

ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study assessed the academic challenges faced by students of higher education programme. A descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. The population constituted 468 higher education students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze. A sample of 216 students was selected to participate in the study. A structured questionnaire was developed, validated by experts and used in the collection of data. Data collected were analysed using the mean. The study found that personal factors, facilities, classroom condition and time constraints pose challenge to higher education students. Based on the findings it was recommended as follows: there is need for parents to provide adequate financial support to their children, government should provide students with allowance to support their parents' effort, and adequate fund should be directed to the procurement of teaching and learning facilities in order to facilitate teaching and learning of higher education, among others.

Key Words: Academic Challenges, Assessment, Students, Higher Education

Introduction

Higher education also referred to as post-secondary or tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics and universities and those institutions offering correspondence courses (Federal republic of Nigeria, 2013). Higher education has been recognized as a fundamental instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capitals all over the world (World Bank, 1999 in Asiyai, 2013). Higher institutions of learning are the power house and the driving force for the strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier and industrial development of a nation. The quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to national competitiveness. It is only quality

education that can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and politically.

The teaching and learning at higher education level therefore supposed to provide all-round development of the students in such a way that will make them contribute meaningfully to national development. Trainings offered to higher education students however fall short of complete preparation for graduates (Okorie & Ezeji, 2018). In fact, higher education programme obviously has not been able to provide the recipients with the all-round development which is its main goal. Ukpai and Ereh (2016) observed that there are cases of decay, dilapidation of few existing facilities, and infrastructure. Classrooms are substandard and grossly inadequate. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning persist while the 21st century approaches to teaching and learning, such as the use of internet, computers, projectors, simulators and other means are conspicuously unavailable. Furthermore, lack of equipment especially for information communication technology (ICT) paradigm shift has made teaching and learning approaches of the 21st century impossible.

Similarly, libraries in most institutions of higher learning in the country are stocked with obsolete text books, with current journals and text books lacking. This means that students can only have access to obsolete books stocked in the academic libraries. In the opinion of Asiyai (2013), the library is at the heart of the academic effort in a college or university. For an institution to be strong academically, it must have a formidable library put in place. This explains why top universities of the world such as Harvard, Cambridge, Tokyo and University of California are academically of high strength and quality. The acute shortage of educational facilities in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria has led to decline in the quality of higher education. This is compounded more by years of decline in budgetary allocation to the education sector. In 2019, allocation to the education sector was a mere 5.23 per cent (Ndujihe, 2019). Thus, Okoli (2015) gave insight to the many challenges facing Nigerian universities to include the struggle to grapple with issues of admission, accommodation, education policies, student unionism, funding and the likes.

The foregoing portrays huge challenges faced by students of higher education programme. Challenges are sets of trials or encounters standing in the way of achievement (Onyeme, 2018). These trials are meant to be surmounted to achieve success. Challenges faced by students may not be limited to the aforementioned. There could be personal, school-related and policy implementation challenges which may constrain students' meaningful academic achievement. Challenges may bother on social, psychological and academic. Students' academic challenges are those constraints to the attainment of their academic goal.

Worried about the challenges of higher institutions in Nigeria, a need assessment survey was carried out which included the following highlights;

- Only about 30% of Nigerian students' population has adequate access to classrooms, workshop, lecture halls, laboratories and libraries.
- Deficient libraries in terms of currency and number of books, journals, and electronic support facilities.
- Inadequate academic calendar resulting from staff unions' industrial action premised on low salary, wages/welfare and students strikes often time related to inadequate facilities.
- Lack of practical experience, often times resulting from deficient facilities (Okebukola, 2015).

These factors above are all threats to attainment of goals, and constitute main academic challenges faced by students generally. Without serious attempt to address these challenges, the goal of higher education may not be attained.

As challenges vary from individual to individual and institution to institution, it is through assessment that the challenges peculiar to an individual, programme or institution can be ascertained. Assessment is a fact-finding activity that describes conditions that exists at a particular time (Onyeme, 2018). In the context of the study, it is an activity geared towards identifying the academic challenges facing higher education students. Assessment in education is the process of collecting information for making decisions about students, curricula, programmes and educational policy (Nitko & Brookhart, 2017).

