

Students' Personnel Services in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: Bridging the Gap to Address the Needs of Nigeria Students

INEYE-BRIGS Amarachi Cynthia, PhD
Department of Educational Management
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

DOI: 10.56201/ijee.v9.no8.2023.pg117.127

Abstract

To actualize the objectives of tertiary education, there should be adequate provision, allocation, and utilisation of student personal services so as to ensure a conducive and effective teaching and learning process. This paper examines ways of improving student personnel services in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Student personnel services refer to those services in the school system that aim at helping to solve students personal and social problems and care for their wellbeing. Such services include hostel accommodation, health services, financial aid, counselling services, cafeterias, classroom facilities, instructional materials, and so on. The quality of student personnel services in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria is poor, leading to overcrowded hostels and classrooms and poor attention to the counselling needs of students. Some strategies that could be adopted to improve student personnel services include the provision of adequate infrastructure and instructional materials, the provision of special grants by the government for student personnel services, the employment of qualified guidance counsellors, the staffing and equipping of school health facilities, etc. It was, however, concluded that the provision of student personal services is relevant to the achievement of educational goals.

Keywords: *Students', Personnel Services, Tertiary Institutions*

Introduction

In Nigeria, tertiary institutions are established to actualize a wide variety of goals, such as the development of manpower needs in a country, imparting desirable knowledge to students, and disseminating research information to the general public, among others. In pursuance of these goals, the government at all levels, including the private sector, devotes a great deal of resources towards the achievement of these goals. The school, as a community of its own, is supposed to be provided with essential services such as water, electricity, health facilities, food, libraries, and laboratories. The absence of these services creates situations that constitute a bottleneck to the achievement of the goals and objectives of educational institutions (Ejeh, Okenjom, and Chizi-Woko, 2016). To achieve the overall objectives of tertiary education, there should be adequate provision, allocation, and civilization of resources to ensure a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning. These services provided to students are varied and include registration and orientation of students, enrolment, guidance and counselling, food and catering services, health

services, and so on. Student personnel services, according to Arikewuyo and Adegbesan (2009), are those services other than classroom instructions that are concerned with the identification, admission, registration, enrolment, classification, and those services that contribute significantly to the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of students. Ejeh et al. (2016) define student personnel services as those services and functions that complement classroom instruction for the total development of the individual. The services place emphasis on the intellectual, social, emotional, cultural, and physical development of individuals. The provision of these services is meant to meet the different aspects of human development and the academic needs of students. In a nutshell, student personnel services are all the initiatives that school administrations carry out to help students become better members of the society in which they live. In recognition of the importance of student personnel services in tertiary institutions, Adesina and Ogunsaju (2014) observed that for effective teaching and learning situations, physical facilities and educational goals should be viewed as being closely interwoven and interdependent. This implies that no matter the strength of manpower needed in the system, the educational process must require a conducive environment and other facilities and equipment to function effectively and efficiently.

The effective and efficient management of student personnel services in tertiary institutions is not only relevant but necessary for the attainment of the desired educational goals of inculcating the right type of values, attitudes, skills, and mental and physical abilities as equipment for producing good-quality citizens for Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The importance of student personnel services implies that they should not be adequately provided but should be well utilized. Hence, Omo (2016) posited that the management of student personnel services rests in the hands of university management, which is in a position to appreciate and administer the school in a productive manner so as to achieve the goals and objectives of the institution. In our various tertiary institutions across the country, school infrastructure not only appears to be inadequate, but some is also dilapidated and poses a danger to the health of the students on campus.

Akkuchi in Ejeh et al. (2016) observed that the medical centres on campus are at best referred to as consulting clinics because of inadequate staff personnel and the non-availability of drugs. Equally, power and water supply are epileptic in most tertiary institutions. In most institutions, student activities and movement are not effectively monitored; hence, there are several cases of cult activities, robbery, kidnapping, and drug-related cases involving students. There is therefore a need to improve the student personnel services in our tertiary institutions so that our students will come out in flying colours, showing that they have been trained not only in academics but also in character.

