



THE BIG PICTURE ON RISING NIGERIAN STUDENT DEMAND



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The complexity and dynamism of Nigeria's higher education market undoubtedly mirrors its people, a vast and linguistically diverse population of over 200 million people¹, half of which are under the age of 19. This large youth demographic, partly made up of an expanding middle class who have the means to explore quality institutions overseas, makes Nigeria a sought-after market for student recruiters. My own grandparents were part of a cohort of young Nigerian students who came to London in the late 1940s to seek a British education with hopes of returning to enrich the country. And in 2021, the UK's international education strategy identified the West African country as an 'immediate priority' market post Brexit, alongside major international players like India, China, Indonesia, Brazil, and Vietnam².

Like crude oil, Afrobeats and natural gas, university students will need to be added to the list of Nigeria's biggest exports in the foreseeable future. With the largest youth population in Africa, Nigeria's domestic higher education system faces structural challenges. The Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB), the country's national education body, cannot meet growing demand, leaving many qualified students without a place at university. In light of this, there's a preference to study abroad with Canada, the US, the UK, and to a lesser extent Australia, all competing for the Nigerian student market. Therefore, when recruiting universities must think critically about the requirements of Nigerian students as well as the various factors driving demand to other global destinations, including a welcoming environment, quality education, affordability, and post-study work opportunities.



NIGERIAN STUDENTS SET THEIR SIGHTS ON CANADA, UK AND US

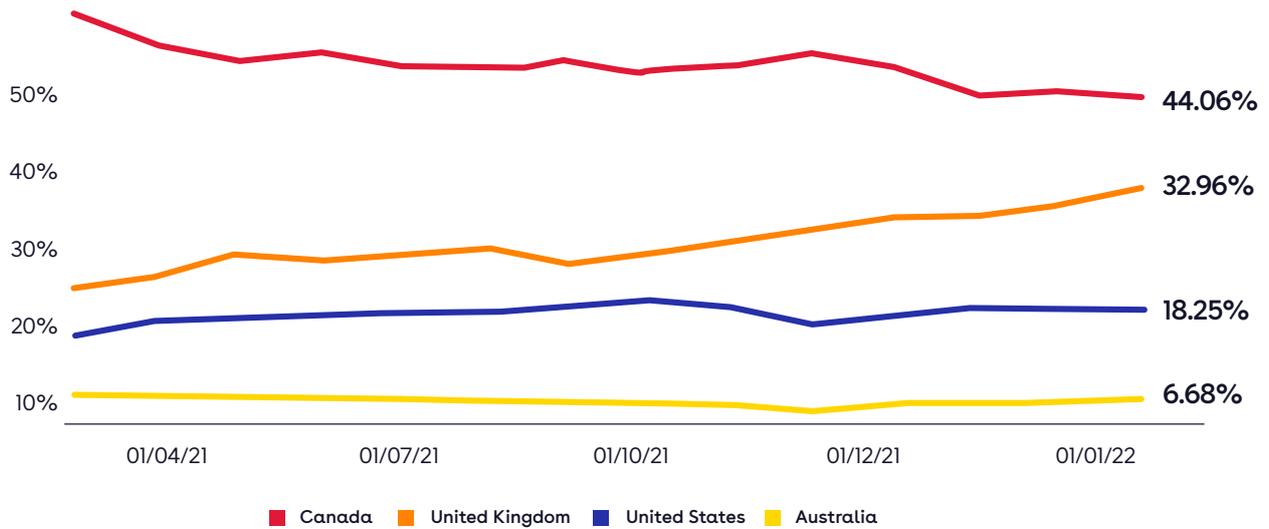
With world-class institutions, excellent learning facilities and the prospect of international work experience, it is no surprise that Canada, the UK and the US are the top three global destinations for Nigerian students as highlighted by our IQ Demand Tracker. Our IQ Demand Tracker tool shows Canada is the most popular destination for Nigerian students claiming 54.28% of share in 2021 when compared to other key English-speaking destinations. This is followed by the UK at 29.46%, the US at 19.58% and Australia at 6.46%. Rohan Rego, IDP Connect's Associate Director Destination Manager, Middle East and Africa says, "There continues to be a strong momentum for students from Nigeria to study abroad in the US, Canada and the UK, which are among the leading recruiters from Nigeria."

The pandemic restricted movement across borders which hindered international students globally, and Nigeria was no exception. There was a brief fall in demand from Nigerian students, likely caused by imposed travel restrictions. However, there is now evidence of pent-up demand post-pandemic and an upward trend with Nigerian students eagerly waiting to study abroad in key global destinations such as the UK, US and Canada as borders re-opened.

