

STUDENTS' OFF-CAMPUS RESIDENCE AND IMPACT ON LOCALITIES: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN AND EKOSODIN VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

One of the problems facing most Nigerian Universities is inadequate accommodation facilities which makes many students seek accommodation off-campus in the surrounding localities. This paper examines the impact of University of Benin students off-campus residence on Ekosodin village. A field survey was carried out with the use of questionnaire. The study reveals that the presence of the students in Ekosodin has brought significant changes both positively and negatively on the physical and socio economic environment of the village. Although the students enjoy the close proximity between the village and the university, they experience some problems living in the village. These include increase in rent, crime occurrence, and poor supply of water and electricity. The paper therefore urges the state government to improve on the water and electricity supplies, as well as providing adequate security measures in the village. The landlords should also provide boreholes in the hostels for students use.

KEYWORDS: Students' residence, village, impact, environment.

INTRODUCTION

A substantial body of research supports the notion that students' residence on campus has a positive effect on students growth and development. Bliming (1993), Pascarella, Ernest, Patrick and Bliming (1994) Schroeder and Mable (1994) Pike (2002) Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explained that living on campus as opposed to commuting to campus is associated with significant student gains in many ways. These include maximum opportunities for social, cultural, intellectual and extracurricular development. On the other hand those living off campus do not develop well and are susceptible to negative influences. Price (2003) in his work on universities in United Kingdom noted that the facilities that a school has determine to a large extent students choice of university to attend. Students, particularly first year students consider the availability and quality of accommodation that a university has of high importance as well as safety and security. Schools noted to be notorious are usually avoided, more so when accommodation outside the campus environment is an option. Consequently the importance of adequate accommodation in any university

cannot be overemphasised. However, due to the increasing number of students and inadequate funding, both federal and state universities in Nigeria lack adequate accommodation for their students. Consequently, students who do not have accommodation on campus reside off-campus in the surrounding localities close to the universities. Various studies on university and its surrounding region have shown the economic impact of universities on their surrounding regions. Abiodun (1981) stated that the establishment of Obafemi Awolowo University in 1967 at Ile-Ife, expanded and turned Ile-Ife and Modake an area close to it into an urban unit. The expansion gave rise to land speculation in the neighbouring town as a result of both students and staff population who are in need of accommodation off-campus.

Ronald (1997), George and David (1999) and Griey (2005) also explained that the presence of a university plays an important role in the geographical regions surrounding it. They noted that the university has made the local economy of the regions around it grow and blossom with sales of goods and services provided by merchants for students consumption.

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In the same vein, Hill (2006) stated that university research activities could have positive effects on jobs and incomes in the local economy size of the surrounding regions. However, not much work has been carried out on the other impacts of university on its locality outside the economic impact. For example students residing off-campus bring with them all sorts of norms, culture and tradition creating institution that affects negatively or positively the communities in which they live. This is why this paper examines the impacts of students off-campus residence on surrounding localities, using University of Benin and Ekosodin village as a case study.

This study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To examine the impact of students on the socio-economic activities and physical environment of Ekosodin village
- (2) To determine the level of security in the area
- (3) To evaluate indigenes opinion on students residence in Ekosodin.
- (4) To find out problems students encounter in the village.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The findings of this research will cover the gap mentioned earlier in the existing literature on the impact of universities on their surrounding areas. The work will also provide information for planning to the government.

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Regional inequality is a serious problem to development particularly in 3rd world countries. Therefore many countries try to introduce regional development strategies to integrate lagging regions into the main stream of national development (Agbola and Oladaja (2004). One of the strategies to achieve this is the "growth centre" strategy. Alden and Morgan (1974) Friedman and Weaver (1979) Apparaju and Safier (1976) in Omuta and Onokerhoraye (1986) explained that growth centres are centres specifically created as engines of development for their regions.

