

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF COVENANT UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA

Z. Omogbadegun, T. Oyedepo, F. Fasina, E. Omotosho

Covenant University (NIGERIA)

Abstract

Background

For every world-class university emphasizing student learning as a core principle, students and their parents expect campuses provide: safe and secure environments for student learning; high-quality facilities and services responsive to student needs in a technological and “instant” environment; and beyond classroom experiences to facilitate opportunities for student growth and development toward successful careers and life post graduation. Nigeria has 129 approved universities (40 Federal, 39 State, and 50 Private). Her undergraduates are confronted with inadequate structures and facilities; inadequate housing; overcrowded classrooms; and a dearth of reading materials. Researchers based any education system’s success on principles of excellent learning and teaching material, high quality student support services, and efficient logistical systems. Student Support Services and Strategies (SSS) are approaches to enhancing students’ success through services to resolutely meet all learners’ needs.

Objective

This paper’s objective is to present a functional and sustainable student support services infrastructural framework for excellent academic performance in tertiary institutions.

Methodology

We used causal research design to assess the impact of student support services structures on admission in Nigerian universities.

Results

Nigeria’s Academic Staff Union of Universities had over 36 months of learning-disruptive incessant strikes between 1999 and 2013 for reasons including erratic power supply and inadequacy of student support services infrastructures for conducive teaching and learning environments. Only about 5.2% to 15.3% get university admission yearly. Many universities deviated from their carrying capacities (CC) between 10.60% and 97.67%. A few operated below their CC. 14.55% (2004/05), 8.40% (2005/06), 11.02% (2006/7), 11.78% (2007/2008), 18.97% (2008/2009), and 28.97% (2013/2014) of qualified candidates got university admission. In 2013/2014, 6.46% (University of Ibadan, UI, CC = 5720), 19.80% (University of Lagos, UNILAG, CC = 6500), and 64.36% (Covenant University, CU, CC = 2500) of applicants matriculated. 71.03% to 94.8% of applicants are denied admission yearly largely due to infrastructural constraints and carrying capacity problems. As universities (e.g. UI and UNILAG) engage private partnership in building hostel accommodation on a Build-Operate-Transfer basis to war housing issue, all CU students reside on campus (9236-CC 10 halls of residence). CU students’ excellence has been sustained by peerless academic calendar; Faculty Support Programme; modern technology-based teaching and learning resources; internet services; students’ evaluation system, and 24hr-power/water supply since 2002. CU records the first in Africa to host two Nobel Laureates in May 2014. The developed framework’s typical elements for excellent academic performance include stakeholders, university expectations, and requisite infrastructures representing an important tool for deepening stakeholders’ understanding of what works, where, and why.

Conclusions

A nation’s future depends on the quality of her citizenry’s education. It can be threatened by lack of SSS structures. University admission increase is mainly contingent on adequate SSS infrastructure for effective teaching and learning, excellent performance, and sound intellectual development. The salient SSS structures in CU, rare feats in Nigeria, exemplify the required framework.

Keywords: Academic performance, critical success factors, educational environment, framework, in-loco parentis, institution, student support services.

1 INTRODUCTION

Objectives of learning institutions include providing support for student academic success sustainably, helping ensure students are retained at the same rate as the overall student population, and achieving a graduation rate no lower than the overall student population [1]. Researchers have based the success of any education system on three principles: “excellent (learning) and teaching material, high quality student support services, and efficient logistical systems”. Student Support Services (SSS), the most critical, are in academic and non-academic categories. The academic support category concerns developing cognitive and learning skills, and the non-academic support category deals with the affective and organisational aspects of students’ studies. Both categories are complementary with the resolute purpose of meeting the needs of all learners i.e. breaking learners’ isolation and meeting the academic demands and social needs of students in education. [2] submitted that in helping students acclimate, engage meaningfully in their studies and then graduate, the following pertinent questions must be expressly answered to provide impetus for structuring a meaningful and consistent response that reaches the lowest common denominator among students, staff and faculty: How do we know who the students are? What do they bring to the teaching and learning space? What are their needs? What are their fears and concerns? This is probable the most important intervention since the experiences students have with other students, with staff and faculty are important catalyst for helping them forward, stalling their progress, sending them off to a competitor institution or getting them to give up all together [2]. This paper’s objective is to present a functional and sustainable student support services infrastructural framework for excellent academic performance in tertiary institutions.

