

**AFRICAN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL
FACULTY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
IMO STATE UNIVERSITY
NIGERIA**

VOL. 8 NO. 1 MARCH 2019

**CHALLENGES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN
NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

Postgraduate institutions in Nigeria have grown and developed tremendously since after independence in 1960. Postgraduate student population is so large that the carrying capacity of the institutions has been over stretched. Institutional authorities, therefore, encounter great difficulties in the management of students. Factors responsible for the crisis include poor funding resulting in shortage of infrastructures, lecturers and instructional facilities. Other issues include; diverse family and intellectual backgrounds of students and lecturers inability to provide effective teaching and supervision of students activities and learning achievements. Students awareness of their rights and freedoms without corresponding demonstration of their obligations, emergence of powerful student unions, cultism, rape, prostitution, stealing, bullying, fraud, vandalism and examination malpractices contribute to general indiscipline. Recommendations made to meet the challenges include; proper accreditation of the institutions and their programmes, increased funding to upgrade teaching and learning environment, more student-friendly school administrators and lecturers, better interactions and dialogue with parents, students and other stakeholders.

Introduction

Postgraduate educational institutions are globally recognized as centres of teaching, learning and research beyond the high school level of education. Adebolarinwa (2016) defined postgraduate education as all forms of studies, training or research at the post high school level. Such higher education is provided by state, national or international institutions established for such purpose and approved by appropriate competent authorities. In Nigeria, as in many countries of the world, postgraduate institutions recognized for the provision of higher education are universities, research institutes and other similar higher institutions by whatever name they are called.

It is important to mention that the first higher educational institution in Nigeria was the Yaba Higher College which was established in 1932 by the British colonial government, while the University College, Ibadan was established in 1948 as the first university. The first Colleges of Education, now called Advanced Teachers Training Colleges, were established in 1962 in Lagos, Owerri, Ondo and Zaria (James, 2017). What is of great interest to us in this paper is the very rapid expansion of higher educational institutions in Nigeria and the impact on

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management of postgraduate students. This paper examines the challenges involved and the prospects of effective management.

Postgraduate Students Population Explosion in Higher Institutions

Nigerian government and people are proud of the opening of access to higher educational opportunities for postgraduates through the establishment of new universities and the expansion of the existing ones. However, the gap between the demand for admission and the supply of places remains persistently high. Consequently, many candidates seeking admission cannot secure places, in spite of the increase in the number of universities in the country (National University Commission, 2017). In response to the intense pressure mounted on higher institution authorities, they often offered admission to postgraduate students beyond the carrying capacity of the academic and non-academic staff, facilities and funds. Perhaps one of the greatest problems confronting these school authorities in the management of their students is the student population explosion. There appears to be a shortage of everything except students, resulting in serious challenges (John, 2016).

Apart from the pressure mounted on university authorities by staff, government officials, politicians and other stakeholders to admit their candidates, there is the added factor of increasing internally generated revenue. This is absolutely essential since governments and other proprietors of the higher institutions are either incapable or unwilling to provide adequate funds for the institutions. Some governments expect institutions to generate 30% of their annual expenditure internally. Therefore, students are admitted in very large numbers beyond the ability of staff and facilities to cope. The National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) have intervened to prescribe the maximum number of students that any university can admit in any given academic session. The figure is arrived at after a rigorous accreditation exercise conducted to ascertain the quantity and quality of academic staff and facilities available to accommodate and effectively manage the students and learning programmes (Taiwo, 2014).

Ineffective control and supervision of students was one of the major reasons for the entrenchment of such vices like student unrest, stealing, prostitution, bullying, rape, cultism, examination malpractices etc in Nigerian higher institutions in the 1990s. With restricted admission mechanisms student enrolment and population started to decline the manageable figures. It is to be observed that higher institution administrators all over the country have acknowledged that with a more manageable student population, the quality of students' academic performance has improved as well as students welfare services. Discipline among students has also been greatly enhanced, and so we have less frequent student management crisis in the institutions (Okebukola, 2014).

Complexity of Postgraduate Students Characteristics

At the postgraduate education level, there is much diversity among the students and this constitutes a big challenge to the institutional authorities. No wonder then, every higher institution in Nigeria has a Department of Student Affairs which reports directly to the Chief Executive, that is, Vice Chancellor for the universities. Indeed, the success of any tertiary institution chief administrator is often assessed by his ability to harness and control the potentials and activities of his students towards positive aspirations and achievements.

Postgraduate students in higher institutions are matured citizens. They come into the universities with their individual characteristics, aspirations and expectations. They come from diverse home backgrounds, rich and poor families, urban and rural environments, public and private schools with ordinary academic and social programmes. In the higher institutions, they mix and mingle with one another, males and females alike. For institutional chief executives and management staff, some of who may lack the necessary administrative training and professional experience to provide effective leadership, coping with students' demands, ethics and discipline poses a serious challenge. In Nigeria where some chief executives and their deputies are occasionally appointed or selected on the basis of godfatherism, favouritism, nepotism, ethnicity, religious or political affiliations rather than demonstrated competence and experience, the issue of student management becomes very complicated (Williams, 2017).

