

Influence of Stable Institutional Policies On Educational Planning Practices of Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract: *This study examined the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 4,531 academic staff from three public universities: University of Port Harcourt (1,416), Rivers State University (1,603), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (1,512). A sample of 453 academic staff representing 10% of the population was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Institutional Policy Stability and Educational Planning Practices Questionnaire (IPSEPPQ), a self-structured instrument validated by experts and tested for reliability yielding a coefficient of 0.86. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions, while simple regression and independent t-test were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that stable institutional policies influence educational planning practices to a high extent (Grand Mean = 3.09). A statistically significant positive relationship was found between institutional policy stability and educational planning practices ($r = 0.62$, $r^2 = 0.38$, $F\text{-cal.} = 168.45 > F\text{-crit.} = 3.84$). No significant difference was found between federal and state universities in their perception of the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices ($t\text{-cal} = 1.45 < t\text{-crit} = 1.96$). The study recommended that university management should entrench long-term policy frameworks that resist arbitrary changes and that both federal and state governments should institutionalise mechanisms that guarantee policy continuity in public universities.*

Keywords: Stable institutional policies, educational planning practices, public universities, Rivers State, policy consistency, Federal Universities, State Universities

INTRODUCTION

Educational planning constitutes the backbone of institutional development in any university system. It involves a systematic and deliberate process of setting goals, allocating resources, formulating strategies, and monitoring outcomes to ensure that educational institutions achieve their mission and objectives (Akpan, 2017; Okoroma, 2000). For public universities in Nigeria, the quality and sustainability of educational planning are often contingent upon the stability of the institutional policies that govern academic, financial, and administrative activities. Policy stability, in this context, refers to the degree to which institutional rules, regulations, and frameworks remain consistent and predictable over time, enabling administrators and academic staff to plan effectively without frequent disruptions (Biondi & Russo, 2022).

The Nigerian higher education system is characterised by a complex dual structure in which federal and state governments each fund and manage their own sets of universities (Odukoya, Bowale, & Okunlola, 2018; Okonta, & Nkedishu 2024). The National Universities Commission (NUC) serves as the apex regulatory body accrediting and overseeing the standards of all universities irrespective of their ownership (Adeyemi & Adu, 2015). However, significant disparities exist between federal and state universities in funding levels, governance stability, and the consistency with which institutional policies are maintained (Amadi, 2001; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2013). These disparities have consequential effects on the educational planning practices of universities and, ultimately, on their academic output and national development contributions.

Public universities in Rivers State provide a compelling system for examining these issues. The state hosts three public universities: the University of Port Harcourt (a federal institution), Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (both state institutions). Each of these institutions operates under different governance regimes and funding patterns, making Rivers State a microcosm of the broader national tensions in Nigerian higher education. Frequent leadership changes, policy reversals, industrial actions, and underfunding have historically disrupted planning efforts in these institutions (Okoroma, 2003; Eru, Ogi, & Ikpe, 2022; Omeni, & Nkedishu, 2021), creating an urgent need for empirical investigation into the relationship between policy stability and educational planning.

Internationally, scholarly evidence consistently affirms that institutional policy stability is a cornerstone of effective educational planning. Biondi and Russo (2022) demonstrated that when universities integrate strategic planning with performance management through coherent, consistent policy frameworks, they achieve greater alignment between institutional objectives and operational activities. Similarly, Hinton (2012) argued that stable strategic frameworks are essential for integrating budgetary resources with academic priorities to drive institutional excellence. In the African context, however, political interference, volatile funding environments, and leadership instability continue to undermine policy consistency in higher education institutions (Zezeza, 2022; Jansen, 2023).

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Despite the recognised importance of policy stability, empirical research specifically examining its influence on educational planning practices in Nigerian universities remains scarce. Most existing studies have focused on the challenges of policy implementation (Okoroma, 2001; Odukoya et al., 2018; Ibrahim, 2018; Ataine, & Nkedishu, 2017) without specifically investigating the extent to which policy stability shapes planning practices across different categories of public universities. This gap forms the rationale for the present study, which seeks to provide evidence-based insights into how stable institutional policies influence educational planning in public universities in Rivers State and whether significant differences exist between federal and state institutions in this regard.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Rivers State, like many institutions across Nigeria, seem to grappled with persistent policy instability arising from frequent changes in government leadership, erratic funding releases, unresolved industrial disputes, and inconsistent regulatory directives from oversight bodies. These disruptions have adversely affected long-term planning, resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluation processes within the universities (Ogunode & Samuel, 2020; Adekunle, 2023). The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) embarked on strikes for a cumulative period of 1,587 days between 2010 and 2023 alone, largely attributable to failures in policy consistency regarding funding, staff welfare, and institutional development (Adekunle, 2023). Such disruptions not only interrupt academic calendars but also create uncertainty that fundamentally undermines strategic educational planning.

