

A Comparative Study of Students' Access to and Utilization of Learning Resources in Selected Public and Private Universities in Southwest, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated students' access to and utilization of some learning resources in selected public and private universities in southwest Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 585 (295 public and 290 private) students from 12 (six public and six private) universities in southwest Nigeria. Two instruments-Cost and Quality of University Education Questionnaire (CQUEQS) with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 and Availability of Learning Resources Observation Schedule (ALROS) which had been used in a previous study-were used to collect data for the study. Frequency counts and simple percentages were used to analyse the data while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant difference between public and private universities in terms of access to learning resources while there was no significant difference between public and private universities in the utilization of some learning resources. It was recommended that public universities should endeavour to provide more learning resources in their institutions while university authorities should ensure that learning resources that are provided are adequately utilised by students.

Keywords: Accessibility, utilization, learning resources, public and private universities, southwest Nigeria.

Introduction

Globally, economic and socio-political development is increasingly driven by the advancement in and application of education. No wonder education in general and higher (university) education in particular is germane to the growth and development of knowledge, economy and society. This is why education is viewed as an important element in nation building or national development: it is a fundamental correlate of socio-economic, cultural, political and technological development of any society or nation. This is why the quest for education in general and university education in particular has been on the increase all over the world especially in a developing country like Nigeria. This also explains the reason for many countries expending so much of their resources on education in general and university education in particular.

In order to further buttress the importance of education to the society and nation building, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), of which Nigeria is a member, has charged all its member-nations to ensure that a reasonable portion (at least 26 percent) of their annual budgets should be devoted to education. This is partly because education improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as unemployment as well as brings about knowledge, social, economic and political empowerment in the society (Oni and Alade, 2010). This shows why there have been agitations by citizens of the world to have unhindered access to university education, as education is seen as a social institution that is concerned with imparting knowledge and skills which make an individual to be integrated and useful to the development of the society (Ramon-Yusuf, 2003).

Thus, while education in general provides the platform for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, habits and values for productive living in the society (Adesina, 1985), university education has been recognized as an important instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capital all over the world (World Bank, 1999). Countries can achieve sustainable development through training at higher level the skills of their human capital. Higher level manpower training has been globally recognized as a tool for national development. Such high level educational provision, as provided only in universities, enables the citizens to acquire skills and techniques which are ploughed into human productivity, creativity, competence, initiative, innovation and inventiveness (Ekundayo and Ajayi, 2009). Furthermore, university education provides the platform for individuals to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and values to make them productive in the society. On the basis of this, university education equips the individuals with the personal capabilities to be functional in and contribute to the collective survival in the larger society. Therefore, university education provides not only intellectual development but also the acquisition of necessary skills and character required for socio-economic and political development of the society (World Bank, 2004).

The essence of university education differs from one society to another. Generally, university education

is assumed by long established tradition for all learning activities that are governed by creative skepticism, constant questioning, disputation and argumentation which are encouraged not as ends in themselves but as a means of ensuring the discovery of novel, economic empowerment, human and societal development, and better solutions to both the results of the shortcomings in the expectation of the university system (Cabal, 1993). Furthermore, the operations of and programmes offered by universities differ from one society to another even though there is supposed to be a universality in university education.

There are broad areas in which the citizens of a country need to learn: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together serve to define that breadth. The condition for developing those freedoms is for a massive increase in human learning through education (Aniekwu and Ezemonye, 2010). That is why all over the world people and even societies use knowledge acquired through education to improve their capabilities and efficiencies in economic development. Sometimes, according to Aniekwu and Ezemonye (2010), people create such knowledge themselves; at other times they adopt knowledge created by others and education is the key to creating, adapting and spreading knowledge. They (Aniekwu and Ezemonye, 2010) argued further that basic education increases the capacity of people to learn and to interpret information while university education – which is the focus of this study – is the required platform to build a labour force that can keep up with a constant stream of advances and speed up the building of human capital.

Higher education has been recognized as an important instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capital all over the world (World Bank, 1999). According to Peretomode (2008), higher education is the facilitator, the bedrock, the power house and the driving force for a strong socio-political, economic, cultural, religious, healthier and industrial development of a nation as institutions of higher learning are key mechanisms increasingly recognized as wealth and human capital producing industries. This is because only human capital can sustain growth (Kors, 2008).

