
OPTIMIZATION OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper establishes the need to optimize service delivery in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and discusses the factors that enable realization of this noble objective. The paper commences with definition of some concepts such as 'service' optimize and what optimization of service delivery entails. Some major goals of tertiary educational institutions as stipulated by the National Policy on Education are discussed. How optimization of service delivery can enable achievement of the national educational goals and lead to individual and national development were discussed. The view of psychologists which is that some environmental and personal factors predispose individuals to act in certain ways is noted. In the same regard the paper records that some factors associated with employers, employees, students and availability of equipment and infrastructure influence optimization of service delivery in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on the points raised, conclusions were drawn. The paper ends with recommendations of what can be done to optimize service delivery in higher institutions in Nigeria.

Longman English dictionary defined service as “duty or work done for someone”. “Optimize” is also defined by the same dictionary as “to make as perfect or effective as possible”. Following the dictionary definitions, service can be said to be optimized when duties assigned to people are performed to perfection or as effectively as possible. Optimization of service delivery in a tertiary institution can be defined as "a stated of affairs under which duties assigned to people in tertiary institutions are done as effectively as possible". For an individual to optimize his service he needs to have the

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capacity to perform the duty effectively and also needs to put in his best, (Nkwocha, 2006).

Like other developed and developing nations, Nigeria continues to strive for a better tomorrow. The ambition to enhance both individual and national development has been the promise of both past and present Nigerian leaders. For this singular purpose, series of policies have been made, implemented and reviewed. Researchers like Nwanna (1997) Abuja (1997) and Denga & Denga (1994) have proposed ideas they perceive as factors that can move the wheel of national development. The mentioned efforts notwithstanding, Nigeria is still a developing country. More suggestions about how to improve the state of affairs are needed. Like other researchers this paper is proposing a state of affairs it optimistically propounds as a condition which can propel Nigeria and her citizenry to greater heights. This is optimization of service delivery.

Goals of Higher Institutions and the Need for Optimization of Service Delivery

The National Policy on Education (2004) stated the following numbers as stipulated achievements of these goals for tertiary education in Nigeria.

“59a contribute to national development through high level manpower training.

59b develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society”

Some goals that tertiary educational institutions are designed to pursue are:

“60c - Virile staff development programmes

60g - student's industrial work experience scheme

60j - dedicated service to the community

It is noteworthy that the goals stipulated for this level of education are very high. They cannot be achieved if workers in such institutions are not effective in performing their duties. To produce high level manpower all functionaries in tertiary institutions need to put in their best. University graduates are usually entrusted with high level responsibilities in the nation. As stated in 59b, they are supposed to have acquired proper values that will enable survival of the individual and the society. Products of such institutions should have learnt the need for optimization of service delivery from both what they heard and observed functionaries of tertiary institutions model.

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National and individual developments are possible in a country where most people put in their best for national service. Guzman (2003) emphasized that a nation populated by people who are dedicated, patriotic and industrious in their duties attain rapid development. Optimization of service helps individual development. Practice makes for perfection. The more effort an individual makes to be efficient in His/Her duties the more proficient he becomes in helping himself and others. Job effectiveness facilitates productivity. It enhances economic, emotional and social development. Guskey (1984) conducted a study on the influence of change in effectiveness upon the affective characteristics of teachers. Data was collected from 117 intermediate and high school teachers from New York. Fifty two of them underwent an in-service workshop on the use of Mastery learning technique in teaching. Out of the 52 teachers only forty-four tried out the method in class. Thirty four out of the 44 teachers noted improvement in their student's learning. Guskey (1984) further used a Likert attitude scale to compare the effect of positive change in instrumental effectiveness on the teachers' affective characteristics. He observed that improvement in instructional effectiveness has positive influence on teachers' affective characteristics. This confirms that achievement or productivity which is the fruit of dedication to duty gives joy and personal satisfaction and hence enhances personal development.

