



Availability, Use and Contribution of Support Services to Students Academic and Social Development in Nigerian University System

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the university's support services is to support, enable and promote world-class learning, discovery and enterprise and so make vital contribution to students' success and well-being. This work examined the availability, use and contribution of these support services to students' academic activities and social life. Five research questions guided the study. Multi-stage cluster sampling was used to draw a sample of 3225 students from University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and Anambra State University, Uli (ANSU). Simple percentages were the method used in analyzing data obtained through questionnaire. Results show that the students endorsed that most of the support services were not available in their institutions. It was also found that most of the students do not use support services available in their universities. Further, the study revealed that of the few that use the services, most were of the view that the support services contribute meaningfully to the academic activities and social life. It was therefore recommended, among others things, that orientation programme should be ongoing programme for all students, students' evaluation of support services should be initiated by the university management to help direct actions on provision of support services to the students.

Key words: Educating, Nigerian Youth, dynamic world, university, support services.

INTRODUCTION

The world is currently experiencing rapid changes driven by forces of globalization. These changes - economic shifts; and changes in market forces, labour relations and technology - have far reaching implication for all. As

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such global citizens are required to possess values and skills that would enable them to, not only withstand these changes, but also operate effectively within different contexts and situations. Higher education, the world over, has significant roles to play in responding to these needs. It is expected to develop balanced individuals with both disciplinary and generic skills and values who can effectively operate within different contexts. A number of higher institutions in some developed countries are currently responding to these needs (Hambur, Rowe, & Luc, 2002; Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2006)

Nigeria's articulation of her goals for higher education shows appreciation of these values. The National Policy on Education states that higher education in Nigeria would, among other things, serve as means of developing intellectual and physical skills, developing proper values for the survival of society and promoting national and international understanding (FGN, 2004). Achieving these goals would require providing for both academic and necessary support services to enable intellectual, appropriate skills, social and psychological development. Student support services refer to range of services provided for both the individual student or for groups of students which complement the course materials or learning resources that an institution provides for its students, (Croft, 1991; Tait, 2000, Pullan 2009). These are, among others, accommodation, career/counseling services, financial aid, work aid, library, religious programme, sports/recreational provisions. Since the aim of higher institutions in Nigeria is to aid in the personal growth and academic development of the students, they cannot downplay the importance of support services for students' integral development. If the aim of student support services is to support, enable and promote world-class learning, discovery and enterprise and to make a vital contribution to the success and well-being of institutions and members, their availability is therefore an important and in fact, an indispensable component of university education.

It would seem that all efforts centred more on the intellectual and skill development to the detriment of social and psychological development of the students. Some writers have observed that lack of support services has been the content of university students' and staff protests and complaints (Adelola, 1999; Oyaziwo, Jimoh, Agwinede & Omoregie, 2005). Further, the Nigerian education sector diagnosis shows that today's higher education students in Nigeria are under more stressful conditions than their forebears and that providing for their social and psychological needs should be given adequate attention. Achieving this is one of the challenges facing the sector (FME, 2005). Indeed, Adegoroye, Ayedele and Babatunde (n.d), attribute the increase in anti social behaviour and decline in ethical and moral values among university students to inadequate student support services. Further, reports of poor quality of graduates from Nigerian universities have implicated low status of support services (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2003).

Therefore the aim of this study is to carefully look into our university system to find out the student support services that are available. Students'

use of available support services and the contributions of these services to students' academic and social life will also be examined.