2 FUNDAMENTAL SUPPORT SERVICES

According to [2], in addition to creating challenging and congruent learning opportunities, it is important for higher education leaders to create a supportive learning environment to help learners connect with others and as well as access well-matched student support services to help them complete their studies. These support services ‘must’ minimally include:

- a) Transition and housing services for faculty, staff and students.
- b) Use technology everywhere there is an opportunity to use technology to make faculty, staff and students’ engagement and access to service more readily available.
- c) Accreditation, vetting and accountability system for collaborative teaching and learning arrangements in foreign countries.
- d) Opportunities for students to learn from faculty through mentoring, coaching and other types of collaborative learning opportunities.
- e) An environment where people feel they fit because the uniqueness are aspects respected, celebrated and seen as a vehicle for creating pathways to improve learning and greater sensitivity.

3 METHODOLOGY

A causal research design was adopted to assess the impact of student support services structures on admission in Nigerian universities. Fundamental support services for conducive learning environments were assessed for adequacy vis-à-vis accreditation status of the universities.

4 UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

University education commenced 1948 in Nigeria with 210 undergraduates in University of Ibadan, Ibadan (UI), followed by University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) (1960); Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU), University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, OAU), and University of Lagos, Lagos (UNILAG) in 1962. **Table 1** presents the phenomenal growth in enrolment leading to hysterical expansion, which, although, more prominent at the lower levels of the educational system has put more burden and pressure on the university education system.

Table 1 Enrolment and Demand versus Supply of University Education in Nigeria: 1960- 2009 [3], [4].

Year	Number of universities	Total Enrolment	% Increase	Application	Admission	% Admitted	Total Unplaced
1960/61	2	1395	-				
1961/62	5	2406	72.47				
1962/63	5	3,761	56.32				
1963/64	5	5,106	35.76				
1964/65	5	6,707	34.36				
1965/66	5	7,709	14.94				
1966/67	5	8,904	15.50				
1967/68	5	7,058	-20.73				
1969/70	5	9,695	11.50				
1970/71	5	14,468	49.23				
1971/72	6	17,093	18.14				
1972-78	13	48,698	184.94				
1979-88	29	160,174	228.9				
1989-99	39	574,723	258.8				
1998/1999	39			537,226	64,176	11.9	473,050
2000-05	51	810, 220	40.98				
2002/2003	53			994,381	51,843	5.2	942,335
2003/2004	54			1,046,950	105,157	10	941,793
2004/2005	56			841,878	122,492	14.5	719,386
2005/2006	75			916,371	76,984	8.4	839,387
2006/2007	76			806,089	123,626	15.3	679,846
2007/08				911,653	107,370	11.8	804,283
2008	94	1, 096, 312	35. 31				
2008/09	94			1,054,060	200,000	18.9	854,060

The number of universities to accommodate the demand for university education grew over time to stand at 129 (40 Federal, 39 State, and 50 Private) approved as at December 2013. Covenant University (Nigeria) (CU), one of the approved 50 private universities, commenced operations October 21, 2002 with a vision to be a leading world-class university, committed to raising a new generation of leaders through a qualitative and life-applicable training system that focuses on value and skill development in all fields of human endeavour. For every world-class university emphasizing student learning as a core principle, students and their parents expect campuses provide: safe and secure environments for student learning; high-quality facilities and services responsive to student needs in a technological and “instant” environment; and beyond classroom experiences to facilitate opportunities for student growth and development toward successful careers and life post graduation.

5 NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION (NUC)

The National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are the regulatory bodies for universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education respectively. Supporting students’ academic activities by providing relevant physical facilities and services will help them to achieve qualitative education. In

order to address the inadequacy of relevant physical facilities and services, the Federal Government and the NUC created the Department of Students' Support Services in May, 2007 to coordinate provision of standard Students' Support Services in all Nigerian universities, among other things [5]. Extracts from NUC's Strategic Action Plan 2010 – 2014 are as presented in **Table 2**. How much of these objectives achieved could best be measured by the widening gap in the provision of infrastructural facilities required for conducive learning environments in Nigerian universities. The gap has led to inexorable increase in the number of qualified candidates denied admission yearly.

Table 2 NUC Strategic Action Plan 2010 – 2014 [5].

