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The Symbiotic Synergy of Students and Lecturers Relationship in Obong University, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

The study examined the symbiotic synergy of students and lectures relationship in a University setting, using Obong University in Nigeria as a case study. It is no gainsaying that in a university setting, there is a great diversity in terms of socio-cultural, political, religious and racial backgrounds among students and lecturers. This diversity, with the presence of an appropriate lecturer-student or student-lecturer relationship creates a campus environment that prepares students and lecturers to live and work amicably in a socio-culturally diverse society. It also equips them to respond to an increasing complex global environment; besides, interpersonal relations in diversity which makes room for the generation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge, which is one of the key mission characteristics of university education in Nigeria and elsewhere. Usually, a healthy relationship between the lecturers and students does influence students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education. The study indicated that there is a cordial, interpersonal relationship and peaceful co-relationship between lecturers and students making room for generation, advancement and cool environment for learning. Positive and no negative relationship is found as a result of the background setting of the University. This shows in diversity, making it possible for the generation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge, which is one of the key mission characteristics of university education in Nigeria and elsewhere. Usually, a healthy relationship between the lecturers and students does influence students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education. Response got from the questionnaires and interaction with both students and lecturers couple with participatory observation, revealed that Students-Lecturers cordial relationship has helped to advanced academic learning and exercise possible which undoubtedly will lead to a better trained and enlightened labour force to minimize or reduce illicit activities on campus that will eliminate insecurity, anti-social activities such as armed robbery, prostitution, political thuggery, violence, kidnapping, restiveness and other social vices evident among the uneducated or half baked labour force which could have ordinarily bring about instability, stunted economic growth and development of the Nigerian economy. The research concludes that, addressing the problems of Student- Lecturer relationship must involve all stakeholders. Obong University has a track record of no cultism, providing peaceful, serene and green vegetation for a citadel of learning. All University authorities are encouraged to ensure that good, peaceful and cordial inter-personal relationship devoid of rancor be pursued vigorously which will drastically reduce or eliminate cultism and other vices on campus, thereby making our Nigerian Universities a haven and real citadel of learning which could be compared to any other University in the world.

1. Introduction

The Obong University is the first Private University in the Eastern Niger Delta established by Dr. Moses Akpanudo Foundation, with Professor Moses Akpanudo as the Chairman, Board of Trustees; and was licensed by the Federal Government of Nigeria on May 17, 2007. It was inaugurated on February 16, 2008 and commenced academic activities on February 25, 2008. The University is located at Obong Ntak, along Utu Etim Ekpo-Iwukem Road. It is accessible by road from all parts of Nigeria. Specifically, it is ten kilometers from Utu, Etim Ekpo, which is the Local Government Headquarters and is forty kilometers from Abak and of equal distance to Aba in Abia State. It is about one-hour drive from Uyo or Port Harcourt, and 30 minutes' drive from Aba in Abia State.

The University's Vision is to be an academic centre of excellence that will provide an enabling environment for nurturing students who will excel in Agriculture and Management Sciences and indeed other fields of study to attain maximum personal and intellectual development for the benefit of the society.

The University has a mission to provide a suitable environment for academic and moral development that will guarantee the production of globally competitive graduates for societal benefit and self reliance. Hence, it has the philosophy of producing graduates equipped with qualitative education and skills to be job creators.

In the bid to achieve its objectives, the University is poised

- a. To encourage the advancement of learning and to hold out to all persons without distinction of race, creed, sex or political conviction, the opportunity of acquiring higher and liberal education;
- b. To provide courses of instruction and other facilities for the pursuit of learning in all its branches and to make these facilities available on proper terms to such persons as are equipped to benefit from them;
- c. To encourage and promote scholarship, and conduct research in all fields of learning and human endeavours; and
- d. To undertake any other activities appropriate for a University of the highest standards.

There are about twelve (12) departments in two faculties and other Faculties will soon follow.

It is no gain saying that in a university setting, there is a great diversity in terms of socio-cultural, political, religious and racial backgrounds among students and lecturers, as is opined by Chepchieng, 2004. This diversity, with the presence of an appropriate lecturer-student relationship creates a campus environment that prepares students and lecturers to live and work amicably in a socio-culturally diverse society. It also equips them to respond to an increasing complex global environment. Besides, interpersonal relations in diversity make it possible for the generation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge, which is one of the key mission characteristics of university education in Nigeria and elsewhere. Usually, a healthy relationship between the lecturers and students does influence students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

This could be attributed to the fact that lecturers contact with students in and out of the classroom is very important in student motivation and involvement in all facets of life.

