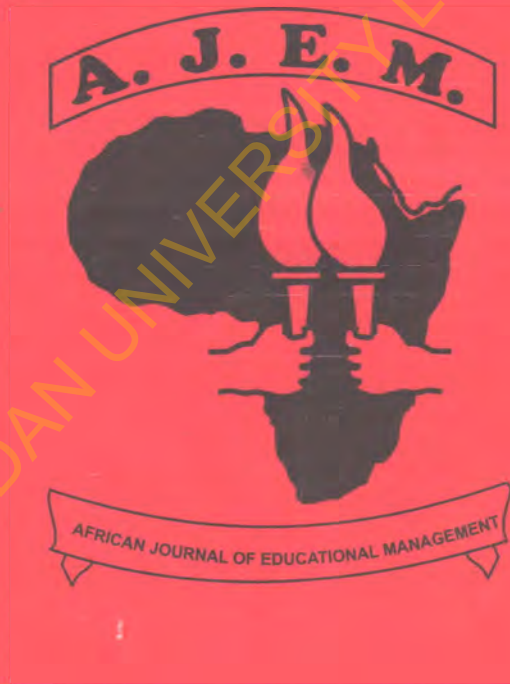


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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC PLANNING EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The problem of inadequate and insufficient infrastructural facilities is not new as several scholars have investigated it over the years. However, the role of the academic planning unit in Nigerian universities has not been investigated as the section is often down played when selecting items and areas to investigate. With the attention generated on the insufficiency of infrastructure, several interventionist policies that have been adopted by government who is almost sole investor in public universities. This study therefore investigated the effectiveness of such planning from the perspective of students who utilize such infrastructure. The study adopted the survey research design using the multi stage sampling procedure to select 3,340 student respondents from five faculties in Nigeria's first and second generation universities. A simple instrument titled 'Students Perception of Academic Planning Questionnaire' $r=0.87$ was used to elicit responses from respondents. The instrument was divided into two sections with section A eliciting bio-data information and section B on academic planning effectiveness (infrastructure). 2 research questions guided the study and were answered using simple descriptive statistics as percentages and frequency counts. The study found that of all the items surveyed; adequacy of library, health centre, hostel facilities, classrooms, Information Communication Technology (ICT) equipment, laboratory facilities, only ICT and laboratories scored a medium score. All others scored low as shown in Table 1 and 2. The impact of recent investments is yet to be seen in the universities. It is recommended that the universities seek to be independent in fund generation to facilitate planning and timeliness.

Key Words: Academic planning; Academic planning effectiveness; Perceptions on academic planning effectiveness

Introduction

Academic planning is a very important aspect of university administrations all over the world. Nigeria is not exempted from this all important venture. In some cases, the academic planning unit is usually attached to the Vice chancellor's office as we have at the University of Ibadan and some other Universities in Nigeria as a Directorate.

The functions of the academic planning sections of universities as described by Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006), in Nigeria are as follows;

- i. Planning university wide programmes in order to conform with the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) as set by the National Universities Commission (NUC).
- ii. Ensure quality control internally for academic programmes as set out by the NUC
- iii. Compiling and categorizing the teaching, research and equipment needs for academic programmes in universities
- iv. Assessing high level manpower requirements in universities
- v. Collecting, collating and analyzing data on staff, students and facilities as well as recurrent expenditures in universities to ensure compliance with standards and submitting same to the NUC with the aim of including such data in the NUC databank
- vi. Preparing the universities annual research grant request to be included in the university's annual budget preparation process for onward transmission to the NUC.
- vii. Holding annual university system review meetings to enhance financial projections and plans
- viii. Evaluating the annual university target plans for each section of the university and evaluating their performance for onward transmission to the National University authorities' and the NUC.
- ix. Supplying information on departments, faculties and other important areas in the university community with the intention of matching performance with strategic plans.

The functions of the academic planning unit in universities are non exhaustive as the foregoing could be a preview of their mission and it clearly explains that the entire university is in the hands of academic planning. While this study may not be able to overview all the functions of the academic planning unit in universities, items 3 and 8 stand out strategic in the areas of university planning, accountability and projections in that visible evidences of what is done or has been going on could be seen and evaluated by stake holders. Among these stakeholders are university students whose opinion could be considered mature at least on issues that affect them.

In recent years in Nigeria, the decadence and dearth of both teaching and manpower infrastructure attested to by several scholars especially Adeyemi and Uko-Aviomoh (2004), Akpochofo and Fellio (2006) and Isah (2012), clearly showed how poor universities were and projected the devastating effects that could occur if any remedy was delayed and this has been a continuous cry of other scholars for over 10 years. Again, it could be clearly seen how the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) had taken on the FGN through industrial strikes on several issues that resulted in the 2000/2001, 2009 and 2013 negotiation agreements on the various ways to improve teaching and learning situations in our universities. The most recent in 2013 is yet to be implemented at all.