In view of this, it can be concluded that assessment plays a vital role in higher institutions of learning. In view of the aforementioned challenges that could be faced by higher education students in Nigeria, which could in turn hamper the acquisition of prerequisite skills, it becomes necessary for the present study to carry out an assessment of the academic challenges faced by students of higher education in Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

One of the goals of higher education is to contribute to national development through high level manpower training. In reality, higher education in Nigeria is faced with enormous challenges that may undermine the achievement of this laudable goal. Most importantly are the academic challenges faced by students. These academic challenges may mar this laudable goal. These challenges have prevailed despite the effort made by the federal government to make higher education a centre of excellence. In view of this unsatisfied need, it becomes imperative to assess academic challenges facing higher education students in FCE (T) Umuze.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to assess the academic challenges faced by students of higher education. Specifically, the study assessed:

1. Personal challenging factors faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze.
2. Teaching and learning facilities challenges faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze.
3. Classroom condition challenges faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze.
4. Time constraint challenge faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze.

Research Questions

Based on the specific purposes, the following research questions were answered:

1. What are the personal challenges faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze?
2. What are the teaching and learning facilities challenges faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze?
3. What are the classroom conditions challenges faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze?
4. What are the time constraint challenges faced by students of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuze?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. This type of research design is adopted when a study is merely interested in describing situation or events and would rely on opinion of members of the population or sample (Anaekwe, 2016). The area of the study was Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze, Anambra State, Nigeria. The FCE (T) Umuze is one of the eight technical colleges established by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1989 to prepare student-teachers for teaching under the basic education programme. The population of the study was 468 NCE 1-3 students in the College. The sample of the study was 216. The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane formula. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled 'Assessment of Academic Challenges Faced by Higher Education Students Questionnaire' which was validated by experts and found suitable. The instrument was administered personally by researcher and assisted by two research assistants. Data obtained from field study were analysed using simple descriptive statistics, namely frequency and mean.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings on Personal Factors as Challenge to Higher Education Students (N= 216)

S/N	PERSONAL FACTORS	SA	A	D	AD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
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1	Students do not have adequate interest in their study.	21	27	76	92	1.89	Disagree
2	Students exhibit poor attitude to course work.	31	33	85	67	2.13	Disagree
3	Students are not adequately sponsored financially by parents.	65	32	66	53	2.50	Agree
4	There is poor reading culture among students.	76	55	25	60	2.68	Agree
5	Students feel stressed by heavy course work.	158	39	11	8	3.60	Strongly agree
Mean of means						2.56	Agree

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of respondents on personal factors that pose challenge to higher education students. Item 5 was rated strongly agree (3.60); items 3 and 4 were rated agree (2.50 and 2.68 respectively); while items 1 and 2 were rated disagree (1.89 and 2.13 respectively). The mean of means, however is 2.56. This indicates that the respondents agreed that personal factors pose challenge to higher education students.

Table 2: Mean Ratings on Teaching and Learning Facilities Challenges to Higher Education Students (N= 216)

S/N	TEACHING AND LEARNING FACILITIES	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
6	Laboratory is not adequate for students' use.	87	59	23	47	2.86	Agree
7	Teachers are not adequate to teach business courses.	12	33	65	106	1.77	Disagree
8	Available teachers lack the zeal to teach.	33	21	56	106	1.91	Disagree

9	Instructional materials are not adequate.	78	87	25	26	3.00	Agree
10	Unavailable materials are not improvised for instruction.	103	56	17	40	3.03	Agree
11	Students are not exposed to modern business equipment.	98	55	19	44	2.96	Agree
12	ICT facilities are not deployed in teaching and learning.	123	67	14	12	3.39	Agree
13	Students are not exposed to the nature of the modern office by means of excursion/field trip.	87	88	14	27	3.09	Agree
Mean of means						2.75	Agree

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of respondents on extent to which teaching and learning facilities pose challenge to higher education students. Apart from items 7 and 8, the rests of the items were rated agreed to pose challenges. These are items 6 (2.86), 9 (3.00), 10 (3.03), 11 (2.96), 12 (3.39), and 13 (3.09). Items 7 and 8 were rated 1.77 and 1.91 respectively which indicate the challenges were rated as disagreed. The mean of means of 2.75, however, indicates that the respondents agreed that teaching and learning facilities pose challenge to Higher education students.