Psychological Conditions that Influence Behaviour

Psychology can be defined as a scientific study of human and animal behaviour. There is a consensus among psychologists that conditions which determine peoples' reactions to their environment are both traceable to environment and personal factors. Environmentalists like Pavlova, Skinner and Watson as observed by Wallace and Goldstein (1997) reiterated that every response has a stimulus. Thorndike, a renowned psychologist states that people like to engage in acts they derive reinforcement from. Piaget another psychologist cited by Silverman (1978) stated that the capacity to perform an act must be developed before performance can take place. In the light of the above, it is necessary to discuss the current factors that influence optimization of service delivery in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Factors that can Influence Optimization of Service Delivery

Factors which affect service optimization can be traced to employer, employee and student factors. Other factors include availability of equipment, infrastructure and other facilities needed to perform duties effectively.

Employer-Factors: Employer factors which influence optimization of service delivery include, the work-load workers are saddled with, the wages and fringe benefits paid

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promptly, payment of salaries, provision of in-service training and provision of opportunity for students seeking industrial attachment to practice in their offices.

In order to minimize wage bills some employers deliberately employ few staff and admit many students. In many tertiary institutions in Nigeria the existing staff/student ratio deviates from professional standards. The numerical strength of students greatly outnumbers those of lecturers and typists, in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria one lecturer is expected to teach up to three thousand students in a semester. The same lecturers are expected to mark continuous assessment and examination scripts of all the students' within a stipulated short time frame. Lecturers are given numerous number of project students to supervise. Promotion of each academic staff largely depends on the number and quality of research works he has done.

Publication of articles in academic journals and books are usually time and money consuming. In addition, lecturers are expected to prepare and teach effective lectures. In most cases the lecture topics have no relationship with the journal articles lecturers write. It is very difficult for an employee saddled with this number of duties to be able to optimize his services in each of those tasks.

It is natural for employees to check whether the remuneration they got for the services they deliver is at par with what their counterparts working in similar institutions get. If what they receive is less, there is a tendency that while still engaged in their present post they will be looking for a greener pasture. This state of affairs cannot promote optimization of service delivery. Delay in payment of salaries makes employees look for other means of supplementing their income. The fact that an individual has not been paid does not shelve his financial responsibilities. Insufficient salaries and delay in payment of salaries are the major reasons why many staff of tertiary institutions have other businesses which distract them from their official duties. It also causes truancy among the staff. In recent times employers of labour have been accused of reluctance to allow their staff to go for in-service training. In the early 1990^s, a group of workers who were duly authorized by the government to go for further studies had to go to court to regain their jobs at the end of their studies in Imo state. (Nkwocha 2006). It should be called to mind that the National Policy on Education of (2004) number '76' stipulates that professional growth shall be encouraged at all levels. Number 60c recommends that virile staff development programmes should be encouraged. Study by Guskey 1984) revealed that in-service-training offers teachers the opportunity to learn how to improve instructional effectiveness.

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Famoroti (2004) blamed employers for existence of half baked professionals. He notes that many employees do not offer students the opportunity to do industrial training in their offices. This leads to production of graduates who did not have the opportunity to acquire the practical experience which is part of the educational objectives they are supposed to accomplish before graduation. Such people are incapable of giving optimal service delivery when they get employment.

Abuja (2003) blamed workers truancy on poor remuneration by employers of labour. Onyechere (2003) investigated obstacles to effective teaching and learning in Geography in Ideato North in Imo State. The sample of the study comprised two hundred students and eight teachers. Data collected with a questionnaire and interviews were analyzed with mean scores and percentages. He found that over labouring of the few available teachers and lack of supervision were major obstacles to effectiveness in job performance,

Employee-Factors: Members of staff of tertiary institutions are composed of academic and non academic staff. Some non-academic staff who form the administrative cadre are; the Vice- chancellor, the provost, the registrar and deputy registrar. The academic staff are the lecturers. Other non-academic staffs include record officers, typists and messengers. Staff-factors which influence optimization of service delivery are; qualification and competence in performance of assigned duties, cooperation among members of staff, personal attitude to work, craze for acquisition of wealth rather than dedication to duty, financial status, health conditions, patriotism and level of morality. Nwanna (1997) noted that the high rate of examination malpractice casts doubts about the credibility of certificates many Nigerians hold. Okai (2003) noted that possession of certificates obtained through examination cheating can lead to wrong placement of students into departments and employment of incompetent personnel.

Other factors are lack of cooperation among staff of an institution and failure to disseminate essential information among members of staff. The administrative staff should work hand in hand with representatives of the academic staff in deciding the school calendar, knowledge of how many holidays there are in a semester would enable each lecturer plan his lectures and cover courses outlines effectively.