The spread effect mechanism has been the greatest attraction of the growth centre strategy in stimulating the socio-economic development of backward regions thereby reducing regional inequalities. Spread on trickle down involves the transfer of income earned in a growth centre to the service sector of the surrounding settlement (Myrdal 1957). Although the spread effect is usually overcome by the

backwash effects which involve the working of population migration and capital movement towards the centre, it is believed that with time there will be a balance between the two. This will eventually lead to regional integration and development (Sharma 2000). Nigeria in adopting the growth centre strategy has established several industries and institutions in strategic locations as growth centres which serve as engines of development in the nation. Among these centres are several Federal and private universities established in various parts of the country. University of Benin as a growth centre has impacted on the physical and socio-economic development of its surrounding areas especially through students' off-campus residence. As Osamwonyi and Iyamu (2007) rightly stated, universities are not just educational institutions designed to produce high level manpower but also major socio-economic agents of change and development to the surrounding areas.

METHODOLOGY

Administration of questionnaire, direct observation and oral interview were used to obtain first hand information from the students and the indigenes in Ekosodin village.

From the 240 private hostels in Ekosodin, 40 were randomly selected. Five students were randomly picked from each of the selected hostels for the administration of questionnaire making a total of 200. Only 180 questionnaire were filled and returned.

The questionnaire aimed at finding out the following;

- (1) Why students prefer Ekosodin village to other localities,
- (2) The nature of security in the village
- (3) Rent paid by students
- (4) Problems students encounter in Ekosodin
- (5) Impacts of students on socio-economic activities and the physical environment of Ekosodin.

The odionwere (traditional head) of Ekosodin and his chiefs were also interviewed to find out their view on the impact of students residence on Ekosodin.

Percentages, frequency tables were employed in the presentation and analysis of data.

STUDY AREA**a. UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

As the name implies University of Benin is located in Benin City in Edo State of Nigeria. The university was initially established in 1970 as Mid West Institute of Technology at former Marere Teachers Training College along Ekenwa Road in Benin City. The institute was accorded the status of a full-fledged university by the Federal Government on 1st July, 1971 with Ugbowo Campus as its main campus.

Between 1974 and 1984 the physical development of the university at the Ugbowo Campus accelerated in order to keep pace with the expansion of the staff and students' population.

The university started with 108 students but by 2003 the student population had risen from to 8,133 in 2003. By 2007, the students population had risen to 40,000. Presently the university (Ugbowo Campus has nine halls of residence. The large population which is about four times what the university had initially planned for has put significant pressure on facilities on ground (white paper report 2007). The university now faces accommodation problem even with the provision of the nine hostels. Consequently students who do not have accommodation on campus seek accommodation in the surrounding localities such as Ekosodin village.

b. EKOSODIN VILLAGE

Ekosodin village is in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. It shares its eastern boundary with the University of Benin. According to the odionwere of the village, the history of Ekosodin dates back to the 19th century when the land was given to its early settlers by Oba Obanosa who reigned in the Benin Kingdom in the 19th century. The village was established as a farm settlement. As at 1963, the population of Ekosodin was 177 (from 1963 census). In 1991 with the influx of students, the population rose to 1811. Presently, the village has an estimated population of 7,000 (Ekosodin Youth National Development Association, 2003) since the local result of 2006 census result is not yet out.

Accommodation problem at the University of Benin have forced many students and some of the staff of the university to seek accommodation in the village since it shares a common boundary with the university. This has led to a change in the form and character of the

village. This study therefore examines the impact of the students' presence on the village.

FINDINGS**physical characteristic of ekosodin village before and after the establishment of the university**

According to the Odionwere (The traditional head of the village), the early settlers of the village were mainly farmers and hunters. Crops such as Maize, Coco yam, Yam and Cassava and Plantain were planted. The land has a fertile soil and light forest vegetation. Prior to the establishment of the university, the land use type was mainly agricultural, with few residential houses for the indigenes, but with the influx of the students, there has been a shift from agricultural land use to mainly residential and commercial land uses.

The traditional housing pattern of the village has also changed into modern types as a result of the presence of the students who do not want to live in a sub-standard houses without good toilets and bathrooms. Many developers have made investments on hostels for students in the area.

With the establishment of the university the major road leading to Ekosodin from the Lagos- Benin Express Road was constructed. This attracted the construction of many houses along this road. With time more areas were opened up as a result of the increase in the number of students who seek accommodation in the village. Today there are up to 240 hostels in Ekosodin village.