In spite of the foregoing, the problem of inadequate infrastructure is not new for example, understanding the challenge; the FGN has undertaken several interventionist actions among which are the introduction of the Education Task Force (ETF) and the Petroleum Technology Development Trust Fund (PTDF). Majority of these funds are to be assessed by the universities directed and retired by them. The purpose is to ensure that universities are developed and equipped to meet MAS. In the opinion of this research paper, there is a need to find out the opinion of the beneficiaries of these plans on how effective the plans have been.

Another core observation by Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) was the flouting of the university carrying capacity which went contrary to the functions of the academic planning universities especially item 5 on this paper that deals with collating, collecting and analyzing data to ensure compliance with NUC guidelines. The findings of the study showed that stakeholders were completely alarmed with the flagrant

abuse of NUC power leader to poor student teacher ratio, over bloated average class sizes etc. It was evident that the malaise was more evident in private universities but also affected both private and public universities including Federal government universities.

The problem was further investigated by Isah (2012). It was observed that several items in a checklist were still to be put in place in most universities. However, this study is seeking the opinion of university undergraduates on the suitability, availability and applicability of the infrastructure already put in place. Among some items to be investigated in this study are issues bordering on building infrastructure, classroom development, ICT utilization in teaching and learning, academic staff capacity to deliver and study skills acquisition for repositioning in the overcrowded national labour market.

This study is directed at university administrations. It is significant as it could serve as a compass and pathfinder to university policy and administrative personnel. Its importance to the NUC cannot be over emphasized neither can its uses to the organized private sector and other stakeholders be quantified. It will enable the ETF and the PTDF assess the perceptions of its investment beneficiaries on its assistance over the years. A casual visit to several higher institutions in Nigeria will always show structures constructed by the ETF in these institutions but of what advantages are these to the students? The study will also serve as a pointer to the private sector that is always in need of a secure place to invest its funds. A good investigation will place before private stakeholders opportunities for investments in our universities. While the study will not be able to visit all universities in Nigeria currently estimated at well over 150, the study will dwell on the older universities who have been acquainted with the university growth over time. Specifically, the study will concentrate on first and second generation universities as classified by the NUC that are conventional universities and are 13 in number.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of inadequate infrastructure in our universities has been a major cause of concern for stakeholders. Infrastructure which are in serious dearth are many and include; buildings, personnel, ICT and several others. The absence of these infrastructures has been attested to by several researches by scholars. The result of these dearth include

over bloated average class size, inappropriate student-teacher ratio, absence of student hostel accommodation, poor offices for lecturers. On several occasions, the arguments between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has led to serious industrial strikes leading to negotiations on how to ameliorate the situation. The problem has also led to Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) intervention programmes such as the ETF and PTDF. Again, large money as claimed by the FGN had been kept for the development of universities but how these have impacted on universities is yet to be unraveled. Previous studies indicate that student hostel accommodation is poor, lecturers offices and equipment are poor and hence require the implementation of minimum standards. In all Nigerian universities, it is evident that paper work academic planning goes on but what is the practical effect of these plans on beneficiaries. It is clear that absence of these infrastructures will lead to half baked unemployable graduates. Again, it will compound the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. It is for the forgoing reasons that this study found out the perception of students on the effectiveness of academic planning in Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The following research question was formulated to guide this study;

1. What is the perceived evidence of successful academic planning (infrastructure) in Nigerian universities
2. What is the level of students awareness of university plans for academic planning effectiveness (infrastructure - ICT, Hostel Accommodation, Classroom sizes etc)

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design that was conducted '*ex post facto*' was adopted for the study due to the largeness of the scope to which it is directed. Also it was not possible for the researcher to manipulate any of the variables as they were investigated in their natural occurrence. The population for the study consisted of all students in the first and second generation Nigerian universities that are thirteen (13) in number. A purposive sample of 40% of the universities was adopted in stage 1 of a multistage procedure. Though the purposive sample was adopted, the universities were selected using

age and geographical spread criteria resulting into the selection of the Universities of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) and University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) as first generation universities while Bayero University, Kano (BUK), University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID), University of Ilorin and University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) were selected as second generation universities. A 20% random sample of student respondents gave a total sample of 3,300 student selected from five faculties namely; Arts, education, science, social science and agriculture.

A simple instrument titled 'Students Perception of Academic Planning Questionnaire' (SPAPQ) was developed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of simple test items that respondents were requested to respond to. Section A of the instrument generated simple demographic data of respondents such as school, gender, level etc. Section B consisted of 15 questions scaled after the Likert type scale. The instrument in section instructed respondents to tick options that were consistent with their universities with Section B consisting of items scaled as SA = Strongly Agree (4) points, A = Agree (3) points, D = Disagree (2) points and SD = Strongly Disagree (1) point.

