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The Role of Administrators in Enhancing Students' Academic Performance in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: As customers, products and/or partners, the welfare of students must be of critical concern to the managers of every Higher Education institution (HEI). Good academic performance is not only critical and beneficial to students but also to the HEI. There are many factors that impact students' academic performance, many of which must be addressed by HEIs through designing programmes and coming out with appropriate strategies and procedures. Administrators in HEIs play various roles some of which directly or indirectly impact students' academic performance. However, although administrative positions are now integral part of management structure of all HEIs in Ghana, their role in enhancing students' academic performance have not been thoroughly and carefully considered by many HEIs in the country. The aim of this paper is therefore to bring to the fore and stimulate a discussion in Africa in general and Ghana in particular, the roles administrators in HEI can play in contributing to enhancing student performance.

Key Word: Academic Performance, Administrators, higher education institution (HEI).

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I. INTRODUCTION

Students are very important stakeholders for every higher education institution (HEI)[1] without whom, the institution cannot thrive. Although there have been many debates about how to describe student-higher education institution relationship, it has been generally accepted that students can be viewed as customers, products or partners depending on the context. Guilbault, in her articles titled "Students as customers in higher education: reframing the debate"[2] and "Students as customers in higher education: The (controversial) debate needs to end"[3] highlighted the fact that if students are not viewed as customers, it could result in a lack of customer orientation in higher education institutions. Haley on the other hand underscored the fact that students could be considered as customers, products or partners[4].

Nonetheless, whether students are customers, products or partners, the need for HEIs to take a keen interest in their welfare, satisfaction, performance and future career success cannot be overemphasised. As customers, students must be satisfied with the services that a HEI is offering. And the recognition of the student as a customer stresses the importance of treating students as such in order to succeed in the competitive higher education marketplace[3]. On the other hand, recognition of students as products, stresses the importance of preparing students to become successful and be worthy ambassadors of the HEI. Furthermore, the success of alumni of every HEI is key to the development and the future sustainability of the institution. This is not only because the institution will have a good number of wealthy alumni that will most likely give back to the institution but also the institution will be attractive to potential students.

Good academic performance is very important to students as key stakeholders whether as customers or products of every HEI. Academic achievement is important for the successful development of students, in that, students who do well in school are better able to make the transition into adulthood and to achieve occupational and economic success. Therefore, the future success of alumni of an educational institution depends on many factors including good academic performance. The academic performance depends on numerous factors including quality of teaching (communication), learning facility (environment), guidance and counselling, family stress[5,6], socio-economic factors[7], discipline, user behaviour and study habit[8].

The role of HEI administrators in influencing some of these factors and thus contributing to enhancing student academic performance cannot be overlooked. Administrators play important roles in the growth and success of every institution/organisations including academic institutions. The aim of this paper is therefore to bring to the fore and stimulate a discussion in Africa in general and Ghana in particular, the roles administrators in HEI can play in contributing to enhancing student performance.

II. Problem Statement

Students are key stakeholders of every HEI. As customers, products and/or partners, the welfare of students must be of critical concern to the managers of every HEI. Good academic performance is not only critical and beneficial to students but also to the HEI. There are many factors that impact students' academic performance, many of which must be addressed by HEIs through designing programmes and coming out with appropriate strategies and procedures. Administrators in HEIs play various roles, some of which directly or indirectly impact students' academic performance. However, although administrative positions are now integral part of management structure of all HEIs in Ghana, their role in enhancing students' academic performance have not been thoroughly and carefully considered by many HEIs in the country.

III. Students as Key Stakeholders

According to Ulewicz, there have been a few theories concerning who might be considered a stakeholder in a HEI and that it could be any person or a group of people that can influence the process of achieving the aims of a HEI[9]. He further indicated that the division into internal and external stakeholders was introduced by Burrows[10] and that not all groups seen as stakeholders are, indeed, stakeholders, as the role they play and their influence on an organization is very low or non-existent. He also indicated that in the last two decades, two stakeholder groups have acquired a specific role in the case of HEI, i.e., students (internal stakeholders) and employers (external stakeholders).

Indeed, students are important and critical internal stakeholders in every HEI[1] and the existence of the institution depends heavily on them. According to Degtjarjova, Lapina & Freidenfelds, studies have shown that students are the most important stakeholders for HEIs and failure in fulfilling students' needs and expectations may dramatically affect the operations of HEIs[11]. Abidin postulates that a HEI, which strives to provide excellent quality of education should endeavour to fully understand the needs of its stakeholders[12]. One of the best ways to do so is through direct feedback from its internal stakeholders (students and staff) and external stakeholder. When students are seen as important stakeholders, they could be considered as customers, products and/or partners[4]. Consequently, the HEIs will put in place the necessary programmes, processes and strategies to fulfil the needs of these key stakeholders (the students). As a result, students' needs can be satisfied, quality of education can be improved and students' academic performance can be enhanced.