This paper therefore examines various student personnel services, strategies to improve student personnel services in tertiary institutions, and challenges facing the provision of student personnel services.

Concept of Student Personnel Services

Student personnel services involve all the activities and services provided for students in schools for the achievement of educational goals and objectives (Akpan, 2010). They are the non-

instructional services rendered to students to enhance quality learning outcomes. Similarly, Akunnubi and Kayode (2012) viewed student personnel services as welfare services provided in educational institutions in order to prevent an un-necessary increase in the rate of anti-social activities among the students and to encourage positive thinking and actions that could promote the attainment of academic pursuit and choice of future career of students. The main aim of student personal services is to satisfy student needs. They complement the academic work of students and facilitate the attainment of the desired educational objectives. However, adequate provision and utilisation of student personnel services makes them behave in a desirable manner capable of improving their academic success in the school.

The Objectives of Student Personnel Services

The objectives of students personnel services as outlined by Akpan (2010) include:

1. To encourage students to make effective and efficient use of the facilities provided by the institution.
2. To help students develop their academic potentials fully through efficient use of available resources
3. To provide students with learning environment that is intellectually stimulating.
4. To advise and guide students on how to achieve success in their chosen career
5. To facilitate the development of the students in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.
6. To ensure equity and consistent implementation of students related rules and regulations, institutional policies and procedures
7. To ensure a safe nurturing academic and motivating school environment
8. To assist students attain maximum self-realization
9. To compliment academic programmes or activities of tertiary institutions
10. To provide a variety of recreational activities.
11. To provide assistance to students on financial aids, health, food and accommodation
12. To organize students orientation to facilitate adjustment to higher institution's life
13. To monitor activities of recognized students associations or organizations
14. To assist in selecting students for scholarship and grants
15. To help in controlling students discipline and individual or group counseling (pg 87)

Enhancing Student Personnel Services in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Student personnel services play a vital role in the holistic development of students in tertiary institutions, offering support and guidance that goes beyond traditional classroom learning. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, these services have often faced challenges and shortcomings (Adams, Monahan & Wills, 2015). However, there is a growing recognition of the need to improve and enhance these services to better cater to the diverse needs of students and promote their overall well-being and success.

One of the primary aspects of enhancing student personnel services in Nigerian tertiary institutions is addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by students. Nigerian higher education institutions are incredibly diverse, with students coming from various cultural, socio-economic,

and educational backgrounds (Amie-Ogan, Nwile&Elenwo, 2021). This diversity demands personalized and multifaceted support services to ensure that each student has the opportunity to thrive.

To improve these services, institutions must recognize that the provision of education goes beyond the mere imparting of knowledge. It encompasses a broader mission of nurturing well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also socially, emotionally, and psychologically prepared for the challenges of the world. This recognition should drive a more holistic approach to student services.

Furthermore, Dambo and Kayii (2022) opined that investing in professional development and training for staff is essential. Personnel working in these services should be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the specific challenges faced by Nigerian students. Training should cover a range of areas, including cross-cultural communication, mental health support, career guidance, and academic advising. Well-trained staff can provide students with guidance that is culturally sensitive and tailored to their unique circumstances.

The use of technology can also play a pivotal role in enhancing student personnel services. With the increasing prevalence of digital tools, institutions can offer students online resources for academic and career support (Amie-Ogan, et al., 2021), mental health services, and counseling. Online platforms can provide a means for students to seek assistance when and where they need it, breaking down the barriers of access and time.

In addition, a comprehensive approach to enhancing student personnel services should involve collaboration between different departments and units within the institution. An integrated system can help address students' academic, personal, and career needs more effectively. When various services work together, students receive a more coordinated and coherent support system. Furthermore, evaluation and feedback mechanisms are crucial for assessing the effectiveness of these services. Institutions should regularly collect data and seek input from students to understand how well the services are meeting their needs. This feedback-driven approach can help identify areas that need improvement and refine the services over time.

