

ESTUDIOS

UNDERGRADUATES' OPINIONS ABOUT THE STATUS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT THE AMBROSE ALLI UNIVERSITY, EKPOMA – NIGERIA

OPINIONES DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD AMBROSE ALLI DE EKPOMA (NIGERIA) ACERCA DE LOS SERVICIOS DE APOYO AL ESTUDIANTE

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduates' perception of the status of student support services at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma – Nigeria, was surveyed with the aid of a questionnaire entitled Student Support Services Questionnaire. Information was elicited from 500 students based on sex, residency and level of study. The study found that majority of the students perceived the presence of student support services in the university as grossly inadequate. The study therefore, recommended that Admission, Registration, Health, Hostel and other support services should be improved to enable students to benefit holistically from university education.

Key Words: Student support services, Higher Education; student's opinions on support services.

RESUMEN

La percepción de los estudiantes acerca de los servicios de apoyo en la Universidad de Ambrosi Alli de Nigeria se recogió a través de un cuestionario elaborado a tal efecto, aplicado a 500 estudiantes. La mayoría de los encuestados reconocieron que la presencia de los servicios de apoyo era altamente ina-

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decuada. El estudio recomienda, por tanto la mejora de los servicios de apoyo para que los estudiantes puedan beneficiarse de forma holística de la orientación universitaria. Antes de presentar la metodología y los resultados de este estudio, se describe brevemente la situación de las universidades nigerianas y se realiza una fundamentación teórica sobre los servicios de apoyo al alumnado.

Introduction

Universities in Nigeria are set up to give the students who enroll in them very sound and qualitative education. But research (i.e., Aluede, 2001; Akinade, 1993; Nwokwule, 1992) does indicate that many of the Nigerian universities today are finding it increasingly difficult to provide quality education to their students because of the many attendant problems they face. These difficulties are largely due to the problems, which students who enroll in them face, or cause irrespective of their home backgrounds.

Today in Nigeria, students' militancy, secret cult activities, incidents of sexual harassment, rape, examination malpractices, gunrunning, and several others social vices are fast becoming visible perennial problems of significance. These problems have assumed such enormity and significance that it seems appropriate to think that there is a fast emerging culture in Nigerian universities, which is a culture of violence (Denga, 1982, 1993). Thus, if there is anything predictable among Nigerian universities is the fact that the doors of Nigerian universities could at least be shut down once in every academic year because of students' violence. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that because of the near permanence of violence in Nigerian universities, the academic system might grind to a halt. Already, the incessant closure of university campuses at the wake of campus violence is affecting the scope of our curriculum and the quality of our students, and degrees awarded in Nigerian universities. Which has now led to the situation whereby Nigerian degrees are beginning to be discriminated against in most International tertiary institutions and the labour market (Aluede, 1998).

Student support services are an integral part of a successful university administration. This is because, it affects the general welfare of the students, for whose sake, the university is set up. Hence, university system anywhere in the world, outlines among its primary responsibilities the commitment to fulfilling specified needs of students beyond the secondary level of education. But, research (i.e., Aluede, 1995; Denga, 1982; Tawari; 1986; Venables; 1978) indicates that many students within the school system face some difficulties in the transition from secondary level to university irrespective of their age and background. As such, students lack the experience in working on their own, in developing and maintaining a balanced study schedule, in coping with the stresses and strains imposed by the expanded curriculum, adjusting to the university atmosphere and the permissive and laissez-faire environment of the university system (Tawari, 1986).

Student support services are essentially aimed at the intellectual, psychological, socio-cultural, and physical development of the student. In addition, they are provided to facilitate the optimal co-ordination and integration of the academic and non-academic needs of students. However, research (i.e., Lut & Jung, 1980) reveals that problems abound with respect to the adequacy and effectiveness of the available support services. Among the identified prohibitive factors tending to neutralize the effectiveness of the support services are: the unrealistic ratio of the available services to the student population; lack of awareness of the full array of services offered; physical location and proximity of the support services to

the students' operational areas; and lack of co-ordination of such services with other aspects of the instructional programmes.

A search of related literature (cf Arikewuyo, 1999; Tawari, 1986) reveals that universities commonly provide twelve student support services for their students. One of these is Admission service, which Heap (1975) reports is a means of ensuring an adequate supply of able students in a matter of first importance to institutions of higher education. Admission services also assist in enlightening potential students on the needed intellectual ability to gain admission into the university. It further enlightens them on the specific requirements to the university, which is 5 credits at one or two sittings in the ordinary level subjects for those moving directly from secondary school to the university or 2 advanced level and 3 ordinary level subjects in one or two sittings for those going through direct entry.