Furthermore, higher (university) education provides the platform for individuals to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and values to make them productive in the society. On the basis of this, university education equips the individuals with the personal capabilities to be functional in and to contribute to the collective survival in the larger society. Therefore, university education provides cognitive and intellectual development, acquisition of necessary skills and character required for socio-economic and political development of the society. It is in recognition of these benefits that many countries have made giant strides in expanding access to education at all levels even to the point of making basic education free and universal (World Bank, 2004).

Over the years, and in spite of the importance attached to education, successive governments in Nigeria (Federal and State) have paid lip service to education generally and university education in particular. Inadequate funding, particularly in the last three decades, tends to explain the lack of adequate facilities being experienced by universities in Nigeria and the corresponding fall in standard. This has mostly affected infrastructure (buildings, roads, electricity and water), knowledge facilities such as library facilities, information and communication facilities, and teaching/instructional aids; research funding; recreational facilities; and welfare package for lecturers, administrative staff and students (Akinnsaso, 2012). This probably resulted from the fact that the Federal Government, for instance, has kept the percentage of budgetary allocations to the education sector at a single digit as against the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO's 1997) recommendation of 26 percent (see table 1).

Table 1: Nigeria's budget estimates and allocations to Education Sector (1999 - 2009).

Year	Total Recurrent Expenditure (₦) Million	Education Recurrent Expenditure (₦) Million	% of Education to Total Recurrent Expenditure
1999	*NA	*NA	*NA
2000	461,600.00	57,956.64	12.56
2001	579,300.00	39,882.60	6.88
2002	696,800.00	80,530.88	11.56
2003	984,300.00	64,782.15	6.58
2004	1,110,643.60	76,527.65	6.89
2005	1,321,229.99	82,797.11	6.27
2006	1,390,101.90	119,017.97	8.56
2007	1,589,269.80	150,779.27	9.49
2008	2,117,362.00	163,977.47	7.74
2009	2,127,971.50	137,156.62	6.45

Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin (2000 – 2009) cited in Oseni (2012)

Table 1 shows that Nigeria has not met the 26% of annual budget on education recommended by UNESCO. While countries like Ghana, South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya and Morocco had 31%, 25.8%, 30%,

23% and 17.7% respectively of their annual budgets on education (Abayomi, 2012), the closest Nigeria has come to the UNESCO recommendation was a meagre 12.56% of the year 2000 annual budget.

The deplorable state of Nigerian universities in terms of quality of programmes, curriculum content and physical facilities occasioned by inadequate funding by the government is another issue in university administration. This is particularly so with the recent world rankings of universities which have exposed the country's university system to much ridicule. Whereas Webometrics Ranking of universities (which measures web presence and content) in 2012 does not rank any university in Nigeria among the best 4000 colleges and universities in the world and none in the best 30 universities in Africa, the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking which uses programme and instructional content as part of the yardstick/ criteria did not mention any university in Nigeria at all (Olukotun, 2012). The implication of this development is that the running of universities in Nigeria has not lived up to the level that the programmes offered and their operations can be comparable to world standards. For instance, it has been argued that many of the programmes offered in public universities in Nigeria are such that cannot make their products (graduates) either to be self-reliant or employable in the labour market (Akinnaso, 2012; Oluwasanya, 2014).

The Webometrics Ranking and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) seemed to be a wake-up call to the university system in Nigeria in terms of quality of programmes and high standard of operations. In the World University Web Ranking for 2012, Universities of Lagos, Ibadan and Ilorin were the only institutions in Nigeria that made the first 40 in the top 100 Universities and Colleges in Africa (CSIC, 2014). Institutional framework, style of governance (operations), research and teaching are some of the criteria used in the ranking. According to Omole (2012), it would be difficult for universities in Nigeria to be among the best 10 in Africa as long as universities are locked up for months due to incessant strikes resulting from industrial disputes between staff unions and university management on one hand, and student unrest on the other hand. The implication of this is that quality and standard are compromised when, in an apparent move to make up for lost time, the semester and by extension, the academic session is shortened when programmes that are supposed to last for twelve (12) to thirteen (13) weeks are compressed to eight weeks or less (Omole, 2012). This is one area that public universities can learn from private universities: staff and student unionism is not allowed on their (private universities) campuses. This, to a large extent, has brought about industrial peace and harmony as well as smooth running of programmes and operations in private universities though this situation does not augur well for organizational efficiency as staff and students are not allowed to enjoy their fundamental human right of freedom of association. However, this freedom in public universities has made their academic calendar to be unpredictable due to disruptions caused by some of the factors earlier mentioned.