S/N	ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	COLLABORATING PARTNERS	TIME FRAME
1.	Production of Benchmark on Student Support Facilities in Nigerian Universities	To provide working documents and guidelines for evaluation of students Support programmes and facilities in Nigerian Universities.	Common standards of practice and grounds for evaluation.	Experts from the universities and other relevant agencies.	2011 – 2012
2.	Encourage universities to promote better career services	To bring about better career choices among students and reducing unemployment and under-employment in Nigeria.	Employment generation and economic growth.	All universities in Nigeria.	2010 - 2014
3.	Fine-tuning the departmental input for institutional accreditation.	To develop standard guidelines for assessing student support facilities and services in Universities.	Standard instrument for the evaluation of student support services and facilities.	Selected experts from universities.	2012 – 2014
4.	Monitoring compliance of universities with set standards on students support services and facilities.	To promote continuous improvement in the quality of support services and facilities in universities.	Data on universities performances in the provision of support to students.	All universities.	2010 & 2014

5.1 Admission and Carrying Capacity

Admission process into universities in Nigeria starts with a Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Matriculation and Examination Board (JAMB) once a year for a new session. The selection of qualified candidates to be considered for admission involves a screening exercise of the applicants by each university, guided by a cut-off mark for eligibility set by JAMB. On yearly basis, several applicants participate in the UMTE. The regulatory bodies (NUC, NBTE, and NCCE) release Admission Quota per academic session in order to guide each institution on the number of students to admit per course. Carrying capacity (CC) of institutions refers to the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for quality education available based on human and material resources. On resumption, many of those that eventually get offered admission, are confronted with inadequate structures and facilities; inadequate housing; overcrowded classrooms; and a dearth of reading materials. This is often the reason some students sit outside lecture halls and some on windows in order to receive lectures. **Table 3** reflects the universities' cumulative carrying capacities as at December 2013 [6]. The number of applicants for subsequent UMTE increases from the previous exercise following the non-admission of all the qualified applicants by the universities in that session due to inadequate infrastructure.

Table 3 All Nigerian Universities' Carrying Capacities as at 2013 [6].

Year	University Cumulative	Applicant	Carrying Capacity	Capacity : Applicant
2010/11	112	1,493,611	450,000	30.13%
2011/12	117	1,503,933	500,000	33.25%
2012/13	128	1,735,729	520,000	29.96%

The Federal Ministry of Education noted in 2009 that the carrying capacity of Nigerian university system stood at 150,000 while the actual demand was about 1 million. With 112 Universities in 2010/2011; the carrying capacity of Nigeria tertiary institutions was 450,000 with 1,493,611 applicants. This means at best effort only 30.13% of total applicants could only be accommodated during that academic session. In 2011/2012 academic session, a total of 1493,604 candidates sat for the UTME conducted by JAMB. In the results announced showed that 842,851 candidates scored below 200 marks over 400, indicating less than 45 per cent passed the examination. JAMB later fixed 180 marks as minimum for university students [4]. However, this has dropped to 29.96% in 2012/2013 academic session. In 2013/2014 academic session, 1.7million sat for UTME with 0.5million finally admitted, leaving 1.2million to join other applicants for 2014/2015 admission qualifying examination exercise.

5.2 Some Universities & Their Admission Quota

The Admission Quota for each University during the 2011/2012 academic session was released by the NUC; however, most of the universities admitted more than allotted quota as shown in **Tables 4** through **6 [6]**.

5.2.1 Some Federal Universities

Table 4 Some Federal Universities' Admission Quota for 2011/2012 session [6].

Institution	NUC Quota	Admission	Difference	Remarks
ABU	6,688	7,397	-709	Exceeded CC
UNILAG	6,500	7,527	-1,027	Exceeded CC
UNN	5,970	8,267	-2,297	Exceeded CC
UI	5,720	2,989	2,731	Far Below CC

5.2.2 Some State Universities and Their Admission Quota

Table 5 Some State Universities' Admission Quota for 2011/2012 session [6].

Institution	NUC Quota	Admission	Difference	Remarks
LASU	5,294	1,103	4,191	Far Below CC
NSU	2,500	3,113	-613	Exceeded CC

5.2.3 Some Private Universities and Their Admission Quota

Table 6 Some Private Universities' Admission Quota for 2011/2012 session [6].