Record service, which is the gathering of data to expedite action and to furnish information about students or former students, is another support service. Record service, therefore has many benefits, primarily to ensure fair purpose towards students (Yalokwu; 1992). Sometimes too, employers may want to verify the claims of employees with regards to their educational background. Through record service of institutions, this can be verified (Uadia 2001). Record service therefore, further achieves the following purposes in the university: to record achievement and growth of a student during his/her school career; to provide information for preparing reports by boards and others; to report to parents on progress of children at school; to provide data for research; to provide information needed for higher former students; and to provide information needed by teachers and counselors in working with students. In all, Anderson and Vandyke (1972) classified students' records within the educational system based on purposes they serve as follows: (a) keep pupils' cumulative record (b) keep attendance record (c) keep registration and classification record (d) keep permanent school record (e) reports to parents (f) reports to college and employs and (g) keep consumable records for day-to-day management and operation.

Orientation service is the process of helping freshmen to overcome some problems in their transition from secondary school to university level irrespective of their background, as all individuals within the university system cannot adapt to all climates without a form of freshmen orientation (Denga, 1993; Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989). Similarly Rossi (cited in Uadia, 2001) remarked that orientation service provides an intervention into the process by which new students are socialized into the formal and informal as well as classroom and out of classroom aspects of a university.

Financial aid scheme according to Orvig (1971) is an investment in students' attainment of their full personality. However, the goals of students' financial aid programmes are directed at reducing the financial barriers of attending and staying in colleges (Sanford, 1980; Yalokwu, 1992).

A major responsibility of a university is related to the subsequent placement of the students in the social, economic and educational life of the community. Hence, the university should maintain contacts and dialogue with business, industry and labour representatives (Uadia, 2001).

Housing and food services are integral part of the educational programme of the university system, which are concerned with the educational, personal and social development of students (Peterson, 1968; Uadia, 2001; Yalokwu, 1992). Absence of these according to Aluede (1995), Aluede and Aluede (1999), Aluede (2001) and Yalokwu (1992) may affect student's adjustment to campus environment.

Since students are recruited from different backgrounds, there is therefore the urgent need in each of the Nigerian universities to have a functional health centre on the campuses. This according to Arikewuyo (1999), Boynton (1949) and Tawari (1986) is a condition of well-being, which embraces physical, mental, emotional and health condition of students. It also controls to a very large extent, personal and social behaviour of all students.

Student activities and conduct service which also refers to student behaviour, is an important area in student life, which must receive a great deal of attention in higher education. This attention should centre on the perennial problems of youth. The perennial problems of the youth especially in Nigerian universities are campus cult activities, incessant sexual harassment/ rape, student unrest, insecurity, alcoholism and drug addiction, examination malpractices, gun-running, etc. These problems bring the students into open conflict with their fellow students, the faculty and/or members of the university community (Denga, 1993; Froley & Okonkwo, 1982; Hood & Arameaux, 1990). These concerns can be strengthened through organised joint action and by the provision of opportunities for students to choose freely from a wide range of activities (Schiralli & Williams, 1993).

Student counseling service assists students in coping with emotional problems as a result of educational issues (Yalokwu, 1992). This service serves as a means of providing help to students as individuals or groups with the target of meeting their personal and educational needs for development (Okoye, Adejumo & Achebe, 1990. Olayinka, 1993; Uadia, 2001). Which made Aluede (1995) and Aluede (1997) to advocate that conflict and violence related tendencies in student conduct and behaviour on campuses could be eradicated if counselling services are stepped up

Academic advisement service, which is the process of providing information to students, thus providing him/her with a diversity of choice in areas of career, and vocational/occupational decisions is another fundamental aspect, which the university must account for (Koe-rin, 1991; Olayinka, 1993). Nonetheless, academic advisement is also geared towards choice of relevant subject courses, interpretation of scores and grades and possible job opportunities (Aluede & Maliki, 2002; Hood & Arameaux, 1990; Maliki 2001; Yalokwu, 1992).

Support services generally help to overcome all problems on campus (Delworth et al, 1990; Upcraft, et al 1989). As such it is very necessary to have them on campus (Upcraft et al, 1989).

