

Analysis of the Learning Environment of University Students on Nigeria: A Case Study of University of Benin

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ABSTRACT This study analyzed the state of the learning environment of University students in Nigeria. A guided interview schedule was used to collect data from the principal officers of the University in the library, academic planning division and the Vice Chancellor's office. A similar schedule was used to collect data on twenty students' representatives. Secondary data were collected from the University involved in the study. The result of the analyses showed that the learning environment was very much below standard. Based on the findings, it was recommended that National Universities Commission minimum guidelines should be strictly adhered to in terms of staffing, staff-student ratio and provision of adequate physical facilities.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is acquired in Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and other tertiary institutions of learning. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN2004), the goals of tertiary education include:

- Contributing to National development through high level relevant manpower training.
- Developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of the individual and society
- Developing intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- Acquiring both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- Promoting and encouraging scholarship and community service.
- Forging and cementing national unity and
- Promoting national and international understanding and interaction.

In order to achieve these goals all stakeholders of higher education, the government at all levels and organizations involved in tertiary education must share in its management. The University is the highest level of schooling. Its environment must be accorded highest premium,

therefore it must be properly managed for effective functioning and productivity. However, the rapid expansion and the resultant proliferation of courses in the Universities (as witnessed since the 70s), without sufficient regard to the resource constraints and limited executive capacity have brought much burden on the Universities. Learning environments in the Nigerian Universities have been described as uncondusive, unproductive, unattractive and unhealthy with decayed and dilapidated infrastructural facilities. Consequently, the goals and objectives as spelt out in National Policy in Education are seriously being undermined. Both teachers and learners have become disinterested and apathetic to the goals of learning. Many reasons have been adduced for this seemingly bad situation, some are institutional and internal, and others are external. The internal reasons are shortage of resource materials, (human and material), mismanagement of funds and consequent neglect of the learning environment, explosion in student enrolment, lack of maintenance culture, pedagogical factors, (teaching methods and curriculum implementation), distortion of academic programmes by students' unrest and academic and non-academic staff strikes. In addition, there seems to be a very high relationship between external factors and the learning environment.

In the University of Benin, the Vice Chancellor's address during the 28th convocation ceremony clearly stated that the physical facilities and development in the university couldn't be matched with the growth in student population.

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He noted that the library built when the university had only three thousand (3,000) students is still serving nearly thirty five (35,000) students (full-time and part-time students). Alutu and Ojogwu (2002), noted that University of Benin which was established in 1970 is relatively young to belong to the first generation category and also old to belong to the second-generation university. The blanket assumption that all first generation universities are adequately equipped with physical facilities affected University of Benin, which was barely five years old when the Federal Government took it over in 1975. The University of Benin lags behind in terms of Physical facilities when compared with other universities in the same category hence this study attempted to analyze the learning environment of undergraduates with special reference to the University of Benin.

The appalling situation that exists in over 90% of the institutions of higher learning in the country in the area of Physical facilities has become worrisome and topical. In University of Benin, for example, the space provided for most departments is by no means adequate for lectures or practical. Some lecturers have no offices; the classroom spaces are small and do not permit meaningful interaction between the teacher and the students. NUC (1989) prescribed a minimum of twenty-one lecture theatres with a capacity to sit between one thousand (1,000) to two thousand (2,000) students at once. The classrooms are overcrowded and poorly ventilated with most of the seats broken. Consequently, most students stand as there are not enough seats, while lectures go on for up to three hours. Note-taking is virtually impossible under the existing situation and this makes teaching and learning unpleasant and uninteresting (Nwadiani 2000). In education, inputs have tremendous effects on the outputs and ultimately, the attitudes and behaviours of the students are also adversely affected. A definite and resolute attempt has to be made to redeem this ugly state, thus provide adequate classrooms and lecture theatres as stipulated by NUC for each discipline. When university enrolment in 1989 is compared with that of 2004, a review of the decree 16 of Minimum Academic Standard is urgently advocated.

The university exists for the advancement of learning through teaching and research; hence, an academic library should be an essential facility in any higher institution. A standard academic library should be equipped with current materials

for the teachers and the students' libraries are repository of important information available as learning resources for students. For a library to be useful to its users it has to be stocked with current books, journals and periodicals. Funding therefore becomes a major controlling factor on the quality of a library. During the National Universities Commission accreditation exercise conducted in most universities, absence of libraries in the various departments constituted major reasons for denied accreditation. The libraries, where available were deficient in current books and journals.

