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Exploring Support Provision and Resources Strategies for Academic Performance Achievement Improvement of Tourism Management Students

Abstract

This paper focuses on developing possible strategies for improving the academic performance achievement of tourism management students in institutions of higher learning. The study is significant to close match the existing gaps between academic grades awards and set standards for employment. The research employs participatory action research and survey feedback approach in a mixed-method premise entailing qualitative and quantitative methods. Data are presented, coded and analyzed using thematic analysis on Microsoft Excel Spread Sheet, bar charts and PSPSS statistical analysis free software tool comprising simple percentages and means. The participants comprise tourism education stakeholders comprising 525 students and 13 staff. The study discovers that the tourism management education process (support provision and resources) significantly impacts output (degree awards). In collaboration with the research participants, possible support provision and resources strategies developed for improving degree awards of TM students include the regular invitations of guest speakers from the tourism industry and related sectors, local and international exchange programs for the students, etc.

Keywords: *Academic performance, support provision and resources, strategy development, tourism management education system*

Introduction

The tourism industry is endowed with employment generation due to its demand and supply nature (Adele, 2013; Bassey & Egon, 2016; World Tourism Organization, 2017; Yusuff & Akinde, 2015). Numerous tourism jobs exist in tourism operating sectors. As a result, globally, there is a surge in the number of tourism programs and graduates every academic session to meet the demand for suitable and qualified human resources in the industry (Fagbolu, 2021). Meanwhile, the tourism education sector is significant in coping with the human resources demand in the tourism operating sectors. The TM program is perceived as multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary.

Notwithstanding, the cultural diversity of the continents has caused variation concerning curriculum, course length, and administrative organization of related courses. The tourism management (TM) program is often designed to systematically prepare and produce the workforce to utilize resources to achieve smooth operations in the tourism industry and related sectors (Airey et al., 2015). A mismatch, therefore, often exists between degree awards and the employment of TM graduates. Most tourism graduates are not meeting degree awards set standard for tourism employment by employers (Akinyemi et al., 2012; Asuquo & Agboola, 2014; Trading Economics, 2018; Vanguard, 2018). Outputs from the educational system provide inputs to other subsystems. This is often understood to develop the students to their full potential, which could be evaluated based on input, process, output and outcomes. From an outcome perspective, behaviorally, performance comprises behaviours and how perfectly such behaviours are performed about achieving objectives and goals relevant to feedback on output even in an educational system (von Bertalanffy, 1955).

Several authors (Batra, 2016; Daniel et al., 2017; Fallon & Fagbolu, 2021; Fagbolu, 2021) have made significant contributions to the history of tourism education developments in examining training, skills and delivery of knowledge in higher institutions of learning to fulfil the requirements by employers. This study sets to fill the gap by exploring possible support provision and resources strategies towards improving the academic performance achievement of tourism students. This research digresses from relying on models and personal efforts of the researchers. It involves stakeholders' participation and collaboration to develop possible support provision and resources strategies for improving the academic achievement of TM students. The perspective of Margerison (1978) informs this study on the teleological premise of purpose, goals, and results through participatory action research and survey feedback approach in the tourism education context.

Research Questions

1. What is the current status of the tourism management education system (TMES) in terms of support provision and resources in relation to output (academic achievement) in terms of TM students' academic achievement and employment in the tourism industry?
2. What are the possible support provision and resources strategies for academic achievement improvement of TM students?

Conceptual Framework

It has been observed that

education policy and reform need to deal with the issues of the internal and [the] external economic effectiveness of the education system. The external economic effectiveness issue concerns whether the existing education policy can meet the needs of new economic development in the new millennium and how education should be changed to prepare new generations for the knowledge-driven and technology intensive economy. (Cheng et al., 2002, p. 34)

The critical economic sectors, issues, and matters of concern are worth considering the demand and supply, the structure of education, and the effects and interrelations of economic impacts and consequences. The education demand and supply drive the tourism education system entailing inputs, processes and outputs.

TMES: Environment, Input, Process and Output

In an educational context, an environment is a learning environment widely used as a classroom in diverse physical, open, distance and online settings, including cultures in which teaching and learning occur. The environment could be interactive, autonomy, flexible, virtual and internal control, among other teaching-learning environments (Bates, 2018; Siagla, 2013).

Inputs consist of resources such as humans, information, energy and materials coming into the organization, and they are acquired from the organization's external environment and part of it (Cummings & Worley, 2009). According to Salam (2015), inputs are fundamentally the objectives and objectified contents that instructors put into the education system in an educational context. As a result, human resources, curriculum and learning assessment stand to be the three significant input elements to the education system (Airey et al., 2015; Becket, 2013; Fagbolu & Fallon, 2021).

