

SERVICE QUALITY IN NON-REGULAR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES (A SURVEY OF STUDENTS IN THE SOUTH-EAST)

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Abstract

This study investigates the service quality level of non-regular undergraduate programmes in South-Eastern universities in Nigeria from the students' perspective using a conceptualized service quality framework; iCEL. The study used a judgment sample of 1500 non-regular students and 50 regular students (control group) drawn from five South-Eastern universities in Nigeria. Two sets of structured questionnaires were used to elicit information from students on their perception of their institutions in terms of quality of infrastructure, course content and instructional material, examination system and lecturers. Using the relative mean score and the paired sample t-test, the study compared the ranking of the institutions from the non-regular and regular students. Findings revealed that there are no significant differences between the non-regular and regular students' responses (ratings) of their institutions along these yardsticks, while a significant difference exists between their rating of course content and instructional materials. Using a benchmark of 6.50, the institutions performed below acceptable standard in seven out of the twenty-two variables (attendance/regularity of lecturers, substance of lectures, preparation of lectures, furniture in classrooms, sitting space in library, up-to-date text books and promptness in release of transcripts) and in two out of the four

key quality metrics (lecturers and course content/instructional material). The regulators and the government were encouraged to be on the alert to the standard of university education in the non-regular programmes; ensuring that adequate sanctions are fully implemented on institutions found to compromise the set standard.

Keywords: Non-regular programmes, Service Quality, University Education, iCEL Model

Introduction

Non-regular undergraduate programmes have been an integral aspect of University development since 1960, when the Ashby Commission Report recommended the establishment of evening degree programmes for civil servants at University of Nigeria, Nsukka and University of Lagos (Nakpodia, 2010). The essence of this provision was to enable the civil servants upgrade their skills and knowledge so as to constitute high level man power, necessary for the economic, political and social development of Nigeria. These programmes, going by different names in different universities ranging from Continuing Education, Distance Education, Work-Study, Summer School, Sandwich, to Satellite programmes, had come to stay, with significant enrollments (Abdullahi, 1997). While service quality in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has been

an issue that attracts the interest of many stakeholders (government, regulatory bodies, employers of labour etc), most Nigerian universities offering non-regular programmes are yet to give sufficient attention to the quality of service delivery in the programmes (Okpara and Agu, 2017).

Non- regular undergraduate programmes have transformed from serving the needs of few adults,

to tertiary institutions offering admission to a good number of Nigerian youths. In 2011 alone, 1.5 million candidates took JAMB and admission was offered to only four hundred thousand individuals. Non-regular undergraduate programmes offered an alternative option of having access to university education. This scenario changed little even in the 2014/2015 admissions, thus:

Table 1: 2014 JAMB (Regular) Application and Admission Statistics in the South-East Nigeria

S/N	State	Application Statistics	Admission Statistics	Regular Admission Rate (%)
1	Abia	60059	11623	19.35
2	Anambra	84520	18777	22.22
3	Ebonyi	36512	7842	21.48
4	Enugu	77519	15839	20.43
5	Imo	120006	21366	17.80
	TOTAL	378616	75447	19.93

Source: JAMB Website, 2015

Since the non-regular undergraduate programmes have increasing enrollments, whose graduates are supposed to contribute no less to national development, relative to the Regular students, a study of the quality of service delivery by the universities have become imperative. Management of any gaps would boost graduate prospects. The greater concentration of the National Universities Commission (NUC) on Regular programmes, had added to this impetus. It is observed that the quality of non-regular undergraduate programmes in most Nigerian universities is speedily deteriorating. The quality of lecturers, quality of instructional materials, quality of infrastructural facilities and the quality of examination/evaluation system have not been given the required attention by both the universities' management and NUC. There is this fear that given the population of admission seekers opting for the non-regular option, the quality of manpower in the near future is at risk given the present quality. The prevailing quality situation in the universities seems to be contrary to the expectations of many students.

As an aspect of marketing, the ideal service quality in the university system is that which adopts best practice delivery system that meets and or exceeds the expectations of students and other stakeholders. Understanding the perceptions of the

students on the actual service quality vis-à-vis their expectations could provide insights on the right steps to adopt in tackling identified quality gaps. This is the thrust of this study. This paper investigates students' perceptions of their universities' service quality delivery level using a new measurement framework; the iCEL. This is a four-dimension, twenty-two variables model proposed by the researchers. It is an acronym for institutional infrastructure, course content and instructional material, examination and evaluation system and lecturers' quality and attitude. In evaluating service quality in non-regular undergraduate programmes, this study sought to:

1. Find out the students' perceptions of and expectations on their institutions of study, prior to admission.
2. Appraise the institutions' performance (service quality) using the iCEL model.
3. Identify the extent of gap between the perceptions (#1) and performance (#2) above.
4. Compare non-regular students' responses with the regular students' responses
5. Make recommendations for better service quality (gap management) in non-regular undergraduate programmes.