2. Review of Related Literature

Lecturer-student relationship is viewed as a helping hand in which the student perceives that the lecturer has his or her best interest at heart. This usually averts student negative feelings towards the campus thus the student persists in the university.

It is a common phenomenon that students in public universities perceived to have negatively affected their lecturer-student relationship due largely to the non-availability of lecturers. Some lecturers in this category of institutions do not provide consultation hours to students because they teach self-sponsored students in other universities where they get an extra pay because of underpayment. In effect, they are on their parent campuses for a short time in the day. Kerlinger (2000), affirm this when he said, there is internal brain drain in university education in developing countries. This, as the report indicated, is because the low paid lecturers at public tertiary institutions seek second and third jobs in extra-mural positions such as teaching at better paying private institutions and colleges.

According to Dia (1998), students' evaluation of lecturers is one of the most important ways of generating vital information for course improvements and also useful for making lecturers aware of their strengths and weaknesses of their teaching and interactions with students. In fact, in highlighting the vision for higher education for a new Africa, the Forum of Students Association in Africa on Higher Education in the 21st Century recommended that higher institutions of learning set up mechanisms for the assessment of the academic staff by students (Habeshaw, 1992).

In order to create and maintain an enabling environment for lecturers and students to thrive, it is important that Obong university management establish a number of guidelines relating to proper standards of behaviour between lecturers and students, hence the various departmental handbooks.

Interpersonal relationship in diversity makes it possible for the generation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge, which is one of the key mission characteristics of university education in Nigeria and elsewhere. Usually, a healthy relationship between the lecturers and students does influence students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

In their relations with students, lecturers should be mindful of the disparity of their relationship in terms of dependence and authority as is pointed out by Sorcinelli, (1991).

3. Method of Study

According to Ekong (2003), research design refers to a plan, blueprint or guide for data collection and interpretation. Considering the nature of the research problem, we adopted the survey method of study to generate the required data. Also questionnaire and interview method were used as the major instruments of data collection. The population for the study is finite but students and lecturers between the ages of 18 and 60 years constitutes the respondents. Out of Nine Hundred and Twenty (920) questionnaires distributed, only Nine Hundred of them were returned signifying 97.83%. Therefore, 900 respondents of current and past students as well as lecturers were interviewed.

Students were given open ended questions and the researcher partook in participatory observation in the survey. Students and Lecturers were individually and collectively asked to air their views of their relationship with lecturers or students in Obong University, Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Notes were taken and compared to arrive at our findings and conclusions.

The following questionnaire forms the bedrock of our investigations:

1. Is there a strong and significant relationship between Students and Lecturers in Obong University?
2.
 - (a) How this student-lecturer relationship does look like?
 - (b) Is the relationship antagonistic or cordial? Does the relationship a filial one that does infringe on the students performance?
 - (c) Are there cases of impunity on the part of lecturers towards their students?

3. There is no significant relationship between Students and Lecturers in Obong University because Lecturers are not friendly and unavailable when required.
4. In the last three academic years how many of your undergraduate students were expelled for unacceptable behaviour?
5. In the last three academic years how many undergraduate students were given formal written warnings for unacceptable behaviour?
6. In the last years 2012 to 2015 how many incidents where a student were given written warnings for unacceptable behaviour and does the case involve the inappropriate use of social media?
7. In each of the last three financial years how many university staff has declared that they are involved in a sexual relationship with a student?
8. In each of the last three financial years how many university staff faced disciplinary procedures because they were engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a student?
9. How many of these cases led to the staff member being dismissed or resigning?

3.1. Hypothesis 1

There is strong and significant relationship between Students and Lecturers in Obong University.

Chi-square (X^2) statistical test was used to validate the statistical significance of the research findings. The formula is:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

Where F_o = Observed frequency

F_e = Expected frequency

\sum = Summary sign for total frequency.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 920 questionnaires were administered and only 900 questionnaires were collected as follows:

Sex	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	400	44.44
Female	500	55.56
Total	900	100

Table 1: Sex Composition of the Respondents

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Students	860	95.56
Lecturers	40	4.44
Total	1000	100

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents

4.1. The Decision Rule in Testing

If the calculated chi-squared (X^2) is greater than the tabulated or theoretical chi-square (x^{2*}) at a given level of significance and degree of freedom (df), we accept the alternate hypothesis, and reject the null hypothesis.

4.1.1. Hypothesis 1

There is strong and significant relationship between Students and Lecturers in Obong University.