Literature Review

The provision of support services for students is an important component of the universities. Evidence exists to suggest that there is a positive relationship between students' academic performance and effective use of support services (Fan, Taplin, Chan, Yum & Jegede 1999; Gibson, 2004). A number of scholars established a link between mode of provision of these support services and students' use. Tones, Eraser, Elder, White (2009) postulate that mature students reported that the timing of dispensing support services often conflicts with the little time available for actual study due to the combination of school, work and family responsibilities. This explains why some students whom Pullan (2009) referred to as "the millennial students" believe that student support services should be provided online. When support services are provided on-campus with no provision to deploy the services on-line, these students feel lost, try to compensate by looking elsewhere hence negatively impacting the institution and the students. This is perhaps why Papadimitriou and Ntinis (2007) noted that in the light of the global changes in technology, learning environment, response to the market, globalization, and social responsibility, universities need to develop new strategies in their delivery of student support services for effectiveness. Indeed, the quality of student support services has been one of the factors influencing choice of university (Price, 2000).

A number of scholars have examined the trend in provision and use of support services in higher education. Gibson's (2004) comparison of the provision of social and academic support services between regular and specially admitted African American females at a predominantly white institution, shows that most of the services were perceived by the students to be relevant. Despite their being positively perceived, these services were not frequently used by the students. Similarly, Petruzzellis, D'uggento and Romanazzi's (2006) study of students' experience of and satisfaction with university facilities in an Italian university shows that the students were satisfied with the quality of accommodation, library, recreation, counseling and learning equipment services offered by the university.

Empirical evidence lends support to the relevance of support services in higher education. In a study to establish the relationship between the use of support services and students academic achievement in a sample of Malaysian students, Fan, Taplin, Chan, Yum and Jegede (1999), found that support services could have a potentially positive effect on students' academic achievement. In another study on the students' support service and academic outcome, Promnitz and German (1999), found that experiences of students generally support the positive role which support services play in both the prevention of attrition and the enhancement of students' experiences while in university.

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Although research in student support services has been extensively carried out in other countries, the area has received little empirical attention in Nigeria. Considering the relevance of support service to students in the higher education and need for empirical evaluation of students perception of these services, this work sets out to examine the availability, use and the contributions of support services to the academic activities and social life of university students. More specifically, this work asks:

- (1) To what extent are support services available to students in the universities?
- (2) To what extent do students make use of support services available in the universities?
- (3) To what extent do support services help students accomplish their academic tasks?
- (4) To what extent do the support services contribute to students' social life?

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was adopted to determine how university support services have contributed to educating the Nigerian youths. The study was carried out in two universities – University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) and Anambra State University, Uli (ANSU). They were selected to have good geographical spread and to represent both federal and state universities in the area. The sample used for study was 3225 students drawn through multi-stage cluster sampling. From the 14 faculties in UNN and 8 faculties in ANSU, 7 and 4 were randomly selected from each. Secondly, from the 37 departments in the 7 faculties selected from UNN, 11 were randomly selected while from the 14 departments in the 4 faculties selected from ANSU, 4 were randomly selected. All the students in these departments, except first level students, were used for the study.

The questionnaire used for data collection was in four parts. Part I dealt with demographic data, consisting of five items that elicited information on gender, programme of study, type of programme, year of study and residence. The second part consisted of a list of thirteen support services generally provided by the institutions. Participants were instructed to tick (√) on the services available in their institutions. Part III of the instrument consisted of 13 items which requested information on the use of support services. Respondents were to endorse either options of “Used” or “Never Used.” Part IV consisted of three open-ended questions which solicited opinions on the contributions of these support services to academic and social life and suggestions for improvement of support services. The instrument was validated by the Deans of Student Affairs in UNN and ANSU. This was to confirm face and content validity of instrument. Feedback was given

regarding question clarity, comprehensiveness and acceptability. Their corrections were effected in the final version of the instrument. With the scores from a pilot test using fifty students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU), a calculated reliability co-efficient of 0.84 was obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Data collection was done by four trained enumerators, and three months were allotted for the data collection process. The purpose of the study and the survey procedures were clearly explained to the participants who were assured of confidentiality to encourage honest responses. Out of 3225 copies of questionnaire distributed, 2864 were collected back duly filled, representing 88.8% return rate. The data was presented and analyzed using percentages.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent are support services available to students in the universities?

