



STUDENTS' AFFAIRS UNITS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

Ogunode Niyi Jacob

Ogunodejacob@gmail.com

University of Abuja, Nigeria

Abubakar Musa

abubakarmusakidah@gmail.com

Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: February 7th 2021 Accepted: February 17th 2021 Published: March 11th 2021</p>	<p>The Students' Affairs Division is a critical unit within the university system. The Unit handles students' affairs matters. The Unit implements policies and program geared towards the development of the students in the university system. The Unit due to increment in the enrolment of students is facing many challenges. This article discussed the challenges facing the Students' Affairs Division of Nigerian universities. The article used secondary data. The article identified inadequate funding of the unit, inadequate staff, inadequate working materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programme of staff and poor motivations. To address these challenges, this paper suggested the following: increase in the funding of the Students' Affairs Unit, employment of more staff in the Unit, provision adequate working facilities, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, effective staff development programme and improvement on the welfare of the staff.</p>

Keywords: Affairs, Challenges, Student, Universities

1.INTRODUCTION

Adeyemi (2001), view Higher education as a system which embraces much of the country's research capacity and reproduces majority of the skilled professionals that are required in the labour market. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), sees Higher Education as the Post -Secondary Section of the National education system, which is given by Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology including courses as are given by the Colleges of Education, Advanced Teachers Training colleges, Correspondence Colleges and such Institutions as may be allied to them. Bennett (1997) views higher education as unique institutions which are differentiated from others in terms of research and its managers are designated as Provost, Rector, and Vice chancellor. Higher education is the education for the production of manpower and for aiding social, economic and technological development of a country. Peretomode (2007) sees higher education as the facilitator, the bed rock, the power house and the driving force for the strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier and industrial development of a nation as higher education institutions are key mechanisms increasingly recognized as wealth and human capital producing industries. Higher education is the education for the production of manpower and for aiding social, economic and technological development of a country. Higher education is the education that comprises the universities, polytechnics, mono-techniques and colleges of education. Higher education is the education that deals with the programme of teaching, researching and providing community services. Higher education is the education at the peak. Higher education is a post-secondary school education. Higher education deals with the programme that deals with production of manpower for the social, economic, political and technological development. Higher education is an organized and planned educational system that deals with human capital development and research for the holistic development of the country. Higher education is the education that gives certificates after graduation. The objectives of higher education include; to carry out critical research for the development of the country, to provide quality teaching programme, to provide post-secondary school education to the citizens, to produce needed manpower for the country, to inculcate the national value and national unity.

The goals and objectives of higher education in Nigeria according to National policy on education (2004) include the following: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2004) The National Policy on Education (2004) stated that higher education should pursue their goals through: teaching,

research, the dissemination of existing and new information, the pursuit of service to the community; and by being a store-house knowledge. The Nigerian higher education system comprised of Universities, Polytechnic and Colleges of Education offering programs in areas such as teacher education and agriculture. It is the largest and most complex higher education system on the continent. The total number of universities in Nigeria according to the NUC (2020) is 175.

The students are crucial members of the university community. The university is centered on the students. The Students are strong members of the university system. Students are the main reason behind the creation of tertiary institutions. Educational institutions are established to equip students with skills necessary to direct the affairs of man's society in the nearest future. Enueme,&Onyene (2010) submits that the development of any nations largely depends on youths while Omonijo, Nnedum, Fadugba, Uche , Makodi (2013) observed that "young students are leaders of tomorrow". Therefore, when attentions are not properly given to students in the course of studentship, the society could be at a risk of competent future leaders. Yusuf (2017) opines that all higher education stakeholders must promote independent, self-directed students' behaviour, and do that in a community context. Worthy citizenship and service to the community are important values to promote during the higher education experience. The delivery of students services and programmes is based on a number of critical values including worth of the individual, diversity, pluralism, inclusiveness, community, high expectations, a global view, citizenship and leadership, ethical living, and the idea that students can and must participate actively in their growth and development.

Yusuf (2017) observed that Students' Affairs draws its origin in United Kingdom on the Oxbridge model and Anglo-American concept in 1982 that school stand in loco parentis, creating a greater legal obligation for the universities/colleges/polytechnics/monotechnics to govern students' life. Students' affairs, Students' support, or students' services is the department or division of services and support for students' success at institutions of higher education to enhance students' growth and development. People who work in this field are known as students' affairs practitioners or students' affairs professionals. These Students' affairs practitioners work to provide services and support for students and drive students' learning outside of the classroom at institutions of higher education.