Details	Male	Female	Totals
SA	350	460	810
A	45	35	80
D	0	1	1
SD	2	2	4
UD	3	2	5
Total (M)	400	500	900 (T)

Table 3: Response to Test on Relationship between Students and Lecturers. (Hypothetical Data)

To calculate the expected frequency (E) using $E = \frac{MN}{T}$, we have:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{400 \times 810}{900} &= 360; & \frac{400 \times 80}{900} &= 35.55; & \frac{400 \times 1}{900} &= 0.44; \\ \frac{400 \times 4}{900} &= 1.78; & \frac{400 \times 5}{900} &= 2.22 & & \\ \frac{500 \times 810}{900} &= 450; & \frac{500 \times 80}{900} &= 44.44; & \frac{500 \times 1}{900} &= 0.55 \\ \frac{500 \times 4}{900} &= 2.22; & \frac{500 \times 5}{900} &= 2.78 & & \end{aligned}$$

Observed frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)
350	360.00
45	35.55
0	0.44
2	1.78
3	2.22
460	450.00
35	44.44
1	0.55
2	2.22
2	2.78
900	900

Table 4: Observed and Expected Frequency Table

Using $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O - E)^2}{E}$, we have:

$$\begin{aligned} &\frac{(350-360)^2}{360} + \frac{(45 - 35.55)^2}{35.55} + \frac{(0 - 0.44)^2}{0.44} + \frac{(2-1.78)^2}{1.78} \\ &+ \frac{(3 - 2.22)^2}{2.22} + \frac{(460 - 450)^2}{450} + \frac{(35 - 44.44)^2}{44.44} + \frac{(1 - 0.55)^2}{0.55} \\ &\frac{(2 - 2.22)^2}{2.22} + \frac{(2 - 2.78)^2}{2.78} \\ = &0.28 + 2.51 + 0.44 + 0.27 + 0.18 + 0.22 + 2.01 + 0.37 + 0.02 + 0.23 = 6.53 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore the calculate $\chi^2 = 6.53$

At 5% (0.05) level of significance using two degrees of freedom (2df), the tabulated or theoretical chi-squared, $\chi^2 = 5.991$. Calculated chi-squared is greater than the theoretical chi-square (χ^2), we accept the hypothesis that “there is strong/significant relationship between Students and Lecturers in Obong University.

4.1.2. Hypothesis 2:

Ho: (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between Students and Lecturers in Obong University because Lecturers are not friendly and unavailable when required.

Details	Male	Female	Total
SA	10	5	15 (N)
A	2	6	8
D	28	100	128
SD	359	389	748
UD	1	0	1
Totals (M)	400	500	900 (T)

Table 5: The Analysis of Question 4

(Hypothetical Data)

Using $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O - E)^2}{E}$,

$$E = \frac{MN}{T} = \frac{400 \times 15}{900} = 6.67; \quad \frac{400 \times 8}{900} = 3.56$$

$$\frac{400 \times 128}{900} = 56.89; \quad \frac{400 \times 748}{900} = 332.44; \quad \frac{400 \times 1}{900} = 0.44;$$

$$\frac{500 \times 15}{900} = 8.33; \quad \frac{500 \times 8}{900} = 4.44; \quad \frac{500 \times 128}{900} = 71.11$$

$$\frac{500 \times 748}{900} = 415.56; \quad \frac{500 \times 1}{900} = 0.56$$

Observed frequency (o)	Expected frequency (E)
10	6.67
2	3.56
28	56.89
359	332.44
1	0.44
5	8.33
6	4.44
100	71.11
389	415.56
0	0.56
900	900

Table 6: Observed and Expected Frequency of Question 4

Using $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O - E)^2}{E}$, we have

$$\frac{(10-6.67)^2}{6.67} + \frac{(2-3.56)^2}{3.56} + \frac{(28-56.89)^2}{56.89} + \frac{(359-332.44)^2}{332.44} +$$

$$\frac{(1-0.44)^2}{0.44} + \frac{(5-8.33)^2}{8.33} + \frac{(6-4.44)^2}{4.44} + \frac{(100-71.11)^2}{71.11} +$$

$$\frac{(389-415.56)^2}{415.56} + \frac{(0-0.56)^2}{0.56}$$

$$1.66 + 0.68 + 14.67 + 2.12 + 0.71 + 1.33 + 0.55 + 11.74 + 1.70 + 0.56 = 38.72$$

Therefore calculated $\chi^2 = 38.72$.

At 5% (0.05) level of significance using two degrees of freedom (2df), the tabulated or theoretical chi-square, $\chi^2 = 5.991$. Since the calculated chi-square (χ^2) is greater than the theoretical chi-squared (χ^2), we accept the alternate hypothesis.