Transformations entail converting inputs into outputs that comprise social and technological elements. The technical factors cover techniques, tools, and production methods. Processes encompass the activity in an organizational system which shows continuity and growth in an open systems model. Thus, processes entail working towards achieving goals and networking the flow of duties in different units for transformation into output (Nelson & Quick, 2006; Papat, 2009). The education processes serve as mechanisms of conversion of inputs into outputs. The elements of the educational process identified in this study among the elements of processes of the education system include teaching-learning objectives, teaching methods and resources, instruction design and preparation, and support provision and resources (Benson, 2013; Bibbings, 2013; Cheng et al., 2002; Salam, 2015).

Support provision and resources may incorporate expert sources, media-based infrastructure and superstructure, libraries, administrative office for management of submission and returns of assignment; coordination of the process of enrolment and liaison point between lecturers and students (James, 2009). Significantly, they allow the students to gather information and experience on what to practice in tourism operating sectors and the environment (Chon, 2005). From an organization's view, Nelson and Quick (2006) refer to output as a specific and unique product delivered at a particular time to a consumer with some quantifiable cost to the organization. The concept of output denotes performance, which results from transformed products by the system and back to the environment. Salam (2015) asserts that output is the students' academic achievement, which is the outcome of the education environment, inputs and processes. Academic achievement is a percentage of the students admitted and registered for a particular course completing each level with a specific grade (Fagbolu, 2019). Direct impacts of education environment, input and process of the system output relate to students' knowledge and skills acquisition, attitudes, and beliefs. Teaching-learning and assessment are often regarded as two sides of a coin. In educational organizations, success is usually quantified by how well students meet set standards by the academic institution and employers or simply by academic performance (Zajacova, Lynch & Espenshade, 2005).

Research Methodology

This participatory action research and survey feedback employs mixed methodology comprising quantitative and qualitative methods (Jennings, 2010; Veal, 2011). This research approach allows stakeholders' contribution and participation in this study instead of relying only on the researchers' personal efforts to provide answers to the 2 research questions set above. The primary data are collected through 2 semi-structured questionnaires developed based on the review of related studies and submitted to research experts in TM education for possible suggestions, contributions, and modifications. The pilot study engages 3 academic and nonacademic staff respectively and 54

students from 400 level to 100 level, respectively. The instrument was further pretested using PSPP Cronbach's alpha to test its reliability of the instrument (GNU PSPP Statistical Analysis Software, 2018). It was remodified based on the test outcome before proceeding to the main study. The main research is conducted by administering the semi-structured survey questionnaire 3 sections. The first section contains the participants' profiles. Next, it comprises open-ended questions. The third section includes close-ended questions on a Five-Point Likert Scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Support provision and output are considered independent dependent variables respectively. Due to the nature of the study, the study further employs an agenda and a strategic checklist to serve as a compass during the strategy development processes (Lewis & Chambers, 2000; Moutinho, 2000).

The population comprises the students and staff offering TM and other related courses at the time of this research. Hence, the sample was drawn from the entire population because it was impossible and rigorous to study the whole population. The study tries to compile a list of the universities offering the program, either as TM, hospitality and TM, tourism studies, etc. It uses a lottery method involving blindfolding to pick a continent, a country and a geopolitical zone. The technique supports sampling in a finite population and gives every university in the zones an equal chance. Furthermore, convenience sampling was adopted to select the study organization due to the time lag for the study. This study selects TM students and academic and nonacademic staff among all the stakeholders identified. The students are chosen because this study assumes that they can provide the valuable data required to diagnose the education system. Staff are recognized as a focus group because they can offer appropriate options to develop a strategy that can enhance the academic achievement improvement of the students.

Data Collection Methods

A letter of introduction is presented to the Dean of the School. Pre data collection meeting is held with the students and staff on the research purpose and expected participation. 100 to 400 level TM students are invited level by level with a specific role of filling and returning the questionnaire. The survey is administered to the students and collected back at the venue. Writing materials are provided for the respondents to curb the difficulties of the lack of writing pens. It also serves as an incentive for the student. The method eliminates the stress of tracking students to return the questionnaires later. In engaging the second set of participants comprising academic and nonacademic staff in the feedback and strategy development meeting, writing materials and light refreshments are provided for the participants while flip charts and snap photo shots are employed to document the process.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The study presents, codifies, and analyzes qualitative data using thematic analysis on MS Excel spreadsheet. The quantitative data are presented using tables and bar charts and analyzed using PSPP statistical analysis free software tool that entails simple percentages and means (*M*). The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Aspiration and Expected Results (SWOTAR) analytical tool was employed to analyze the education system (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009; Stavros & Saint, 2009).