Review of Related Literature

Non-Regular Higher Education Programmes in Nigeria

Non-regular higher education is an alternative to the formal/regular mode of acquiring higher education. It is a method that is different from the regular education programmes in many aspects such as mode of entry, years of completion, lecture days and periods, age requirement, service to fatherland (NYSC) after programme completion, use of out-reach centers in some cases, etc (Okpara & Agu, 2015). Nevertheless, non-regular students take similar courses and lectures as their regular counterparts, write projects and seminars, observe teaching practices, etc (Adeyinka, 2014). In Nigeria, non-regular higher education can be obtained in different forms. While quoting Adeyinka (2014), Okpara and Agu (2015) classified it into:

- Part-time programmes which are offered by Nigerian universities to higher education seekers on weekend basis. According to Adeyemi and Osunde (2004), there are two types: On-campus and outreach programmes.
- Sandwich programmes: Offered to serving-teachers and educational administrators.
- Distance Learning: Distance education, as noted by Parraton (2001) is an educational process in which significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by “someone” removed in space and time from the learner. A fundamental attribute of distance education is that it is learner centered (Terhemba, 2007; Keegan, 1993; Jegede, 2003; Jain, 2000; (Adesoye & Anusa, 2011).

Reasons for and Benefits of Non-Regular Higher Education Programmes

Authorities in the field of education and social sciences have documented some of the reasons why non-regular university education is inevitable in an economy and Nigeria in particular. In a survey involving 2654 part-time higher education students, Callender and Rayah (2009) found the reasons for part-time study were overwhelmingly financial; 82% said they could not afford to give up their job. Adeyinka (2004), Adesoye and Anusa (2011) are in agreement with this view since they believe that non-regular programmes are mainly for students who desire the opportunity to prepare for university degrees while retaining full-time

jobs. Also, affordability, convenience and flexibility are among major factors advancing the quest for part-time and non-regular programmes (Eric, 2013; Callender Hopkin & Wilkinson, 2010; Harman, 2014).

Summarizing the reasons for part-time higher education, Eric (2013) classified part-time undergraduate students thus: Career Enhancers, Career Changers, Non-career Learners: and Career Entrants. In all, Okpara and Agu (2015) observed that in Nigeria, job and family commitments, need for personal development, desire to hold top and management positions, quest for better job, flexibility, finance and difficulty in securing full-time regular university admission are key reasons accounting for choice of non-regular studies. Assessing the importance of non-regular higher education, Eric (2004) observes from the economic perspective that part-time higher education plays a vital role in skill enhancement of working age people, as well as providing a second chance for those who missed out on higher education when younger, thereby providing an economy with the graduates required to support economic growth. Harmon (2014) and Artess (2010) add that it provides the economy with more qualified workforce for the civil service as well as the larger labour for proficiency and efficiency. Again, part-time studies have significant impact on self-confidence, happiness, career prospect and fight against social inequality (Callender, 2011; Eric, 2005; Callender & Wilkinson, 2013; Harmon, 2014). Since non-regular education has become a globally acceptable mode of higher education, higher education policies need to support this rather than undermine it.

Problems and Solutions to Non-Regular Higher Education in Nigeria

Non-regular programmes in Nigeria are characterized by irregularities and practices contrary to the set standard (Okpara & Agu, 2015). This has led to the closure of some forms of non-regular education such as outreach campuses. Udochukwu (2013) identified such setbacks as: poor screening for entrants, poor standard and quality control in the system, poor performance of the products of the system in the labour market, use of unqualified lecturers, over population and

poor educational facilities. Also, poor motivation to qualified university lecturers in the form of delay in payment and non-provision of enabling environment play major role in crippling the system. This is because release of results, attendance to classes, quality of teaching are all at stake. As a remedy to the ugly situation, Okojie (2012) outlined National Universities Commission guidelines to streamline the system.

Model/Conceptual Framework

Classical models of service quality in higher education enunciate “the difference between what a student expects to receive and their perceptions of actual delivery” (O’Neill and Palmer, 2004). This is simply denoted as the perception-performance gap analysis. The conceptual model

for this study was adapted from the service quality analysis by Gronroos (1990) and Ankomah (2005), thus:

Expected quality is a product of words-of-mouth about a university, rankings, past experience, marketing communications, etc. On enrolment, the student undergoes a process involving interactions (with teaching and non-teaching staff), observations (of facilities and amenities), etc. The experienced quality is an empirical first-hand assessment of the universities within the duration of the student’s study. The extent of gap between the expected and experienced quality, is a measure of service quality, hence customer satisfaction. Based on the study variables, the conceptual framework is as shown in figure 2.