Answers to question 4 - In the last three academic years how many of your undergraduate students were expelled for unacceptable behaviour? The answer was none except that three (3) students were suspended from School for one (1) academic session and they have resumed normal school curriculum activities this academic session.

Answers to question five (5) -In the last three academic years how many undergraduate students were given formal written warnings for unacceptable behaviour? The answers from both students and the Management of the University were NONE.

The collective answers to question no. 6 that is, In the last years 2012 to 2015 how many incidents where a student were given written warnings for unacceptable behaviour and does the case involve the inappropriate use of social media?; was NONE.

In a similar vein, the uniform answers to question seven (7) i.e. in each of the last three financial years how many university staff has declared that they are involved in a sexual relationship with a student was none, although there has been some unreported cases from the grapevine that has been kept under secrecy.

The collective reply to question eight (8) i.e. in each of the last three financial years how many university staff faced disciplinary procedures because they were engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a student; was that NONE has been identified as culprits.

Finally the answer to question nine (9) that is to say, how many of these cases led to the staff member being dismissed or resigning was not far from the existing answers received from the other questions. The same NONE answer was received.

5. Findings

5.1. Satisfaction with the Lecturer-Student Relationship/Interaction

Lecturer-student relationship depends on whom you are relating to and in which situation. In small classes, especially science classes, interaction is very good. Lecturers are approachable and students get to know lecturers better. However, most lecturers are staying off-campus and so are only available in some few days per week when they have their classes.

Some lecturers are approachable and others are not. The largeness of General Studies classes, it is hard for students to interact with lecturers. Some provide time for consultation and others do not because they would want to lecture in many campuses, teaching parallel students.

Most of the lecturers are lowly paid when compared to their contemporaries in other universities be it Private, State or Federal; hence they move around to look for extra pay. Professors are rarely available because they are marketable and they also hold administrative posts hence have no time to interact with students as compared to the junior lecturers who are always available. This corroborates the findings of Kerlinger (2000), that there is internal brain drain in university education in developing countries.

5.2. Professors /Lecturers Are Approachable

The relationship of lecturers with students is cordial. They are approachable except a few lecturers who don't understand special student needs. They are present and offer consultation time with appointment. In fact, most of them are administrators, so they are always in their offices. This shows interpersonal relationship in diversity making it possible for the generation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge, which is one of the key mission characteristics of university education in Nigeria and elsewhere as pointed out by Cohen & Manion, (1994). Usually, a healthy relationship between the lecturers and students does influence students' academic, personal and social integration into higher education (Cohen & Manion, 1994) as we can see in Obong University.

There are clear indicators of student satisfaction with relations to lecturers. However, some glaring factors emerged that may have hindered better relations between lecturers and students.

5.3. Students Population Size

Students in Obong University numbering less than two thousand feel more satisfied with lecturer-student relations and classroom instruction than in large institutions. Perhaps, this is because it is a small university, and students are likely to come into contact with lecturers outside the classroom. In small classes, especially science classes, interaction is very good. Lecturers are approachable and students get to know lecturers better. However, most lecturers are staying off-campus and so are only available in some few days per week when they have their classes. While some lecturers are approachable, others are not. Due to large size of students' population in General Studies classes, it is hard to interact with lecturers. Some provide time for consultation and others do not because they would want to lecture in many campuses, teaching parallel students due to low pay. Professors are rarely available because they are marketable and they also hold administrative posts hence have no time to interact with students as compared to the lower cadre of lecturers who are always available and are approachable except a few, who don't understand special needs of students. Lecturers who are administrators, and students advisers appointed in all departments are always in their offices are listen to students complains, offering free consultation services and counseling.

It is evident that generally, the lecturer-student relationship is good in Obong University. However, there are some glaring factors that may have hindered better relations between lecturers and students.

5.4. Availability of Lecturers

Another factor that students in public universities perceived to have negatively affected the lecturer-student relationship is the availability of lecturers. Some lecturers in this category of institutions do not provide consultation hours to students because they teach self-sponsored students in other universities where they get an extra pay because of underpayment. In effect, they are on their parent campuses for a short time in the day. In fact, according to Kerlinger (2000), there is internal brain drain in university education in developing countries because of low paid lecturers at public tertiary institutions who seek second and third jobs in extra-mural positions such as teaching at better paying private institutions and colleges. Our findings in this regard revealed contrary, as almost all the lecturers both full time and adjunct lecturers are in the services of Obong University for philanthropy and service to humanity. This is evident as a lot of them left their highly paid jobs to seek solace in lowly paid salary at Obong University.