From the foregoing, it is appropriate to stress that inadequacy or absence of student support services on campuses are very likely to pose a serious threat to the smooth running of academic programs. Which perhaps is evidenced by the perennial incidents of student unrest, sexual harassment, rape, cult activities, etc, in Nigerian Universities (Aluede 1995). Thus, the import of this paper therefore is to assess the status of student support services at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma – Nigeria. Specifically, this study will attempt to resolve the following question:

1. Would undergraduates at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma – Nigeria, consider student support services as necessary in helping them to overcome their personal problems?
2. What student support services do undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma perceive as existing in the university?
3. Do undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, perceive the available student support services at the university as adequate?

Definition of key words

- i. Student support services: refer to these administrative and supervisory activities and services order than the classroom instructions, which are provided for the academic, intellectual, psychological, social, cultural and physical development of the students.
- ii. Undergraduates: the category of students within the University, who are pursuing a course of study leading to the award of a Bachelor's degree.

Method of Study

This study employed the descriptive (survey) method. The survey approach was preferred because it was not possible to elicit information from every member of the population (Vockell & Asher, 1995).

The population of the study comprised all the matriculated full-time undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma Nigeria, and the total enrolment figure during the 1999/2000 stands at Ten thousand, two hundred and one (10201) students.

The sample was made up of five hundred undergraduates that comprised two hundred and fifty males and two hundred and fifty females drawn through simple random sampling method. The adequateness of this sample size is supported by Kerlinger's (1986) assertion that when samples are carefully drawn, a sample of 600 to 700 research participants can give a clear picture of the characteristic of a population of a community of about 100,000 in terms of its values, beliefs and customs.

An instrument, a questionnaire, entitled *Students Support Services Questionnaire*, designed by the current investigators, which was an adaptation of the earlier ones by Fitzgerald (1962) and Tawari (1986) was used to elicit data for this study. The instrument which comprised of twenty six items divided into three sections: Necessity, Existence and Adequacy of student support services was content validated by four experts in the field of guidance and counseling, higher education and educational management. The instrument yielded a split-half reliability co-efficient of 0.87

Results

1. Would undergraduates at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma Nigeria, consider student support services as necessary in helping them to overcome their personal problems?

The answer to this question is provided in Table 1.

It can be concluded that undergraduates at the Ambrose Alli University consider student support services as necessary in helping them make necessary adjustments and in overcoming the social – personal and educational problems, which they are likely to face while attending the university.

2. What student support services do undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University perceive as existing in the university?

The result is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 1: Undergraduates' Perception of the Necessity of Student Support Services in overcoming personal problems.

S/N	Items	Response category	
		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1.	Student support services are necessary in the university to help solve problems of scholastic inefficiency	450 (90%)	50 (10%)
2.	Student support services are necessary in the university to help students overcome personality defects	401 (80%)	99 (20%)
3.	Student support services exist within the university, to help students overcome their personality defects, which can interfere with their personal happiness	470 (94%)	30 (6%)
4.	Student support services exist within the university in furtherance of students' competence in their academic quest	480 (96%)	20 (4%)
5.	Student support services exist within the university for the furtherance of students' social contacts	460 (92%)	40 (8%)

TABLE 2: Undergraduates' Perception of the Existence of Student Support Services in Ambrose Alli Univeristy, Ekpoma.

S/N	Items	Response category	
		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1.	Admissions services (e.g., specification of admission requirements, screening and selection procedure) are available to students.	400 (80%)	100 (20%)
2.	Data embracing several aspects of student life at available in the permanent record file of each student	300 (60%)	200 (40%)
3.	Orientation services are provided to acquaint students with the intricacies of academic community of this university	400 (80%)	100 (20%)
4.	Medical care is available to all students in this university	410 (82%)	90 (18%)
5.	Hostel facilities are provided by this university to accommodate different categories of students.	420 (82%)	90 (16%)
6.	Counselling services are available to students in the university to help them in overcoming problems of emotional, behavioural and cognitive nature	100 (20%)	400 (80%)
7.	Specific information about the norms of the university in terms of conduct is provided for all incoming students.	350 (70%)	150 (30%)
8.	Information is available and communicated to all students concerning the various sources of financial aid.	100 (20%)	400 (80%)
9.	Information is communicated to all the students about the placement trends in a variety of field in the labour market.	100 (20%)	400 (80%)

The following interpretations can be made from the responses in Table 2. The majority of students believe that Admission services, Data embracing several aspects of students' life, Orientation services, Medical care, Hostel facilities and Specific information on the norms of the university are the student support services that exist at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma – Nigeria. Furthermore, majority of the respondents disagree that Counselling services, Information of sources of financial aid and Information on job placement trends, exist at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma – Nigeria.

3. Do undergraduates of the Ambrose Alli University, perceive the available student support services at the university as adequate?