The instrument SPAPQ was face validated by colleagues in the Department of Educational Management of the University of Ibadan and test generation experts of the Institute of Education of the same university. A simple trial test was conducted on similar subjects at the university of Agriculture in Abeokuta that yielded a Cronbach alpha ' r ' = 0.87. The method of split half was adopted. After validation, corrections were effected to SPAPQ that reduced the number of items in section B of the questionnaire from 15 to 9 indicating that 6 items were found inconsistent. This was also ascertained through the use of Factor Analysis where test items whose cumulative item correlation fell below 0.0 were expunged.

After the corrections to the instrument, was administered by the researcher in the company of well trained research assistants in the various universities. The two research questions raised were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics that consisted of percentages only.

Results and Findings

Research Question 1

What is the perceived evidence of successful academic planning (infrastructure) in Nigerian universities?

S/N	Questions	Classification	Respondents	SA	A	D	SD	% Agreed	Remarks
1.	In your opinion, the number of classrooms in your faculty is adequate for all lectures held in there	First Generation Universities	1400	50	130	650	170	41	Low
		Second Generation Universities	1940	70	450	600	20	68	Medium
2.	There is ample opportunity for you to use the library without any hindrance in the area of sitting space or reading tables	First Generation Universities	1400	50	350	150	150	78	Medium
		Second Generation Universities	1940	930	179	200	631	57	Low
3.	In your opinion, the level of hostel accommodation currently available for students in this university is adequate for comfort	First Generation Universities	1400	200	400	520	280	42.8	Low
		Second Generation Universities	1940	500	400	700	340	46.4	Low
4.	In your	First	1400	720	245	400	35	69	Medium

	opinion, facilities for practical studies such as laboratories and ICT/e-learning equipment laboratories are available in this university	Generation Universities Second Generation Universities	1940	590	200	1100	50	40.7	Low
	In your assessment, the metropolita n facilities in this institution such as water and electricity are in no way different from what obtains in the general society in Nigeria	First Generation Universities Second Generation Universities	1400	745	320	250	85	76.1	Medium
5.	Health is an important aspect of life. In your assessment, the university health centre is adequately equipped and prepared to handle emergency cases	First Generation Universities Second Generation Universities	1940	1350	120	340	130	75.8	Medium
		First Generation Universities Second Generation Universities	1400	700	315	218	167	72.5	Medium
6.		First Generation Universities Second Generation Universities	1940	1200	85	250	405	79	Medium

The above research question was answered using simple questions as evident in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Perception on Infrastructure Status through Effective Academic Planning in First and Second Generation Universities in Nigeria

Key: 0-39 = Poor; 40-59 = Low; 60-79 = Medium; 80-100=High

From the responses in Table 1, it could be inferred that if the academic planning section of Nigerian universities is to be scored in all infrastructural facilities such as students accommodation, hostel facilities adequacy and comfort, health facilities, ICT availability and adequacy, classroom infrastructure, then it has not scored high in any of the infrastructural facilities as at today. This study has become imperative in terms of the several interventions embarked upon by government. In some cases, critics could argue that students opinion is not the best way to measure these variables but the opinion of students who utilize these infrastructure matter. When other infrastructure as staff offices, office furnishings etc is being considered, staff opinion must be sought. They are the users of the items being provided.

Research Question 2

What is the level of students' awareness of university plans for academic planning effectiveness (infrastructure - ICT, Hostel Accommodation, Classroom sizes etc)

This research question is also important because the awareness of students is a major factor in stemming the tide of grape vine gossips against university administrations, instigating riots etc.

Table 2: Students Awareness of University Plans for Infrastructural Development (Information Dissemination)

S/N	Question	Classification	N	SA	A	D	SD	% Agreed	Remarks
7.	Information on future infrastructural development and expansion is usually communicated to students through this university bulletins or in the websites	First Generation Universities	1400	56	380	795	169	31.1	Poor
		Second Generation Universities	1940	350	485	950	155	43.0	Poor
8.	Students often make representations to the authorities but such representations have yielded good results	First Generation Universities	1400	320	375	569	136	50	Low
		Second Generation Universities	1940	540	478	555	367	52.5	Low
9.	In your opinion information dissemination	First Generation Universities	1400	580	360	112	348	67.1	Medium
		Second Generation Universities	1940	1350	120	340	130	75.8	Medium

other
 issues
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In Table 2, it is clear that no item in the list scored above 75% indicating that the best of the items which has to do with information dissemination still has a capacity of at least 25% to cover. Others in some cases like the communication of development on expansion has a capacity of 70% to develop. It clear that the task before academic planning sections in universities as at today from the perceptions of students has a long way to go.