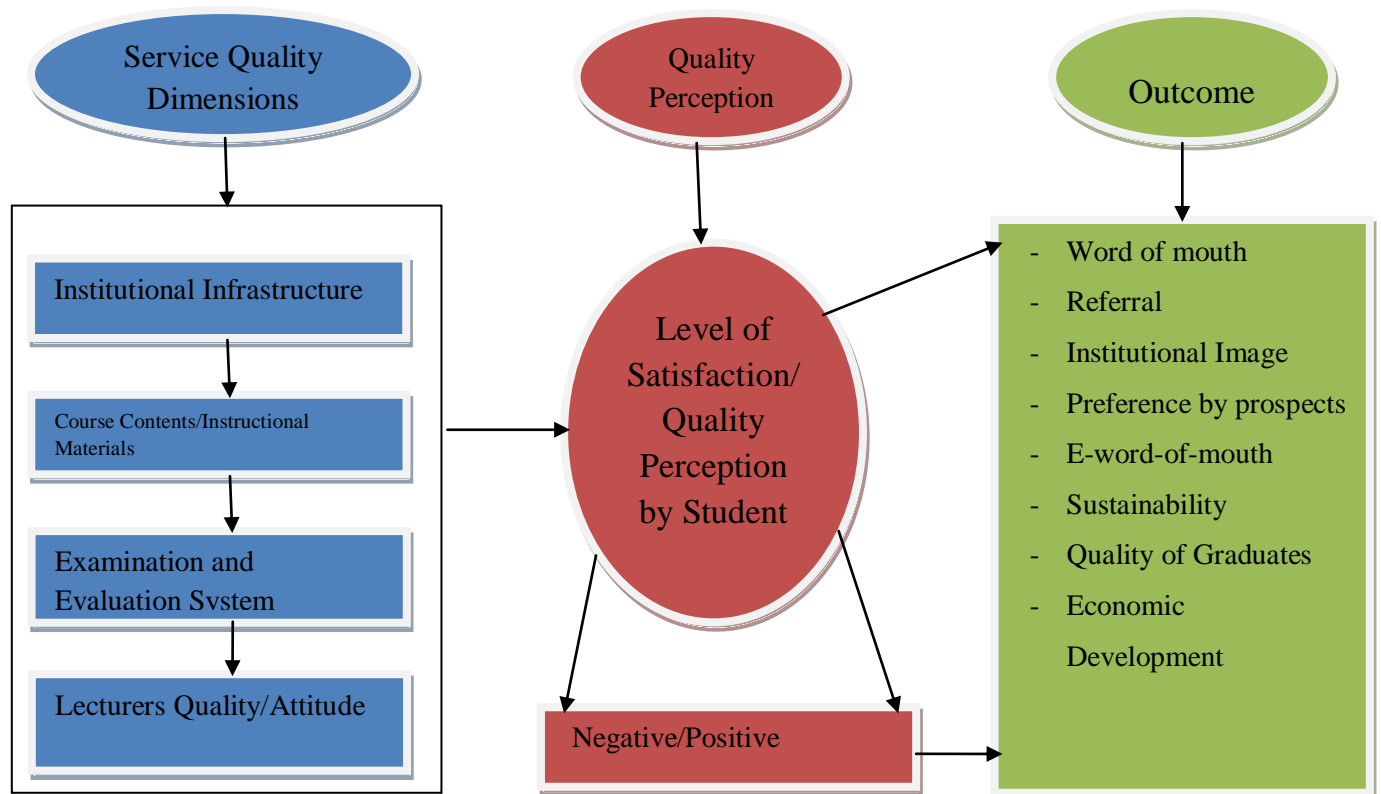


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: The i-CEL Service Quality Framework for Tertiary Institutions
 Source: Researchers’ Proposition (2017).

The diagram shows the key service quality metrics as contained in the study. The researchers focused on four critical service quality metrics (Institutional infrastructure, Course content and instructional materials, Examination and evaluation system as well as Lecturers’ quality and attitude). The authors believe that students’

expectations from institutions offering non-regular undergraduate programmes are formed around these quality dimensions. The ability of an institution to meet, exceed or deviate from already formed expectations of students determines the perceptions students would hold about the institution. It could be negative or positive. And

this directly or indirectly produces outcomes such as word-of-mouth, referrals, institutional image enhancement enhanced institutional choice amongst admission seekers (prospects) e-word-of-mouth such as internet posting, face book, twitter, etc.

Empirical Review

Reviewed literature shows that a number of studies had been carried out on specific areas of non-regular undergraduate programmes globally (Okpara & Agu, 2015). In a study of 3000 part-time degree graduates of Birkbeck University London and Open University London, Feinstein et al (2007) found that interest in the subject, self development and desire to have a recognized qualification are common reasons for engaging in part-time programmes. They observed that enjoyment, progression and personal development were more likely to motivate the students into part-time studies than finding new job, improving their current job and meeting employment requirements. These assertions tally with the revelation about the population of part-time students, which indicates that around a third are already graduates (Mason, 2007; Callender et al., 2006; Davies, 1999; Randsden, 2006).

Similarly, a study of 2654 part-time students by Callender et al., (2006) indicates that financial factors, job security, convenience and family responsibilities are reasons behind enrolment into part-time programmes. In a comparative study involving full and part-time students in a US college, Stratton et al (2004) found that age and contextual economic factors, especially the local employment rate, rather than cost consideration affected choice of mode of study. A study of 556 part-time students by Schullar et al (1999), in addition to these reasons disclosed that enhancement of promotion prospects and protection from redundancy are common reasons for choice of part-time mode of study.

Again, Fuller (2001) carried out a study on disadvantaged adults returning to study part-time programmes. The study revealed that the motivation to return to study reflects the opportunity to realize aspirations which are not narrowly vocational. A comparative study of full

and part-time entrants and potential entrants by Davies et al (2002) shows that the part-time students reported lack of time as major barrier to study. In Scotland, Schuller et al (1999) compared the quality of full and part-time programmes and concluded that full time students were better provided for than part-time students. They however, observed that the part-time students were satisfied with the course content, unit choice, quality of learning material, flexibility of study hours, friendly atmosphere, support services and library books availability.

From the Nigerian context, Ojo and Olakulehin (2006) reported that Nigerian distance learners are favourably disposed to open and distance learning institutions, as they value the open access, flexibility, quality of learning materials, and use of multi-media ICTs etc. The study involved 120 National Open University of Nigeria students from the country's six geopolitical zones. On the use of library among part-time students in Nigeria, Mabawonku (2004) observed that Nigerian Universities do not adequately provide for the library needs of part-time students.