Results

Qualitative Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1. What is the current status of TMES in terms of support provision and resources in relation to output (academic achievement) in terms of TM students' academic achievement and employment in the tourism industry?

A total of 525 respondents across entailed 118, 140, 150, and 117 across 100 level, 200 level, 300 level and 400 level respectively actually participated while only 15, that is about 3(%) of the expected respondents were unable to participate in the study. The outcomes showed that both females and males are studying for TM Bachelor degrees in TM. The results show the current CGPA of the participants. As of the period of this study, it portrayed that none (0%) of 525 participants has a first-class CGPA, 12 participants (2%) can boast of second class upper, 193 (37%) of the respondents possess second class lower, 263 (50%) participants have third class while 57 (11%) participants are on pass. About 98% of the students are graduating with grades below second class upper, which is the employment degree grade is set as the standard by the Nigerian labour recruiters.

Only 33 (6%) students are aware of the program before securing admission, while 492 (94%) lack pre-information on the program before their admission into studying for a Bachelor's degree. The findings indicate that greater parts of the students lack prior knowledge and/or do not apply for the course but were offered admission into studying the course.

The students are studying the course for different reasons. The aims include knowledge impartation, becoming a professional and knowledge acquisition. Others are lack of choice, marketability, passion/love/interest for the course and service. 41(8%), 2(0%), 15(3%), 12(2%) and 27(5%) of the participants are studying TM on the ground of entrepreneurship, willingness, future purpose, B. Sc degree and employment opportunities respectively. Others comprising 5(1%), 1(0%), 36(7%), 17(3%), 5 (1%) disclosed that the rationale for studying the course include revenue generation, good grade, travelling, self-achievement and making impacts in their communities.

75(14%) preferred to study Pharmacy/Medicine/Nursing/Plant Biology/Science Laboratory Technology/Botanical Science/ Human Kinetics/Microbiology, 44(8%) would prefer studying Law/Political Science/Government, 132(25%) desires to study Marketing/Economics/Banking and Finance/Accounting/Entrepreneurship/Commerce/Actuarial Science, 47(9%) have a preference for Mass Communication/Linguistics/Library and Information Science, 23(4%) preferred to study Theater/Performing Art while 30(6%) aspired to study Food Technology/Human Nutrition and Dietetics/Food Science. Furthermore, 26(5%) wish to study Business Administration/Public Administration, 48(9%) prefer to study International Relations/History/Sociology/Criminology/Psychology, 20(4%) to study Town Planning/Geography/Architecture/Geology, 44(8%) applied to study Hospitality/TM, 18(3%) like to study Computer Science and Engineering, 12(2%) hope to study Agricultural Science/Food Agriculture and Biological Engineering, and 6(1%) prefer to study Petrol Chemical Engineering. Based on the findings, in line with the responses to question one on the reasons for studying, this indicated that only 44 out of 525, that is, only 8% of the participants preferred to study TM over other courses before admission into the program. This corroborates the findings that 6(%) of the requested students knew of the course before admission.

None of the participants could state the program's objective, vision or mission. The students generally were uninformed or unaware of the program's nature, vision, mission and objectives. The results portray that 12% of the participants hope to be in the event sector, 24% indicated their interest in the tourism sector as an employee, and 15% had the intention to be in the tourism sector. 30% of the participants would like to be entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, and 5% hope to be educators. The results further reveal that 1% and 3% of the participants aspired to be international, national and local employees.

Quantitative Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Diagnosis: Process and Output: Support Provision and Resources, and Output

1	Tourism Education Processes: Support Provision and Resources	N	Mean	Rating Level
1.1	The teacher makes the following expert sources available such as an instruction guide, advanced textbooks and a glossary	525	1.11	Strongly Disagree
1.2	Students are allowed to attend conferences and association meetings	525	1.22	Strongly Disagree
1.3	Visiting speakers are invited to the school by instructors	525	1.23	Strongly Disagree
1.4	Students are allowed to participate in study exchange programs	525	1.22	Strongly Disagree
1.5	Instructors use case studies and academic journals	525	1.20	Strongly Disagree
1.6	Instructors use media, web and electronic-based to support teaching	525	1.11	Strongly Disagree
2	Output: Academic Performance Achievement			
2.1	My present CGPA is second class upper and above	525	1.20	Strongly Disagree
2.2	I will be able to meet labour academic degree awards requirement upon graduation	525	1.25	Strongly Disagree