The answer to this question is reported in Table 3

TABLE 3: Undergraduates' Perception of the Adequacy of Student Support Services at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

S/N	Items Do you consider the following support services available at Ambrose Alli University as Adequate	Response category	
		Yes (%)	No (%)
1.	Admission Services	8 (1.6%)	492 (98.4%)
2.	Registration Services	5 (1%)	496 (99%)
3.	Record Services	4 (0.8%)	496 (99.2%)
4.	Orientation Services	6 (1.4%)	494 (98.6%)
5.	Health Services	5 (1%)	495 (99%)
6.	Hostel Services	2 (0.4%)	498 (99.6%)
7.	Food Services	3 (0.6%)	497 (99.4%)
8.	Counselling and Student conduct Services	7 (1.4%)	493 (98.6%)
9.	Student Activities Services	3 (0.6%)	497 (99.4%)
10.	Academic Advisement Services	4 (0.8%)	496 (99.2%)
11.	Financial Aid Services	2 (0.4%)	498 (99.6%)
12.	Job Placement Services	2 (0.4%)	498 (99.6%)

The following interpretations can be made from the responses in Table 3. The majority of undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma – Nigeria believe that Admissions, Registration, Records, Orientation, Health, Hostel, Counselling and Student conduct and student activities, Academic advisement, Financial Aid and Job Placement services available at the university are grossly inadequate.

Discussions

This study found that student support services are necessary in the university to help the students resolve problems that may affect their scholastic efficiency. This was essentially

the expectation of this research, given the fact that student support services do have very significant impact on students' learning, growth and development. This finding agrees with those of Delworth et al (1990) and Upcraft et al (1989) that educational environment and facilities have impact on the learning, growth and development of students. And that undergraduates coming into university for the first time need student support services to succeed in their educational pursuits.

There is no denying the fact that student support services are necessary in the university to help students overcome personality defects, which may interfere with their academic effectiveness, positive social interactions and emotional balance. Hence, the result of this study that student support services help students overcome personal problem is not surprising. This finding lends support to an earlier one by Upcraft et al (1989) who argued that when there is congruence between undergraduates and the campus climate, the undergraduates would be happier and is socially and emotionally adjusted and is more likely to achieve personal and educational goals.

The study also revealed that the twelve support services, which are identified by literature to be the most commonly provided support services by universities are inadequate at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. Of specific concern are counselling and student conduct services, academic advisement services and orientation services. This is not surprising if viewed from the perspective that Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma is globally acknowledged to be one of the most volatile/restive tertiary institutions in Nigeria and beyond. Perhaps the cause of the incessant incidents of student unrest, campus cult activities (clashes between various secret cult organisations in the campus), rape, sexual harassment and other social vices prevalent in the university could be minimized should the students be exposed to very decent support services that would to a very large extent help them to, not only adjust to the campus environment, but also, have very direct impact on the students' learning, growth and development.

Implications For Practice

The purpose of education (higher education inclusive) in Nigeria has been identified by the Federal Government of Nigeria (1981) as the process, which helps to develop the whole man physically, mentally morally and technologically, to enable him/her function effectively in any environment in which he/she finds himself/herself so that he/her may become more productive, self-fulfilling and attain self-actualization. Hence, any university in Nigeria aims at bringing about the psychological, mental, social and behavioural well being of students who are admitted. That is why degrees in all Nigerian universities are awarded on the basis of having satisfied the institution both in character and in learning. Consequently, all the activities carried out by students within the school system are geared towards developing their total personalities to the optimum, so that they can be more productive and self-fulfilling.

However, the aforementioned goals of university education in Nigeria is gradually becoming difficult to realise because of the difficulties, which the students face or experience within and outside the campus environment, irrespective of their backgrounds. Such difficulties according to Tawari (1986) and Venables (1978), which include lack of experience in working on their own, in developing and maintaining a balanced study schedule, in coping with the stresses and strains imposed by the expanded curriculum, adjusting to the uni-

versity atmosphere and the permissive and laissez-faire environment of the university system, contribute to making students' campus life experience a very traumatic one. As a result, students of universities in Nigeria and even beyond, especially in several developing countries, have had to protest peacefully or violently against issues relating to their welfare and satisfaction.

No matter the hindrances which students face in Nigeria universities, they can be brought to the barest minimum should the students be exposed to qualitative, adequate and viable support services. Thus, school counselors and other student services professionals should be able to instill in the university management, the need to have functional student support services, which will go a long way in modifying students' conduct. As provision of adequate and functional student support services will go a long way in helping many of the students who hitherto are very restive, to become more tolerant.

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