Students encounter three major transitions related to their higher education experience: the first, into higher education; the second, through their collegiate life; and finally, the move from higher education into the workplace and their careers. Considerable support must be available and when necessary, provided for students during these transitions; support includes delivery of timely and accurate information, a broad range of students support services, and activities that enhance the learning process in and out of the traditional classroom. Learning for all must be lifelong in scope if society is to fully benefit (Yusuf, 2017). Students' Affairs Unit is saddled with the responsibilities of attending to students needs promptly on campus while faculties are expected to impact knowledge on them. This students' affairs unit is faced with many challenges preventing it from effectively discharging its functions. This article is aimed to discuss the challenges facing Students' Affairs Units of Nigerian universities.

2.0 CONCEPT OF STUDENTS' AFFAIRS UNITS

The Students' Affairs Division is a unit created for administration and management of students' issues. The students' affairs is a special unit that organizes the students' programme in the university system. Students' Affairs Division develops programme for students' development in the university system. Students' affairs unit is a unit within the university system that handles students' programme and aid students' development within the studentship in the school. The Dean of Students' Affairs, who is a senior member of the academic staff of the University and by virtue of the office a member of senate, is the head of the Division. He/she is appointed by the Vice-Chancellor and is directly responsible to him/her for the day to day running of the Division, and for the conduct of students' affairs. The Dean is assisted by at least a deputy and a Students' Affairs Officer, who is a senior member of the administrative staff from the Registry and handles the secretariat work of the Division.

The Dean of Students' Affairs is the overall Chief Executive of the Division. The Dean of Students' Affairs coordinates all non-academic affairs of the students. He/she is responsible for the welfare and discipline of the students. The Dean of Students' Affairs controls the account of the division, the votes and vehicles. He /She is responsible for administering accommodation for students in hotels. The Dean of Students' Affairs represent the Division in all matters affecting students' welfare and discipline. It is the responsibility of the Dean of students to compile and keep record of up to date vital statistical information on students eg name, age, gender, year of registration, duration of course of study, contact address, next of kin, nationality, state, local government, marital status, form of sponsorship and any other relevant information. The Dean of Students' Affairs presides over committees located in the Division and submits report to the Vice-Chancellor. The Dean of Students' Affairs also performs other functions assigned to him by the Vice-Chancellor. Some committees of the university that are charged with the welfare of the students include; Students' Affairs Committees, Senate Student Disciplinary Committee, Senate Committee on Examination Related Misconduct and Hall management Committee. The Students' Affairs Division have the following division: central administration, Guiding and Counseling unit, Sport unit, student relation and hall administration, hall committees and students' welfare unit (FUW,2017)

The Students' affairs Unit is headed by a Dean with some support staff to assist in driving the set Vision and Mission. The Office of the Dean of Students' Affairs is designed to attend to the following: orientation programme for new students to educate them about university life and various challenges they would face in the course of their study, the welfare and general wellbeing of students, Psychological testing service to detect students who are pruned

to cultism or violence. Supervision of various campus programmes and serving as liaison between administrative council and student council, educational counseling for under-achieving students, responsibilities towards issues that involve student academic duties and student life, socio-personal counseling and Job facilitation for graduating students.

The Students' Affairs Division is in charge of all students' services except academic matters. The unit comprises some units which handle the following functions; students' accommodation and hall administration, counseling, sports, orientation for freshmen, financial assistance [information on bursary and work study programme] mobilization of graduating students for NYSC programme, ensuring that foreign students' visas are renewed and validated, and writing of attestation letters to embassies, among others. The Division is under the Office of the Vice-Chancellor.