In the University of Benin, the library at the inception of the university started with in 1970 is what is still being used at present. Most of the students do not bother to consult the library because they will not have a seating place. The library consists of two main sections; the undergraduate section and research section, there is no reading space specifically for lecturers.

A standard academic library should be conducive for reading and consultation. The library staff is highly under the National Universities Commission (NUC) stipulated minimum standard. NUC has recommended that at least 5% of the total university recurrent expenditure should be provided for library services in universities. Academic libraries should reflect the philosophy of the institutions of which they are a part; they design their collections and services to meet the educational aims and instructional objectives of the institutions they serve.

According to Ike (1990) students' welfare should include everything necessary to assist the students to achieve optimum results from their career at the university. In other words, the relevance and quality of the instructions, their accommodation and feeding and other facilities necessary for their overall development as human beings come under students' welfare. The issue of students' welfare has been viewed very significant in university management to their general positive development that the NUC advised the newer federal universities to create a special post of deputy Vice-Chancellor (community services) to cater for the welfare of students and staff (Aminu 1986). The hostels or halls of residence where the students reside during their academic tenure is very central and a major part of their learning environment. The University of Benin started with the provision of students'

accommodation in its temporary site, which is now the Ekenhuan campus. It started with an initial four (4) blocks of student's hostels, which later increased to seventeen (17), and these now house both male and female postgraduate students and the diploma students. About seven hundred and sixty (760) bed spaces are available at the Ekenhuan campus.

In Ugbowo Campus (permanent site) there are four halls of residence Halls (1, 2, 3 and 4), two for male undergraduates and the other two for female undergraduate. There is also the clinical hostel for medical students built later. By 1978/79 sessions when most of the faculties have fully moved to Ugbowo campus about 1,990 students were accommodated to these halls and this accounts for about 68% of the undergraduate population. The government's policy that only one third of the full-time students should be accommodated and the low priority to funding were the major causes of this problem. The criteria adopted to admit students in the hostel due to limited bed spaces were ranked thus;

1. Fresh students,
2. Final year students
3. University Scholars
4. Foreign students
5. Distinguished sports men and women
6. Handicapped students
7. Student union/Hall executive
8. 500 Level medical/Dental Students

The last admission into the hostel for 2003/2004 session represented in the table1 showed that out of about two thousand (20,000) requesting admission and only eleven thousand two hundred and thirty seven students(11,2370 were offered.

The university, however, in view of these problems is proposing a system of entrepreneurship whereby contractors will be invited to build, maintain for a while, recover their investment and then transfer it to the university at the expiration of the agreement.

The Problem

Learning environment has direct and indirect influence on the quality of learning, the learners, the teachers other inputs and the society as a whole. The indices for good learning environment were clearly included in the Minimum Academic Standard (MAS) Decree 16 of 1989. Between 1999 and 2000, National University Commission (NUC) carried out a critical examination of all academic

programmes in all Nigerian Universities. In a qualitative assurance report released after a thorough evaluation of all academic programmes offered by the various universities, the scorecard showed a serious decay in the system. Based on the reports, many universities were denied accreditation, some were given interim accreditation, and only very few got full accreditation of their courses. For example in courses that attracted highest number of applications according to the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB), such courses as Accounting, Banking and Finance, Economics and Law in many first generation Universities, were either denied or given interim accreditation. According to Oyekanmi (2002) in Accounting, out of the Twenty-three universities listed, only Universities of Ilorin and Jos had full accreditation.

The problems of those denied accreditation or given interim accreditation bordered on lack of physical facilities, library and staff. This analytical study will enable the policy makers to have empirical data on the extent the minimum academic standard decree has been implemented in the University of Benin.

METHOD OF STUDY

This study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative approach to collect data in order to analyze the undergraduate-learning environment. The quantitative data were collected through searching for secondary data kept on some physical facilities studied the library, classroom and hostels. The authors also undertook physical visits of the learning environment to establish the gathered information.