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

TMES still lacks adequate support and resources in terms of expert sources, student conference attendance, case studies, academic journals, and electronic and online engagements. The diagnosis results could explain why most of the respondents' current CGPA is below second class upper. Significantly, considering the present academic achievement of the students, if no strategies are employed to avert the current situation, the majority of the students will continue to graduate with degree awards not meeting the employment standard upon graduation. The implication is that non-TM graduates or professionals will continue filling the available TM job vacancies. The outcome of the diagnosis of the current status of the TMES above depicts that the education system, in terms of support provision and resources, has a significant impact on output (academic achievement). Furthermore, the study proceeds to question 2 to develop possible support provision and resources strategies for academic achievement improvement.

Research Question 2. What are the possible support provision and resources strategies for academic achievement improvement of TM students?

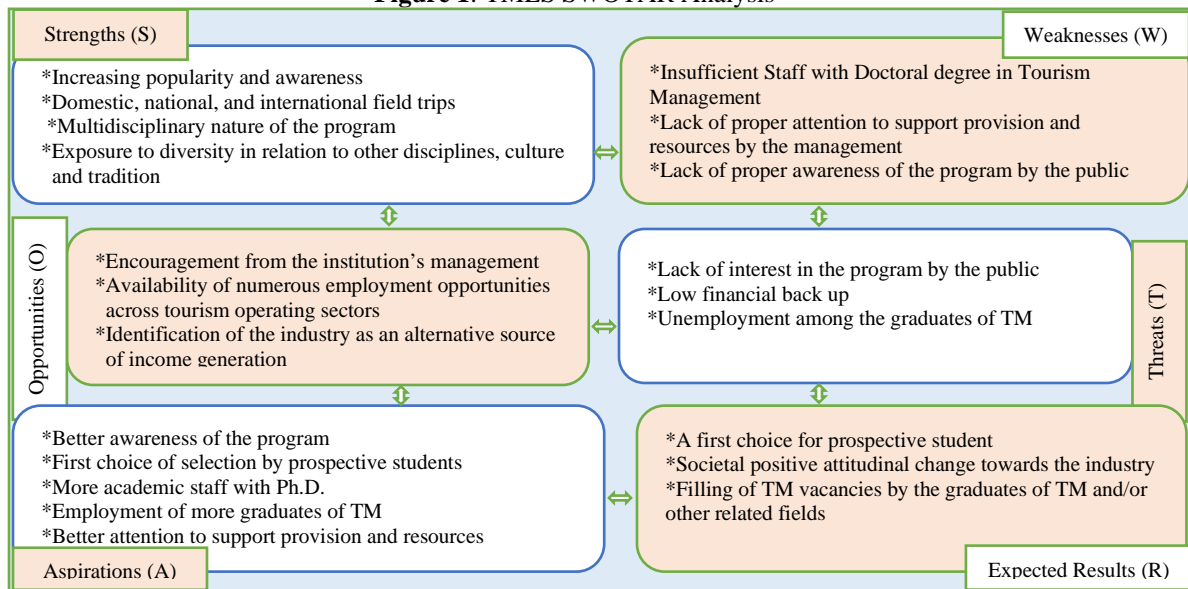
Quantitative Data Presentation and Analysis

The expected respondents for the strategy development meeting study comprised of 11 academic and 10 nonacademic staff respectively, making 21 TM staff. However, 7 54(%) nonacademic and 6 46(%) academic staff showed interest in the research. The gender identity of the participated research participants comprised 9 males and 4 females, accounting for 69 and 31 percent respectively. This means that the staff of the education system entailed both males and females. The results indicate that 2 of the participants possess OND, 5 possess HND, 5 possess M.Sc. Degree, while 1 out of the academic staff has Doctoral Degree with 16(%), 38(%), 38(%) and 8(%) respectively. It was further revealed that the doctoral degree was not in TM or related fields.