However, enhancing student personnel services in Nigerian tertiary institutions is a critical step in providing students with the support they need to succeed academically and in life. This requires a holistic approach, including addressing the specific needs of students, providing staff with the necessary training, utilizing technology, fostering collaboration, and implementing robust evaluation processes (Nwile&Befii-Nwile, 2023). By recognizing the importance of these services and investing in their enhancement, Nigerian tertiary institutions can better serve their students and contribute to their personal and academic growth.

Functions of Student Personnel Administration

Peretomode in Uwazurike (2014) stated that the functions of students personnel administration are follows:

1. Providing guidance and counseling services

2. Instituting procedures for the orientation of students
3. Establishing school attendance policy and procedures and maintaining a system of student accounting
4. Establishing policy and procedures for dealing with student conduct
5. Developing policies and procedures of ensuring student safety in buildings and in the school premises
6. Arranging and coordinating co-curricular activities
7. Handling disciplinary cases
8. Developing systematic procedure for the continual assessment and reporting of students programmes

It could be noted that the functions of student personnel services are largely performed by the office of the student affairs department and the personnel department in every higher institution.

Various Areas of Student Personnel Services

Student personnel services or activities are an integral part of school programmes geared towards the realisation of the set goals of the institution. They are developed in such a way that they blend with the instructional process of the institution to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Some specific areas of student personnel services are discussed as follows:

Admission/Registration of Students: Students seeking admission into higher institutions must write the Unified Tertiary Institutions Matriculation Examination (UTME), conducted by the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB). The students who meet the cutoff mark of their respective universities are offered admission. The head of institutions should be mindful of the existing infrastructure before admitting students to avoid overpopulation. After admission, the next step is the registration of students, which involves filling out relevant forms and paying the admission acceptance fee. This is followed by certificate verifications, reference letters, etc. The aim is to ensure that the new entrants possess the basic qualifications for admission into the programme. However, proper registration of student enrollment helps the school management know the exact population of students to cater for in the institution in terms of the provision of infrastructure.

School safety practices: Safety is the achievement of a state of relative freedom from exposure to foreseeable risk (Arikewuyo, 2006). Most higher institutions incorporate safety practices into the student personnel programme. A good school safety programme must include safety education, which, in its scope and ramifications, includes all the safety precautions to be observed in the school, on recreation grounds, in laboratories, in school buses, etc. The incidence of fire outbreaks in schools has been very common; however, there is a need to drill the students on the measures to be taken if there is a fire outbreak. Health services: every tertiary institution should have a functional health facility with qualified health personnel and well-equipped drugs. It is an indisputable fact that without sound health, the academic activity of students will be greatly impaired. It is regrettable to observe that most institutions do not have functional clinics for students. When students feel sick, they are taken to nearby clinics or hospitals for treatment. This scenario does not speak well of an institution that is geared towards the development of individuals.

There is also a need for periodic inspection and surveys of school buildings with respect to sanitation procedures, ventilation, lighting, and the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases.

Student Accommodation: Hostel accommodation does not only foster cooperative living among students; it also socialises and adapts them to the norms of the miniature society, such that students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds learn to live and work together. Living together enhances the social, cultural, and educational development of students. In most higher institutions, four students occupy four beds with wardrobes and reading chairs. However, the relevant sanity of halls or hostels can be improved by preventing something from happening to students and ensuring that appropriate sanitary standards are maintained in student hostels. Adequate measures should be taken to ensure that student toilets are kept clean at all times. However, the state of student personnel services in Nigerian universities made Chukwu (2001) carry out a study on the problems of student accommodations, with a focus on the University of Nigeria, Nsuka. The findings led some universities to setup task forces on student personnel services, through which the recommendations informed the introduction of double bunk beds in hostels and the repair and maintenance of spoilt toilets and bathrooms at regular intervals.

Transport Services: An efficient transport system enhances effective coordination of school activities. The school bus, apart from conveying students from one destination to another, is also needed to carry out essential services such as conveying students to excursions, study projects, sports, cultural and social activities, and also in times of emergency. It is the responsibility of the school personnel services department to clearly establish rules and regulations guiding the operation of the school bus. However, the school personnel services department also determines how much students will pay for transport fares to their destinations.