Inadequate and inconducive learning environment and facilities is yet another issue in university education in Nigeria. The environment in which teaching-learning takes place in most Nigerian universities is not conducive as lecture halls, laboratories, seminar rooms and other facilities are in advanced state of degradation-too small and ill-equipped- coupled with the absence of potable water, internet access, regular supply of electricity which has further exacerbated the problem of lecturer-student ratio. The National Universities Commission (NUC) stipulates a maximum lecturer-student ratio of 1:40, but most universities in Nigeria have at least 1: 100 or more (Sa'ad, 2010).

The proliferation of private universities in the country has brought with a number of issues such as diversity of operations, programmes, quality of staff, mode of admitting students, mode of students' assessment, availability of and access to learning resources. For instance, the quality of staff in private universities has been described as low (Okebukola, 2010). This is because the motive for establishing private universities is to make profit as the proprietors expect returns on their investments hence the tendency on the part of the proprietors to constantly interfere with operations of the institutions. This interference tends to fuel the feeling of job insecurity as the management of private universities can hire and fire their staff at the slightest provocation. In view of the job insecurity in the system, many private universities in Nigeria operate with limited number of full-time teaching and non-teaching staff. Most of their teaching staff are either on part-time or sabbatical appointment without the requisite qualification (Ph.D) to teach in university as stipulated by the National Universities Commission (Ige, 2013; Oluwasanya, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The invaluable contribution of university education to contemporary Nigerian society has been highlighted as an instrument per excellence for achieving national development. This is because government sees university education as providing the solutions to the socio-economic and political challenges of the country. This lofty objective of university education could not be achieved as the existing public universities could not accommodate and train the much needed manpower with the already overstretched, inadequate and dilapidated learning resources. Therefore, there is the need for the establishment of more universities than the available public ones, hence the establishment of private universities. The establishment of private universities has further brought about an increase in the types of programme offered in the universities and the style of administration of

the university system. Besides, diversity of ownership of university has brought about diversity of programmes, availability, accessibility and utilization of learning resources, methods of dissemination of knowledge and other university experiences that the students are exposed to. However, there is the raging debate over whether students in public universities have access to and utilise learning resources in their institutions just as products of private universities are often discriminated against by employers of labour and post-graduate schools of public universities largely due to the perceived inaccessibility to and non-utilization of learning resources.

Since the inception of university education in Nigeria in 1948 and the coming of the private sector into the provision of university education in 1999, the system has been bedevilled by a myriad of problems such as the inaccessibility to, unavailability and non- utilization of learning resources. However, since 2003 when the pioneer private universities produced their first set of graduates, there have not been any known empirical studies that attempted to compare students' access to and utilization of learning resources in public and private universities in southwest Nigeria. The present study therefore made a comparative study of students' access to and utilization of some learning resources in public and private universities in southwest, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were stated to guide the study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of students' access to learning resources.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of utilization of learning resources.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was used for the study. This research design was used because the data collected covered a large area for making comparison between public and private universities in terms of availability and utilization of some learning resources.

Instrument

Two instruments were used to collect data for the study. The first one, Cost and Quality of University Education Questionnaire for Students (CQUEQS) was a two-part questionnaire designed and validated by the researchers. It has been used in a previous study (Viatonu, 2016). Section A elicited demographic information from respondents on name of institution, gender, course of study, department of study, level of study, age and the sponsor. Section B consisted of items on registration for courses, availability, utilization of and accessibility to some learning resources/facilities in the institution. When the instrument was administered on two selected universities - Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos (public) and Redeemer University, Ogun State (private) that were not among the selected universities for the study- the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87, an indication of the reliability and suitability of the instrument.

The second instrument, Availability of Learning Resources Observation Schedule (ALROS) was developed by the researchers. It was meant to observe the availability and utilization of some learning resources (projector, well-equipped library and access to internet facilities) in the institutions. It was completed by the researchers. It was validated by two (2) experts in test and measurement in the Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Their recommendations were used to modify the content and wording of the schedule.