The qualitative data was gathered through interview with twenty (20) students' representatives. The Scheduled interview was designed to elicit information from the students on the state of the library, classrooms and hostels as important features of their learning environment. The interview schedule has three sections A, B, and C, Section A, sought information on the classroom and its adequacy and functionality. Section B, The third section sought to find out the adequacy of the hostels as a residential unit for students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analyses, table 1 showed the state

Table 1: Hostel accommodation male/female (2004/2005*)

<i>Students' population</i>	<i>No. accommodated</i>	<i>No. requesting accommodation</i>
Hall 1	2106	20,000 Undergraduates
Hall 2	2586	
Hall 3	2244	
Hall 4	3012	
Clinical Hostel	544	
Ekenhuan Hostel	763	
Total	11,237	

of the hostel is not different from other faculties in the University because they are faced with similar conditions. Consequently, the rooms designed to take 2 students originally are now officially accommodating 8 students with the introduction of the double-decked bunks in order to cope with the increasing demand. For example, hall1 has 10 rooms in each floor and each room has 4 double bunks accommodating 8 students, originally these rooms were designed for 2 students. In spite of this current situation, most students unofficially hang on as squatters if they are not able to have an off campus accommodation. In the same small accommodation, the students cook their food in the hostel since the Cafeteria system was abolished. The situation faced by students is very deplorable in terms of living accommodation. In sympathy with the students over this shortage in accommodation facilities, the former president of Nigeria, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo responded positively by promising two (2) 100-bed hostels for students during his visit in May 2000. The project has now been completed and has housed quite a population of students even though the accommodation problem is not yet solved. Table 2 shows that the library facilities are quite inadequate.

Table 2: Library facilities

Staffing	Very low below recommendation
Books	Low subscription
Journal	Low subscription and not current
Equipment	
air-condition, computer	Not efficient
Library data	Not computerized
Library building	Very inadequate for current student population
Library designed to sit 700 students	Number of students using the library has risen to 35,000

Table 3: Findings from scheduled interview on learning environment

<i>A. Classrooms</i>	<i>Agree Disagree</i>	
1. There are enough classrooms for our lectures.	2	18
2. We have enough sitting places for our lectures	3	17
3. The seats are comfortable	7	13
4. Microphones required for lecturers	18	2
5. Microphones available when needed	3	17
<i>B. Library</i>		
1. Library standard enough	2	18
2. The library has enough seats to accommodate the students.	5	15
3. Current journals and books available.	5	15
4. Library conducive for reading	10	10
<i>C. Hostels</i>		
1. The hostel accommodation is adequate.	6	14
2. Would not like to live in the hostel.	6	14
3. The hostels have enough toilet facilities	4	16
4. Toilets in the hostel are regularly maintained.	2	18

Table 3 shows the qualitative analysis of the guided interviews administered to twenty (20) students' representatives in the University of Benin showed that the learning environment is sub-standard. Data analysis showed that about eighteen students (18)72% of the students agreed that there are not yet enough standard classroom for their lectures; the microphones needed for their lectures are not available. The classrooms are over crowded and some departments do not have their own specific classrooms for their classes and these results in clashes. These problems would be solved if and only when more classrooms are built to house the various departments. The Vice Chancellor of University of Benin has highlighted these problems during the 28th Convocation Ceremony in 2002. Ehiamentolor (1999) and Nwadiani (2000) also noted that there is need for improvement in the physical Facilities for effective learning in our universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. The Universities should source for funding through other ways and should not depend solely on the National Universities Commission.
2. University autonomy should be encouraged,

as it will help in the better management of the University.

3. The standard of physical facilities should be enhanced to match the necessary student population.
4. Parents should be involved in the management of the Universities.
5. The National Universities minimum guidelines should be strictly adhered to in terms of staffing, and provision of adequate physical facilities
6. The physical environment of undergraduates should be properly planned to match the ever-increasing population of students

CONCLUSION

This paper has confirmed various statements made about the deplorable situation of the physical facilities in our higher institutions. Adequate funding is Central to effective management of University education, hence, institutions of higher learning should seek for ways to generate fund. Total dependence on government support is not feasible in the face of increasing demands and salary adjustments needed to maintain the staff morale for expected high productivity.

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