



MANAGING ACADEMIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

This survey-designed study investigated managing academic service delivery in South-South Nigerian universities for national education transformation. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to draw a sample size of 200 subjects made up of 46 Deans of Faculties and 154 Heads of Departments, from a population of 322 subjects (46 Deans and 276 HODs) in 4 Federal Universities. Data were collected with the use of “Academic Service Delivery Management Questionnaire (ASDMQ)”. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using Population t-test of single mean and Independent t-test statistical techniques. Results disclosed that managing academic service delivery at the departmental level is significantly low; managing academic service delivery at the faculty level is significantly low; there is no significant difference in managing academic service delivery between departments and faculties in south-south universities. On the strength of these findings, it was recommended that Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments should give priority attention to academic service delivery to enhance students’ academic outcomes, quality education and national education transformation.

Keywords: Academic service delivery, Universities, Education, Transformation.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of the very few studies which have investigated managing academic service delivery in south-south Nigerian universities for national education transformation, with results showing that this all important aspect of institutional administration is poorly managed. There is need for proper management of this for quality learning outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities exist to disseminate knowledge through teaching, research and community service. These triple mandates make universities unique organizations whose existence stands for purely academic purposes. There is also no gainsaying the fact that universities are established for the sake of training high level manpower of which students are the main constituents. Students are the major beneficiaries of universities’ dissemination of knowledge. They constitute the end product of university education whose quality determines to a large extent the effectiveness of universities in performing their roles. Without students, universities may not be established. Universities render many services one of which is academic service. This is so because their existence centres on executing academic-

related activities. It can therefore be rightly pointed out that the ability of universities to fulfill their mandates is a function of their effectiveness in managing their academic service delivery.

Academic service, according to [The Design-Based Research Collective \(2003\)](#) is a teaching method which promotes student learning through active participation in meaningful planned service to the community related to course content. It is founded on theories of experiential learning, transformation theory, critical reflection and education as preparation for civic responsibility. To [Peck *et al.* \(2010\)](#) it is any activity or social exchange that supports students in their academic studies. The aim of academic service is to improve the quality of education. Its role is to provide high quality, prompt, reliable and cost-effective administration and student support services to the university community ([Price, n.d.](#)). Academic service delivery has to do with the effectiveness with which universities discharge their academic services to yield the desired dividend. On the other hand, transformation means a complete change from one situation to another, a total departure from the old order to a new one through deliberate effort ([Akuogwu *et al.*, 2012](#)). National education transformation has to do with the process in which the outdated education is replaced with efficient system to leverage significant advances in the global environment and therefore, enabling educational institutions to serve more number of people in a better manner ([Babalola, 2010](#)). This implies changing university education into a new order whereby it is placed in a better pedestal to serve students, stakeholders and the nation better.

In this study, academic service delivery shall be considered from these perspectives: Academic Advising, Academic Guidance and Counseling, Administrative Service, Library Service, Health Service, Safety Service, Academic Relations with Students, Academic and Social Support, Hygiene and Care of Physical Areas, and Students' Activities. Academic advising has to do with giving timely and gentle instructions or exhortation to students on how to improve their academic pursuits. Academic guidance and counseling involves measures undertaken to guide and make useful suggestions to students on the need to opt for academic programmes based on their abilities and aptitudes. Administrative service is those expert helps or advice given to students from the offices of the heads of departments, deans of faculties or the principal officers in the university. Library service on its own part, means assistance, expert instructions or directives aimed at enabling students have access to books and other library materials and resources. Health service has to do with tips, professional advice and recommendations offered to students to ensure that they remain healthy at all times while pursuing their academic careers. Safety service involves supplying useful information, professional help or assistance to students with a view to prevent them from exposure to harm and injury. Academic relations with students mean polite and cordial dealings with them on academic matters aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence with the university authority. Academic and social support has to do with helps rendered to strengthen close relationship, promote interaction, enhance friendly coexistence and sharing of information by students on academic and group matters. For hygiene and care of physical areas, it means measures initiated to pay serious attention to cleanliness and protection of tangible areas to enhance students' wellbeing. Students' activities are those human endeavours within the university which students indulge in. They can take the forms of academic, social, religious or traditional. To manage them is to ensure that they are effectively undertaken to achieve the desired results. Heads of Departments are academic leaders at the departmental level, while Deans do the same at the Faculty level.