On the number of variables studied, extensive review of literature disclosed that scholars have measured service quality in university education using five, six and fifteen variables (Sudharan, Ravindran & Kalpana, 2012; Grubert, Fubs, Voss & Micheal, 2010; Okpara & Agu, 2017). Our proposed framework of four dimensions (the iCEL) consists of twenty-three variables.

Gap

It is obvious that there are very few researches on the experiences of non-regular undergraduate students in the Nigerian context. The few studies available focused on Sandwich programmes or the National Open University (distance learning). This study however, covers significant variants of non-regular undergraduate programmes in Nigeria, including weekend, distance, sandwich, evening and part-time, in order to close the gap of dearth of empirical studies in this area. Again, previous studies on global non-regular undergraduate education are becoming aged. As evident in our empirical review, most studies are about a decade old. This gap deserves to be filled. Moreover,

unlike previous studies in this area that adopted factor analysis or cluster analysis, e.g; Feinstein, et al., (2007), this study adopted the relative mean approach and independent t-test in comparing the responses of students from sampled institutions. Again, most studies focused on one institution (Agu & Kalu, 2015; Sudharan, et al., 2012; Gruber et al., 2010; Okpara & Agu, 2017). Our study, however is regional based, covering one university from each of the five states in South East of Nigeria.

Methodology

This study was a survey, via questionnaire, of undergraduate students in some universities offering non-regular undergraduate programmes in the South-East of Nigeria. Out of ten public universities in the region; made up of five state institutions and five federal, the researchers purposively chose five; one from each state. The admission records of the institutions revealed a total of twenty three thousand eight hundred and sixty two (23862) current, non-regular students. The team however decided to adopt a judgmental sample size of one thousand five hundred (1500) for the non-regular students, while fifty (50) regular students (ten for each university) were involved as control units. The percentage method was adopted in splitting the sample size for the various institutions. Numbers were assigned to the universities based on the ratio of their populations. Two sets of structured questionnaires were used for both non-regular and regular students (control group). This was tested for reliability and validity using test-re-test and experts' review. The test-re-test involved 20 respondents used for a pilot study, who filled the questionnaire twice within two weeks interval. The correlation yielded 78% which falls within the accepted minimum threshold for acceptance (Bornstedt,1977; Rattray & Jones, 2007; Costello & Osborne, 2005). The rating scale of ten (10) options was adopted for the key variables of the study.

Collected data were analysed using SPSS version 20 software. Descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, measures of central tendency and dispersion were adopted. Quality metrics were measured with mean, median, mode and standard deviation in SPSS version 20. A total of four

quality metrics, comprising twenty-two variables were weighed on a ten point rating scale, while decision was based mainly on the relative mean rating (see figures in red) of each metric and their various variables.

Decision Rule:

Mean scores ranging from 9 to 10 stand for **Excellent**, Mean scores ranging from 7 to 8 stand for **Very Good**, Mean scores ranging from 5 to 6 stand for **Good**, Mean scores ranging from 3 to 4 stand for **Poor**, Mean scores ranging from 1 to 2 stand for **Very poor**, Mean scores of less than 1 stand for **Appalling**. *The researchers set a benchmark of 6.50 as acceptable yardstick. This implies that for each variable to be accepted, the rating, if approximated must be equal to or above 7.0, that is, 'Very Good'*. To compare the regular and non-regular responses, the independent samples t-test was used. This has the power to show whether there exist differences between two variables and the significance of such differences (Agu, 2016; Ezejelue, Ogwo & Nkamnebe, 2007).

Results of Non-Regular Students' Responses (Demographics)

Out of the 1500 copies of the questionnaire issued to non-regular students, 1108(74%) were returned, while 392(26%) were lost. There were more females (602=54%), more singles (575=52%), more 25-30 years old respondents and more ordinary level certificate holders (540=48%) from our sampled population. Overall, the nature of present engagement is the core reason for choice of non-regular education option; 502 (46%) of respondents voted this. 724 (65%) believe that non-regular programs offer the same quality as regular programs. 384 (35%) believe that the qualities differ. Of this number, 337 (86%) see the regular option as being of higher quality, while 57(14%) rated the non-regular programme higher.

Non-regular students' expectations for enrolling into their various disciplines ranges from enhancement of standing in the society (363=33%), enhance natural talent and skills (268=24%), improve chances in present engagement (237=21%) and enhance potential to get a job (118=17%).

Analysis of Non-Regular Students Responses

Table 1: Perception of Students on Extent to which their Expectations are Met

		ABSU	UNN	EBSU	IMSU	NAU
N	Valid	157	111	138	263	439
	Missing	323	369	342	217	41
Mean		76.60	76.68	75.68	74.31	73.16
Median		75.00	75.00	77.50	80.00	75.00
Mode		70	60	70	80	80
Std. Deviation		12.011	13.435	13.615	15.249	14.221
Skewness		-.185	-.078	-.333	-.913	-.352
Std. Error of Skewness		.194	.229	.206	.150	.117
Kurtosis		-.725	-1.391	-.846	.720	-.989
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.385	.455	.410	.299	.233

This table shows that UNN and NAU occupy the first and last ranks respectively on institution’s ability in meeting students’ expectations. They were ranked 76.68% and 73.16% respectively. Closer examination of the mean ratings indicates that the institutions do not differ significantly on students’ rating. IMSU and NUA had more students’ ratings on 80% in terms of meeting of

expectation. ABSU and EBSU had more ratings on 70%, while UNN was rated 60% by majority of its students .The students’ expectations have not been fully met because lecturers did not perform up to students’ expectations (313=28%), course content is not fully adequate (265=24%), students’ perception changed (247=22%) and others, such as personal circumstances (283=26%).