Table 3: Mean Ratings on Classroom Conditions as Challenge to Higher Education Students (N= 216)

S/N	CLASSROOM CONDITIONS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
14	Classes are usually overcrowded.	87	66	32	31	2.97	Agree
15	Seating arrangement is poorly conceived.	22	43	99	52	2.16	Disagree
16	Megaphones/speakers are not used for audibility.	132	55	11	18	3.39	Agree

17	There are always distractions during academic activities.	76	55	32	83	2.85	Agree
18	The classroom is not supportive of meaningful learning.	65	45	33	73	2.47	Disagree
Mean of means						2.77	Agree

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of respondents on extent to which classroom conditions pose challenge to higher education students. Apart from items 15 and 18, the rests of the items pose challenge and rated agreed. These are items 14 (2.97), 16 (3.39) and 17 (2.85). Items 15 and 18 were rated 2.16 and 2.47 respectively which indicate the respondents disagreed to challenges being faced. The mean of means of 2.77, however, indicates that the respondents agree that classroom conditions pose challenge to higher education students.

Table 4: Mean Ratings on Time Constraints as Challenge to Higher Education Students (N= 216)

S/N	TIME CONSTRAINTS	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	Remark
19	Students struggle with time to hand-in their assignments.	187	25	4	-	3.85	Strongly agree

20	There is always stress in meeting up time for class requirements.	166	23	22	5	3.62	Strongly agree
21	There are minimal social activities due to the demand of academic work.	212	4	-	-	3.98	Strongly agree
22	Students rarely find time to visit the library to explore further.	121	22	32	41	3.03	Agree
23	Students rarely find time to read for leisure.	201	7	3	5	3.87	Strongly agree
Mean of means						3.67	Strongly agree

Table 4 shows the mean ratings of respondents on extent to which time constraints pose challenge to higher education students. Apart from items 22, the rests of the items pose challenge and was strongly agreed to. These are items 19 (3.85), 20 (3.62), 21 (3.98), and 23 (3.87). Item 22 was rated 3.03 which indicates that the respondents agreed to the challenge being faced. The mean of means of 3.67, however, indicates that the respondents strongly agreed that time constraints pose challenge to higher education students.

Discussion of Findings

The study assessed the academic challenges faced by students of higher education programme. Four areas of interest namely, personal factors, teaching and learning facilities, classroom conditions and time constraints were particularly assessed. The findings of the study revealed that there are some challenges in all the stated areas.

In respect of personal factors, the challenges faced by higher education students include students are not adequately sponsored financially by parents. Higher education programme needs financial contribution from parent's to enable students participate actively in academic activities. Moreover, there is poor reading culture among students. Poor reading culture is a manifestation of the general problem discovered among students in the contemporary times. Due to poor reading culture, students lack in-depth knowledge of their discipline and rely on classroom effort of the teacher. The finding on poor reading culture is consistent with earlier positions of educators such as Okorie (2011) and Onyeme (2018). According to Okorie, very many Nigerians are often associated with poor reading culture. In fact, there is a saying that, if you have something worth millions of dollars to be given

to Nigerians, then hide that inside a textbook and give it to the Nigerians to read and discover it, they said they are sure the Nigerians will never read the textbook to discover that treasure. Poor reading culture has affected the fabrics of our society so much so that many Nigerian students are held captive to it. Many Nigerian students hate being given voluminous materials to read and in this way miss out the knowledge, skills and competencies that go with such materials. Such students forget that a well-read student is bound to do far better than a poorly read one in all facets of life. Okoli (2018) observed that the social media which many students indulge have ruined reading culture and called for discretionary use of the social media. Again, the courses seem to be too many for students to manage effectively. This leads to stress occasioned by heavy course work.