Qualitative Data Presentation: TMES SWOTAR Analysis

The education system is identified and analyzed using SWOTAR analytical tool by the study participants and presented in the Figure below. The analysis reveals the current strengths of the TMES. The level of awareness of the

Figure 1: TMES SWOTAR Analysis



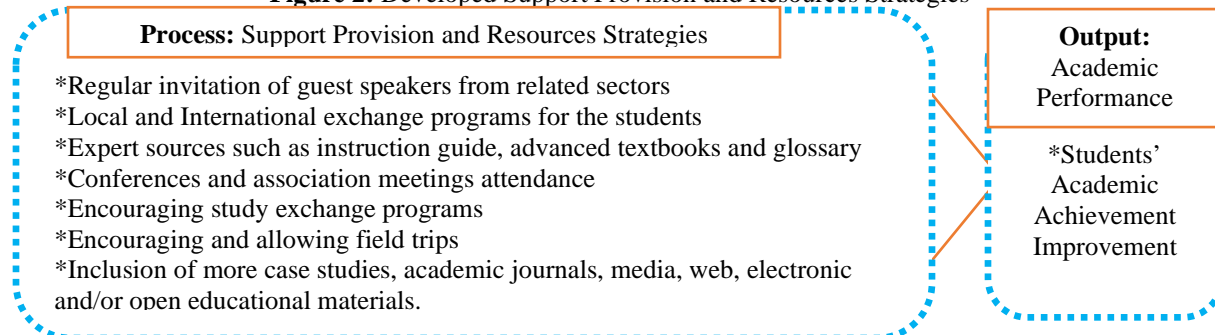
Source: Field Survey, 2021.

course is increasing and gradually gaining popularity. The program exposes students to other disciplines, cultures and traditions due to its multidisciplinary nature. The analysis reveals 3 weaknesses of the education system. First, insufficient human resources with a Doctoral degree in the field of TM. Next, currently, there is inadequate attention to support provision and resources by the management. Lastly, there is a lack of proper awareness of the program by the public. Considering the admission and enrollment, the low awareness of the course among the prospective students could be responsible for low students' enrollment into the TM program. Despite the current weaknesses, the analysis discloses the following opportunities. The program enjoys encouragement from the institution's management. There is availability of numerous job opportunities across the tourism industry and operating sectors. Significantly, the industry has been identified as an alternative source of income generation.

Nevertheless, the education is threatened by a lack of interest in the program by the public, low financial backup and unemployment among the graduates of TM. The educators aspire better awareness of the TM program. There is a strong aspiration that the majority of the students admitted and enrolled will prefer TM as their first choice of course. The system is expected to employ more academic staff with PhD. Other aspirations include the employment of more graduates of TM in the tourism sector and better attention to support provision and resources. The expectation is that the TM program will soon become a first-choice course of study by admitted and enrolled students. Therefore, filling vacancies in the industry and its operating sectors by the graduates of TM and/or other related fields tends to increase. Likewise, societal positive attitudinal change towards the program and the industry is highly expected.

Support Provision and Resources Strategies Developed for Academic Achievement Improvement of TM Students

Figure 2: Developed Support Provision and Resources Strategies



Source: Field Survey, 2021: Compiled by the researchers

Educators must begin using expert sources such as instruction guides, advanced textbooks, and glossaries. Students should be encouraged to attend conferences and association meetings. There is a necessity to promote study exchange programs and allow field trips on courses requiring outside the classroom exposure. Instructors can include case studies, academic journals, media, web, electronic and/or open educational resources to support teaching. The TMES can also involve regular invitations of guest speakers from related sectors. Incorporating local and international exchange programs for the students in the education process is critical to improving the academic performance achievement of TM students.

Conclusion

Performance is related to the system in terms of quality of teaching, the organization's capacities and students' capabilities, the scale of resource provision, resources and the level of students' academic condition. Output from the educational system provides inputs to other subsystems. The current findings showed that about 98% of the students are currently on CGPA less than second class upper division during this study. It means that majority of the students might graduate with degree awards below second-class upper division, not meeting the academic degree requirement of labour upon graduation. There is a synergy between the teaching environment, processes and output (academic achievement) in TMES. This research, therefore, concludes that adequate supporting provision and resources strategies can enhance teaching and learners' experience in sharing ideas and in turn influence the students' academic performance.

Recommendations

In collaboration with the research stakeholders viz; namely TM students and staff, it diagnoses and analyses the education system. Progressively, the research develops possible strategies for academic achievement improvement. Significantly, the strategy implementation is pertinent to improving the students' academic achievement to close match the existing gap between academic grades and labour requirements set standards for employment. This study recommends that:

1. Future researchers need to consider implementing the support provision and resources strategies above in the education sector.
2. After implementation, it is essential to evaluate further the influence of the strategies on the students' academic achievement in the education context for possible institutionalization.
3. Similar studies are expected to be conducted by including a larger sampling frame involving more higher institutions offering TM and/or related courses and stakeholders in the education sector.
4. The education regulatory bodies should collaborate to have a wholistic regulation and policy during accreditation exercises and mainly to produce a unified curriculum for the TM higher education sector.

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