The growth in higher education and expansion, especially in universities, widening participation and increasingly diverse student body are all signals of a radically changing educational landscape ([Christie, 2012](#)). Aside from this, the nature of students' experience and changing students' expectations in the ever-changing academic environment are eloquent indications that there is need for academic service delivery. Academic service delivery strengthens students' learning experiences and enables staff to be alive to their responsibilities of ensuring that quality education is bequeathed on students. As such, it could be an effective solution to developing skills and attitudes of students as it would enable them to begin to conceptualize themselves as future professionals and stakeholders with the service learning experiences.

The principal contribution of a university to society turns out on the quality of knowledge generated, impacts, habits in critical thought, problem solving qualities institutionalized and inculcated in its graduates, with values of openness and democratic governance it promotes and demonstrate. The easiest way to ascertain these contributions is the caliber and commitment of lecturers to continuous improvements in teaching, research and community interactions; range of quality in curriculum and pedagogy; quality and extent of educational facilities; commitment to evaluation and review of activities to seek continuous improvements (Liston, 1999; Sawyerr, 2004). However, these contributions can be achieved, made relevant to university education and students' learning through a properly articulated and vibrantly managed academic service delivery.

Academic service is available at all levels of study in the university and tailored according to the specific contexts of the academic programmes (Christie, 2012). In spite of this, it is initiated and domiciled at the departmental level and faculty by extension. This is so because departments are mainly the nucleus of academic programmes, where most of the courses are taught, evaluated and managed. All departmental academic programmes are geared towards imbuing students with the ability not just to discern things, but also to apply time-tested theories to explain events, ideas and values; knowledge of the natural order; the pursuing of the common good and individual well-being (Adekunle *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, students' are critical to the success of any academic service activity. This arises from the fact that it integrates students into academic life by accommodating the needs of their increasing diverse communities. Academic service is a dynamic process that is intrinsically linked to the student journey and academic role or cycle (Christie, 2012).

Academic service delivery is as old as university education in Nigeria. It has been handled at three levels namely - departmental, faculty and institutional. As the quest to improve academic quality in these three levels is given pride of place, so is academic service delivery. Each university in South-South strives to carve a niche for itself in the quality of education it provides and so improves its academic service delivery to meet the demands of students and other clients.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

There have been tremendous efforts by the government and university administrators in Nigeria to improve the quality of university education. These attempts are in forms of provision of new facilities and updating existing ones, enhancement of the condition of service for university personnel and engendering conducive learning environments. These efforts have resulted to the transformation of academic service delivery. Despite these laudable efforts, academic service delivery has not produced the desired results in enhancing students' learning experiences. Poor academic outcomes are still common features among graduates and undergraduate students in universities. Students who lack direction and proper guidance; those who operate as if they are aliens to university education are ubiquitous in the departments, faculties and institutions. Given this prevailing scenario in the universities, it is skeptical if academic service delivery will revolutionize the university system in the near future, and make it stand the test of time. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate and provide solutions to this problem stated thus: what is the extent of managing academic service delivery at the departmental and faculty levels in universities in South-South Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on academic service delivery focused mainly on institutional level, rather than at the departmental and faculty levels. As such, little or nothing is known about this very important service at these levels (departmental and faculty).

Christie (2012) reported that academic service results to high standards of students' work. Students respond positively to challenging assignments, which stretch their conceptual, reflective and technical skills. The

development of strong practical and technical skills and the capacity to work independently prepare students extremely well for future endeavours and employment.

Research evidence had it that the higher education sector is confronted with intense competitive pressures due to the globalization of education market and reduction of government funds that force tertiary education institutions to seek alternative financial sources particularly from full-fee paying students. This development has called for a greater attention towards understanding academic service expectations as well as essential antecedents and consequences of service quality evaluation towards students' loyalty (Greenaway and Haynes, 2000; Abdullah, 2006; Hotamisli and Yoruk, 2011).

According to Christie (2012) libraries and learning zones represent an obvious location for academic service as they already accommodate a wide range of learning activities and are open to all students of the university. Thus, academic service delivery in libraries tends to stimulate learning and enhance students' learning outcomes.

Eyler (2005) reported that academic service learning that links community service projects to course subject matter not only motivates students to learn, but also provide experiences that facilitate the development of attitudes, skills and intellectual abilities necessary for civic engagement. Academic service learning gives students the knowledge, critical thinking capacity, and practical strategic experience to act on their commitment.

