FACTORS INFLUENCING ATTRITION OF ESTATE MANAGEMENT STUDENTS IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This literature review explores the possible reasons why Estate Management students experience such a high rate of attrition in other countries. In Nigeria, a significantly large portion of Estate Management students do not appear to have chosen to study the course on their own volition. The fact of having to study estate management seemed to be based on some external influence or as a last resort to forfeiting that year admission. There is low participation rate in estate management program across the different institutions in the country and to worsen the situation, not all those who enroll in the study graduate at the end of the 5-year programme. This study is a follow up on an earlier study on three universities in the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This attrition experienced in higher institution in Nigeria calls for serious scrutiny. This study is aimed at drawing a concept of the likely factors that may influenced attrition among estate management students in Nigeria. Thereafter, suggestions are made on ways to curb attrition.

Keywords: Factors, Attrition, Estate Management, Student, Nigeria, Concept.

1   INTRODUCTION

There has been several viewpoints to the concept of attrition in higher education. Attrition in higher education can be said to leave or delay the fact of completing of study programmes in a higher institution. For instance, [1] referred to "attrition" as the number of students in a particular year who neither graduate nor continue their study at the same institution in the following year. [2] opined that attrition in higher education focuses more with student attrition at an institutional level and not on a particular program or course. The definition according to [3] developed one of the first theories on student attrition and retention in higher education. This definition considers attrition as "a period of interactions between a student and the academic and social systems of the institution wherein the student's personal experiences in those systems continually adjust their goals and institutional commitments in ways that tend to result in retention or attrition.

[3]'s definition establishes how student attrition can involve many interrelated factors which are quite complex when attempting to study they operate. Some other terms often used to refer to attrition in higher education include: drop-out, discontinuance, non-completion and withdrawal ([4], [5]). In addition, some of the ways attrition occurs amongst students in higher institution as highlighted by [6] include: "those who inform the institution of their leaving, those who do not inform the institution that they are leaving, those who are advised by the institution to leave, those who do not return in the following academic year to progress in their study in a multi-level program, those who choose to defer their programme till a later date and those who decide to change to another institution to complete their studies.

It is important to state that the performance and worth of higher institutions are measured by the quality of students they produce and other activities that revolves around the student such as: student attrition, retention and graduation rates ([7]). Studies have shown that students are seen to leave higher institutions for many reasons and based on many circumstances in which the students find themselves and a considerable of attrition is reported in the higher education sector of developed nations ([8], [9]) and in institutions of developing nations as well ([10], [11], [12]).

Surprisingly, earlier studies from both the United States and Canada have shown that about 20 to 25 per cent of all first-year students do not proceed to the next academic year in their study. An additional 20 to 30 per cent of students drop out of the institution in subsequent years before completion ([13], [14]). Most of the students that leave the institutions often tend to return at a later to complete their studies but there are some others who never return thus, their educational ambition is terminated at that point.

In Nigeria, limited studies abound on student attrition and there are little or no studies on attrition in Estate Management programme. It is against this background that this study seeks to follow up on the earlier study that established attrition in higher institutions in Nigeria with a view to identify the factors influencing such attrition.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

Estate Management (ESM) is a programme that students can enroll in at tertiary level of education. It has a scientific focus and therefore can be considered as one of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. In the light of this, the factors influencing student drop out decision in higher institutions and especially in STEM fields may also influence student attrition in Estate Management programme. It is necessary to examine these factors which can later be assessed on estate management students to determine whether they actually influence attrition amongst the students and to what extent have these factors influenced attrition in estate management programme. A review of some of these factors are considered.

Several studies abound on factors influencing student attrition in higher institutions. For instance, [15] identified the factors responsible for adult learners' decision to persist or drop out from online learning in Seoul, Korea. The study examined if the personal characteristics (such as age, gender, and educational level), external factors (such as institutional supports and family), and internal factors (such as motivation and satisfaction) could influence learners' choice to stay or leave the programme. 147 learners who have completed or dropped out of one of the three online programmes offered in the university and who were willing to participate in the survey were administered questionnaire. Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics, chi-square, logistic regression analysis and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The result showed that the factors that were responsible for the students' attrition include: the type and level of assistance the students' obtained from the institution and their family, the level of students' motivation and satisfaction with the programme and the institution, and relevance of the programme to the students' career and the students' individual characteristics were the factors identified by the study that could predict the decision to stay or leave the programme.