Institution	NUC Quota	Admission	Difference	Remarks
Covenant (CU)	2,500	2,162	338	Below CC
Babcock	2,337	3,561	-1,224	Exceeded CC
Redeemers	800	1,290	-490	Exceeded CC

5.3 University of Ibadan, Ibadan (UI)

University of Ibadan, Ibadan (UI), the premier Federal university in Nigeria, was established in 1948 with 210 undergraduates. UI matriculated 2839 undergraduates at the beginning of the 2011/2012 session. This is just 6% of the total applicants who made the UI first and second most preferred institution. It is UI's policy that all undergraduate new intakes must have accommodation on campus. The student population increased by 5% from 20,623 in 2010/2011 session to 21,636 (13,408 undergraduates and 8,228 postgraduates; 12,223 male and 9,413 female students) in 2011/2012 session. The female students' population increased by 7.8%, while the male population increased by 2.8%. The overall male-female ratio therefore moved from 58:42 to currently stand at 56:44. The female population is thus gradually catching up with the male population, and this has serious implications for accommodation. Constructing additional hostels especially for females has become a major priority. This is being tackled by engaging private partnership in building hostel accommodation on a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis [7].

5.4 Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria (CU)

CU has sustained peerless academic calendar; Faculty Support Programme; modern technology-based teaching and learning resources; internet services; on-campus accommodation for all students; students' evaluation system, and 24hr-power/water supply since her inception in 2002. CU matriculated 1649 undergraduates (64.36% of applicants) and 18 postgraduates on November 30 2013 for 2013/2014 academic session. **Fig. 1** shows some of the students taking the Matriculation Oath.



Fig. 1 CU Matriculation Ceremony, 2013.

As at December 2013, Covenant University (Nigeria) (CU) has had 29 international awards, 13 national recognitions and awards, and 22 international linkages and collaborations as shown in **Figs. 2 - 4**.



Fig. 2 CU Signs MoU with Top American Varsities.



Fig. 3 Professor Folakemi Odedina from the University of Florida to CU.



Fig. 4 University of Johannesburg Management's Visit to CU.



Fig. 5 NUC Accreditation Team's Visit to CU.

Regularly, CU Management interacts with both undergraduate and postgraduate students to harvest their challenges and put in place strategies to resolve them, as shown in **Fig. 6**. In July 2013, CU graduated 1,466 with first degree (114 in first class, 720 in second class upper, 565 in second class lower, and 67 in third class), while 141 were in higher degrees (30 PhD, 85 MSc, 3 MA, 16 MBA, and 7 MEngineering). **Fig. 7** shows a cross section of the PhD graduates in 2013. CU retains students at the same rate as the overall student population, and achieves a graduation rate no lower than the overall student population in sustaining academic success.



Fig. 6 A cross section of Postgraduate students at a meeting with CU Management.



Fig. 7 Cross section of PhD. Graduates at the 8th Convocation Ceremony, July 2013.

CU students' excellent performance earned the university the 'best performing higher institution of the year award' in 2013, 'best maintained educational institution award', 'the most preferred university among the private universities in Nigeria', 'number one private university in Nigeria (2011, 2012, and 2013) webometric ranking of world universities', and other awards. CU Management's commitment to a successful beginning of a session with fresh intakes is as demonstrated in **Fig.8**, where the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Charles K. Ayo (middle) engaged himself in checking resumption status with the Chair, Students' Registration Committee, Dr. Daniel Gberebie (right) at the Registration Venue, on August 5, 2013 for 2013/2014. With the level of commitment by top Management leading, every faculty and student leaders are also engaged to see to the comfort of fresh intakes as shown in **Fig. 9**.



Fig. 8 CU VC (middle) checking students resumption status with the Committee's Chair.



Fig. 9 Student leader assisting a New intake with the registration.

Fig. 10 shows CU's Health Centre for medical services. In pursuit of being 1 of the top 10 universities in the world in the next 10 years (christened Vision 10: 2022) mandate, CU hosted two Nobel Laureates in Economics in her First International Conference on African Development Issues on May 5 and 6, 2014 as reflected in **Fig. 11**. CU is the first institution in Africa to record such a feat.



Fig. 10 CU Health Centre



Fig. 11 CU hosted 2 Nobel Laureates in Econs.