Table 1 below shows the analysis of students' perception of the availability of the 13 listed support services. Greater proportion (over 50%) of the students was of the opinion that six of the 13 services were available in their universities. These were accommodation (52.3%), health services (82.8%), academic advising (78.1%), library services (55.7%), chaplaincy/religious programme (68.2%) and sporting services (51.5%). However, seven of the 13 support services were endorsed as unavailable in the universities by over 50% of the students. These were counseling services, career counseling, disability services, students' work aid, financial aids/sponsorship services, study centres and internet services. It is shown that 46% of the support services were endorsed as available by most of the students, while 54% were endorsed as not available by greater proportion of the students.

On students' use of the support services, table 2 shows that most of the students do not use support services available in their universities. Of the six services that were endorsed by most of the students as available in the university, the library is the one that has been used by most of the students (68.4%) while more than 50% of the students have never used all the other 12 support services. It would seem that the support services were under- utilized by the students.

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Table 1: Availability of Support Services to University Students (N=2864).

S/N	Support Services	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Accommodation	1499	52.3	1365	47.7
2.	Health services	2372	82.8	492	17.2
3.	Counselling Services	1283	44.8	1581	55.2
4.	Academic Advising	2236	78.1	628	21.9
5.	Career Counselling	1129	39.4	1735	60.6
6.	Library services	1596	55.7	1268	44.3
7.	Chaplaincy/Religious programme	1952	68.2	912	31.8
8.	Disability Services	514	17.9	2350	82.1
9.	Students' Work Aid	919	32.1	1945	67.9
10.	Financial Aids/Sponsorship Services	482	16.8	2382	83.2
11.	Sporting Aids	1476	51.5	1388	48.5
12.	Study Centres	1130	39.5	1734	60.5
13.	Internet Services	1190	41.6	1674	58.4

Research Question 2: To what extent do students make use of support services available in the universities?

Table 2. Students' Use of Support Services in their Universities

S/N	Support Services	Used		Never Used	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Accommodation	1024	35.8	1840	64.2
2.	Health services	1088	38.0	1776	62.0
3.	Counselling Services	912	31.8	1952	68.2
4.	Academic Advising	1136	39.7	1728	60.3
5.	Career Counselling	1344	46.9	1520	53.1
6.	Library services	1960	68.4	904	31.6
7.	Chaplaincy/Religious Activities	1144	39.9	1720	60.1
8.	Disability Services	328	11.5	2536	88.5
9.	Students' Work Aid	364	12.7	2500	87.3
10.	Financial Aids/Sponsorship Services	556	19.4	2308	80.6
11.	Sporting Services	1112	38.8	1752	61.2
12.	Study Centres	1064	37.2	1800	62.8
13.	Internet Services	1052	36.7	1812	63.3

Research Question 3: To what extent do support services help students accomplish their academic tasks?

Table 3 shows the analysis of the contribution of the support services to students' accomplishment of their academic tasks. Although, the proportion of students using the services was small (except for library services), most of them were of the view that they were very helpful in carrying out their academic activities. These include Accommodation (70.7%), Health services (76.8), Counselling services (71.1%), Academic advising (74.3), Career counseling (71.7%), Library services (74.7%), Chaplaincy/Religious programme (78.7%), Disability services (74.4%), Students' Work Aid (80.2%), Financial Aid/Sponsorship services (71.9%), Sporting Services (69.8%), Study Centres (77.8%) and Internet services (77.6%).

Analysis of open-ended questions on how these services helped in their academic life show that some students made reference to specific support services as; "academic advising has given me motivation"; "encouragement from the career adviser has been helpful"; "the library helped in inculcating reading habit in me"; "the academic advising has helped in shaping me"; "university hostel helped me to be close to the school". Some others generally said the services "enhanced my creative ability" and "enhanced my ability to understand".