Students' residence at Ekosodin village has brought amenities such as electricity and pipe borne water to the village. However, 60% of the students complained of the irregular supply of these services. The number of students has affected the environmental sanitation of the village since there is no adequate provision for waste disposal in the village. Fifty-five percent of the students disposed their waste in the bush, 28% by burning, while 12% through general public container which is not regularly disposed of by the relevant authority. Consequently 82% of the students were dissatisfied with the environmental condition of the village.

Personal interview with the traditional head and his chiefs revealed that students were the major cause of low level of sanitation in the area. They claimed that the physical environment of the village was neater when the students were on holidays.

IMPACTS OF STUDENTS ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF EKOSODIN VILLAGE

As mentioned earlier Ekosodin village started as a farm settlement with farming as the major economic activity taking place in the village.

Students' residence at Ekosodin has transformed the village from a farm settlement into a commercial village where almost every household in the village is involved in one commercial activity or the other. The influx of students in Ekosodin has attracted many people into the village. These people provide one form of service or the other to the students. Ninety percent of the houses in the village that are not students' hostels are residential cum commercial buildings. Among the commercial activities taking

place in these houses are trading, cyber café, hair saloon, boutique, pharmaceutical shop, tailors work shop computer and photo-copying centres. Traders who cannot afford shop or kiosk merely display their goods on the tables along the roads. Majority of these groups sell vegetable and fruits. Some are GSM vendors and shoe makers. Consequently, students' residence in the village has brought means of livelihood to the landlords and other people who live in Ekosodin for economic activities.

Students pay between N20,000 and 75,000 per annum for their accommodation Table I shows that 29% of the students live in rooming apartment, 54% live in self-contained, 9.4% and 7.2% live in flat (shared) and flat (not shared) respectively;

Table I: Types of Accommodation Occupied by students

Types of Accommodation	No. of Students	Percentage
(1) Rooming	52	29.00
(2) Self-contained	98	54.4
(3) Flat (shared)	17	9.4
(4) Flat (not shared)	13	7.2
Total	180	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Work (2010)

Table II: Rents paid by students

Rent paid per annum (N)	No. of Students	Percentage
Below 20,000	50	27.8
20,000 – 39,999	90	50.0
40,000 – 59,999	25	13.9
60,000 and above	15	8.3
Total	180	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Work (2010)

Table II shows that 27.8% of the students pay below N20,000 per annum for accommodation, 50% pay between N20,000 and N39,999 while 13.9% pay between N40,000 and N59,999. Only 8.3% pay N60, 000 and above.

Social activities are very much alive at Ekosodin as students are engaged in one social activity or the other. Prior to the students' arrival to the village the natives practiced mainly Traditional African religion, but the students have brought in Christianity to the village. There are several churches especially the Pentecostal churches in the village where students and the natives worship. Students usually organise social gatherings in their hostels for their birthdays, graduation or matriculation ceremonies. There are many video and CD centres where both

students and indigenes can buy or borrow video or can watch films. These centres make the village lively with the music they play most of the time.

According to the traditional head and his chiefs one major social impact of the students' residence in Ekosodin village is that the indigenes became very conscious of university education. With improvement on their economic base, and seeing other people's children in the University, they also struggle to train their children in the University. Prior to the students' arrival to the village most of the youths of the village were more interested in farm work, even those who had West African School Certificate were not very keen on going to the University. That was because their parents could not afford

University education for them. With the improvement on their financial resources, the parents can now finance their children in the University. The youth themselves are also motivated, by the presence of the students to become university students themselves. Consequently many of these children are admitted yearly into the University. According to Johnson (1986), modernization is the process of social change resulting from diffusion and adoption of the characteristics of more advanced societies by societies who are less advanced. In the case of Ekosodin village the presence of the students has enabled the indigenes to adopt modern ways of life.

Restaurant business thrives very well in Ekosodin since most of the students are lazy to cook in their hostels. The same thing goes for the cyber cafés and computer and photocopying centres which provide services to students for their academic needs. These centres make a lot of money from the students especially the final year students who type their projects in these centres.