While it is generally understood that policy instability negatively affects higher education, there is insufficient empirical evidence specifically examining the extent of stable institutional policies' influence on educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State, or whether differences in this influence exist between federal and state universities. This study, therefore, seeks to address this problem by generating empirical evidence to inform policy and management decisions.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices of public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study determined the extent to which stable institutional policies influence educational planning practices and investigated whether a significant difference exists in this influence between federal and state universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent does stable institutional policy influence educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State?

2. Is there a significant difference in the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices between federal and state universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

From the questions raised, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. Stable institutional policy has no significant influence on educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices between federal and state universities in Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Educational planning is broadly defined as the systematic process of applying analytical reasoning to the process of educational development with the view to making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of students and societies (Aghenta, 1993; Akpan, 2000). It encompasses long-term planning, resource allocation, programme development, implementation strategies, and monitoring and evaluation processes. Effective educational planning is not a mere administrative exercise; it is a strategic management activity that requires predictability, continuity, and a coherent policy environment (Biondi & Russo, 2022; Dickeson, 2010).

Institutional policy stability, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the policies governing a university's operations remain consistent, predictable, and resistant to arbitrary changes over time. Policy stability creates an enabling environment that allows administrators to make long-term decisions, allocate resources rationally, and maintain momentum in programme implementation without the disruption that accompanies frequent policy reversals (Odukoya et al., 2018; Nkedishu, 2020; Zeleza, 2022). In contrast, policy instability generates uncertainty and erodes stakeholder confidence, leading to suboptimal planning outcomes (Ogunode & Samuel, 2020; Ibrahim, 2018).

Policy Stability and Long-Term Educational Planning

Research consistently demonstrates that stable policies enhance long-term educational planning. Biondi and Russo (2022), in their analysis of Italian universities, established that the integration of strategic planning and performance management is only effective when underpinned by consistent, multi-year policy frameworks. The University Strategic Plan (USP) which guides operations across multiple academic years can only yield its intended benefits when institutional policies remain stable enough to allow for sequential implementation of planned activities. Jansen (2023) similarly found that transformation efforts in South African universities are most vulnerable

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during periods of executive turnover and policy instability, emphasising the need to embed institutional objectives in formal, stable governance frameworks.

In the Nigerian Akpan (2017) observed that educational planners frequently produce long-term plans with ambitious goals and objectives, yet these plans often fail to yield results because policy changes between administration cycles disrupt implementation. The failure of successive national education programmes such as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) of 1976 and later reform efforts was largely attributable to lack of policy continuity across administrations (Okoroma, 2001; Taiwo, 1980). This pattern, as documented by Eru et al. (2022), continues to manifest in Nigerian public universities, where strategic plans are often abandoned or significantly altered with each change of vice-chancellor or government leadership.

Policy Consistency and Implementation of Planning Strategies

Policy consistency is widely acknowledged as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of educational planning strategies (Akpan, 2000; Babalola, 2003). When policies remain consistent, administrators, academic staff, and other stakeholders can align their activities with institutional plans, ensuring that strategies are implemented as designed. Conversely, inconsistent policies create confusion, reduce commitment among implementers, and generate resistance that undermines planning outcomes (Odukoya et al., 2018).

Javed et al. (2024), examining resource allocation in South Asian universities, found that policy consistency significantly influences academic research efforts and institutional progress. Their findings corroborate earlier work by Hinton (2012), who argued that consistent policy frameworks enable universities to integrate information from various budgetary and academic units into coherent strategic priorities. In Nigeria, the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme suffered from inconsistency in policy direction between levels of government, resulting in uneven outcomes across states (Bassey, Ekpo, & Edet, 2008; UNESCO, 2023).