It has been observed that crisis in Nigerian higher institutions were because of demonstrations organized by different groups of students. Protests may occur due to perceived favouritism for or discrimination against a particular ethnic or religious group in the campus. For example, students religious fanatics almost made Ahmadu Bello University Zaria ungovernable in the late 1990s, because Moslem and Christian students clashed over who should be appointed as Vice Chancellor for the University. The government had to appoint a military general to serve as Sole Administrator for the University. The factor of socio-economic status of students' families comes frequently into play, especially in the state-owned universities where high tuition fees are charged in order to augment inadequate government subventions. For illustration, at Imo State University, Owerri, in 2009 and at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma Edo State in 2010, students went on rampage when tuition fees were increased by 80%. Students argued that most of their families could not afford such astronomical fee increases, and government intervened to reduce the fees (Okorie, 2016).

Institutional authorities often find themselves in a big dilemma in the management of their students. the problem usually is that governments and proprietors of the higher institutions make some pleasant sounding promises and policy decisions in the mass media only to tell the institutional leaders privately to do whatever they thought was feasible even when such discretion would contradict government publicized policies and promises to parents and students. The situation is like sailing between the devil and deep blue sea. Benjamin (2017) considers over centralization of control of Nigerian education system and too much dependence on government funding a source of concern in the management of both staff and students.

Students' Rights and Privileges

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1999) guarantees the citizens a whole range of rights and freedoms in chapter four of the constitution titled "Fundamental Human Rights". There are sections on Right to Dignity of the Human person; Right to Freedom of Association; Right to Freedom of Movement; Right to Freedom of Expression and Right to fair hearing. The rights have been highlighted because students are citizens and they are sensitive over the observance of these rights by institutional authorities (Ademola, 2015).

University administrators have frequently been confronted by students demanding restoration of light and water in their hostels when in fact it was the students' vandalistic acts and wrong use of these facilities that led to the breakdown of the facilities. Whenever,

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institutional authorities ban some student unions because of their illegal activities, the students cite their right to freedom of expression and so they protest over violation of their rights and freedoms.

Higher institution authorities had so much problems managing the students' unions that the Federal Government had to enact Decree 47 of 1989 on Students Union Activities. The purpose was to regulate membership, funding and activities of unions and associations within the institutions. Today, the greatest problem is the emergence of what students call "Student Union Government: which attempts to set itself up as a parallel authority for the administration of the institutions. The leadership of these union governments at times become arrogant and intoxicated with power and huge sums of money generated from the student union fee which they often spend recklessly without any accountability. Some union leaders even abandon their academic work in order to hold on to power by creating a cult around themselves. This usually poses a great challenge to the constituted institutional authorities. The student unions are supposed to protect the interests of the students. At the same time, they are expected to collaborate them like an opposition political party (Okechukwu, 2016).

Managing and Monitoring Students Learning Achievements

Higher institutions are established as centers of excellence for teaching, learning and research. Only students who have been found worthy both in learning and character are entitled to graduate with certificates at the end of their studentship. In recent times, however, many aberrations, according to Babalola (2017), have manifested in the institutions. The most serious of these are cultism, rape, prostitution, stealing, vandalism, fraud and examination malpractices among staff and students. Some lecturers and students absent themselves from classes frequently, while there is lack of seriousness and sense of responsibility among a few. The situation is complicated by unfriendly school environment which many basic necessities for decent living are wanting or in short supply and instructional facilities are inadequate.

School management authorities and lecturers have a duty to ensure improved teaching and learning conditions in the institutions. Towards this end, governments and other proprietors of higher institutions should substantially increase funding supply so that glaring shortages can be taken care of and hardships experienced by students ameliorated. Rosemary (2017) stressed the need for proper accreditation of the tertiary institutions by the regulatory agencies. It is by so doing that inadequacies can be brought to the attention of those responsible for providing the lecturers, facilities and other instructional support services.

There are strong indications that the level and quality of teaching and learning in Nigerian higher institutions are below expectation, and indeed a cause for alarm. Examination results presented to university senates and academic boards reveal general poor performance by many students. Very few students pass all their courses with good grades at the end of the session. The inadequate supervision and counseling of students plays a major part in their poor academic performance. Ebiyewari (2016) suggested that, with more effective and efficient management, students would improve on their learning achievement. Some students resort to involvement in examination malpractices as an option. The more honourable and reasonable alternative is to improve the teaching and learning environment and encourage students to work hard and become self-confident and self-reliant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Higher institutions in Nigeria do not appear to have reliable programmes for the orientation, supervision and monitoring of their students. Consequently, institutional authorities experience many difficulties in the management of the students. With an exaggerated sense of their rights and freedom, students often become too assertive and demanding, thus generating unnecessary crisis in their campuses. Managing the students, therefore, is challenging. It requires school authorities to be patient, understanding and innovative in their dealings with student union leaders. Dialogue, consultation and adoption of conflict prevention and resolution strategies are useful. Those factors in the school environment which create problems, frustration, anger and revolt must be promptly addressed by school authorities. There should be a well organized Student Affairs Department and Counseling Clinic to attend to the social, personal and academic problems of students.

It is important to note that the challenge of managing higher education students does not rest only on the school authorities. Parents and lecturers have very important parts to play too because they maintain close relationships and interactions with the students. Positive attitudes and value orientation are critical in influencing students towards imbibing virtues of hard work, honesty and disciplined behaviour. Governments and proprietors of the higher institutions should ensure that no school admits more students or organizes more programmes than the carrying capacity of the institution in terms of available staff, infrastructures, and instructional facilities. Moreover, efforts must be made to address problems of shortages and inadequacies caused by poor funding of the institutions. Our institutions must become attractive, student-friendly centres of excellence for teaching and learning.

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