

Living Conditions and academic quality of Students in Tertiary Institutions in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria youths over the years have been shortchanged in all aspects of life and education sector is not left out. Several efforts aimed at addressing this issue have neglected the students' perspective. While raising this issue, the study interrogated the living conditions of campus students outside classrooms in selected tertiary institutions in southwest Nigeria. Findings revealed that the living conditions are deplorable and the students are not satisfied with it. Further, they were not satisfied with the attitude and responses of the management towards their living conditions.

Introduction and Statement of Problem

Youths in Nigeria and elsewhere in African are at disadvantaged position and education sector is not left out. Students at present can no longer boast of quality education due to distortions in the social, economic and religious aspects of the nation and this has impacted negatively on them and on the nation as a whole. Several efforts have been made in understanding and addressing this challenge and in spite of these efforts, the issue of academic quality is still a challenge (Zezeza and Olukoshi, 2004; Magagula, 2005; Assie-Lumumba, 2005, 2006; Adesina, 2006, 2007). While all efforts have been directed at addressing the challenge of education in the country, not much has been done to explore the plight of the students who constitute a major key player in this issue. This study sought to contribute to knowledge by examining what students face within the education sector more especially outside the four walls of classrooms. A study regarding youths have revealed that they are actors who shape and re-invent the space they find themselves (Diouf, 1996; Boeck and Honwana, 2005; Biaya, 2005) yet, not much has been done as regards this within Nigerian campuses. A thorough understanding of their actions must first be preceded by an examination of their living conditions. This is the focus of this study and the following constitute the objectives of this study:

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to examine and document the living conditions of tertiary institution students outside classrooms in selected tertiary institutions. The specific objectives were to:

- a. Examine the social and economic characteristics of the students
- b. Assess and document their living conditions
- c. Understand their coping strategies
- d. Investigate the roles of the authorities in addressing the challenges.

Methodology

The study was conducted in three institutions namely University of Ibadan, Ibadan Polytechnic and Federal college of forestry all in southwest Nigeria. The study employed quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting the data for the study. Quantitative method involved the use of

survey questionnaires administered to nine hundred and sixty-two respondents randomly selected after a multistage selection of students' halls of accommodation. Regarding the qualitative instrument, the researcher employed the use of observation, in depth interviews, and Key informants (KII) following a multistage selection process as well. In analyzing the quantitative data, frequencies, simple percentages and cross-tabulations of relevant variables were adopted. Chi-square was used to test the association between each of these cross tabulations. As regards the qualitative data, it was based on content analysis and verbatim quotations were made where necessary.

Table 1: Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Male	417	43.3
Female	545	43.3
Total	962	100.0
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	898	93.3
Married	64	6.7
Total	962	100.0
Names of hostels	Frequency	Percentage
Idia	192	30.0
Queens	130	13.5
Independence	94	9.8
Unity	13	1.4
Olori Male	47	4.9
Olori Female	123	12.8
Forestry hall 1	36	3.7
Ramat	186	19.3
Forestry hall 2	9	0.9
Total	962	100.0
Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Basic Medical Sciences	30	3.1
Arts	85	8.8
Sciences	216	22.5
Social Sciences	185	19.2
Vet Medicines	39	4.1
Technical	55	5.7
Law	38	4.0
Public Health	11	1.1
Clinical Sciences	14	1.5
Education	71	7.4
Agri and Forestry	186	19.3

Pharmacy	15	1.6
Medicine	8	0.8
Total	962	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey

The table above describes the social and demographic characteristics of the respondents. From the table, all the respondents that participated in this study were youths going by the definition of who a youth is in Nigeria; the National Youth Policy (2001) defined youth as persons between the ages of 18-35 years of age. This age distribution is also reflected in the marital status of the respondents as over 90 per cent of the respondents were single at the time of the study. Further, the data was fairly representative both gender as both males and females constitute 43.3 per cent and 56.7 per cent respectively. From the IDI on why more females were found on the campus hostels than males, findings revealed that boys preferred to go to outside the campus to rent apartments since the hostels cannot accommodate all the students and the facilities there are nothing to write home about. In spite of this, a considerable number of the students still preferred to reside within the school halls and this is attributed to the cost implication of staying on campus compared to staying outside the school premises. Findings above further show the distribution of respondents as regard their various courses of study in the institutions. From the table 22.5 were studying science related disciplines while 19.5 percent were into the social sciences. This is usually the case based on the vastness of the disciplines in the domains of science and social science in Nigeria.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Living Conditions