5.5 Deviation from Carrying Capacity

Compliance with carrying capacity (measured by the degree of deviation from carrying capacity): This indicator measures how well enrolment of the university matches available human and material resources. It is computed as:

$$(\text{Deviation from Carrying Capacity} / \text{Carrying Capacity}) \times 100\%$$

Table 7 Some Universities' Deviation from their Carrying Capacities for 2011/2012 session [6].

Institution	NUC Quota	Admission	Difference	Deviation
Afe Babalola	1,200	2,372	1,172	97.67%
UNN	5,970	8,267	2,297	38.48%
UNILAG	6,500	7,527	1,027	15.80%
ABU	6,688	7,397	709	10.60%

While it is an established fact that most institutions exceed recommended quota; it is also evident that over 70% of candidates are denied admission yearly, even though they are qualified, there are just not enough space to accommodate them. For 2013/2014 academic sessions where 1.7 million jostled for 520,000 admission spaces; over 1.2 million were denied admission again.

6 RESULTS

There is a widening gap in the provision of infrastructural facilities required for conducive learning environments in Nigerian universities. Nigeria's Academic Staff Union of Universities has had over 36 months of learning-disruptive incessant strikes between 1999 and 2013 for reasons including erratic power supply and inadequacy of student support services infrastructures for conducive teaching and learning environments. The details showed 1999 (5), 2001(3), 2002 (0.5), 2003 (6), 2005 (0.25), 2006 (0.25), 2007 (3), 2008(0.25), 2009(4), 2010 (5.25), 2011 (3), 2013 (5.0) respectively during which universities in Nigeria were shut down and students' learning continuity disrupted. Public universities (which account for 98.5 of university applications) as shown in **Fig. 12**, are obviously more affected than private institutions, meaning that educational inequalities and problems facing the country will only continue to deepen. A disruption to the school timetable has an impact on students' ability to understand and absorb the course material, and puts a lot of pressure on them when they only get a few days for revision before the start of their exams.



Fig. 12 Students shut out of a university campus during ASU strike in 2013.

The gap in the provision of infrastructural facilities has led to inexorable increase in the number of qualified candidates denied admission yearly. Only about 5.2% to 15.3% get university admission yearly. Many universities deviated from their carrying capacities (CC) between 10.60% and 97.67%. A few operated below their CC. 14.55% (2004/05), 8.40% (2005/06), 11.02% (2006/7), 11.78% (2007/2008), 18.97% (2008/2009), and 28.97% (2013/2014) of qualified candidates got university admission. In 2013/2014, 6.46% (University of Ibadan, UI, CC = 5720), 19.80% (University of Lagos, UNILAG, CC = 6500), and 64.36% (Covenant University, CU, CC = 2500) of applicants matriculated. 71.03% to 94.8% of applicants are denied admission yearly largely due to infrastructural constraints and carrying capacity problems. The accreditation of students in certain disciplines is also affected by the strike, slowing down the flow of graduates into higher degrees. Consequently, some universities' programmes received interim accreditation while some also got accreditation denied by NUC. The report of universities' accreditation status is made public by NUC to guide parents and prospective students. Transfer students, prospective students (both from Nigeria and foreign countries), and parents lose interest in the public universities as a result of strike action, leading to an increase in enrolment at private institutions, which further affects public sector education. Over-enrollment is a common practice as most institutions do not abide by their carrying capacity for reasons best known to them. As universities (e.g. UI and UNILAG) engage private partnership in building hostel accommodation on a Build-Operate-Transfer basis to war housing issue, all CU students reside on campus (9236-CC 10 halls of residence). CU students' excellence has been sustained by peerless academic calendar; Faculty Support Programme (FSP); modern technology-based teaching and learning resources; internet services; students' evaluation system, and 24hr-power/water supply since 2002. CU's FSP is a unique programme that plays *in loco parentis* role for students making CU 'a home away from home' to enhance students' concentration on their studies for excellent academic performance. CU records the first in Africa to host two Nobel Laureates in May 2014. The developed framework's typical elements for excellent academic performance include stakeholders, university expectations, and requisite infrastructures as shown in Fig. 13 represent an important tool for deepening stakeholders' understanding of what works, where, and why. Excellent academic performance would materialize wherever the identified critical success factors exist and equally sustained.