Eyler and Giles (1999) conducted a research study that supports the link between effective academic service learning and students' outcome. The study documented the impact of academic service learning on college students and particular characteristics associated with high quality academic service learning. It included a pre-and post-service academic learning survey of 1,100 students participating in academic service learning on over twenty college campuses, along with four hundred non-participants. Six-five additional students on six campuses participated in hour-long pre-and post-academic service interviews, which assessed problem solving capacity and critical thinking capacity. The study found that academic service learning was a significant predictor of students' growth in personal and community efficacy and in commitments to future service. Students in placements that were challenging and engaging also reported increases in skills for civic involvement, such as leadership and communication skills. In their intensive interview study, they established that increasing the extent to which subject matter of study and the expenses are integrated through continuous challenging reflection leads to increased problem solving sophistication and to higher levels of cognitive development. All these findings point to the efficacy of academic service delivery in enhancing students' learning outcomes and future service commitments.

2.1. Hypotheses

1. Managing academic service delivery at the departmental level is not significantly low.
2. Managing academic service delivery at the faculty level is not significantly low.
3. There is no significant difference in managing academic service delivery between departments and faculties in universities in South-South Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey design approach. This is so because this study examined the nature of academic service delivery at the time of investigation. It was conducted in federal universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which constitutes part of the oil-rich Niger Delta Region. 6 federal universities are located in this zone. The population of the study comprised 322 subjects made up of 46 Deans of Faculties and 276 Heads of Departments located in 4 randomly sampled federal universities. A census of all Deans of Faculties in these 4 federal universities was adopted as their size was manageable while a random sample of 154 Heads of Departments (HODs) out of 276 was adopted. A breakdown of the sample showed that University of Calabar had 10 Deans and 40 HODs, 12 Deans and 38 HODs from University of Uyo, 11 Deans and 39 HODs from University of Port Harcourt while 13 Deans and 37 HODs were selected from University of Benin making a total sample size of 200

subjects. Data collection was carried out with the use of researchers-constructed instrument titled “Academic Service Delivery Management Questionnaire (ASDMQ)” which contained 45 items. The instrument consisted of 2 sections - A and B. Section A comprised 5 demographic variables, while Section B arranged on 5-point rating scale consisted of 40 items, 4 of which measured each of the 10 variables isolated for this study. The variables include; Academic Advising, Academic Guidance and Counseling, Administrative Service, Library Service, Health Service, Safety Service, Academic Relations with Students, Academic and Social Support, Hygiene and Care of Physical Areas, and Students’ Activities. The instrument was face-validated by experts in measurement and evaluation. The reliability was established through a trial test conducted on 50 subjects who have similar characteristics with the sampled subjects, but did not take part in the study. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the internal consistency of the instrument. The result yielded a coefficient of .93 which is an indication that the instrument was reliable for use in achieving the purposes of the study. Administration of the instrument was handled by the researchers with the help of trained research assistants. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using Population t-test of single mean and Independent t-test. Results were presented in tables.

4. RESULTS

Hypothesis One

Managing academic service delivery at the departmental level is not significantly low. The only variable is managing academic service delivery at the departmental level. Population t-test of single mean was used to analyse statistically the data collected. Summaries of the results are presented in table 1.

Table-1. Population t-test of Single Mean Statistical Analysis of Managing Academic Service Delivery at the Departmental Level N =154

Variables	Observed Mean (\bar{X})	Assumed Mean (μ)	SD	t
Academic Advising	11.92	12.00	3.09	-47.844*
Academic Guidance and Counseling	13.10	12.00	4.04	40.258*
Administrative Service	12.65	12.00	3.68	42.707*
Library Service	11.89	12.00	3.10	-47.550*
Health Service	11.81	12.00	3.23	-45.328*
Safety Service	12.29	12.00	3.36	45.366*
Academic Relations with Students	12.08	12.00	2.86	52.332*
Academic and Social Support	11.40	12.00	2.89	-48.940*
Hygiene and Care of Physical Areas	12.53	12.00	3.35	46.435*
Students’ Activities	12.11	12.00	3.10	48.532*

*Significant at 0.05; df = 153; Critical t-value = 1.972.

The results presented in this table 1 has shown that in all ramifications of academic service delivery, the calculated t-values were found to be higher than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 alpha level of significance and 153 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected and so managing academic service delivery at the departmental level is significantly low.

Further observation of the results disclosed that the observed mean managing of academic service delivery was higher than the assumed mean of 12.00 in 6 variables, whereas in 4 variables, the assumed mean were higher than the observed mean. Statistical comparison of these observed mean values and the assumed mean value of 12.00 using Population t-test analysis of single mean yielded positive and negative t-values. This by implication means that managing academic service delivery at the departmental level is significantly low.