The UK, for instance, experienced strong recovery post-pandemic with a wave of new international students, and in 2021, there was a significant increase (+368%) in sponsored study grants for Nigerian nationals compared to 2019³. By contrast, Australia kept its borders closed to all non-residents from March 2020, which clearly reduced the flow of new international students. Our IQ Demand Tracker shows a steady decline of demand from Nigerian students from 11.29% in March 2020 to 6.56% in January 2022.

Revenue from international students is important to the higher education sector in the UK, US, Canada, and Australia, and governments are keen to quickly recover post-pandemic. The Graduate Route opened on July 1st, 2021 to support international graduates in finding post-study work opportunities and retaining talent within the UK. It was devised to help the government increase the number of international students in the UK to 600,000 by 2030, and as of January 2022, this has already been achieved. Similarly, the US, through its departments of state and education, proposed a “renewed commitment to international education” in July 2021⁴.

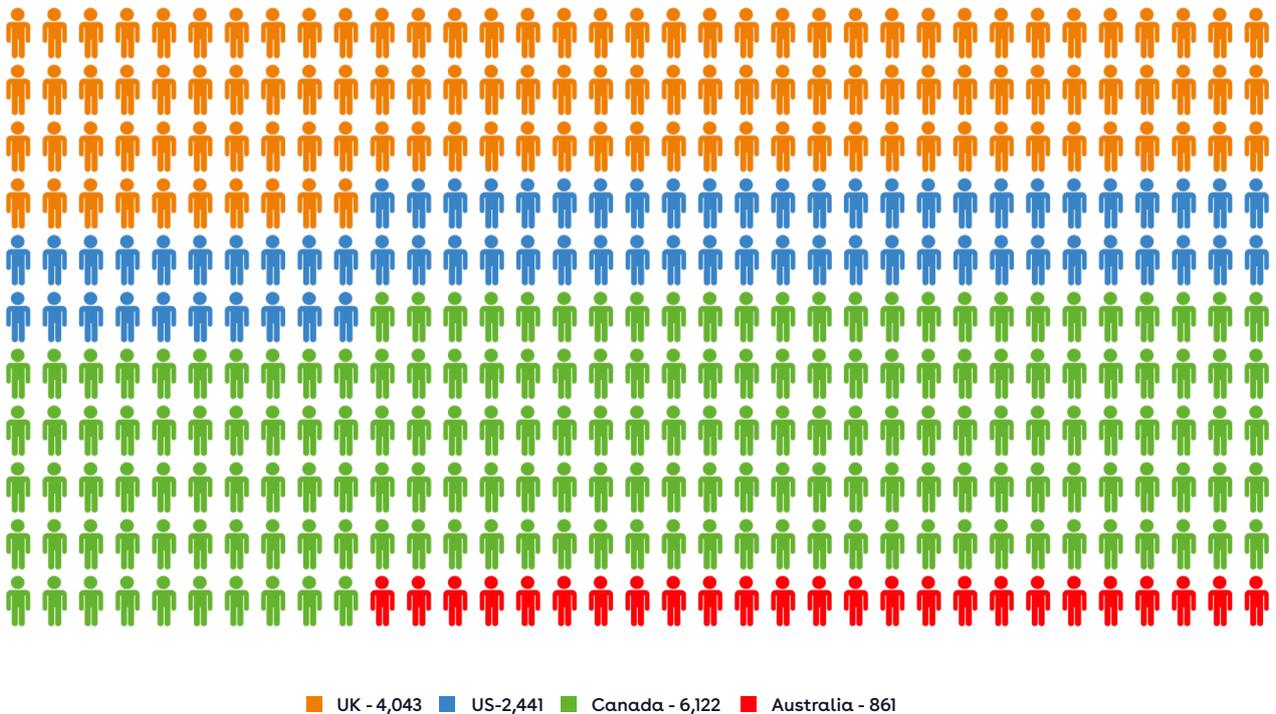
DESTINATION MARKET DEMAND SHARE OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS (2021-2022)



Source - IQ Demand Tracker, February 2022

WHERE NIGERIAN STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING TO STUDY ABROAD

This data from our IQ Demand Tracker shows Nigerian student demand as of February 2022 for the top four destination countries



Source - IQ Demand Tracker, February 2022



POSTGRADUATE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES ARE KEY

Domestic instability may be an influencing factor for Nigerian students and their families when choosing to study abroad. Enrollment into UK, US, Canadian and Australian universities can often be tied to Nigeria's GDP. A recession in 2020 and Naira (Nigeria's currency) devaluation is pushing Nigerian students to seek better opportunities outside of the country. And while COVID-19 and its accompanying travel restrictions caused a short-term decline in applications from Nigerian students to the UK, the UK government recorded a surge in student visas late last year as aforementioned. Ultimately, studying abroad is seen as an investment, and the cost of education will need to be recovered either through professional work placements, paid internships (particularly for postgraduate students), or simply made more affordable with flexible payment of tuition fees (installments) and provision of more scholarships.