Table 2: Mean Scores of Students’ Perception of their Institutions’ Quality of Infrastructure

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Average
Adequacy of classrooms	6.76	6.68	6.52	6.24	6.63	6.57
Adequacy of furniture in classrooms	6.32	6.57	6.34	6.78	6.41	6.48
Is library stocked with adequate number of up-to-date relevant reading materials?	6.76	6.70	6.59	6.34	6.41	6.56
Adequacy of sitting space in library.	6.22	6.56	6.35	6.66	6.56	6.47
Adequacy of ICT facilities	6.56	6.62	6.66	6.34	6.51	6.54
Average	6.48	6.62	6.49	6.52	6.58	6.52

The table shows that the institutions collectively met the minimum acceptance mark on infrastructure, being ranked 6.52. They were

ranked low on furniture in classroom and sitting space in library.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Students’ Perception of their Institutions’ Quality of Course Content and Instructional Materials

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Average
Coverage: comprehensive and up-to-date, academic and professional	6.56	6.62	6.66	6.48	6.56	6.57
Recommended texts up-to-date and lists provided.	6.44	6.47	6.46	6.37	6.60	6.47
Books available at non-exploitative terms.	6.65	6.62	6.40	6.74	6.46	6.57

Handbooks available at non-exploitative terms.	6.22	6.57	6.35	6.23	6.30	6.53
Average	6.47	6.57	6.47	6.46	6.48	6.49

The table shows that the institutions collectively fall below the minimum acceptance mark on course content, being ranked 6.49. They were

ranked high on coverage, and non-exploitative pricing, but low on currency of recommended materials.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Students' Perception of their Institutions' Quality of Examination/Evaluation System

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Average
Coverage of exam papers/questions.	6.56	6.62	6.65	6.46	6.58	6.57
Fairness in grading of exam scripts.	6.34	6.44	6.67	6.40	6.70	6.51
Fairly well-regulated exams investigation and supervision.	6.71	6.62	6.50	6.75	6.51	6.62
Promptness in release of exam results	6.56	6.57	6.64	6.42	6.55	6.55
Readiness to handle complaints on exams grading or script grading.	6.34	6.56	6.64	6.68	6.45	6.53
Ready access to exam grades	6.71	6.62	6.50	6.42	6.53	6.56
Promptness in release of transcripts.	6.32	6.57	6.47	6.66	6.44	6.49
Average	6.51	6.57	6.58	6.54	6.54	6.55

Table 5: Mean Scores of Students' Perception of their Institutions' Quality of Lecturers

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Average
Punctuality of lecturers	6.50	6.60	6.50	6.57	6.62	6.56
Attendance/ regularity of lecturers	6.27	6.52	6.26	6.24	6.38	6.33
Delivery of lectures	6.68	6.62	6.63	6.78	6.43	6.63
Availability and access after lectures for counseling	6.27	6.50	6.19	6.31	6.52	6.59
Substance of lectures	6.62	6.58	6.61	6.64	6.50	6.33
Adequacy of preparation of lectures.	6.41	6.32	6.37	6.29	6.25	6.45
Average	6.46	6.52	6.43	6.47	6.45	6.47

The table shows that the institutions collectively fall below the minimum acceptance mark on quality and attitude of lecturers, being ranked 6.47. They

were ranked high on punctuality and access for counselling

Table 6: RANKING OF INSTITUTIONS BASED ON NON-REGULAR STUDENTS' PERCEPTION:

S/N	FACTOR	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH	FIFTH
1	Punctuality	NAU	IMSU	EBSU	UNN/ABSU	-
2	Regularity	IMSU	NAU	UNN	ABSU	EBSU
3	Delivery of Lecture	EBSU	UNN	ABSU	IMSU	NAU
4	Access for Counseling	NAU	IMSU	EBSU	UNN	ABSU
5	Substance of Lecture	EBSU	UNN	ABSU	IMSU	NAU
6	Adequacy of Lecture Prep	UNN	ABSU	IMSU	EBSU	NAU
OVERALL	LECTURERS' RATING:	IMSU	UNN	EBSU	NAU	ABSU
1	Classroom Adequacy	UNN	IMSU	NAU	ABSU	EBSU
2	Furniture in Classroom	EBSU	IMSU	NAU	ABSU	UNN
3	Library Materials	UNN	IMSU	ABSU	NAU	EBSU
4	Library Sitting Space	EBSU	IMSU/EBSU	ABSU	UNN	-
5	Adequacy of ICT Facilities	ABSU	IMSU	UNN	NAU	EBSU
OVERALL	INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE	IMSU	UNN	NAU	ABSU	EBSU
1	Coverage	ABSU	IMSU	UNN/NAU	EBSU	-
2	Up-to-date Materials	NAU	IMSU	ABSU	UNN	EBSU
3	Non-exploitative Books	EBSU	UNN	IMSU	NAU	ABSU
4	Non-exploitative Handbooks	IMSU	ABSU	NAU	EBSU	UNN
OVERALL	COURSE CONTENT/MATERIALS	IMSU	NAU	ABSU	UNN	EBSU
1	Exam Coverage	ABSU	IMSU	NAU	UNN	EBSU
2	Fairness in Grading	NAU	ABSU	IMSU	EBSU	UNN
3	Exam Regulation	EBSU	UNN	IMSU	NAU	ABSU
4	Prompt Release of Results	ABSU	IMSU	UNN	NAU	EBSU
5	Complaints Handling	EBSU	ABSU	IMSU	NAU	UNN
6	Access to Grades	UNN	IMSU	NAU	ABSU	EBSU
7	Prompt Release of Transcript	EBSU	IMSU	ABSU	NAU	UNN
OVERALL	EXAMINATION SYSTEM	ABSU	IMSU	EBSU/NAU	UNN	-
GRAND	NON-REGULAR PROGRAMME RANKING	IMSU(6.570)	NAU(6.495)	ABSU(6.493)	UNN(6.488)	EBSU(6.480)