Hypothesis Two

Managing academic service delivery at the faculty level is not significantly low. The only variable is managing academic service delivery at the faculty level. Population t-test of single mean was used to analyse statistically the data collected. Summaries of the results are presented in table 2.

Table-2. Population t-test of Single Mean Statistical Analysis of Managing Academic Service Delivery at the Faculty Level. N=46

Variables	Observed Mean (\bar{X})	Assumed Mean (μ)	SD	t
Academic Advising	12.43	12.00	3.22	26.227*
Academic Guidance and Counseling	13.98	12.00	3.54	26.996*
Administrative Service	13.21	12.00	3.93	22.797*
Library Service	12.93	12.00	3.12	28.094*
Health Service	12.11	12.00	3.14	26.132*
Safety Service	13.35	12.00	3.31	27.311*
Academic Relations with Students	12.70	12.00	2.79	30.886*
Academic and Social Support	12.30	12.00	3.25	25.666*
Hygiene and Care of Physical Areas	13.87	12.00	3.90	24.106*
Students' Activities	13.35	12.00	3.03	29.903*

*Significant at 0.05; df = 45; Critical t-value = 2.009

The results presented in table 2 revealed that in all ramifications of academic service delivery, the calculated t-values were found to be higher than the critical t-value of 2.009 at 0.05 alpha level of significance and 45 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected and so, managing academic service delivery at the faculty level is significantly low.

Further examination of the results indicated that the observed mean managing of academic service delivery was higher than the assumed mean of 12.00. Statistical comparison of these observed mean values and the assumed mean value of 12.00 using Population t-test analysis of single mean yielded positive t-values. This by implication means that managing academic service delivery at the faculty level is significantly low.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference in managing academic service delivery between Heads of Departments and Deans of Faculties. The independent variable is institutional leaders (HODs and Deans), while the dependent variable is managing academic service delivery. Independent t-test statistical technique was used to compare mean scores of HODs and Deans in their managing of academic service delivery. Summaries of the results are presented in table 3.

Table-3. Independent t-test Statistical Analysis of the difference in Managing Academic Service Delivery between Heads of Departments and Deans of Faculties

Variables	HODs (N=154) \bar{X}	SD	Deans (N=46) \bar{X}	SD	t
Academic Advising	11.95	3.00	12.13	2.98	-0.350
Academic Guidance and Counseling	13.17	3.85	12.33	2.15	1.278
Administrative Service	12.65	3.33	12.54	4.72	-0.185
Library Service	12.09	3.01	12.20	3.23	-0.203
Health Service	11.85	3.12	11.96	3.17	-0.201
Safety Service	12.75	3.35	12.26	3.01	0.883
Academic Relations with Students	12.03	2.89	11.82	2.77	0.429
Academic and Social Support	11.37	2.81	11.35	3.09	0.046
Hygiene and Care of Physical Areas	12.05	3.21	13.02	3.91	-1.706
Students' Activities	11.77	2.85	12.28	3.56	-1.003

Not significant at 0.05; df = 198; Critical t-value = 1.972

The results presented in table 3 disclosed that the calculated t-values, in all ramifications of academic service delivery, were found to be lower than the critical t-value of 1.972 at 0.05 alpha level of significance and 198 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This has shown that there is no significant difference in managing of academic service delivery between heads of Departments and Deans of Faculties.

Further revelation from the results had it that the mean managing of academic service delivery by Heads of Departments was higher in 4 variables than those of the Deans. Conversely, the mean managing of academic service delivery by Deans of Faculties was higher in 6 variables than those of Heads of Departments. This means that Deans of Faculties were better in managing academic service delivery than the Heads of Departments as evidenced by their mean values. However, the difference in mean values was not glaring enough to warrant a significant result.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results of hypothesis 1 revealed that managing academic service delivery at the departmental level is significantly low. This necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis, and in its place retaining the alternate hypothesis.

This finding by implication, means that the way and manner academic service delivery is managed by Heads of Departments is inadequate, and so do not produce the desired result. That is, management of academic service delivery has not been able to influence students' learning outcome positively. Thus, the skills which would have enabled students to function effectively in their future roles in national education transformation have been lacking as a result of poor management of academic service delivery. Little wonder then why the quality of our university products has been suspect, leading to blames being heaped on universities for failing to live up to the expectation of producing high caliber manpower who are able to perform creditably in their chosen fields. This position is accentuated by [Okonjo-Iweala \(2012\)](#) that several universities are producing graduates that lacked the right skills needed to perform tasks required in their chosen fields. This means that graduates produced by universities are incapable of contributing effectively towards transforming education industry if called upon to do so in their societies in particular and nation in general. It can therefore be rightly pointed out that poor academic outcome which is common among our university undergraduates is a direct fallout of the inability of the Heads of Departments to initiate modalities for proper academic advising, academic guidance and counseling, academic relations with students, academic and social support, among other academic services.