Another major business that thrives well in Ekosodin is Okada (motor cycle) riding. Okada is a major means of transportation in Ekosodin village, and it has provided means of livelihood to many people in the village. The positive impact of students on the village is well appreciated when the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) is on strike. The village is like a ghost-town at this period with little life in it, because the students have all gone home. The villagers also suffer because the booming social and economic activities of the village cease to exist.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF STUDENTS PRESENCE ON EKOSODIN VILLAGE

The presence of the students has brought about many positive impacts on the village as discussed above. That notwithstanding the presence of the students has also brought some negative impacts on the village. Among these are;

- (1) Violence and crime by the students
- (2) High price of things in the village
- (3) Influence of the indecent moral behaviour of some of the students on Ekosodin youths.
- (4) Change of the peaceful atmosphere of the village.

Before the arrival of the students, the village was peaceful. Unfortunately some of the students residing in the village are bad and have criminal tendencies, which they exhibit from time

to time. Almost every year one or two students are killed by their fellow students from a rivalry group. This has made Ekosodin notorious. The villagers are not happy about the situation, but cannot do much about it since they depend on the students' patronage for their means of livelihood.

Another negative impact of the students is high price of things in the village. Things are costly in the village because the traders know that the students usually do not have the time to haggle for price of things and will not bother to go to the market in the city to purchase things at a cheaper price.

The villagers complained that their children have been influenced negatively by the indecent moral behaviour of some of the students. For example, some of their daughters have been impregnated by the students and this has affected the education of the girls in question.

Another negative impact of the students on Ekosodin village is the change of the clean and peaceful atmosphere of the village into a noisy village, littered with illegal structures, which have affected the physical beauty of the village. The village now suffers from irritating noise and polluted air from the generators used by the various business centres and Okada riders.

PROBLEMS OF THE STUDENTS IN THE VILLAGE

Though the students enjoy the proximity between Ekosodin village and the University campus they have some problems living in the village. Among these problems are;

- (1) Insecurity
- (2) Inadequate supply of water and electricity
- (3) Flooding and poor roads
- (4) Incessant rent increase.

A major problem of students in the village is insecurity of lives and property, although the students are responsible in most cases for the threats to lives and property in the village. Some of the students living in the village belong to bad groups such as cult, and they harass their fellow students. Table III shows the degree of seriousness with which crime occurs in the village, according to the response from the questionnaire. The table shows that killing of students is the most serious crime the students experience in the village. Others are robbery, rape and molestation. Unfortunately there is no adequate security from the police to check these criminal activities.

Table III: Degree of Seriousness to which Crimes occur in the Village

Nature of crime	Very serious	Serious	Slightly serious	Not serious	Total
Robbery	22 (12%)	43 (24%)	40 (22%)	75 (42%)	180
Rape/molestation	20 (11%)	24 (13%)	22 (12%)	114 (64%)	180
Killings of students	81 45%	52 (29%)	47 (26%)	0 (0%)	180

Source: Authors' Field Work (2010)

Another major problem the students have in the village is poor supply of water and electricity. In most cases the students buy water especially students staying in hostels that do not have bore hole. In terms of electricity some students contribute money to buy generator in the hostels, since there is no regular supply of electricity in the village.

Another problem facing the students in Ekosodin village is the related problem of flooding and poor roads. Due to lack of drainage facilities, the village is subjected to heavy flooding during the rains and most of the roads are facing serious erosion so that people find it difficult to move about during the rains.

Another problem of the students is incessant rent increase by the landlords. This is a burden on the students' parents or sponsors who provide these rents. In spite of all these problems, the students like Ekosodin village because of its proximity to the university.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to inadequate accommodation in the University of Benin, some of the students who do not have accommodation reside in Ekosodin village. Their presence has brought significant changes both negatively and positively on the physical and socio-economic nature of the area. Though, the students like living in the village, they have some problems from the village. These include poor security, frequent increase in rent from the landlords, crime occurrence, poor supplies of water and electricity and poor roads.

In view of the problems discussed above the state government should provide adequate security agency like the police force to monitor the movement of people in the village. This will reduce the incidence of criminal activities in the area.

Although the problem of inadequate water and electricity supply is a national problem, the state and federal government in charge of water and electricity supply respectively should give preference to Ekosodin and supply them

water and light more regularly since the village is helping to reduce the problem of accommodation in the university. The government should also construct drains in the village to reduce the problem of flooding and erosion in the village. Landlords without boreholes in their hostel should provide boreholes in their hostels especially as they always increase the rent of the hostels.

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