The functions of the Students' Affairs Division of University of Ilorin include:

(a) The Students' Affairs Unit is responsible for the overall administration of Students' guidance, counseling and Students' Discipline (b) the unit oversees the day-to-day activities and needs of students such as their socio-cultural and academic development (c) The unit also coordinates the mobilization of prospective National Youth Corp members of the University. (d) It oversees the administration of the Hall of Residence, including accommodation of students (e) It processes all the papers for the Student Disciplinary Committee (SDC) (f) The Students' Affairs Unit Coordinates Students Unit activities including Students' Representative Council elections, the swearing in-ceremony of elected Students' Union etc (g) It organizes and selects ushers for ceremonies such as Convocation and Inaugural Lectures. (h) It registers clubs and societies and monitors their activities (i) It is worthy to mention that members of the Student Consultative Council (SCC) comprising executive members of the various Faculty Associations have been put in place to co-ordinate the activities of Students and prepare the ground for the next Students Union election

The students' affairs unit also handles the following: The Students' Affairs Unit oversees the disbursement of Bursary Awards to Students by the various States that pay bursary to their Students. The role of this Unit includes the compilation and collation of names of Students from the various states that give bursary and scholarship awards to their indigenes. The unit also ensures that adequate correct data of the state indigenes are obtained from the Management Information Services Unit (MIS) of the University. It ensures that such payment of bursary/scholarship awards is done without any hitch and under conducive conditions.

The Students' Disciplinary Committee is an administrative Committee set up by the University Administration to deal with disciplinary cases involving Students from time to time. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) is the Chairman while the PAR (Student Affairs) services as the Secretary. As a result of the effectiveness of the SDC, acts of misconduct such as cultism, examination malpractice, sexual harassment, admission irregularities, vandalization of properties, and other related anti-social behaviours common in some tertiary institutions, have been reduced considerably, if not completely eliminated in this University.

3.0 CHALLENGES FACING THE STUDENTS' AFFAIRS UNITS OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

This article discussed the challenges facing the Students' Affairs Division of Nigerian universities. The article identified inadequate funding, inadequate staff, inadequate working materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programme of staff and poor motivations.

3.1 Inadequate Funding

One major problem affecting the administration of higher education in Nigeria is underfunding. Inadequate funding is a challenge to realization of the objective of education in Nigeria. The funding style adopted by the government for the funding of tertiary education is not stable and is affecting the development and survival of the university system. Higher institutions cannot carry out their cardinal function of teaching, researching and provision of community services. The higher institutions find it difficult to fund the sub-units in the system effectively to discharge their functions. The higher institutions especially the university system is designed to work with many sub-units. Among these units is the unit of students' affairs unit. This unit deals with welfare of the students, this make the unit one of the prominent unit in the university system. It is unfortunate that this unit is under-funded and this makes it ineffective in discharging its responsibilities in many universities. According to Udida, Basse, Udofia, & Egbona (2009) the major issue in educational development is shortage of funds. One of the most serious problems threatening the survival of the educational systems is that of dwindling level of public funding in the face of rising demands and hence rising cost of higher education. This shortage of funds affects job performance and the growth of the institution. Higher educational institutions cannot perform optimally without funding. This situation calls for increased fund initiative from both the government and educational stakeholders so as to sustain the tempo and growth of education industry. The inability of the Nigerian government to objectively accept and implement the 26% funding formula for education recommended by the UNESCO impact negatively on the performance and sustainability of higher education. Thus, it has become obvious that Nigeria's neglect of the funding formula is detrimental to higher educational institutions' performance and development aspiration as quality performance is the veritable instrument for sustenance of education system. This neglect has further precipitated crises in the entire higher educational systems as effective teaching, research and service are no longer taking place seriously.

3.2 Inadequate Staff

Non-academic staffs are professionals working in the higher institutions especially in the universities. The non-academic staffs are saddled with the responsibilities of providing non-academic services. The services of the non-

teaching staff are crucial for the survival and sustainability of the universities. The non-academic staffs are found in all the units and department of the universities. The Students Affairs Division is one of the vital units in the Universities where the non-teaching staff are actively working. It is unfortunate that many units especially the Students' Affairs Units of many universities are understaffed. Inadequate staff is a challenge that is facing the Students' Affairs Unit of many universities in Nigeria. Many Students' Affairs Units of Nigerian universities are facing shortage of trained staff in the students' administration and management. Due to the nature of work the students' affair units are carrying out, this makes the unit to need more staff to handle students' issues.

3.3 Inadequate Working Materials

Lack of adequate working tools is another problem facing the majority of Nigerian universities' Students' Affairs Units. Working tools or office equipment like Stapler, Eraser, Push-pin, Drawing pin (U.K)/ Thumbtack (U.S), Paper clip, Rubber stamp, Highlighter, Fountain pen Pencil, Marker, Ballpoint, Bulldog clip, Tape dispenser, Pencil sharpener, Label, Calculator, Glue, Scissors, Sticky notes, 4A Paper, Notebook, Envelope, Clipboard, Monitor, Computer, Keyboard, Folder, Fax, Filing cabinet, Telephone, Swivel chair, Desk, Wastebasket, printer and calculators are inadequate in many students' affairs units across the various universities in the country. The inability of students' affairs units to have these equipment adequately is affecting the functions of the units.