Policy Changes and Disruption to Educational Planning

The relationship between frequent policy changes and disruption to educational planning is well-documented in the literature. In Nigeria, political leaders often drive policy directions in response to their administrative agendas, leading to shifts in policy with each administration (Odukoya et al., 2018; Federal Ministry of Education, 2024). These shifts create an environment of perpetual uncertainty in which educational planners cannot commit to long-term strategies, resulting in what Ogunode and Samuel (2020) describe as a cycle of abandoned plans and incomplete projects.

The OECD (2020) emphasised that policy evaluation and monitoring are only effective when there is a coherent whole-of-government strategy that ensures consistency in policy direction. Without such consistency, monitoring efforts become disjointed, and evaluation results are rarely incorporated into future planning cycles. In the South African context, Jansen (2023) documented how transformation policies in universities were frequently deprioritised during institutional

crises, reinforcing the argument that policy instability fundamentally undermines planning processes. For Rivers State public universities, where leadership transitions and funding volatility are common, the planning implications of policy instability are particularly severe (Okoroma, 2003; Amadi, 2001).

Stable Policies and Resource Allocation in Educational Planning

Resource allocation is a central component of educational planning, and its effectiveness is heavily contingent upon the stability of the policies governing financial management (Dickeson, 2010; Caldwell, 1994). Stable institutional policies enable universities to develop multi-year budgets, prioritise programmes systematically, and ensure that resources are directed toward activities that advance the institution's strategic mission (SCUP, 2024; Biondi & Russo, 2022). Massy (1996) argued that appropriate and equitable resource allocation can only be achieved through long-range, holistic strategic planning grounded in consistent institutional policies.

In contrast, policy instability in Nigerian public universities has been linked to chronic underfunding, misallocation of resources, and inadequate planning for capital projects (Ogbondah, 2010; Mohammed & Gbenu, 2007). Javed et al. (2024) further demonstrated that resource allocation efficiency is a key driver of academic research productivity and institutional advancement. The differential funding structures of federal and state universities in Nigeria, where federal universities generally receive more stable funding through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and federal government subventions, suggest that resource-related planning practices may differ between the two categories (Statista, 2023; Myschoolinsight, 2025).

Policy Stability and Monitoring and Evaluation Processes

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are critical components of the educational planning cycle, enabling institutions to assess progress, identify challenges, and make evidence-based adjustments to their plans (OECD, 2020; Akpan, 2017). However, effective M&E requires a stable policy environment that defines clear indicators, establishes accountability structures, and ensures continuity of data collection over time. When policies change frequently, M&E systems become fragmented, baselines shift, and comparisons across planning periods become unreliable (Trettel & Yeager, 2011; SCUP, 2024).

The AAUP (2022) emphasised that faculty governance in universities should include a substantive role in long-term planning, budgeting, and evaluation. This principle of shared governance, which is an important mechanism for institutionalising M&E practices, can only function effectively when institutional policies are stable enough to support sustained participatory structures. In Nigerian universities, the disruption of academic calendars through strikes and policy reversals has repeatedly undermined M&E processes, making it difficult to assess the true effectiveness of planning interventions (Adekunle, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Federal versus State Universities: A Comparative Perspective

The distinction between federal and state universities in Nigeria has important implications for educational planning. Federal universities are funded by the federal government through the Ministry of Education and benefit from TETFund interventions for infrastructure, research, and academic development (Myschoolinsight, 2025). State universities are primarily funded by state governments, whose financial capacity varies widely and is subject to political and economic volatility (Higherstrategy.com, 2023). Despite both categories being regulated by the NUC, the governance contexts and funding predictability differ significantly (Statista, 2023).

Higherstrategy.com (2023) noted that both federal and state universities are controlled by the NUC for accreditation and standards purposes, but the appointing authorities for vice-chancellors and governing councils differ, creating different governance dynamics. Clacified.com (2025) observed that federal universities generally attract more stable funding and better resources than their state counterparts, which can translate into more predictable planning environments. However, empirical evidence on whether these structural differences produce significantly different planning practices remains limited, underscoring the need for studies such as the present one.

METHOD

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State. The population comprised 4,531 academic staff from three public universities: University of Port Harcourt (1,416), Rivers State University (1,603), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (1,512). A sample size of 453 academic staff, representing 10% of the population, was selected using a simple random sampling technique through stratification and balloting to ensure equal representation.