Similarly, [16] carried out a literature review of the possible reasons why high rate of attrition is experiences among adult learners in educational programme in Athabasca, Alberta, Canada and suggested ways to remove barriers to graduation. The numerous reasons identified in the study were classified under five group of factors such as: situational (such as but are not limited to financial difficulties; job commitments; other conflicting responsibilities for home, family and work; transportation issues; having a learning disability or physical, mental; and lack of support from others), institutional (such as the challenges of providing learning materials, challenges of providing financial assistance to learners to pay for school fees, negative disposition towards the learners; lack of support services at places and time that is convenient to the learners and the lack of recognition of previously obtained academic qualifications. Other examples include lack of accommodations for learning disabilities, lack of flexibility in courses, poor guidance, high costs of tuition, long waiting lists and lack of appropriate local learning opportunities. The attitudinal/dispositional factors include: the feeling of little or no return on academic investment made, lack of interest and motivation, attaching low value to education and, anxiety and having a low self-esteem, fear of returning to school, or the fear of not being able to complete their program at the appropriate time, fear of failure and difficulties with adjusting to current school culture. The pedagogical factors are: lack of understanding on the part of the institution such as the instructors, administrators and facilitators about the different learning styles of the adult learners, challenges with instructional approaches, teaching materials, settings and facilities, testing procedures, and time frames that are not convenient to the adult learners. The academic factors include: lack of basic literacy, numeracy and computer-related skills, lack of deep, meditative and thoughtful ability to produce quality write up such as in essays, examinations and tests and the inability to access and understand information.

In addition, [17] investigated into the factors influencing student attrition in the United States of America and suggested systemic strategies for promoting student persistence. The study made use of relevant literature review. The root causes identified in the study were classified as academic roots, motivational roots, psychosocial roots and financial roots. The academic roots relates to inadequate preparation to meet the academic demands of the programme and disinterest in or boredom with the content of courses which leads to failure or dismissal. Motivational roots has to do with low initial commitment on the part of the student to stay and graduate from the school as well as competing external influences (such as family, friends or work) that exert on the time and energy that students

would have committed to their education. Motivational roots also relates to the perceived feeling of uncertainty about the relevance of the programme to the student's career or future plans. Psychosocial roots relates to lack of social interactions with people in the academic community which results in feeling of separation or marginalization. Incongruence is another type of psychosocial roots which relates to feeling of mismatch between the students' expectations, interest or values and those of the prevailing community and also adjustment difficulties which relates to new students especially having difficulty adjusting to the culture, demands or stressors that accompany transition into higher institution. Financial roots relates to the inability (or perceived inability) to afford the financial implications of the study. It also concerns the perception that the financial demands outweighs its benefit.

[19] researched on the topic "attrition in STEM fields at a Liberal Arts College: The importance of grades and pre-collegiate preferences. The study was conducted in USA with a sample consisting of 5,044 students from the graduating classes of 2001 through 2009 from the administrative records. The findings showed that the grade received in a course is an important factor in the decision to continue studying the course. Therefore, the attrition modeled in the study is not the usual college attrition that has a rich literature. Rather, it is attrition within department which is modeled as students' progresses from a first course to a second, and a second to a third. The results showed that there is significant heterogeneity in attrition across and within departments when considered by gender. The study also showed that the relative grading relationships across departments hold as well. STEM departments grade lower than non-STEM departments, and the grade received is an important factor in the high attrition rates experienced in STEM majors. Roughly two-thirds of students reported that they have preference for a particular major. The study showed evidence of a decline in the propensity of applicants to state a preference for any discipline; however, the largest decline has been among the STEM majors. Most of the attrition in the STEM departments occurs after the first or second course, as individuals who take a third course or more are very likely to major in the discipline.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