Source: Field Work, 2017.

The table shows that the institutions collectively met the minimum acceptance mark on evaluation system, being ranked 6.55. They were ranked low on promptness in release of transcript.

Using our benchmark; 6.50, these tables shows that the institutions performed below acceptable standard in seven out of the twenty-two variables (attendance/regularity of lecturers, substance of lectures, preparation of lectures, furniture in classrooms, sitting space in library, up-to-date text books and promptness in release of transcripts). They also performed below acceptable standard in two out of the four key quality metrics (lecturers and course content/instructional material).

IMSU emerged best in the key areas of ranking (lecturers, institutional infrastructure and course content and instructional materials). It finally was ranked overall best in non-regular university undergraduate programmes amongst students of the five universities. NAU emerged overall second in non-regular undergraduate university programmes. However, it was not ranked best on any of the four key quality metrics. ABSU emerged overall third in non-regular undergraduate university programmes and also best on examination and evaluation system. The fourth and fifth positions went to UNN and EBSU respectively on overall non-regular undergraduate university education.

Analysis of Regular Students' Responses

Of the 50 copies of the questionnaire issued, 49 (98%) were retrieved while 1 (for EBSU) was lost.

Table 7: Demographic Analyses of Regular Respondents

Option	ABSU	IMSU	EBSU	UNN	NAU	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Gender:							
Male	4	4	2	10	6	26	53.06
Female	6	6	7	0	4	23	46.94
Age Bracket:							
Below 25	7	8	6	8	10	39	75.59
25 – 30	3	2	2	1	0	8	32.65
31 – 40	0	0	1	1	0	2	8.16
41 and above	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Highest Education:							
O'Level	0	0	1	5	8	14	28.57
ND	1	1	0	0	0	2	4.08
HND	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BSC	9	8	8	5	2	32	65.31
Others	0	1	1	0	0	2	4.08
Marital Status:							
Married	0	0	2	0	2	4	8.16
Single	10	10	7	10	8	45	91.84
Discipline:							
Linguistic	0	0	6	4	0	10	20.41
HIR	0	0	3	0	0	3	6.12
Marketing	9	7	0	6	9	31	63.27
Economics	1	3	0	0	0	4	8.16
Business Administration	0	0	0	0	1	1	2.04
Consideration for non-Regular:							
Yes	2	1	1	4	1	9	18.38
No	8	6	8	6	9	37	75.51
Others	0	3	0	0	0	3	6.12

This table shows that there were more males (26=53%), more singles (45=92%) and more under-25 years (39=76%) amongst the regular students sampled.

Table 8: Mean Scores of Students' Perception of their Institutions' Quality of Lecturers

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Average
Punctuality of lecturers	6.00	7.90	6.22	5.00	6.60	6.34
Attendance/ regularity of lecturers	6.50	7.30	5.89	6.50	6.68	6.57
Delivery of lectures	6.80	8.00	6.44	6.70	7.40	7.07
Availability and access after lectures for counseling	4.90	7.00	4.22	6.80	7.20	6.02
Substance of lectures	6.00	8.10	5.00	6.50	7.10	6.54
Adequacy of preparation of lectures.	6.70	8.60	5.56	6.40	7.40	6.93
Average(Lecturers)	6.15	7.82	5.55	6.32	7.11	6.59

The table shows that the institutions collectively met the minimum acceptance mark on quality and attitude of lecturers, being ranked 6.59.

Table 9: Mean Scores of Students' Perception of their Institutions' Infrastructure

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Total
Adequacy of classrooms	5.20	8.60	7.67	6.50	7.30	7.05
Adequacy of furniture in classrooms	5.30	6.70	5.33	5.70	7.30	6.07
Is library stocked with adequate number of up-to-date relevant reading materials?	4.90	5.30	7.67	6.80	7.20	6.37
Adequacy of sitting space in library.	4.90	3.20	4.00	6.50	7.40	5.20
Adequacy of ICT facilities	2.70	4.90	4.56	7.10	7.30	5.31
Adequacy of laboratories (if applicable)	3.70	4.10	4.56	7.20	7.10	5.33
Average	4.45	5.47	5.63	6.63	7.27	5.89

The table shows that the institutions collectively are below the acceptance mark on institutional infrastructure, being ranked 5.89.