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised all the students in public and private universities in the six states of southwest geo-political zone of Nigeria. The sample consists of 585 (295 public and 290 private) students from 12 (six public and six private) universities in southwest Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. The respondents cut across all the levels and faculties/departments of the selected universities. The students were assumed to have interacted long enough in their respective universities to provide useful and relevant information on the availability and utilization of learning resources in their institutions.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 2: Respondents Distribution by Gender

Variable	Public University	Private University	Total (%)
GENDER			
Male	85	83	168 (28.7)
Female	210	207	417 (71.3)
Total	295 (50.4)	290 (49.6)	585 (100.0)

Table 2 shows that 168 (85 public and 83 private) of the respondents were male while 417 (210 public and 207 private) were female. Table 2 also shows that 295 of the respondents were from public universities while 290 were from private universities.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Study

LEVEL	Public university	Private university	Total (%)
100L	17	52	69 (11.8)
200L	126	106	232 (39.7)
300L	98	58	156 (26.7)
400L	49	68	117 (20.0)
500L	03	06	09 (1.5)
600L	02	0	02 (0.3)
Total	295 (50.4)	290 (49.6)	585 (100.0)

Table 3 shows that 69 (17 public and 52 private) of the respondents were in 100 level; 232 (126 public and 106 private) were in 200 level; 156 (98 public and 58 private) were in 300 level; 117 (49 public and 68 private) were in 400 level; nine (three public; six public) were in 500 level while two (two public; 0 private) were in 600 level.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of accessibility to learning resources.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis showing Difference between Public and Private Universities in Access to Learning Resources

Variable	N	Mean	Std.D	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Public Universities	295	21.420	3.291	4.46	583	0.00	significant
Private Universities	290	22.841	2.630				

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between public and private universities in the access to learning resources ($t = 4.46$; $df = 583$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of accessibility to learning resources is hereby rejected. It can be inferred that private universities have greater access to learning resources than public universities.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of utilization of learning resources.

Table 5: Summary of t-test Analysis showing Difference between Public and Private Universities in Utilization of Learning Resources

Variable	N	Mean	Std.D	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Public Universities	295	16.102	2.873	-1.733	583	0.83	Not significant
Private Universities	290	16.497	2.630				

Table 5 reveals that there is no significant difference between public and private universities in the utilization of learning resources ($t = 1.73$; $df = 583$; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of utilization of learning resources is upheld. It can be inferred that the difference between public and private universities in the utilization of learning resources is not significant.

Discussion of Findings

One of the findings of the study was that students in private universities in southwest Nigeria had greater access to quality and current textbooks and journals as well as research reports. Students in private universities also had access to better learning resources/ facilities than their counterparts in public universities in the areas of internet facilities, institutional computer facilities and well equipped laboratories. Also, students in private universities had greater access to library facilities and recreation centres than students in public universities. On the whole

therefore, it can be inferred that students in private universities had significantly greater access to learning resources than their counterparts in public universities. This development might not be unconnected with high rate of fees that students in private universities pay. This finding corroborates earlier findings which indicated that private universities in Nigeria have better facilities and more learning resources than public universities (Okoro and Okoro, 2014; Iruonagbe, Imhonopi and Egharevba, 2015). According to World Bank report (2009), many public and private universities operate overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient and outdated equipment and instructional materials, outdated curricula, unqualified and poorly motivated teaching staff, and an absence of academic rigour and systematic evaluation of performance.

The study found no significant difference between public and private universities in southwest Nigeria in terms of utilization of learning resources. The implication of this finding is that students in public universities tend to adequately utilise whatever learning resources/facilities that are available to them in their institutions, even the obsolete or dilapidated ones. This finding is in line with results of earlier studies which found that though infrastructural facilities were provided in public and private universities yet the facilities were adequately utilised in both public and private universities in terms of quality and adequacy of health facilities, reliability and fastness of internet facilities on campus, and online library service as well as decentralization of library services and facilities (Ige, 2013; Abdullahi and Wan Zahari, 2015). However, this finding is in contrast to earlier findings that inadequate, dilapidated or obsolete learning resources/facilities coupled with the lack of utility value of some facilities/resources in public universities was one of the reasons that gave rise to the proliferation of private universities in Nigeria (Akinnaso, 2012; Asiyai, 2013).

Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the major factors that promote teaching-learning in any educational institution, especially at the university level is the availability of, access to and utilization of learning resources. This is because learning resources/facilities are a measure of a university's level of readiness to facilitate learning by students. In the same manner, access to and utilization of available and adequate learning resources help students to recall what has been learnt in the classroom situation. On the part of teachers, access to and utilization of learning resources help to reduce the burden of teacher-centred teaching as reference can easily be made to the teaching-learning resources/facilities to aid students. It can also help to enhance the quality of learning and make learning accessible to all students thereby making the students to realise their goal of university education.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities, especially public universities, should endeavour to provide more learning facilities/resources in their institutions and ensure that the resources so provided are made accessible to the students.
2. Authorities in public and private universities should ensure the adequate utilization of resources/facilities at their disposal by students to enhance teaching-learning situation in their institutions.

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