Lack of cooperation among lecturers is another factor that can hinder optimal service delivery. This negative factor reflects in the distribution of courses to be taught. Some senior lecturers assign many courses and departments that have large number of students to themselves in order to sell their books. They assign less number of courses and less number of students to junior lecturers who can competently handle more

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classes. The resultant effect of this is that, those with large numbers may not be able to mark student's scripts as thoroughly as they should and produce the results when needed. This could lead to invalid results and their antecedent consequences.

Sometimes optimal service delivery is hindered when examination questions are set before teaching is done. Some lecturers having known the questions focus their teaching only on areas set in the examination papers. The consequence is that the course outline is not covered. Students thereby are not made to acquire all the skills they need to acquire for those courses. Immorality, lack of patriotism, greed, and laziness among workers hinder optimal services delivery. Guzman (2003) in a review of educational system in Philippine found that effective service delivery is facilitated by personal qualities such as, "industry, good health, sound patriotism, righteousness, high social ideas and a strong moral fibre". A righteous record officer or typist will not collect money from students and change their scores or leak examination question to them.

It is noteworthy that a school is a body with different parts. The school functionaries and the students are the parts. If one part refuses to function properly, because of lack of cooperation the functions of other parts will be adversely affected. This assertion is confirmed by Esomonu (2003) that a harmonious relationship among staff is fundamental to "achievement of institutional goals",

Student-Factors: Education should be student- centered. If students are unruly and lack prerequisite education needed to be at this level of education, the staff would find it difficult to help them effectively. The status quo is that many students do not attend lectures. They only come on examination days to cheat in examination halls. Some use money given to them to purchase books for other frivolities. Some gain admission with certificates they cannot defend. Many have not even acquired the ability to read and write. Delivery of effective lectures is very difficult when a greater percentage of students are of this category.

Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities in Tertiary Institutions

The use of necessary infrastructure, equipment and facilities for achievement of optimal service delivery cannot be overemphasized. Some essential infrastructures are sufficient classrooms, libraries, laboratories and availability of fields for games. Insufficient classrooms generate a lot of problems such as clashes between lecturers. Sometimes more than one lecturer is given one classroom to deliver lecture at the same time. The consequence is that one group of students lose their lecture. If the lecturers involved do not handle the problem with caution they may quarrel in their students' presence. Insufficient examination rooms lead to examining more students than should be in a class. This gives room for examination cheating.

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Many tertiary institutions do not have sufficient seats in their classrooms. Many students take lectures that last for many hours standing. Learning cannot be optimized under such conditions. Necessary equipment such as; computers, typewriters, required stationery materials and examination papers are needed for optimization of service delivery.

Computers are needed for storing students' results. School libraries need to be stocked with recent journals and books. Seats should be provided in the libraries for students who want to read when they do not have lectures. This will minimize incidents where students who do not have lectures stay by the corridor or inside a classroom where lecture is going on and disturb ongoing lectures.

Conclusion

The position of this paper is that optimization of service delivery obtains in a tertiary institution when duties are done as effectively as possible. It is noted that factors may lead to optimization of service delivery are traceable to employers, employees, students and provision of necessary infrastructure, equipment and facilities.

Recommendations

1. The correct number of student/lecturer ratio stipulated by teaching profession should be maintained in tertiary institutions. A lecturer should not be assigned more than fifty students for a course.
2. Coordinators of courses should ensure that the content of courses-outlines are covered by every lecturer. To ensure coverage of course contents no single lecturer should handle a course.
3. Workers' remuneration should be made attractive and at par with what their counterparts receive in similar institutions.
4. Academic unions and non-academic unions should interact and ensure that there is cooperation among all members of staff.
5. Every new student should be given a prospectus, which should contain the rules and regulations of the school to sign before admission.
6. Infrastructures, equipment and facilities required for performance of all duties should be provided by the school,
7. The government should give enough financial assistance to tertiary institutions.
8. There should be at least three weeks interval between two semesters. Some time interval should also be allowed between two programmes run by an institution, such as regular sandwich programmes. This is necessary because the same lecturers teach students in the different semester programmes. They need some rest to keep healthy and also enough time to mark examination scripts properly.

9. Post Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination interviews should continue to be used to screen candidates before admission.

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