Table 10: Mean Scores of Students' Perception of their Institutions' Quality of Course Content and Instructional Materials

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Total
Coverage: comprehensive and up-to-date, academic and professional	6.90	6.50	4.33	5.60	6.80	6.03
Recommended texts up-to-date and lists provided.	5.90	6.20	5.33	5.00	7.10	5.91
Books available at non-exploitative terms.	6.30	3.40	4.78	5.80	7.40	5.54
Handbooks available at non-exploitative terms.	4.90	6.20	5.67	5.80	7.40	5.99
Average	6.00	5.58	5.02	5.55	7.18	6.49

The table shows that the institutions are below the acceptance mark on course content and instructional material, being ranked 6.49. They were ranked high on all sub-variables.

Table 11: Mean Scores of Students' Perception of their Institutions' Quality of Examination/Evaluation System

Option	ABSU	AWKA	EBSU	IMSU	UNN	Total
Coverage of exam papers/questions.	7.90	5.30	5.22	5.80	7.10	6.26
Fairness in grading of exam scripts.	6.50	8.30	5.11	4.80	7.20	6.38
Fairly well-regulated exams investigation and supervision.	7.20	7.60	4.33	7.20	7.40	6.75
Promptness in release of exam results	5.80	7.00	5.89	6.40	7.40	6.50
Readiness to handle complaints on exams grading or script grading.	4.50	6.80	5.89	5.80	7.30	6.06
Ready access to exam grades	5.40	6.80	5.00	5.50	6.80	5.90
Promptness in release of transcripts.	4.80	4.30	4.67	5.90	7.40	5.41
Average	6.01	6.59	5.16	5.91	7.23	6.18

The table shows that the institutions collectively are below the minimum acceptance mark on examination system, being ranked 6.18. They were ranked high on all sub-variables

UNN leads on all the dimensions with mean rating of 7.11, 7.27, 7.18 and 7.23 for lecturers, infrastructure, course content and examination system respectively.

Comparing the Regular with Non-Regular Results

Table 12: Lecturers

S/N	Variables	Non-Regular	Regular
1	Punctuality of lecturers	6.56	6.34
2	Attendance/ regularity of lecturers	6.33	6.57
3	Delivery of lectures	6.63	6.07
4	Availability and access after lectures for counseling	6.59	6.02
5	Substance of lectures	6.33	6.54
6	Adequacy of preparation of lectures.	6.45	6.93

Source: From tables 5 and 8.

Table 13: Institutional Infrastructure

S/N	Variables	Non-Regular	Regular
1	Adequacy of classrooms	6.57	6.05
2	Adequacy of furniture in classrooms	6.48	6.07
3	Is library stocked with adequate number of up-to-date relevant reading materials?	6.56	6.37
4	Adequacy of sitting space in library.	6.47	5.20
5	Adequacy of ICT facilities	6.54	5.31
6	Adequacy of laboratories (if applicable)	0.00	5.33
7	Availability of Conveniences and Leisure Facilities	6.52	5.89

Source: From tables 2 and 9.

Table 14: Course Content and Instructional Materials

S/N	Variables	Non-Regular	Regular
1	Coverage: comprehensive and up-to-date, academic and professional	6.58	6.03
2	Recommended texts up-to-date and lists provided.	6.47	5.91
3	Books available at non-exploitative terms.	6.57	5.54
4	Handbooks available at non-exploitative terms.	6.53	5.99

Source: From tables 3 and 10.

Table 15: Examination/Evaluation System

S/N	Variables	Non-Regular	Regular
1	Coverage of exam papers/questions.	6.57	6.26
2	Fairness in grading of exam scripts.	6.51	6.38
3	Fairly well-regulated exams investigation and supervision.	6.62	6.75
4	Promptness in release of exam results	6.53	6.50
5	Readiness to handle complaints on exams grading or script grading.	6.53	6.06
6	Ready access to exam grades	06.57	5.90
7	Promptness in release of transcripts.	6.49	5.41

Source: From tables 4 and 11.

To know whether significant differences exist in the two groups' responses, the SPSS version 20 paired samples t-test was carried out.

Table 16: Paired Samples Statistics: Lecturers

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	NREG	6.4817	6	.13182	.05382
	REG	6.5783	6	.38353	.15658

Table 17: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	NREG - REG	-.09667	.41059	.16762	-.52756	.33422	-.577	5	.589

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 and t-cal less than t-cri, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of regular and non-regular students on the quality of lecturers.

Table 18: Paired Samples Statistics Infrastructure

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	NREG	5.5914	7	2.46588	.93201
	REG	5.8886	7	.67509	.25516

Table 19: Paired Samples Test INFRASTRUCTURE

		Paired Differences				t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	NREG - REG	-.29714	2.30030	.86943	-2.42456	1.83028	-.342	6	.744

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 and t-cal less than t-cri, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of regular and non-regular students on the quality of institutional infrastructure.

Table 20: Paired Samples Statistics: EXAM SYSTEM

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	NREG	6.5486	7	.04337	.01639
	REG	6.3143	7	.48469	.18320

Table 21: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower			

Pair 1	NREG – REG	.23429	.46007	.17389	-.19121	.65978	1.347	6	.227
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Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 and t-cal less than t-cri, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of regular and non-regular students on the quality of examination and evaluation system.