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled Institutional Policy Stability and Educational Planning Practices Questionnaire (IPSEPPQ), consisting of two sections: demographic information and five items measuring institutional policy stability on a 4-point Likert scale (VHE = 4, HE = 3, LE = 2, VLE = 1). The instrument was validated by experts in educational administration and planning, and its reliability was established using the test-retest method, yielding a coefficient of 0.86 via Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Data were analysed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions with a criterion mean of 2.50, while independent t-test and simple regression were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does stable institutional policy influence educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Influence of Stable Institutional Policy

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Stable policies enhance long-term educational planning	3.12	0.78	High Extent
2.	Consistency in policies improves implementation of planning strategies	3.05	0.81	High Extent
3.	Frequent policy changes disrupt educational planning	2.98	0.84	High Extent
4.	Stable policies promote effective resource allocation in planning	3.20	0.75	High Extent
5.	Institutional policy stability supports monitoring and evaluation processes	3.10	0.79	High Extent
	Grand Mean	3.09	0.79	High Extent

The results presented in Table 1 show that all the items assessing the influence of stable institutional policy recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a high extent of influence. Specifically, stable policies enhancing long-term educational planning had a mean score of 3.12, while consistency in policies improving implementation of planning strategies had a mean of 3.05. Similarly, respondents agreed that frequent policy changes disrupt educational planning ($\bar{x} = 2.98$), stable policies promote effective resource allocation ($\bar{x} = 3.20$), and institutional policy stability supports monitoring and evaluation processes ($\bar{x} = 3.10$). The grand mean of 3.09 further confirms that stable institutional policies influence educational planning practices to a high extent in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices between federal and state universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Difference between Federal and State Universities

University Type	N	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Dev.	Mean Diff.
Federal Universities	240	3.15	0.76	0.13
State Universities	213	3.02	0.82	

The results in Table 2 indicate that academic staff in federal universities had a mean score of 3.15, while their counterparts in state universities had a mean score of 3.02. Both mean scores are above the criterion mean of 2.50, suggesting that respondents from both categories of universities

perceived the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices to be of high extent. Although federal universities recorded a slightly higher mean score than state universities, the difference between the two groups ($3.15 - 3.02 = 0.13$) is relatively small. This suggests that the perception of the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices is largely similar across both federal and state universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 1: Stable institutional policy has no significant influence on educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis of Stable Institutional Policy and Educational Planning Practices

Variable	N	r	r ²	F-cal	F-crit	Decision
Institutional Policy Stability	453	0.62	0.38	168.45	3.84	Reject H ₀

The result presented in Table 3 shows that the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.62$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between stable institutional policy and educational planning practices. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.38$) implies that approximately 38% of the variation in educational planning practices can be explained by institutional policy stability. Furthermore, the calculated F-value ($F\text{-cal} = 168.45$) is significantly higher than the critical F-value ($F\text{-crit} = 3.84$) at the 0.05 level of significance. Based on this, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that stable institutional policy has a statistically significant influence on educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices between federal and state universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Independent t-test Analysis difference in the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices between federal and state universities

Variable	N	Mean (\bar{x})	Std. Dev.	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Federal Universities	240	3.15	0.76	339	1.45	1.96	Accept H ₀
State Universities	213	3.02	0.82				

The result in Table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value ($t\text{-cal} = 1.45$) is less than the critical t-value ($t\text{-crit} = 1.96$) at the 0.05 level of significance with 339 degrees of freedom. Based on this comparison, the null hypothesis is accepted. Although the mean score for federal universities ($\bar{x} = 3.15$) is slightly higher than that of state universities ($\bar{x} = 3.02$), the difference is not statistically significant. This implies that there is no significant difference in the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices between federal and state universities in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The finding that stable institutional policies influence educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent (Grand Mean = 3.09) is consistent with a substantial body of literature affirming the centrality of policy stability to effective institutional planning. Biondi and Russo (2022) demonstrated that in public universities, sustainable educational planning is achievable only when institutional policies provide a coherent multi-year framework within which administrators and academic staff can operate. The current findings align with this position, as respondents from all three universities indicated that stable policies enhance long-term planning, support resource allocation, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems.

The specific finding that stable policies promote effective resource allocation ($\bar{x} = 3.20$) as the highest-rated item is particularly instructive. It aligns with the argument of Dickeson (2010) and Massy (1996) that resource allocation decisions in universities are most rational and effective when driven by stable strategic priorities. Javed et al. (2024) further confirmed that resource allocation efficiency is a key predictor of academic advancement in universities, underscoring the importance of stable policy frameworks in ensuring that resources are channelled toward institutional development objectives. In the Nigerian context, Ogbondah (2010) observed that the misallocation of university funds is often compounded by the absence of stable policy guidance, making resource planning particularly chaotic in periods of policy flux.