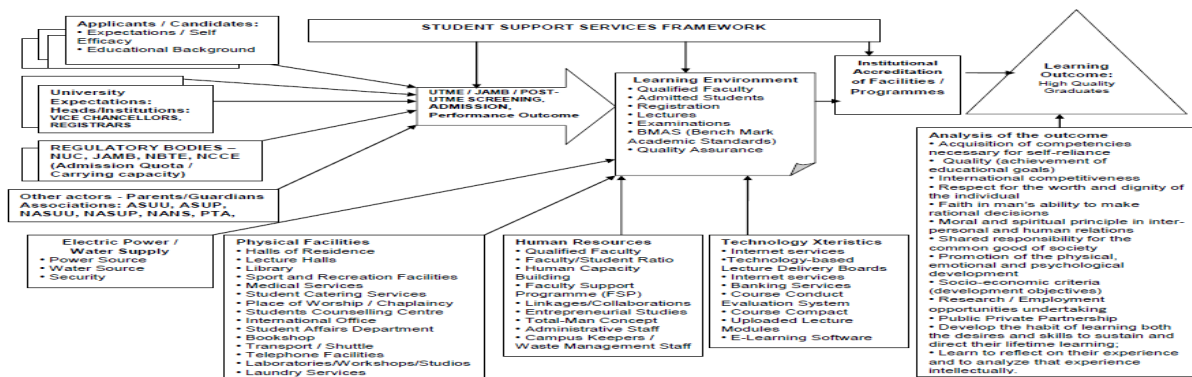


Fig. 13 Student Support Services Framework.

7 CONCLUSION

Student Support Services (SSS) are widely considered as critical in the success of education programmes as proper provision of student support services may break learners' isolation and meet not only the academic demands of students in education but also their social needs. In reality, the above results are discouraging to candidates, parents and younger ones. With uninterrupted academic calendar and other support services, every programme commenced would graciously end as stakeholders would expect. Higher education leaders must therefore work with all constituent groups to forge the best possible strategies to recruit, develop, retain and graduate students who will market the institution by the experiences they have had and their ability to function congruently in the respective workplaces. Covenant University (Nigeria) has become a reference point for university education in Nigeria and Africa in general with active collaborations with reputable global institutions. CU is the first institution in African tertiary educational system to host two Nobel Laureates. The case study examined has sufficiently proved researchers' findings that the success of any education system is based on three principles: "excellent (learning) and teaching material, high quality student support services, and efficient logistical systems".

REFERENCES

- [1] Omogbadegun, Z.O. (2014). Pilotable Framework for Overcoming Barriers in Learning in Nigerian Educational System, 8th International Technology, Education and Development Conference, Proceedings of INTED2014 Conference 10th-12th March 2014, Valencia, Spain. pp. 1879-1889, <http://library.iated.org/view/OMOGBADEGUN2014PIL>.
- [2] Harewood, E. (2014). Fundamental Support Services Every Higher Education Institution Must Have. http://www.evollution.com/program_planning/fundamental-support-services-every-higher-education-institution-must-have/. Accessed 25th April, 2014
- [3] Shu'ara, J. (2010). NIGERIA-Higher education statistics- National experience. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/StatisticalCapacityBuilding/Workshop%20Documents/Education%20workshop%20dox/2010%20Windhoek%20Regional%20Workshop%20on%20Education%20Statistics%20for%20South%20and%20Eastern%20Africa/NIGERIA-Higher%20education%20statistics-%20National%20experience.pdf>. Accessed 3rd May, 2014
- [4] Aluede, O; Idogho,P; and Imonikhe, J.S. (2012). Increasing Access to University Education in Nigeria: Present Challenges and Suggestions for the Future. The African Symposium (ISSN# TX 6-342-323), Volume 12, No. 1, June 2012, 3-13
- [5] NUC, (2010). NUC Strategic Action Plan 2010 – 2014. National Universities Commission, Department of Student Support Services, Abuja, Nigeria
- [6] Micaiah, W. (2013). Carrying Capacity of Nigeria Tertiary Institutions. <http://www.slideshare.net/statisense/carrying-capacity-of-nigeria-tertiary-institutions>. Accessed 3rd May, 2014
- [7] UI – University of Ibadan. (2012). University of Ibadan Annual Report 2012. http://ui.edu.ng/sites/default/files/2011_2012_UI_Reports.pdf. Accessed 29th March, 2014