Kiosk Services: This is an important aspect of the student welfare services provided in schools. Students at all times need important items such as snacks, for refreshment, writing materials, detergent, toiletries, and so on. A well-managed kiosk service in the school compound will fetch the institution some internally generated revenue, which will boost the income level of the institution. Many higher institutions have keyed into this project by collaborating with multiple organisations to open shopping malls on their campuses to broaden students knowledge in marketing, advertising, distribution, and purchasing.

Food and Catering Services: Every human being needs food for existence; apart from the quality of food given to students, its quality is very important. The personnel services department should engage the services of qualified and experienced caterers who should provide higher-quality food to students. In a similar vein, health inspectors from the Ministry of Health or any recognized health agency should check and supervise the foods given to students.

Guidance and Counselling Services: Guidance embraces the services provided for the students to enhance their academic success in the school, identify areas of strength and weakness, and discover their interests and potentials (Arikewuyo and Adegbesah, 2009). While counselling means attending to the individual needs of the person, listening to him, and discussing his problems with him in order to offer suggestions to improve the situation. In higher institutions, guidance and

counselling programmes place a high premium on orientation services, which aim at helping students adjust to new situations, and diagnostic services, which aim at elucidating the students problems with a view to finding a solution. The student personnel services rendered to students play a significant role in their holistic development. For instance, the guidance and counselling services assist students in making intelligent and informed decisions on careers and vocational services and assist students in securing jobs after graduation. However, students who have been known to have been involved in robbery activities within the university and on the high way are those not offered counselling services. The school guidance and counselling services serve as an advisory body for students, which help eliminate them from evil practices.

Unionism and student rights: Students, as citizens of this country, have fundamental human rights enshrined in the constitution, most importantly freedom of association. Many student associations and unions exist on campus, and school administrators should note that students participate meaningfully in school administration through unionism. It is therefore important for school administration to closely monitor the activities of these unions, especially during the election of officers and the execution of social or cultural activities. The school administration should monitor the activities of student unions to prevent the menace of a secret cult in the institution. While students are expected to confirm the rules and regulations guiding the school,

Challenges facing student personnel services

Student personal services are faced with a myriad of challenges, such as :

1. Inadequate provision of infrastructure and instructional facilities: these pose a serious challenge in the operation of student personnel services, especially where student hostels are inadequate to accommodate students.
2. The incidence of cultism, examination malpractice, sexual harassment, and drug abuse among students: in higher institutions where there is a high incidence of these acts, it might hinder the efficient administration of student personnel services.
3. Inadequate provision of guidance and counselling services: these arise due to insufficient qualified guidance counsellors to render counselling services to the ever-increasing population of students.
4. Lack of specialists in student personnel administration: most persons appointed to head student affairs are deficient in the skills and knowledge required for effective management of student personnel services.
5. Communication gap: most administrators in higher institutions do not communicate effectively with the student body. This creates a gap in communication between the students and the management, which may result in students not being protected if their demands are not met.
6. Insufficient funding of higher institutions: this has made it extremely difficult for administration to meet up with the challenges of providing for the needs of students.

Strategies to Improve Student Personnel Services

The importance of student personnel services cannot be overemphasised, as they enable students to develop a love for the school, participate actively in school activities, and stimulate their maturation.

The strategies to improve student personnel services include:

1. Institutions of higher learning should be adequately funded to enable them to cater for the welfare of students and provide all necessary things needed by students in the course of their study.
2. Adequate infrastructural facilities should be provided to avoid crowded hostels and classrooms. When student hostels or classrooms are overcrowded, it causes tension and conflict among the students, which might result in protest.
3. Student personnel services should be managed by student affairs officers who have acquired knowledge and skills in student affairs (Akpan 2010). It is important to put a round pig in a round hole in order to achieve a positive result. The management of tertiary institutions should appoint seasoned technocrats to handle the leadership of the student affairs department for effective coordination of the student body.
4. Tertiary institutions should employ an adequate number of qualified guidance counsellors to carry out vocational and academic advice or counselling on students.
5. The medical centres in the institutions should be well staffed and equipped with drugs to alleviate The sufferings of students in getting medical attention.
6. Student personnel administration should avoid the use of reactive approaches, which are very common in educational institutions in Nigeria, and rather embrace proactive approaches (Akpanumoh, 2011). The student personnel department should always listen carefully to students demands before taking action.
7. The disciplining policies on cult activities, examination malpractice, etc. should be made known to students during orientation, and copies should be distributed among the students.
8. Provision of special grants by the government for student personnel service