Table 22: Paired Samples Statistics: Course Content

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	NREG	6.5375	4	.04992	.02496
	REG	5.8675	4	.22396	.11198

Table 23: Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	NREG – REG	.67000	.24014	.12007	.28789	1.05211	5.580	3	.011

Since the p-value is less than 0.05 and t-cal greater than t-cri, we can conclude that there is a significant difference in the mean responses of regular and non-regular students on the quality of course content and instructional materials.

Summary of Findings

1. Following the decision rule for t-test, since the SPSS t-values for lecturers, institutional infrastructure and examination/evaluation system are below their table values at the various degrees of freedom, and their p-values greater than 0.05, this implies that the tests are not significant. Hence there are no significant differences between the non-regular and regular students’ responses (ratings) of lecturers’ quality, institutional infrastructure and examination systems for the regular and non-regular students. On the other hand, with a t-value calculated of (5.580) and p-value of (0.011) which are greater than t-critical (3.182) at degree of freedom (3) and the alpha (0.05) respectively, we conclude that the test for course content and instructional materials is significant. Therefore, that a significant difference exists between the rating of the non-regular and the regular students on this variable. This calls for serious regulatory and institutional attention.
2. Further comparison also shows that there is significant variation on the responses of the two groups on whether the quality of

- education is same in both. 65% of non-regular gave positive responses, while 63% of the regular students gave negative responses.
3. The non-regular students believed that 75% of their expectations in their chosen programmes were met by their institutions, while the regular students believed that only 61% of their expectations were met. The variation is significant and also favours the non-regular students. The students’ major reason why their expectations were not fully (100%) met by their institutions was ‘lecturers did not perform up to expectation’.
4. No institution was perceived or rated very good/ excellent by the non-regular students in any of the twenty-two variables and the four major metrics unlike the regular students’ rating were some variables were rated very good.
5. Using our benchmark; 6.50, this table shows that the institutions performed below acceptable standard in seven out of the twenty-two variables (attendance/regularity of lecturers, substance of lectures, preparation of lectures, furniture in classrooms, sitting space in library, up-to-date text books and

promptness in release of transcripts) based on the non-regular students rating.. They also performed below acceptable standard in two out of the four key quality metrics(lecturers and course content/instructional material).

6. IMSU emerged best in the key areas of ranking (lecturers, institutional infrastructure and course content and instructional materials. It finally was ranked overall best in non-regular university undergraduate programmes amongst the five universities. NAU emerged overall second in non-regular undergraduate university programmes. However, it was not ranked best on any of the four key quality metrics. ABSU emerged overall third in non-regular undergraduate university programmes and also best on examination and evaluation system. The fourth and fifth positions went to UNN and EBSU respectively on overall non-regular undergraduate university education.

Conclusion

The increasing population of candidates willing, able and qualified to take on non-regular university studies in various fields is a wakeup call to university authorities, regulatory bodies, students, and employers of labour to put an eagle eye on all forms of this mode of study. It will be economically disastrous to graduate half-baked or poorly baked part-time students or to relax some of the academic regulations on part-time studies. Since majority of these non-regular students are already employed, when they obtain additional higher qualification and with their experiences, will advance in positions as heads or managers in their various organizations. The regular students, who may have gained the required knowledge, having passed through a system that is quality conscious, might find it difficult to occupy managerial positions early. This will amount to economic disaster; where the blind lead those that see clearly. Given the desire of Nigerians to receive the right quality of university education not minding the mode of study, there is the need for urgent quality review in the non-regular undergraduate programmes in the country.

Recommendations

1. Since no institution was perceived or rated very good/ excellent by the non-regular

students in any of the twenty-two variables and the four major metrics, university administrators, regulators and the government are encouraged to be on the alert to the standard of university education in the non-regular programmes. Government should ensure that adequate sanctions and regulations are fully implemented on institutions found to compromise the set standard.

2. Universities are encouraged to closely monitor the attitude/quality of lecturers in their non-regular programmes and also assess the quality, content and currency of materials sold to these students by the lecturers. We encourage institutions to adopt the production of teaching materials by lecturers as a team as this will ensure that the substance of the course is passed adequately to the students. Periodic review of the materials would also be carried out as a team.
3. There is also the need for institutions and regulatory bodies to ensure that lecturers who teach the regular students should be the ones that teach the non-regular students. This will ensure consistency of teachings and enhanced quality control.
4. NUC is encouraged to go beyond accreditation to carry out unannounced/impromptu inspection/supervision of non-regular programmes in the Nigerian universities. This will reveal the real quality of education in this mode of study.
5. More specifically, universities management should monitor the regularity of lecturers to classes, available furniture in classrooms, sitting space in library, release of transcripts among others.
6. Periodic review of lecturers' performance and welfare packages in non-regular programmes is also advocated for.
7. To accelerate sustainable development in Nigeria and other African countries, we advocate the adoption our conceptual model and framework (iCEL) by university authorities in the management of non-regular undergraduate education programmes. The result will be positive perception by present and prospective admission seekers both locally and internationally. The model links the quality of non-regular undergraduate education

and the quality of its graduates to national economic development. Being conscious of this relationship is imperative on institutions that are desirous of excellence in quality. Again, to guide institutions on the path to excellence in quality in non-regular undergraduate education, our frame work identifies four quality metrics/pillars which university management can concentrate on. These are: Lecturers, institutional infrastructure, course content and instructional materials as well as examination/evaluation system.

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