Table 3: Contribution of Support Services to Students' academic accomplishment

S/N	Support Services	Helpful		Not Helpful		No Comment		Total
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
1.	Accommodation	724	70.7	100	9.8	200	19.5	1024
2.	Health services	836	76.8	108	9.9	144	13.2	1088
3.	Counselling Services	648	71.1	96	10.5	168	18.4	912
4.	Academic Advising	844	74.3	84	7.4	208	18.3	1136
5.	Career Counselling	964	71.7	116	8.6	264	19.6	1344
6.	Library services	1464	74.7	176	9.0	320	16.3	1960
7.	Chaplaincy/Religious Programme	900	78.7	88	7.7	156	13.6	1144
8.	Disability Services	244	74.4	36	11.0	48	14.6	328
9.	Students' Work Aid	292	80.2	28	7.7	44	12.1	364
10.	Financial Aids/Sponsorship Services	400	71.9	52	9.4	104	18.7	556
11.	Sporting Services	776	69.8	116	10.4	220	19.8	1112
12.	Study Centres	828	77.8	80	7.5	156	14.7	1064
13.	Internet Services	816	77.6	84	8.0	152	14.4	1052

Research Question 4. To what extent are the support services contribute to students' social life? Table 4 shows the analysis of the contribution of the support services to students' social life. Although the proportion of students using the services was small (except for library services), most of them were

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of the view that they contributed meaningfully to their social life. These include Accommodation (62.9%), Health services (64.3), Counseling services (59.6%), Academic advising (59.9), Career counseling (58.6%), Library services (61.8%), Chaplaincy/Religious programme (67.1%), Disability services (64.6%), Students' Work Aid (64.8%), Financial Aid/Sponsorship services (63.3%), Sporting Services (63.3%), Study Centres (63.9%) and Internet services (58.6%).

When asked further how these services contributed to their social life, some said: "The sporting activities have helped to boost my interactive skill", while some did not specify any particular support services but noted that the services: "Promoted relationship with classmates" and "Created wide range of opportunities for me"

Table 4: Contribution of Support Services to Students' Social Life?

S/N	Support Services	Helpful		Not Helpful		No Comment		Total N
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
1.	Accommodation	644	62.9	144	14.1	236	23.0	1024
2.	Health services	700	64.3	148	13.6	240	22.1	1088
3.	Counseling Services	544	59.6	124	13.6	244	26.8	912
4.	Academic Advising	680	59.9	152	13.4	304	26.8	1136
5.	Career Counseling	788	58.6	192	14.3	364	27.1	1344
6.	Library services	1212	61.8	284	14.5	464	23.7	1960
7.	Chaplaincy/Religious Activities	768	67.1	132	11.5	244	21.3	1144
8.	Disability Services	212	64.6	56	17.1	60	18.3	328
9.	Students' Work Aid	236	64.8	48	13.2	80	22.0	364
10.	Financial Aids/Sponsorship Services	352	63.3	84	15.1	120	21.6	556
11.	Sporting Services	704	63.3	128	11.5	280	25.2	1112
12.	Study Centres	680	63.9	132	12.4	252	23.7	1064
13.	Internet Services	616	58.6	144	13.7	292	27.8	1052

Research Question 5

What are the students' suggestions on how provision of support services could be improved?

Table 5 presents Students' suggestions for the improvement support services. Of 560 responses, "Organizing orientation programme for students on available support services" was the most frequently occurring suggestion (17.1%). This was followed by "increasing sponsorship/financial aid programmes" (11.4%) and "provision of more functional internet centres on

campus” (9.6%). Two other notable suggestions include; “increasing work aid provisions for students” and “provision of electricity” (7.5%).