Bridging the Gap: Addressing the Needs of Nigerian Tertiary Students

Nigerian tertiary institutions are diverse ecosystems where students from a wide range of backgrounds come to pursue their higher education. To ensure the success and well-being of these students, it is imperative to bridge the gap and address their unique needs. This endeavor goes beyond academic instruction; it encompasses the broader mission of nurturing well-rounded individuals who are prepared for the challenges of the world (Oladokun & Olaleye , 2017).

According to Oluwaseun (2015), one of the key challenges in addressing the needs of Nigerian tertiary students is recognizing the vast diversity within the student body. Nigeria is a culturally and ethnically rich nation, and students hail from various regions with distinct customs, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds (Amaizu, 2003). This diversity demands a tailored and inclusive approach to student support services that accommodates these differences.

In addressing these diverse needs, cultural sensitivity is paramount. It is essential for academic institutions to provide services that respect and celebrate the cultural backgrounds of students. This involves recognizing the importance of cultural competence among faculty and support staff, which can foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for students.

Moreover, there is a pressing need to acknowledge the socio-economic disparities among Nigerian tertiary students. Many students face financial challenges, and these difficulties can significantly impact their ability to excel academically. Addressing these needs may require offering financial aid, scholarships, or work-study programs, as well as providing access to affordable textbooks and course materials (Agu, 2013).

Mental health support is another critical aspect of addressing student needs. The stresses of academic life, coupled with societal pressures, can lead to mental health challenges among students (Olanipekun & Kola, 2014). Nigerian tertiary institutions should have comprehensive mental health services in place, including counseling and crisis intervention, to support students through difficult times.

In addition to these academic and mental health aspects, career guidance and readiness programs are essential for students' future success. Many Nigerian students are seeking a higher education to secure better career prospects (Akpan-Atata & Sam, 2014). Thus, institutions should provide guidance and support in terms of career planning, internships, and job placements. This can help students transition seamlessly from academic life to the workforce.

To address these multifaceted needs, universities and colleges should consider a multi-pronged approach, including faculty development programs on cultural sensitivity, financial aid and scholarship opportunities, robust mental health services, and career counseling. Additionally, creating a supportive campus culture that values diversity and inclusion can foster an environment where all students feel welcome and supported (Oyelekan & Olarundare, 2012).

It is also important to engage with students directly, through surveys, focus groups, and feedback mechanisms, to better understand their evolving needs and concerns. Their voices should be a central part of shaping the support services offered by the institution.

Conclusion

This study is a critical and multifaceted endeavor. Nigerian tertiary institutions serve a diverse student population, and recognizing and accommodating their unique needs is pivotal for their

holistic development and success. By embracing a holistic approach that prioritizes cultural sensitivity, financial support, mental health services, and career guidance, these institutions can effectively bridge the gap and provide comprehensive support to their students. This support is not only essential for academic success but also for nurturing well-rounded individuals who are prepared to face the challenges of the world.

It is imperative for Nigerian tertiary institutions to continuously evolve and adapt to meet the evolving needs of their students. This includes regular engagement with students to understand their concerns and aspirations, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the support services provided. In the grand scheme of things, enhancing student personnel services in Nigerian tertiary institutions is not just an investment in education; it is an investment in the future of the country. By addressing the diverse needs of Nigerian tertiary students, these institutions contribute to the development of a skilled and well-prepared workforce, ultimately strengthening the nation as a whole. Bridging the gap in student services is not only a responsibility but also an opportunity to empower and uplift the next generation of leaders and contributors to Nigerian society.