To better situate the factors influencing attrition and make it easy to draw the conceptual framework, the factors have been grouped into 4 major groupings which is a modification to that done by [16]. The four groups are: situational, attitudinal, institutional and academic factors. For the purpose of this study, the factors have been selected from the various literature not just from the work earlier cited but based on the researcher's discretion as regards which factor should be under a particular heading. The major groupings and the factors applicable as listed:

(i) Situational Factors: are those issues relating to one's own situation or environment at any given point in time. They consist of events that arise from life circumstances. Examples include: ability to interact well with fellow students, faculty and staffs of the institution, multiple conflicting responsibilities for home, family, children and work; financial difficulties; health challenges, transportation issues; having a physical, mental or learning disability; and lack of support from people, among others of such factors.

(ii) Institutional Factors: relates to practices and procedures within the institution that constitute a challenge in participating in organized learning activities. Institutional barriers consist of limitations inherent in the methods used by institutions to design, deliver and administer learning activities, Examples include: institutional facilities like the class, web design, class size, duration of study, course content and curriculum, modalities of operation of the institution, technical support, and other support services. Institutional factors also include the complexities of providing financial support to learners to pay for tuition fees and the resources needed for learning activities; negative attitudes towards learners and a general lack of places suitable to learners.

(iii) Dispositional Factors: relates to the attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner. It concerns learners' perceptions of their capability to look for, register in, attend, and successfully complete learning activities. Examples include: learning style, motivation, and perception-of-obligation as well as other demographic variables that includes academic preparation, GPA, ethnicity, gender, Web and e-mail competency, socio-economic status, low value on education and perceived lack of return on investment, among other of such factors.

(iv) Academic Factors: relates to the skills that are essential to successful learning. Examples of these include lack of basic literacy, numeracy and computer-related skills, the inability to access and understand information, lack of critical and reflective thinking skills, and poor skills in writing

essays, examinations and tests which results in low academic performance, poor interactions with colleagues and management, low level of academic preparation and unrealistic expectation.

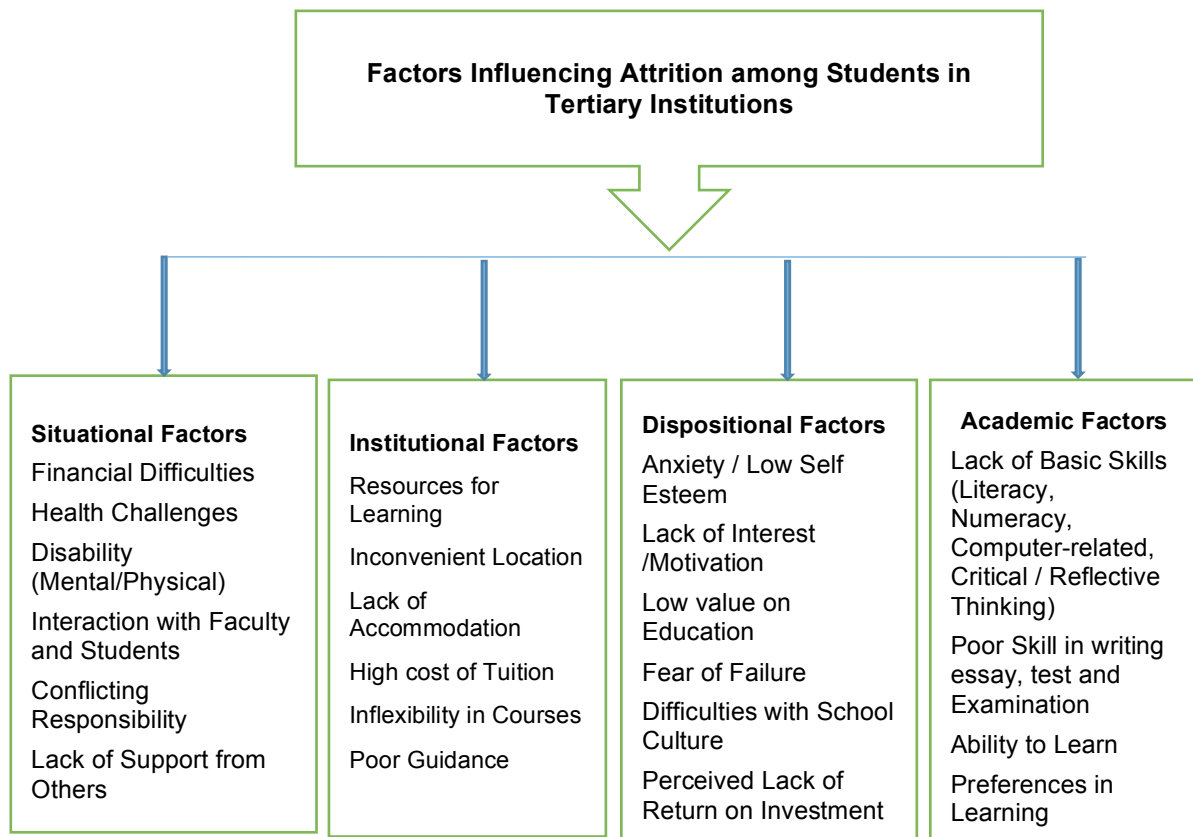The conceptual framework that will be tested in a further study is:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Factors Influencing Attrition among Students in │
│            Tertiary Institutions                 │
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Situational Factors