Apart from these personal factors, teaching and learning facilities also pose some challenges. Laboratory is not adequate for students' use. It is known that some of these business courses, like secretarial component of the programme rely on the laboratory for effective teaching and learning. The inadequacy of the laboratory would mean that students will not be adequately accommodated in the laboratory when the need arises. Apart from this, instructional materials also were found to be inadequate. Educators have always stressed the inevitability of instructional materials in teaching. This is because instructional materials are integral part of the teaching and learning process as it facilitates learning, by deepening knowledge, developing skills and shaping the learners' attitude. The findings are consistent with earlier studies on instructional materials and laboratory status in the higher institutions of learning. Oriya (2005) observed that available facilities in the institutions are inadequate quantitatively and qualitatively and besides they are obsolete. The finding also indicated that only 40% of institutions of higher education in Nigeria have laboratory or workshop space for technical education programmes. The others, 60% do not have laboratory or workshop space and that this reflects the low quality of technology programmes in higher institutions. He further noted that these few universities that have laboratories, experience acute shortage of laboratory equipment and supplies. He concluded that this situation is partly responsible for the reason why it has been increasingly difficult to run experiments effectively for students and made the teaching and research in science and technology difficult and therefore the country was producing insufficient and ill-prepared technical education graduates necessary for driving the technological and socio-economic development of Nigeria as a nation. The inadequacy in teaching, laboratory and workshop facilities has contributed to the diminution of the quality of technical education graduates in Nigeria. Reyes – Guerra (1989) categorized students into three, namely: verbalizers, visualizers and doers. The verbalizers are those who learn easily if information is in written or spoken form. They benefit from lectures, tutorials and hand-outs. Visualizers learn easily when information is presented in pictorial or diagrammatic form while the Doers learn more easily when information is presented by practical demonstration by the lecturers.

While instructional materials are either not available or adequate, the findings of the study also indicate that the unavailable materials are not improvised for instruction. Improvisation enables the teacher to substitute in the absence of standard materials. Where this is not done as well, teaching and learning suffers, and students become the ultimate victims. Students are not exposed to modern equipment. ICT facilities are not deployed in teaching and learning. Students also are not exposed to the nature of the modern office by means of excursion/field trip. All these constitute challenges faced by students.

In addition, classroom condition equally poses some challenges to students to a moderate extent. Classes are usually overcrowded. Without a normal students-teacher ratio, teaching and learning can be impaired. With over hundred students in a classroom, the teacher may have difficulty managing the class, while learners will experience some difficulties learning effectively. Megaphones/speakers could have aided the teachers' voice production, but are not used for audibility. Thus, the fact that there are always distractions during academic activities is obvious in view of the unpalatable classroom condition. In such a situation, students are bound to be dissatisfied. This is in agreement with Nwazor and Nwaukwa (2015) who observed students' dissatisfaction with teaching and learning due to poor facilities.

Finally, time constraints have been found to be major challenge to higher education students to a high extent. Students struggle with time to hand-in their assignments. There is always stress in meeting up time for class requirements. This perhaps, is a consequence of too many courses which students have to cover in a semester. Thus, this also results to minimal social activities due to the demand of academic work and time to read for leisure. Students also rarely find time to visit the library to explore further. This is serious as no teacher is a compendium of knowledge. Students need further exploration to deepen their knowledge of the subject matter and should not rely on the teacher's effort alone. Observing these weaknesses, Eneh and Eneh (2013) stated that, Nigeria's universities' graduates cannot meet employers' needs. They cannot prove their mettle. The graduates are loafers, job seekers as against graduate workers and job creators. Many of them cannot make a correct sentence and cannot defend their certificates by completely handling the jobs imposed on them by their much-vaunted qualifications.

Conclusion

The study assessed academic challenges faced by higher education students in the four key areas of personal, teaching and learning facilities, classroom conditions and time constraints. The findings were that the academic challenges faced by higher education students were found moderate in personal, teaching and learning facilities and classroom

conditions, but high in time constraints. Thus, there is the need to strike a balance between students' academic activities and their need for social life while not sacrificing any.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and implications of the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. There is the need for parents to provide adequate financial support to their children. In addition, government should provide students with allowance to support their parents' effort.
2. Reading culture should be restored among students as nothing can replace the power of the written word. To that end, the overcrowded curriculum should be reviewed downward to provide students with adequate time to read for academic and for pleasure.
3. Adequate fund should be directed to the procurement of teaching and learning facilities in order to facilitate teaching and learning in higher education. The intervention fund of the Federal government should be well appropriated to tackle the areas it is mostly needed.
4. The classroom condition should be made more conducive for teaching and learning. In that vein, the ICT facilities like projector and loudspeakers should be employed. At the same time, streams of classes should be created to decongest the overcrowded classes.
5. There is the need for balance in curricular and extra-curricular activities so that students' social life is not scarified on the altar of heavy course load. To that end, related courses should be merged in order to save time, cost and energy.

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