How would you describe your living condition as a student?	Frequency	Percentage
Fairly good	321	33.4
Living like a slave	88	9.1
Manageable	165	17.2
Not healthy and poor	183	19.0
Boring and uncomfortable	19	10.0
I can't describe it	186	19.3
Total	962	100.0
Do you think the facilities provided for you are averagely enough?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	345	35.9
No	617	64.1
Total	962	100.0
Whether there is regular electric	Frequency	Percentage

supply in their rooms		
Yes	623	64.8
No	323	33.6
No response	16	1.7
Total	962	100.0
If yes, what time of the day	Frequency	Percentage
Anytime	91	9.5
Morning and night	120	12.5
No specific time	88	9.1
No answer	13	1.4
Morning	30	3.1
Afternoon	23	2.4
Evening	132	13.7
All day	52	5.4
Not applicable	323	33.6
No response	90	9.4
Total	962	100.0
Are the electrical fittings like bulbs and sockets functional?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	451	46.9
No	484	50.3
No response	27	2.8
Total	962	100.0
When there is power outage what do you use?	Frequency	Percentage
Candle	357	37.1
Gas lamp	6	0.6
Kerosene lantern	232	24.1
Rechargeable lamp	225	23.4
Local battery lamp	69	7.2
Other means	63	7.2
No response	10	1.0
Total	962	100.0
Is water available in your hostel?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	868	90.2
No	80	8.3
No response	14	1.5
Total	962	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey

From the selected tables above as regards the students satisfaction with the hostels facilities, the students were asked to describe their living conditions within the campuses; a little above half of the total population described their condition as fairly good: (33.4 percent) and manageable (19.0 per cent) respectively. From the in depth interview conducted, some of the students felt that the government was doing its best and that their efforts should be commended, another student also

opined that the fault (condition of living) did not emanate from the government rather the school authorities should be blamed. His remarks:

Well, I think the government is really trying its best to ensure that we all have a conducive atmosphere for learning; it was worse that it is now some years back. More so, it is not the fault of the government that we don't have a better conducive atmosphere on our halls of residence, it is corruption on the part of our administrators, when government releases the money, the authorities embezzle it or in some circumstances divert it to some other things because of their selfish interests... (IDI, Male, 2010)

Further, less than half of the total respondents were not satisfied with their living condition; for instance, 19.0 percent described their situation as unhealthy and poor; 10,0 percent said it was boring and uncomfortable and 19.3 percent claimed they could not describe their situation. In some of the IDI conducted, a respondent had this to say while describing their situation:

Sometimes I wonder whether the management regards us as human beings; no water, no electricity, and when you want to bring in your generator, they wouldn't allow that, a student almost got killed recently when he used adulterated kerosene in his lantern during the last semester examination. You can imagine an undergraduate student having their bath outside the building very early in the morning or late at night because of the condition of their bathrooms... for me, I cannot use the toilet I usually go to the bush because I don't want to be infected with any diseases (IDI,female, 2010).

Some of these assertions by the respondents are reflected in other responses stated below. For instance, as regards whether the respondents were satisfied with the facilities available within their halls of accommodation, a majority (64.1 per cent) of the respondents were not satisfied. Over 60 per cent claimed they have lodged complaints at one time or the other over the deplorable conditions of their rooms and virtually all the respondents concerned claimed that their requests were not considered.

Percentage distribution of maintenance of their halls of residence

Who do you when any of the hostel facilities are not working?	Frequency	Percentage
Lodge complaints with the authorities	615	63.9
Repair it myself	199	20.7
Ignore it	148	15.3
Total	962	100.0

What are the procedures for lodging complaints?	Frequency	Percentage
Fill a form	426	44.3
Inform the block representative	229	23.8
Technicians come around	40	4.2
No tangible procedure	267	27.7
Total	962	100.0
Have you ever made any complaints regarding repairs to the authority?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	610	63.4
No	279	29.0
Not sure	73	7.6
Total	962	100.0
If yes, were u attended to on time?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	123	12.8
No	487	50.6
Not applicable	352	36.6
Total	962	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey

This section attempts to understand how the facilities are maintained within these students' hall of residence. From the table above the students were asked on what they usually do when any of the facilities are not functioning. 63.9 percent argued that they complained to the school authorities while 20.7 and 15.3 do the repair themselves and ignore the faults respectively. IDI and observation revealed that students were expected to inform the porter about any complaints as regards the situation in their rooms. This is usually done verbally while the porter notes down such complaints in his record for necessary action. Further, the students were interviewed whether they have made any complaints for repair to the authority, 63.4 said 'yes' while 29.0 percent and 7.6 percent said 'no' and 'not sure' respectively. Those who opined that they have made complaints before were asked whether their requests were met, 12.8 percent said it was met while 50.6 percent argued that it was not met. One of the IDI sessions conducted further captured why their requests were not met as one of the respondents remarked thus:

To me, going to the porter to lodge complaints about repairs is a sheer waste of time. The man (porter) will listen to you but one could be sure that he will not do anything about it. There is nothing the man can do, as they don't even the facilities for the repairs. The best bet is for one to get a technician from town if the repair is essential or one ignores it if one can survive without it. (IDI, Male)

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents as Regards Recreation

How do you relax when not in class	Frequency	Percentage
Sports	155	16.1
Social clubs	130	13.5
Religion	68	7.1
Freshers' week, hall week departmental and faculty weeks	288	29.9
I don't know	321	33.4
Total	962	100.0
Do you belong to any of the social group in your school?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	87	9.0
No	752	78.2
No response	123	12.8
Total	962	100.0
If no, why?	Frequency	Percentage
I am too busy	295	30.7
That is not my mission in school	314	32.6
It might be dangerous	143	14.9
Not applicable	210	21.8
Total	962	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey

The selected tables above describe the social activities of the students on campus. The respondents were asked about how they relax when not engaged in academic activities, 16.1 held they were into sporting activities, 13.5 per cent claimed they engaged in clubbing activities and among others. On whether they belonged to any social group on campus, close to 80 percent supposed they were not while only 9.0 per cent claimed they belonged to such groups. As regards why they did not belong to any social group, 30.7 percent claimed they were too busy, 32.6 percent opined that their mission in school was not to be engaged in social groups while 14.9 per cent felt it might be dangerous. From observation and oral interview conducted, a majority of the students were into one form of religious activities on campus and this seemed to form the nucleus of their activities when not engaged in academic work.

Percentage distribution of how students cope in the face of challenges

How do you cope with all the challenges you face?	Frequency	Percentage
I have no choice/used to it	389	40.4
Get treatment and visit home often	162	16.8

Religious means	343	35.7
I don't know	68	7.1
Total	962	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey

As regards the coping strategies adopted by students (tables not included here), 40.4 percent claimed that they had no alternative since their primary reason for being in school was to get the certificate (IDI, 2010). Further, 16.8 per cent opined that they ensured that they visit their parents and guardians as often as they could for proper medical attention and other needs; 35.7 per cent argued that religious means has become one of their instruments of coping while 7.1 per cent could not explain how they were coping. IDI session conducted further shed light on this:

We really face a lot of challenges here on campus as the government is not doing enough. Politicians only make empty promises without fulfilling them and what you see a lot of students do is either to get accommodation in town if they can afford it or contribute to endure it if they are on campus. (IDI, female)

Another respondent also remarked thus:

Well, in a as much the library is opened and my fellowship continues I will always survive no matter what and more so it s not forever. My staying here as a student is for a short time. Once I finish my programme I will definitely forget the suffering and more so there are other people (youths) like me outside wishing to gain admission here. (IDI, Male)

How does your institution respond to your plight?

How do your institution authorities respond to your needs?	Frequency	Percentage
Fast and prompt	81	8.4
Response is okay	84	8.7
They are trying	175	18.2
Response is poor and very low	218	22.7
They don't respond at all	177	18.4
I don't know	227	23.6
Total	962	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey

The respondents were interviewed as regards their perception of the attitudes and responses of their authorities to their conditions (tables not shown here). From the table, 8.4 per cent believed that the management's responses to their plight was fast and prompt, 18.2 per cent appreciated their efforts claiming that the management was trying its best; further, 22.7 per cent opined that

management's response to the students was poor and very low; 18.4 per cent felt they have not been responding at all to the conditions of students and 23.6 per cent were not sure of the responses of the government to their situations. From the IDI conducted, some of the comments of the respondents attributed poor responses of the school management to corruption, poor financial allocation from the government, overpopulation and poor management.

On test of hypotheses (tables not included here), findings revealed that there was a relationship between age, year of study and satisfaction with living condition (0.02). Students within ages 15-19 and year two students (fresh intakes) were satisfied with their living conditions. IDI revealed that this was partly because they were still basking in the euphoria of admission into tertiary institution.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The living condition of youths in tertiary education may not be what the students desired it to be based on a number of factors identified by the students. Yet, the management and authorities concerned may not be responding as expected. Students sustain themselves through religious means; and the hope of getting their certificates after completing their studies. There is need for further studies to understand different dimensions of the activities and experiences of youths within the higher education.

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