Table 5: Students’ Suggestions for the improvement of Support Services

S/N	Suggestions	Total Responses (N=560)	%
1	Organizing orientation programme for students on available support services	96	17.1
2.	Increasing Sponsorship/Financial Aid programmes	64	11.4
3.	Provision of more functional internet centres on campus	54	9.6
4	Increasing Work Aid provisions for students	44	7.9
5	Provision of Electricity	42	7.5
6.	Improving student/lecturer relationship	36	6.8
7	Training the Library staff	38	6.8
8	Updating library books	30	5.4
9.	Raising more building for religious activities	28	5.0
10.	Provision of more funds by the government	28	5.0
11	Reconstruction and equipping the university with modern equipment	26	4.6
12.	Expanding the Library building	26	4.6
13	Provision of Counseling Unit	14	2.5
14.	Provision of more personnel to manage centres	14	2.5
15	Provision of more ICT Units	12	2.1
16	Provision of more study centres	2	0.4
17	Improve the accommodation	2	0.4
18	Co-operative management in line with school goals	2	0.4

DISCUSSION

The study was interested in examining the availability, use and the contribution of university support services to students’ academic activities and social life. The result of the study revealed that greater proportion of the students endorsed that most of the support services were not available in their universities. This result is not surprising because of poor funding of the education especially at the tertiary level as noted by Enyi (2001). Nigeria has never met the minimum standard of 26 percent of annual budget on education as recommended by UNESCO. Therefore, the University management, with what meager resources it has, focuses so much on academic activities to the detriment of the provision of support services to the students.

The study also revealed that most of the students do not use support services available in their universities. This seems to give credence to the findings by many scholars (Fan et al, 1999; Gibson, 2004) that most university students

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do not use support services provided in their universities. One of the reasons for this situation is that some students are known to complain of heavy course work and find some of the support services an unwelcome distraction in their pursuit of paper qualification which Nigerian society value so much. They seem not to understand that the use of these services can enhance their academic pursuit. Further, absence of or rushed orientation exercise whereby students miss the opportunity of being introduced to and educated on the importance of these facilities could contribute to their non-use of these services. Moreover, Pullan (2009) ascertained that some students believe that support services should be accessible from any location and not confined to remote corners of the campus. Group of students referred to as the “millennial students” work, play and entertain, using the internet and so believe that anything worthwhile should be provided online. So when the traditional provision of support services are designed only to be administered on-campus with no provision for use on-line, these students feel lost, trying to compensate by looking elsewhere.

The study also showed that, although few students utilize the support services, greater proportion of those who do believed these services were very helpful in the academic endeavours and social life. This finding is significant because it gained empirical support from previous studies in which Fan et al (1999), and Gibson (2004), found that students’ support services have a potential positive effect on students’ academic achievement. However, these services should be designed to enable and empower them to focus more intensely on their studies and their personal growth and maturation both cognitively and emotionally.

Limitations

The authors acknowledge inherent limitations in this survey. It is possible that students’ perceptions on the availability, use and contributions of support services to academic activities and social life in UNN and ANSU may not be representative of all the students in other universities in Nigeria. Therefore, an attempt to generalize these results should be done with caution. It will be important in future to repeat the study on a larger, nationally representative sample of students to reduce any sampling error and to determine if these findings are consistent among the national population of students.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATION

There is need that higher education should address social, psychological and academic needs of students by providing both academic and support services. These services should be designed to empower students to focus more intensely on their studies and on their personal growth, both cognitively and

emotionally. Through this, balanced individuals that can fit into the dynamic global arena will be produced. The study investigated the availability, use and contributions of support services to students' academic activities and social life. The study revealed that most of the support services were not available in their universities. Even where these services were available, there was limited use by the students. However, few students who used the services reported positive contribution to their academic and social life.

Students' suggestions for the improvement of support services give some insight into the areas of concern in the provision of support services in their universities and possible direction in the search for solution. Conscious efforts should be made by university management to make orientation programmes worthwhile for their students. This will help introduce students to the structure and goals of support services of their universities. While availability of funds might be impediment to quality of support services, making their provision occupy a position in the university priority projects may help university management undertake continuous upgrading and updating of these services. A project for students' evaluation of these services should be initiated by universities for the provision of appropriate support services in universities in Nigeria.

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