Results of hypothesis 2 disclosed that managing academic service delivery at the Faculty level is significantly low. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

This finding suggests that managing academic service delivery at the Faculty level is far from being adequate. It therefore implies that what is obtainable at the Departmental level is a spillover from the Faculty. The Dean is the academic head of the Faculty and as such supposed to provide leadership to the Faculty and by extension the Departments. It therefore follows that leadership at the Faculty level has not been able to manage academic service delivery properly.

A plausible explanation for this finding is that Faculty is made up of Departments and since academic programmes are mainly domiciled at the Departments, the Dean may inadvertently play down on managing academic service delivery for Departments to handle. Hence, this outcome of low managing of academic service delivery at the Faculty level accentuates this explanation. Secondly, more students are found in Faculties than in Departments. Thus, the large number of students may prove difficult for the Dean to provide effective academic service delivery management. However, the ineffective managing of academic service delivery has resulted to many students lacking direction and focus in their academic pursuits, a situation that has made them unable to cope with the demands of their academic programmes. This poses serious threat to national education transformation,

Results of hypothesis 3 indicated that there is no significant difference in managing academic service delivery between Heads of Departments and Deans of Faculties. This result made the null hypothesis not to be rejected.

This has shown that the measures put in place by Faculty Deans to manage academic service delivery is replicated by the Heads of Departments. Therefore, where Deans of Faculties manage academic service delivery poorly, the HODs are likely to follow suit.

A plausible explanation for this finding is that Deans of Faculties are academic leaders. They coordinate and control the Heads of Departments to an extent by issuing directives, initiating processes and putting in place modalities for academic programmes to run smoothly (Akuegwu *et al.*, 2012). This implies that HODs cannot deviate from any course of action charted by the Dean since administratively they are under the control and supervision of the Dean. It therefore follows that ineffectiveness observed in Deans in managing academic service delivery may repeat itself in the Departments, as revealed by this finding. Therefore the result obtained at the Faculty level is the same result obtainable at the Departmental level. So, where the Faculty failed to live up to expectation in advising students academically, guiding and counseling them, relating academically with them, supporting them academically, rendering administrative service, library service, safety service, hygiene and care of physical areas, and handling students activities, the Departments may also fail. So any failure in managing academic service delivery in the departments and faculties is likely to replicate itself in students' learning outcomes and work against achieving national education transformation.

However, this result also showed that Deans of Faculties were better in managing academic service delivery in most of the services. This is not surprising because Deans, by their position and placement in university administrative hierarchy which is higher than HODs, are supposed to perform their academic service delivery roles better. It is only when the Dean leads the way by being effective that HODs may tow the same line. This implies that leading the way to managing academic service delivery effectively at the department and faculty administrative control levels to achieve national education transformation is the onus of deans of faculties.

6. CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this study have clearly indicated that managing academic service delivery is significantly low at the Departmental and Faculty levels. Even at that, there is no significant difference in managing academic service delivery between Heads of Departments and Deans of Faculties. This is a serious limitation to students getting the best out of their studies and contributing towards achieving national education transformation. However, Faculties were found to be better in managing academic service delivery in most of the services studied. It therefore follows that if Faculties perform creditably in managing academic service delivery, the Departments may record the same result, and where they perform poorly, there may be a repeat occurrence at the Departments.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the outcomes of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Deans of Faculties as academic leaders should accord academic service delivery a top priority attention. This is necessary because the way and manner it is managed determines to a large extent, the academic outcome of students. Effective management of academic service delivery may go a long way to enhance students' academic attainment to make it more qualitative. Qualitative academic outcome means that the right skills and experiences are derived from academic programmes. This results to individual and national education transformation.
2. Faculty heads should monitor academic service delivery at the Departmental level to ensure that it is given a pride of place. This calls for proper coordination, because it is academic service delivery that strengthens academic programmes. It is only when academic programmes are strengthened that they can result to national education transformation.

3. The Departments on their part, being in direct contact with the students should strive to ensure that academic service delivery is effectively carried out, irrespective of how the faculties handle it. They are in a better position to do this because they have lesser number of students than the Faculties to deal with. This may enable them to identify the needs of students academically and work towards satisfying them. Students may thus be enabled to get the best out of their education, which may help them fit in properly in the national scheme of things.

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