relevance to the subject. Following this screening process, twenty-eight documents were identified as relevant and were included in the final review.

Analytical Framework

Our analysis is based on Institutional Theory (Scott, 2014), which suggests that organizations aim to find legitimacy by complying with normative, regulative, and cultural-cognitive pressures. Institutional arrogance is treated



as a counterproductive organizational practice that occurs when legitimacy is prioritized over accountability. Additionally, Medina's (2013) epistemic injustice theory is used for analyzing how organizational practices silence or discredit the voices of stakeholders. The themes were identified for analysis by following a six-step procedure, as propounded by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes: (1) familiarization with the themes, (2) development of initial codes, (3) identifying themes, (4) assessment of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) production of the report. Five broad themes were identified, which are (a) reputation management and transparency, (b) defensiveness toward critique, (c) hierarchical decision-making and stakeholder exclusion, (d) opaque complaints and accountability mechanisms, and (e) unique contextual drivers.

DISCUSSION

Comparative Analysis

This section presents comparative analysis of institutional arrogance in the UK and Nigeria HEIs. It identifies key themes which shows the universality of the phenomenon and the reasons for such impacts.

Theme 1: Reputation Management Over Transparency

Institutional reactions to criticism in the UK tend to focus on reputation management. In the University of Sussex free speech case (2025), the university described regulation as a political tool, an assertion of defensiveness designed to protect the university reputation. At the University of Kent, institutional responses to sexual misconduct complaints were initially delayed, with a decision to “leave it” a strategy that arguably prioritized reputation control and institutional integrity over student needs.

In Nigeria, it is more a matter of denial, suppression and confidentiality of information in reputation management. University management routinely dismiss press allegations of mismanagement or corruption, and newspaper reports of a staff strike (e.g. ASUU) as proof of political agenda rather than governance failure. On the other hand, whistleblowers and critical commentators are intimidated, as the truth must be hidden for the institution's reputation.

Although preferences for reputation over transparency rule in both Nigeria and the UK, the motivations differ. In the UK, this tendency is motivated by rankings, student markets and pressure from regulators, whereas in Nigeria it reflects the desire for political legitimacy, patronage and the maintenance of institutional authority within an unstable government system.



Theme 2: Defensiveness Toward Critique

Defensiveness is common in both contexts, but its manifestation is slightly different. In the UK, for example, the institutional response to external scrutiny whether from regulators, students or staff tends to occur by means of procedural check and process, which delays or diminishes accountability (the Sussex case is a good example, where attempts to resist regulation were reinterpreted as a threat to independence).

In Nigeria, however, being defensive is more politicalized and personal. The institutional heads might see such criticism, whether from staff, unions, or academics as insubordination. The ASUU strikes, especially the eight months shutdown of 2022, reveal how the management dismissed the union demand rather than engage them in negotiations. Criticism could even be perceived as sabotage or external interference particularly in a politicized leadership context.

Both countries show defensiveness but the motivation in UK tends to be more regulatory/market orientated while in Nigeria it is more political linked to patronage, legitimacy of state authority and disputes over legitimacy.

Theme 3: Hierarchical Decision-Making and Stakeholder Exclusion

In the UK the direction of decisions has moved towards centralized managerial control, marginalizing the inputs of academics and students. The sudden termination of courses like African history at the University of Chichester clearly exemplifies tension between managerial priorities and the preservation of diverse scholarly fields.

In Nigeria, emphasis is on hierarchy and political intervention. Vice chancellors and senior administrators have great influence over hiring, promotion and discipline. Most times faculty and senates/committees are not consulted. Interference by government in leadership appointments weakens institutional autonomy and democratic decision-making. Decisions relating to staff and students whether about resource allocation or changes to programmes are made without consultation.