REFERENCES

- Adams, K., Monahan, J., & Wills, R. (2015). Losing the whole child? A national survey of primary education training provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(2), 199-216.
- Adesina, S and Ogunsaju, S (2014) Students problems handle by student affairs department: implications for guidance. Unpublished M.Ed project. Nsukka.
- Agu, J. A. (2013). The State of Transport Services in Tertiary Institutions in South Eastern Nigeria. *Journal of Environmental Management and Safety*. 4 (1) 88-91.
- Akinnubi, O.P and Kayode, D.J (2012). Student personnel services and students behavior in university of Ilorin. *Global Journal of Applied Science Management and Social Science*, (1) 5, 169-176
- Akpan, C.P (2010). *Student personnel services in higher education, department of educational administrations and planning*. University of Calabar, Cross River State.
- Akpan, C.P (2011). *Fundamentals of school business management*. Prin Choice Konsult
- Akpan-Atata E. A. (2013). Information types and repackaging skills for researchers and academics in the Third World. *African Journal of Educational Research and Administration*. 6, (1) 115-120
- Akpan-Atata, E & Sam, G.F (2014). From policy to practice: bridging the gap in education in nigeria the information and communication technology (ICT) imperative. *Knowledge Review*, 30(1), 1-7.
- Akpanumoh, U.D(2011). *Students' personnel management in higher education*. In S.U bassey and U.U Bassey (Eds) management of higher education in Africa. Abam Printers.

- Amaizu, V. N. (2003). Strategies for Improving Students' Personnel Services in Secondary Schools in Onitsha Education Zone. Unpublished M.Ed Project, Department of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Amie-Ogan, O. T., Nwile, C.B &Elenwo, P. M. (2021). Management of physical resources for academic improvement of junior secondary school students in Rivers State Nigeria. *International Journal of Progressive and Alternative Education*, 7(1), 327-342.
- Arikewuyo, M.O (2006). *Elements of personnel management*. In J.B Babalola and A.O Ayeni (Eds) educational management thoughts and practice. Codat publication.
- Arikewuyo, O.M &Adegbesan S.O (2009). *Practicum on administration*. In J.B Babalola and A.O Ayeni (eds) educational management theories and Practices: Macmillian publisher>
- Chukwu, J.O (2001) Problems of students hostel accommodation in higher education institutions. A case study of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. Unpublished M.Ed project. Nsukka
- Dambo, B.I & Kayii, N.E (2022). Utilization of open educational resources for enriched instructional content of business education courses in Rivers State universities. *International Journal of Innovative Technology Integration in Education*, 6(1), 15-21
- Ejeh, E.I, Okenjom, G.D and Chizi-woko, C,N (2016) management of student personnel institutions. *Journal of research and methods in education (JRME)* 6(2), 1-6
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. NERDC Press.
- Nwile, C. B &Befii-Nwile, M. M. (2023). Re-Engineering Educational Administration and Management for Global Competitiveness in the 21st Century. *International Journal of Contemporary Academic Research*, 4(4).1-14
- Oladokun, T.T & Olaleye, A. (2017). Bridging skill gap in real estate education in Nigeria. *Pacific Rim Property Research Journal*, 1-19.DOI: 10.1080/14445921.2017.1409153
- Olanipekun, S. S. & Kola, A. J. (2014). Improving students' academic performance in Nigerian Schools. *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (2) 1-6.
- Oluwaseun, O. A. (2015). The influence of School Facilities on Students' academic performance in Calabar Municipality. *British Educational Research Journal*, 24 (2) 180-193
- Omo, M.O (2006) Management of physical facilities and equipment in secondary schools in Cross River State. unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of Educational Foundations. Nsukka.
- Oyelekan, O. S. &Olarundare A. S. (2012). Information and Communication technology in Nigeria's Universal Basic Education programme a Consideration of Objectives. 53rd STAN Annual Conference Proceedings. 295-299
- Uwazurike, C.N (2014) Pupils personnel administration. Issues and concerns for school administrators in tertiary institution, Springfield>