Discussion of Findings

The significance of this study is borne out of some pertinent factors. Among them is the mandate of the NUC to ensure quality and standards and in essence the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in Nigerian universities. The study has already known from the findings of Adeyemi and Uko-Aviomoh (2004), Akpochafo and Fellio (2006) that infrastructural decadence had visited our tertiary institutions. According to FRN (2004), it is worthy of note that educational provision in Nigeria is now three fold especially higher education; Federal, States and the Private sector. This study has gone to show the extent to which students opine about the facilities being provided through the academic planning sections of the universities. It must be noted that the purpose of this study is not to apportion blame but to show clearly the level of confidence that is developed among the beneficiaries of government investment.

The study was designed to cut across all first generation and second generation conventional universities why? The policy of most

institutions stem from the NUC inclusive of private tertiary institutions hence any policy applicable to the first and second generation universities is generalizable. It cannot be reasonably denied that all other universities in Nigeria will eventually pass through what these older universities are passing through for example, it clear that only an average of 45% respondents in these institutions agreed that accommodation is adequate and enough. The insufficiency of accommodation in universities is not new as several policies and studies have shown its effects over time for example; Oshinowo (2001), explained that the effect of overcrowding in students' hostel could result into health hazards. Further to this students are made to 'squat' (illegal occupation) with one another. In recent cases, hostel proprietors have been introduced to schools that charge exorbitant hostel accommodation fees making life uncomfortable for indigent students. It is the opinion of this paper that the academic planning sections will work out budgets with the NUC to ameliorate these issues.

This paper is aware that over the years, there have been plans at various levels to effect new accommodation regimes to universities. In the last nationwide strike embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities in 2013, a major contention had to do with students' infrastructure with government promising to build mega hostel facilities, classrooms and other similar metropolitan facilities in Nigerian Universities that is yet to see the light of day.

In a lead paper presented in the conference organized by the Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning (NAEAP, 2009) themed 'Managing inventions in the Nigerian Educational System' it was explained that as long as Nigerian public universities depended solely on government subventions, it will be impossible to make a way forward. Also, as long as it is the Nigerian government, it must be understood that government will only give what it has. Any time a shock happens to the economy, it will reflect on government expenditure and by extension, the university system (Alli, 2009 and Babalola, 2000). It has been explained that as much as possible, universities should begin to look away from 100% dependence on Federal government of Nigeria funding. It is such that will enhance the autonomy of universities and display the effectiveness of academic planning. In reference to Babalola (2000), The budgets of the academic planning units of universities are not sacrosanct as they are still subject

to approvals and releases both at the NUC level and the Federal Executive Council (FEC) levels. A situation in which universities are financially autonomous will bring about the much desired effectiveness in terms of goals and target attainment in universities

The foregoing results indicate that Nigerian universities if they intend to meet the best practices of the world still require a long way to go in the development of infrastructure. It is clear that in both first and second universities, the trend of results appear uniform among students. In the trend, we see both being low, medium or otherwise. The reason from the perception of this study is not due to the plans from the academic unit plans but due to the policy that originates from the same source. Most universities are not allowed to go at their pace since they must come back to the source to take instructions and allocations. Further to thus, the classifications do not allow individual universities to move at their own pace. From the Tables, it is clear that only in ICT and Information dissemination that we have a medium score. In all other indices, the universities either scored low or poor.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perception of students on academic planning effectiveness in Nigerian universities as it relates to infrastructural development. The study sampled three first and four second generation Nigerian universities selecting students across the faculties of Arts, Education, Social science, Science and Agriculture. However, findings have shown that much needs to be done by the academic planning units of universities. The challenge facing the academic planning units of universities is over dependence on government subvention that often derails plans especially when the economy swings low. When the economy does not swing low, plans could always be reviewed by a superior approving body which involves the NUC and the FEC.

Recommendations

From the investigation above, this study recommends that;

- i. Nigerian universities move towards autonomy especially as it involves finances. Though due to some external and local challenges, most stakeholders will not support tuition fees, the

- university internally generated revenue needs to improved upon and speedily too.
- ii. Communication mechanisms between authorities and students to carry the university community as one body in terms of information dissemination should be stepped up. It is unfortunate that most Federal universities have failed to take advantage of the advent and improvements in ICT. In most private universities, information dissemination is 100% as bulletins are sent to lecturers and students customized I-pads and Tablets. These are still considered elitist in our older generation universities. Paper work should be discouraged for electronic information.
 - iii. Students are not aware of plans by the authorities. The public relations sections of universities should liaise with planning units to organize press conferences and fairs to publicize university plans and keep the community sensitized and aware
 - iv. Seating infrastructure, hostel accommodation and laboratory equipment should be improved to avoid students spending their own cash to purchase reagents and other science equipment in schools. Such will kill the spirit of science and technology.

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