Hierarchical decision-making is common between the two systems; however, Nigeria has institutionalized politics and intense hierarchical structure. In Nigeria, governance frameworks is deliberately designed to institutionalize stakeholder imbalance systematically, discouraging participants from participatory decision-making and limiting inclusive engagement. In the UK, it is predominantly a response to managerial efficiency and institutional performance mechanisms.



Theme 4: Opaque Complaints and Accountability Mechanisms

There are some formal accountability mechanisms in the UK (e.g. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)), these systems are complicated and at times inaccessible. Our review demonstrates dissatisfaction with internal grievance processes. Universities are inclined to manage reputation risk by adopting unclear processes, delaying replies or anonymizing complaints.

In Nigeria, complaints mechanisms are weaker, more informalized and generally viewed as ineffective or partially corrupted. Most institutions do not have independent channels such as grievance committee where individuals can voice their complaints without fear of reprisal. Complaints are suppressed or ignored and used to discourage stakeholders from getting involved in various activities. Nigerian and UK experiences reveal opacity in handling complaints. While the UK suggest opacity based on complex procedures within a formal regulatory environment, in Nigeria opacity is structural, supported by weak institutions, limited monitoring and suppression of dissent.

Theme 5: Context-Specific Drivers of Institutional Arrogance

The two contexts are characterized by Institutional arrogance but differs in the way they manifest. Resource dynamics influence institutional responses. UK institutions compete for limited funding along with the pressures of global university rankings, which necessitates defensive and reputation management strategies. Nigerian institutions, though, are chronically underfunded is characterized by rigidities in control aimed at protecting institutional survival. This is evidenced by the imposition of top-down doctoral thesis requirements, limited supervisor structure tied to academic rank and promotions based on length of service.

Secondly, the regulatory landscape is different. In the UK, institutions are held accountable by relatively strong regulators like the Office for Students and the OIA, while in Nigeria, there are weak regulators such as the NUC.

Thirdly, there is greater level of politicization in Nigeria where the influence of government on appointments and institutional priorities serves to politicize universities. This political influence is not strong in UK, but pressure from funds and policy is still high enough to induce defensive behavior.

Finally, the cultural norms of authority present in the context vary. In Nigeria, authority in the institutional setting is often socially reinforced making institutional resistance to authority high, while the UK context may be more conducive to criticism and activism as institutional arrogance might be challenged but not always effective.



Collectively, institutional arrogance exists in both contexts but is influenced by different structures; in the UK, it is motivated by marketization and performance pressures, while in Nigeria, it is driven by political interference, limited resources, and hierarchical power structures.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis clearly shows that institutional arrogance is a transnational phenomenon that challenges the viability, inclusiveness, and social mission of HEIs. Both the UK and Nigeria HE are prone to the dangers of prioritizing the institution's reputations and power over people. The results are consistent with the epistemic injustice framework, showing how institutions can undervalue the contributions and concerns of individuals who challenge their power. This research also aligns with institutional theory, which asserts that a university's struggle to gain legitimacy may produce rigid behavior that stresses reputation over adaptability and meaningful change.

Implications

This study demonstrates the need for multi-level interventions to handle institutional arrogance in higher education. For policymakers, strong regulatory frameworks that foster transparency, stakeholder engagement, and co-created policies are important. In the UK, bodies such as the Office for Students can support collaboration with student representatives and staff, while in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission can enforce standards and intervene in labor disputes to ensure accountability. Institutional leaders should embrace humility, making governance more participatory by involving academic boards, student unions, and staff unions in decision-making processes. For students and staff, collective engagement through advocacy networks, trade unions and awareness of complaints procedures is important to challenge institutional arrogance constructively. Arrogant institutions can lose legitimacy, which can lead to protests, government sanctions, and reputational damage. Marginalized groups such as women, minority students, and working-class learners are disproportionately affected, reflecting equity concerns. Furthermore, arrogance hinders critical thinking, whistleblowing, innovation, and adaptability. Regulators must implement systems that anticipate institutional arrogance and encourage humility, encouraging cultures of accountability, inclusiveness, and responsiveness rather than relying solely on punishment.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are tailored to the specific contexts of UK and Nigerian higher education and aim to mitigate institutional arrogance. By adopting of these interventions, HEIs can move from defensively reputational stance to a culture of learning and accountability, hence strengthening the sector and meeting its social mandate.