The Nigerian government has devised several scholarship award programs for postgraduate students wanting to study in destinations abroad. One notable example is the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), which was established in 1973 and collaborates with 18 British universities⁵. And for the 2022/2023 award, applications are limited to some select PTDF partner universities in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Malaysia⁶. The British Council predicts that Nigeria will be an important market for postgraduate students in the future globally⁷. As one of the fastest growing markets, at the postgraduate level, Nigerian students travelling abroad to study are projected to dramatically increase in the coming years, overtaking India by having the most outbound postgraduate students in the world by 2025⁸. This is reiterated by Rohan Rego, IDP Connect's Associate Director Destination Management, Middle East and Africa who explains "The sheer determination and resilience of Nigerian students and their academic aspirations towards achieving their global ambitions is evident with the growing number of students opting to study abroad year on year." Using the current Nigerian student community and alumni to endorse institutions as well as share success stories may be a useful way for Canadian, US, UK, and Australian universities to recruit more Nigerian students.



AFFORDABILITY OF CANADA WINS OVER NIGERIAN STUDENTS

Our IQ Demand Tracker shows that Canada is the most popular destination for Nigerian students, and with rising inflation, affordability makes studying in Canada an extremely attractive proposition for Nigerian students and their families. Canada's reasonably priced tuition fees, post-study work opportunities, perception as a tolerant, welcoming society and relatively straight-forward immigration process all make it appealing to Nigerian students. In 2020, Canada launched the [Nigeria Student Express](#), a program specifically designed to expedite the study permit application process, reducing it from eight weeks to a 20-day processing standard for study permit applicants. The UK, US and Australia could adopt similar schemes to attract Nigerian students, making lengthy and cumbersome immigration processes swift. In addition, they could consider offering dedicated scholarships for Nigerian students with the objective to make it more affordable.



INTEREST TO STUDY ABROAD COMES PRIMARILY FROM LAGOS AND MEDICINE IS THE TOP SUBJECT

As more Nigerian students are granted study visas and come to the UK, US, Canada and Australia to study abroad, institutions should try to diversify their market by targeting not only Lagos, but also other areas of the country. Our IQ Demand Tracker shows medicine is the subject with the highest share of demand for Nigerian students in the UK, US, Canada, and Australia. This is likely to be driven by high demand for doctors in destination countries as well as the fact that Nigerian students are looking for better work opportunities after graduation where they can choose to apply for residency and receive a higher salary.

Lagos, formerly the capital of Nigeria and the country's financial hub, is the largest source city of Nigerian student demand for study abroad, as our IQ Demand Tracker illustrates. Following the overwhelming demand from Lagos, other notable source cities include Suleja and Abuja.



LOOKING AHEAD

As the world recovers post-pandemic, Nigerian students will continue to study abroad, choosing key destinations such as the UK, US, Canada and Australia to complete their higher education. With demand outstripping the number of places at universities at home and an ever-expanding youthful population, Nigeria will be an important market for years to come comparable only to China and India in its scope. Rohan Rego, further adds “The country, with its significant youth population of 42% and a growing middle class, presents an exciting opportunity on the horizon to foster the growth of international student recruitment.” To remain competitive as well as attract and engage potential students, it is vital that universities understand the requirements and factors that specifically motivate Nigerian students. Affordability, post-study work opportunities, multiculturalism and an easy visa process rank highest amongst the concerns for Nigerian students studying abroad. Marketing strategies centered around these drivers, as well as tapping into an engaged alumni and sharing success stories, will inspire the next generation of Nigerian international students.

ENDNOTES

1. United Nations Population Fund, [Nigeria](#) (2021)
2. Government of UK, [International Education Strategy: 2021 update: Supporting recovery, driving growth](#) (2021)
3. Government of UK, [Why do people come to the UK to study](#) (2021)
4. Government of USA, [A Renewed U.S. Commitment to International Education](#) (2021)
5. Carnegie Endowment Fund for International Peace, [West African Elites' Spending on UK Schools and Universities: A Closer Look](#) (2021)
6. PTDF, [Guidelines - overseas postgraduate scholarship scheme for universities in the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Malaysia](#) (2022)
7. Study International, [Nigeria projected to be one of the world's fastest-growing markets for postgraduate studies](#) (2015)
8. The British Council, [Postgraduate student mobility trends to 2024](#) (2014)



GET IN TOUCH

We have recently commenced operations in Nigeria with a physical office opening in Lagos this Spring. In the meantime, to find out more information regarding sub-disciplines of subjects in demand and where regional demand is coming from within Nigeria, reach out to us.

[CONTACT US](#)