Financial Difficulties

Health Challenges

Disability (Mental/Physical)

Interaction with Faculty and Students

Conflicting Responsibility

Lack of Support from Others

Institutional Factors

Resources for Learning

Inconvenient Location

Lack of Accommodation

High cost of Tuition

Inflexibility in Courses

Poor Guidance

Dispositional Factors

Anxiety / Low Self Esteem

Lack of Interest /Motivation

Low value on Education

Fear of Failure

Difficulties with School Culture

Perceived Lack of Return on Investment

Academic Factors

Lack of Basic Skills (Literacy, Numeracy, Computer-related, Critical / Reflective Thinking)

Poor Skill in writing essay, test and Examination

Ability to Learn

Preferences in Learning

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Having highlighted the factors that can influence attrition among students of different fields in tertiary institution including Estate Management, it is also needful that possible measures to curb attrition should be suggested.

2.2   Possible Measures to Curb Attrition in Higher Education

"At the heart of successful retention and success is a strong sense of belonging in higher education (HE) for all students." ([18]).

This statement depicts an ideal setting where student retention is the key strategic concern for higher institutions ensuring students' commitment to their studies, and eventual success and completion of their study thereby improving the student experience, enhancing the quality of the institution's and contributing to its long term financial security (University of Tasmania, 2015). This suggest therefore that the institution's retention and success strategy should be positioned alongside the institution's tactical laid down plans for learning and teaching, and the students' involvement plan; in acknowledgement that the retention and success of the students is enabled by a whole-of institution approach underpinned by quality learning and teaching and an excellent student involvement in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

Research into student retention indicates that there are particular variables or principles that can aid student retention in higher education. Broadly, the more that students are academically and socially engaged within inclusive contexts the more likely they are to graduate ([19], [20]). The principles that can aid in achieving student retention are:

- The recognition that success commences from the point of first contact with the institution, through to transition to higher institution, progression in academic studies and the student support and experience that enables success, through to graduation.

- The acknowledgement that retention is the responsibility of all staff and organizational units of the institution, which should have clear implementation plan to ensure student success.

- The provision of timely and relevant data relating to student students' engagement with their studies, students' withdrawal and failure, to make it easy to track students at risk, supported by early intervention strategies.

- The understanding that retention activities are designed to be proactive and seek to engage students such that the students are able to learn and to discern when they are in need of additional development or support.

- The understanding that activities should encourage students to collaborate and engage with their peers and with staff in order to build their sense of belonging and maximize opportunities for success and completion of a course.

3 CONCLUSION

The factors influencing attrition in other fields of study and in other locations of the world are possibly likely to also influence attrition in Estate Management programme and in this part of the world (Nigeria). There is the need to test these factors to determine the extent to which these factors affect estate management as a field of study. Afterwards, the application of the strategies suggested in ensuring retention in higher education programmes should achieve a good result in addressing the attrition problem as it has worked in some other fields of study in different location of the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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