Table 1: Recommendations for Mitigating Institutional Arrogance in HE

Theme of Institutional Arrogance	Strategy	UK HE	Nigeria HE
Reputation Management Over Transparency	Transparent accountability mechanisms	Publish aggregate statistics on complaints, misconduct, and institutional responses; commission independent governance audits through external bodies.	Mandate public reporting of complaint outcomes; establish independent ombuds offices; partner with civil society organizations to monitor institutional practices.
Defensiveness Toward Critique	Leadership training in humility and reflexivity	Develop continuous leadership programmes focused on humility, openness to critique, stakeholder dialogue, and crisis communication. Explicitly designed to reduce defensiveness and improve responsiveness to regulatory and stakeholder concerns.	Integrate ethics, stakeholder engagement, and institutional reflexivity into leadership training; link leadership performance evaluation to responsiveness, transparency, and engagement with critique.
Hierarchical Decision-Making and Stakeholder Exclusion	Strengthen participatory governance	Institutionalize student and staff representation in governing bodies; require documented consultation processes for major decisions such as course closures and restructuring.	Strengthen the effectiveness of senate and faculty committees; decentralize decision-making structures; actively incorporate staff and community input in institutional governance.
Opaque Complaints and Accountability Mechanisms	Whistleblower and grievance protection	Strengthen legal protections for whistleblowers; ensure anonymity and introduce third-party review	Guarantee statutory protections for staff and students raising concerns; prevent retaliation through enforceable institutional



		mechanisms for grievance processes.	for policies; independent grievance review channels.	establish
Opaque Complaints and Accountability Mechanisms	Regulatory incentives for openness	Align regulatory frameworks (e.g., funding and quality assurance) with transparency metrics; reward institutions demonstrating strong accountability beyond compliance.	The National Universities Commission (NUC) should incentivize transparent governance through grants, increased autonomy, and performance-based recognition; prioritize auditing and monitoring over punitive sanctions alone.	
Reputation Management Over Transparency & Reinforcement Across Themes	Cultural change and narrative shift	Challenge narratives equating prestige with exclusivity; promote institutional humility, openness, and public accountability as markers of excellence.	Foster national and institutional dialogue involving students, staff, and the public to reposition universities as public service institutions rather than elite, self-protective entities.	

Source: (Authors, 2025)

5.3 Limitations

Although this research provides significant insights into the issue of arrogance within institutions in the UK and Nigerian' HE, it also has some limitations that indicate directions for future research. For instance, given that the research uses secondary data that includes documented cases reported in the open domain, it lacks insider perspectives on the issue. Future research can use methods such as ethnography or interviews to deepen insights into how institutional arrogance affects students, staff, and faculty. The study is limited to two countries, namely the UK and Nigeria, future research can focus on different countries with distinct systems of governance. Lastly, the research paper ignored the aspect of the impact of digital platforms on institutional arrogance. Researchers should explore the lived experiences of individuals affected by institutional arrogance, with longitudinal and qualitative studies illuminating psychological and organizational impacts.

Finally, as an interpretivist qualitative study, the role of researcher positionality is important. The authors bring diverse contextual perspectives, with two authors based in Nigeria and one based in the United Kingdom. These positionalities may have shaped the interpretation of data, particularly in relation to contextual sensitivity, emphasis on governance challenges, and the framing of institutional behaviors. To mitigate potential bias, the study



employed reflexive engagement with the data, iterative coding, and collaborative interpretation among the authors. Nevertheless, future research could further strengthen methodological rigor through strategies such as multi-country research teams, participant validation, and expanded triangulation techniques.

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