3.4 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities is bane to the activities and programme of the Students' Affairs Units in many Nigerian universities. Infrastructural facilities are very important in the administration of higher institutions especially in the Students' Affairs Division. Infrastructural facilities are social capital that every higher institutions must have adequate to be able to deliver effective academic and non-academic services effectively. Ogunode (2020) refers to infrastructural facilities to include classrooms, offices, exam halls, laboratories, tables, chairs, desks, power supply, water, good roads network within the schools etc. Noun (2012) observed that physical plants are required for teaching, learning and research. They include classrooms, laboratories, workshops, staff offices and libraries. Others include hostels (in residential institutions), staff quarters, students and staff recreational facilities, sports and games facilities. They also include roads, electricity and water supplies (Noun, 2012 cited UNESCO, 2006). Infrastructural facilities for non-academic staff include offices, table, chairs, power supply, stable water etc. Many staff of students' affairs unit do not have adequate offices for their staff, no adequate chairs, tables and desk in the various offices provide for the academic planning units. Many students' affairs officers sit under the trees due to lack of adequate offices to accommodate them

3.5 Poor Capacity Development Programme of staff

Poor capacity development programme for staff of Students' Affairs Division is another major challenge facing the staff of Students' Affairs Division of many universities in Nigeria. Many staff working presently in the Students' Affairs Units of many universities have not been going for constant training on students' administration and management. Training and development is the key to high performance of non-academic staff in the Nigerian Universities. Alao (2010) defined training as "a specialized process through which one learns to perform direct tasks of varying complexity and acquire expected job behaviours" while Beardwell et al, (2001) saw development as the process that makes workers gradually becoming more complex, carefully detailed and different by learning and maturity. The Federal government of Nigeria established many training and development centres in the institutions known as the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) in 1971. The Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), the Education Trust Fund (ETF) and the TETFund in training and development in the University system (Bernadette & Ukaegbu, 2017). Romalia (2016) observed that most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Vibrant staff development programme on a continuous basis will help academics and non-academics to clarify and modify their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in the performance of tasks. Staff development is paramount because knowledge of today is only sufficient for today. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge based economy, staff development should be the priority of any nation. It is unfortunate that many students' affairs officers working in the units across the country have not be given the opportunities to attend the workshops. Many staff of the units lack the capacity development programme. A study research Bernadette & Ukaegbu, (2017) on impact of poor implementation of welfare policies on training and development on the performance of academic staff in selected federal Universities in South-South Nigeria was carried out to examine the extent to which poor implementation of welfare policies on training and development impacts on the performance of workers in the selected Federal universities in South- South Nigeria. The study discovered that, whereas there are good welfare policy statements in the study area, the level of implementation of these policies were poor. Furthermore, over 90% of the respondents insisted that full implementation of welfare policies would have positive impact on workers' performance to a very large extent. The results further indicated that there have been very few in-house and outside training programmes in the study area. A total of 87% of respondents agreed that poor level of implementation of welfare policies on training and development is a source of discouragement which have negatively affected academic performance of both teaching and non-teaching staff and have led to poor service delivery in our Universities. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) reported that lack of staff development programmes accounted for the decline in quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Adeogun, (2006) noted that an employee who is not trained and exposed to continuous retraining in the modern methods and new discoveries in his or her field will soon become irrelevant to the organization.

3.6 Poor Motivations

Poor motivation is another problem facing the staff of Students' Affairs Units of Nigerian universities. Many staff of Students' Affairs Units across the country are not happy with the job due to poor motivation. Atiya & Palwasha (2015) defined motivation as a driving force that compels an individual to take some actions in order to achieve certain goals. Motivational level of everyone is different like perception, attitude of everyone is different. For example a person feels hungry, and as a response that particular person eats so the feelings of hunger get diminished. Nigerian non-academic staff in the universities are poorly motivated. Many non-academic staff are also dissatisfied with their working environment and salary conditions. The reason behind the poor motivation of non-academic staff is that they having low salaries as compared to other professionals, poor work environment, and also not giving them opportunity of develop their career. Motivation plays an important role in the organization because it increases the productivity of employees and the goals can be achieved in an efficient way. The behavior of employees can be change through motivation in any organization. Motivation and performance are very important factors in terms of organization success and achievements. If changes occur in external environment then it is necessary for an organization to adopt that change because it may motivates to gain a competitive advantage.