5.5. Availability of Consultation Hours

Lecturers are always available for consultations. Times for consultations at office hours are indicated by lecturers on their office doors. Lecturers are evaluated by students and students openly speak out their grievances over lecturers. This is clearly seen in the way students choose courses. Due to small classes averaging fifty students, lecturers can have one to one interaction.

Consultation times are available for students. Students can also contact lecturers through phones or emails at any time.

Evaluation forms are available to students at the end of every quarter to make comments about their lecturers opening their eyes to their weak points

Most lecturers are friendly and interact freely with students even outside their offices. They are Christians and well disciplined especially the full-time lecturers. Lecturers are fair and have no cases of negative attitude towards students. Once, any lecturer is found in the contrary, he is shown the way out.

5.6. Free Interaction

Thus lecturers of Obong University have the opportunity to interact with students on one to one basis. This is in consonance with the findings of Holland (2002) that the low student population is attributed to the observation that private universities unlike public universities in Nigeria are in a better position to control their student enrollment to a level they can cope with in terms of the essential facilities and educational equipment. Also, lecturers in private universities are usually evaluated by their students at the end of each teaching-learning session, something that seems not to have been embraced in the public universities in the country. In these evaluations, students often point out areas of weakness of their lecturers. This practice in a way gives the lecturers an opportunity to improve especially in their classroom interactions with their students which is in perfect agreement with the findings of Dia (1998). Something else that was noted by student leaders in private universities is that lecturers in such institutions post their consultation times on their office doors and even in some of these universities, internal phones and Internet facilities are available for students to communicate with their lecturers. This is a mechanism that was not pointed out by students in the public universities and this may have limited student interactions with their lecturers. Therefore, it can be observed that in general terms students in Obong university positively perceive lecturer-students' relationships more than those enrolled in public universities as consultation times go beyond school time and stretched to 6.00 pm.

6. Conclusion/Recommendations

Since studies on College impact on students clearly demonstrates that students' interpersonal environment, which include interactions with peers and lecturers, have the greatest impact on students' changes in their aspirations, values, attitudes, beliefs and actions (Chepchieng, 2004), lecturer-student relationships should be enhanced in higher education. It is recommended that lecturers be provided with an enabling working environment that includes the provision of offices, teaching facilities and better pay among other things. The better remuneration will make the lecturers/professors become more committed to their parent institutions thus they become available to their students during working time as also suggested by Dia, (1998).

Lecturers and students should ensure that all forms of mixing personal and professional relationships are avoided. Office etiquette be observed at all times. Should a relationship of a personal or intimate nature develop between a lecturer and student, the lecturer should ensure that he/she is not required to assess the student's study or research performance, nor to take decisions of any other nature regarding the student. The lecturer should inform his direct supervisor regarding the existence of the relationship and should be well managed and guided.

Lecturers should avoid personal contact with individual students in situations or in places where this could give rise to the semblance of harassment or abuse of power as succinctly pointed out by Kowalski, (2003).

Lecturers and students should raise the issue of undesirable behaviour where necessary and alert one another to any (possible) incidence of such behaviour (Boice, 1998).

Studies on lecturer-students behavior clearly demonstrate that students' interpersonal environment, which include interactions with peers and lecturers, have the greatest impact on students' aspirations, values, attitudes, beliefs and actions as it is imperative that good lecturer-student relationships be enhanced in higher education (Holland, 2002).

Lecturer-student relationship usually averts student negative feelings towards the campus thus the student persists in the university. It is viewed as a helping hand in which the student perceives that the lecturer has his or her best interest at heart (Cohen, Manion, 1994).

Students and lecturers good relationship as obtained in Obong University lecturers-students relationship is worthy of emulation by other schools. Lectures inquire students' backgrounds and encourage students to prepare together for classes. Lecturers and students are fair to each other; lecturers accept students for who they are, and advise them on how to achieve overall success.

The Obong University aims to provide a working and learning environment which will enable staff and students to fulfill their personal potential and aspirations. The University is, therefore, committed to the creation and maintenance of a supportive and inclusive environment. It is recognized that in a healthy working environment staff and students form mutually rewarding relationships. This Code provides guidance in all areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships. It seeks to protect the integrity of all students and staff from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest and avoid complaints of harassment and grievance or disciplinary action. This Code covers the staff and students of the Obong University and also areas where some relationships raise questions about conflict of interest, trust and/or confidentiality which may occur at the outset, during or on the termination of a relationship.

Students from all walks of life are adjoined to avail themselves of this University as a citadel of learning in a peaceful atmosphere providing serene and green vegetation suitable for learning. Lecturers here are very supportive and comport themselves as fathers, teachers not just Lecturers and are willing to offer selfless services to humanity at all times.

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