The finding that frequent policy changes disrupt educational planning ($\bar{x} = 2.98$) corroborates the positions of Ogunode and Samuel (2020) and Odukoya et al. (2018), who documented the negative consequences of policy inconsistency on educational programme implementation in Nigeria. The disruptions caused by changes in government leadership, reversals of institutional policies, and unresolved industrial disputes have been well-catalogued in the Nigerian higher education literature. Adekunle (2023) reported that the cumulative 1,587 days of ASUU strikes between 2010 and 2023 were a direct consequence of policy failures in funding and institutional governance, further illustrating how policy instability translates into practical disruptions of educational planning cycles.

The significant positive relationship established between stable institutional policies and educational planning practices ($r = 0.62$, $F\text{-cal} = 168.45 > F\text{-crit} = 3.84$) provides empirical evidence that goes beyond the descriptive observations reported in much of the existing Nigerian literature. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.38$) indicating that 38% of the variance in educational planning practices is attributable to institutional policy stability is a substantial finding with practical implications. This suggests that a large proportion of the challenges in educational planning in public universities in Rivers State can be addressed by strengthening the stability of institutional policies. This finding resonates with the conclusions of the SCUP (2024), which emphasised that strategic planning in higher education must be grounded in consistent institutional policies to translate vision into sustained execution.

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The acceptance of the null hypothesis regarding differences between federal and state universities ($t\text{-cal} = 1.45 < t\text{-crit} = 1.96$) is a nuanced finding that warrants careful interpretation. While structural differences between federal and state universities in Nigeria are well-documented (Myschoolinsight, 2025; Higherstrategy.com, 2023), the present finding suggests that academic staff in both categories perceive the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning similarly. This may be explained by the fact that both federal and state universities operate under the same NUC regulatory framework and face similar governance challenges arising from political interference and funding volatility (Higherstrategy.com, 2023; Odukoya et al., 2018). The slightly higher mean score for federal universities (3.15 vs. 3.02) is consistent with the observed funding advantage of federal institutions, but this advantage does not appear to translate into a statistically significant difference in planning outcomes, suggesting that policy stability itself rather than funding source is the primary determinant of planning effectiveness.

Taken together, these findings have important implications for higher education governance in Rivers State and Nigeria more broadly. They reinforce the argument of Akpan (2017) that educational planning in Nigeria is fundamentally hampered by policy instability and that addressing this instability is a prerequisite for achieving the educational development goals enshrined in national frameworks such as the National Policy on Education and the Education for Change Strategic Plan. The findings also contribute to the broader international literature on institutional governance and educational planning by providing empirical evidence from a sub-Saharan African context that has been underrepresented in comparative studies of policy stability and higher education outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of stable institutional policies on educational planning practices of public universities in Rivers State. The results of the study led to the following conclusions: stable institutional policies significantly influence educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent, with policy stability particularly enhancing long-term educational planning, resource allocation, implementation of planning strategies, and monitoring and evaluation processes. Furthermore, approximately 38% of the variation in educational planning practices in public universities in Rivers State is attributable to institutional policy stability, confirming the critical role of policy consistency in shaping planning outcomes. The study also concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between federal and state universities in Rivers State in the extent to which stable institutional policies influence their educational planning practices, indicating that the challenge of policy instability and its effects on planning are common to both categories of public universities in the state.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

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1. University management in Rivers State should develop and entrench comprehensive, long-term institutional policy frameworks embedded in governance instruments such as the University Charter and Statutes, ensuring that core educational planning policies are protected from arbitrary changes occasioned by administrative transitions.
2. Both the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Rivers State Government should institutionalise mechanisms for policy continuity in public universities, including the establishment of long-term planning commissions that transcend individual administrations and ensure consistency in the implementation of university development plans.
3. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should strengthen its regulatory role in ensuring that public universities maintain stable operational policies, particularly in areas of resource allocation, academic calendar management, and staff welfare, to reduce the frequency of policy-induced disruptions to educational planning.
4. University administrators in both federal and state universities in Rivers State should invest in building robust monitoring and evaluation systems that are integrated with institutional strategic plans and sustained across administrative transitions, ensuring that planning processes are evidence-driven and responsive to institutional performance data.

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

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