3.7 Inadequate ICT Facilities

Inadequate ICT facilities for staff of Students' Affairs Units is a major challenge to effective administration of the unit. Many students' affairs units across the universities do not have adequate ICT facilities to effectively and efficiently carry out their responsibilities. Apart from ICT facilities, there is also a problem of poor internet service and unstable electricity affecting the implementation of the programme of the units.

3.8 Poor Knowledge of Students' Affairs Administration

The administration and management of students required the services of a trained and experienced students' administrators and managers. It is unfortunate that majority of staff working today in most students' affair unit of Nigerian universities did not study any programme relating to students' administration and management. They lack the knowledge and skills to work in that unit and manage the students' affairs well. It is worrisome to known that observing this facts, various universities still fails to constantly engage these staff on students' affairs administration capacity development programme to enhance their knowledge and skills.

4.0 POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

To solve the identified problems and to realize the objectives of the students' affairs unit, this paper suggested the following: increase in the funding of the students' affairs unit, employment of more staff, provision adequate working facilities, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, effective staff development programme and improve on the welfare of the staff.

4.1 Adequate Funding

The achievement of the Students' Affairs Units depend largely on the availability of funds to the units for its administration. So, the universities administrators should increase the budgetary allocation for the students' affairs units to enable them carry out their programmes for the university system. The government should also increase the funding of the universities to enable the universities provide adequate infrastructural facilities and other instructional materials.

4.2 Employment of More Staff

More staff should be employed or deployed to the Students' Affairs Units of Nigerian universities. This will enable the units to function well.

4.3 Provision Adequate Working Facilities

The universities administrators should provide adequate working tools such as Eraser, Push-pin, Drawing pin (U.K)/ Thumbtack (U.S), Paper clip, Rubber stamp, Highlighter, Fountain pen Pencil, Marker, Ballpoint, Bulldog clip, Tape dispenser, Pencil sharpener, Label, Calculator, Glue, Scissors, Sticky notes, 4A Paper, Notebook, Envelope, Clipboard, Monitor, Computer, Keyboard, Folder, Fax, Filing cabinet, Telephone, Swivel chair, Desk, Wastebasket, printer and calculators to the students' affairs units of all the universities.

4.4 Provision of Adequate Infrastructural Facilities

The government should provide adequate infrastructural facilities in all the universities across the country. This will help the universities administrators to have adequate infrastructural facilities to give different units and departments within the university especially the students' affairs units.

4.5 Effective Staff Development Programme

The universities administration should allocate more slots for staff of Students' Affairs Units for workshops because their jobs and responsibilities demand constant training in students' administration. According Bernadette & Ukaegbu, (2017) training can provide an effective channel for two ways communication especially if workshops are used to bring managers and employees together to discuss organizational issues and develop plans jointly to deal with them. Training can contribute to the satisfaction of people's needs for achievement and recognition; for example, to be singled out to attend a course can be a very powerful motivation. Training can enable people exercise greater responsibility and can enlarge their portfolio of skills that they can use both to their own advantage and that of the company/ organization. Fourthly, education and training are essential ingredients in change management programme.

4.6 Improve the Welfare of the Staff

The universities administrators should motivate the staff of students' affairs units by providing allowance for overtime job during student registration and hotel allocation. Welfare packages like on training and development such as study leave, payment of study leave, training and development allowances, promotion allowances should be given to those that are due and the trained should be promoted accordingly without tribalism and gender bias. More funds should be allocated for in-house training to enable the workers get regularly updated with current methods of doing their work.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This article discussed the challenges facing the students' affairs units of Nigerian universities. The article used secondary data. The article identified inadequate funding, inadequate staff, inadequate working materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programme of staff and poor motivations. To solve the identified problems and to realize the objectives of the students' affairs unit, this paper suggested the following: increase in the funding of the students' affairs unit, employment of more staff, provision of adequate working facilities, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, effective staff development programme and improve on the welfare of the staff.

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