IV. Factors Affecting Students' Academic Performance

Academic performance can be defined as an outcome of education where any student, learner, tutor or institutes has attained their educational ambition[13]. It mirrors on the aptitude of students to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired through, quizzes, text, exams, etc. Academic success is important because working people will need higher levels of education to tackle the technologically demanding occupations of the future[14]. Academic achievement is important for the successful development of students, in that, students, who do well in school are better able to make the transition into adulthood and to achieve occupational and economic success[15]. The academic performance depends on numerous factors including quality of teaching (communication), learning facility (environment), guidance and counselling, family stress[5,6], socio-economic factors[7], health status[16,17], discipline, user behaviour and study habits [18,19], some of these factors are discussed below:

Discipline, User Behaviour and Study Habits

Discipline is one of the critical factors that affect academic performance of students. Duckworth & Seligman have shown that self-discipline outdoes intelligent quotient (IQ) in influencing students' academic performance indicating that no matter how intelligent a student is, lack of self-discipline can have significant adverse effect on his/her academic performance[19]. Njoroge & Nyabuto concluded in their study that discipline is a vital ingredient for the success of students' academic performance, both in and after school[18]. Discipline in schools can manifest itself in students' good behaviour, effectiveness of teaching and learning activities, good time management, and successful code of conduct, which ultimately leads to academic success.

User behaviour, which is very closely related to discipline is one of the factors that can impact students' academic performance. Abaidoo & Arkorful stated that user behaviour especially in this era of social media and other electronic gadgets significantly affects students' academic performance because students find themselves spending more time on social media as against apportioning enough time for their studies[20]. Related to discipline and user behaviour is study habits of students. According to Mendezabal, there are a number of studies that pointed out that study habits and attitudes of students are important in academic success and that student need to develop the right study habits in order to achieve academic success[21]. Ali, Haider, Munir, Khan & Ahmed, revealed in their studies that age, father/guardian social economic status and daily study hours significantly contribute to the academic performance of graduate students[22].

Health Status

The World Health Organisation defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social. well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity[23]. With this definition, the influence of the health status of students on their academic performance cannot be overemphasised. It has long been argued that health is an important factor for academic achievement at school[24] and in higher education[25]. Consequently, in the context of universities or colleges, promoting the health and well-being of all members means promoting effective learning [26]. Therefore, the academic success of student will be enhanced if the optimal health related barriers are low. Kernan and colleagues observed reciprocal relationships between health, health behaviour and educational achievement[16]. The health status of student affects their academic performance because it can affect either concentration in lectures or cause them to skip lectures or not submit assignments.

Quality Teaching (Communication)

Quality teaching is an important factor that influences students' academic achievement. Ko & Chung, reported a significant positive correlation between teaching quality of teachers and the learning satisfaction of students, teaching quality of teachers and the academic performance of students, and learning satisfaction of students and the academic performance of students[27].

Hightower and co-workers define a quality teacher as one who has a positive effect on student learning and development through a combination of content mastery, command of a broad set of pedagogic skills, and communications/interpersonal skills[28]. According to them, quality teachers are life-long learners in their subject areas, teach with commitment, and are reflective upon their teaching practice. They transfer knowledge of their subject matter and the learning process through good communication, diagnostic skills, understanding of different learning styles and cultural influences, knowledge about child development, and the ability to marshal a broad array of techniques to meet student needs. They set high expectations and support students in achieving them. They establish an environment conducive to learning, and leverage available resources outside as well as inside the classroom. Thus, an important way of ensuring quality teaching is to put in place ongoing professional development and learning programmes to improve the teaching qualities of lecturers.

Learning Environment and Facilities

Learning environment is a strong predictor of academic performance [29]. Positive learning environment makes students feel safe and secure and can have more concentration on their studies rather than think of their safety when they study into the night in the library or lecture halls. Serene learning environments also encourages student to have a positive and refreshed mind for academic work. Additionally, availability of E-learning facilities, teaching Aids and library environment, hostels, sports facilities and parking and transportation have been observed to significantly impact students' academic achievement[30].

Family Stress

The effect of family and family stress on academic performance has been well documented. The ecological model of human development assumes that individuals are influenced by a mosaic of factors within contexts in their environment or "ecology," and their impact on human development and behaviour are simultaneous and multidirectional. The model places the individual within the family system, which is concentrically nested within broader systems of society[31]. Family stress like divorce has been established to have a significant impact on students' academic performance[15]. Uwaifo observed that significant differences existed between the academic performance of students from single parent family and those from two-parent family structures[32]. Supporting family styles were observed to be associated with intrinsic motivation and higher academic performance[33]. Another important family related factor that significantly impact on students' academic performance is socio-economic factors. Middle class parents were reported to take an active role in their children's education and development by using controlled organized activities and fostering a sense of entitlement through encouraged discussion whereas families with lower income do not participate in this movement, causing their children to have a sense of constraint[34].

Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling services play an important role in enhancing students' academic performance. School counsellors address the academic and developmental needs of all students, not just those in need, by collaborating with students, parents, school staff and the community. Shaterloo & Mohammadyari indicated in their paper that since students are required to continue to improve academic achievement, in the midst of busyness and density of both school assignments, academic assignments and extracurricular activities, it is important students follow the guidance and counselling services in schools to improve academic achievement[35].

V. Effect of Students' Academic Performance on the Future and Competitiveness of an Academic Institution

The importance of student's performance is not only relevant to the students but the HEIs as well. The success of alumni of every HEI is key to the development and the future sustainability of the institution. This is not only because the institution will have a good number of wealthy alumni that will most likely give back to the institution but also the institution will be attractive to potential students.

Excellent performance of students in an institution projects the institution in a positive light. This is even more important when students are seen as customers, products and/or partners[4]. Tertiary institutions have become very competitive due to the number of universities that have sprung up over the years. Students now have more options with respect to accomplishing their professional dreams. Academic performance has therefore become a major determining factor to the choice of academic institution one would want to enroll since it has a significant implication on the career prospects and future success of the students[15]. An analysis of the data collected from students indicated that one of the factors influencing student choice of school is graduate success[36].

VI. The Role of University Administrators and their Potential Impact on Students Life and Academic Performance

University Administrators comprise of university employees (non-faculty members), who are holding a number of administrative positions. In Ghana, they are mainly in the Registrar category with ranks such as deputy registrar, senior assistant registrar, assistant registrar and junior assistant registrar. They manage mainly the non-academic life of a university. Their duties encompass admissions, construction, safety and residence life, vital operations that ensure smooth running of the university. University administrators control the day-to-day operations of the university, including supervising employees at the school's offices, preparing budgets and acting as a link to students' parents. A university administrator may also work with students on specific activities.

It is therefore an undeniable fact that the activities performed by University Administrators impact significantly on students' life and therefore their academic performance. A number of studies have alluded to the fact that administrators play significant roles that can enhance the academic performance of students. LeBlanc & Nguyen identified seven factors of University Service Quality, namely; reputation, administrative personnel, faculty, curriculum, responsiveness, physical evidence and access to facilities[37]. Thus, administrative personnel or administrators constitute one of the seven factors of service qualities outlined by LeBlanc & Nguyen that lead to enhancing academic performance of student.

Administrators have a pivotal impact on faculty and student morale, policies, and learning atmosphere. Administrators provide leadership and lay out positive visions for the future of educational institutions. They ensure a safe and productive learning environment for the students and faculty at their institution. Administrators provide support for the smooth-running of the institutions and play significant roles in the success of the institutions. According to Nyagosia, an orderly school environment, that is efficient and well managed, provides the preconditions for enhanced students learning. Specifically, University Administrators contribute to enhancing students' academic performance by playing a central role in the following:

Orientation programs

Moving to a higher institution is a difficult change and Orientation programs are organised by administrators to help fresh student integrate easily into the academic environment. A successful transition to college has been consistently linked to overall measures of student success and retention[38]. The primary mission of orientation programs is to aid in the successful transition of new students to college[39]. Furthermore, students are normally provided with information to help them navigate through the system and settle on time to concentrate on their studies. Orientation helps them to know where and how to get assistance in case of any difficulties that they may encounter during their studies.

Policy Development

Administrators play integral roles in development of policies such as assessment policy, examination policy, Academic dismissal policy, grading policy etc. to aid in student academic performance. As Kickert and colleagues rightfully said, assessment policy seems to play an important role in optimising student learning and academic performance[40]. Assessment policies developed by administrators create a leeway for the assessment of student performance and measures put in place for better performance of students likewise, the grading policy plays a role in motivating students to work and perform better.

Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling programme is pitched towards improving the self-image of the students and facilitating better academic performance[35]. According to Wiggins & Wiggins, a number of studies have looked at the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance and student with low self-esteem turn to perform poorly than student with high self-esteem[41]. Guidance and counselling help student with low self-esteem to boost their self-esteem and improve on their performance[41].

Identifying Training Needs

The need for training in education particularly for teachers are important to improve the quality of education and further increase the performance of students[42]. Administrators identify training needs of lecturers in tertiary institutions which helps to identify knowledge gabs and assist instructors to be abreast with changing technologies and modern trends in teaching. It also helps them to develop better skills in imparting knowledge to the students. According to Allice as cited in Omar[43], "this responsibility is assigned to administrators because they have ready access to data that provide a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses of the individual staff members, the needs of the students, the week areas of curriculum, the values and desires of the community and how their school measures up to Education Ministry's goals and objectives".

Managing internship programs for students

On-the-job learning and training dates back to as early as 600 BCE, however modern internship programs in higher education can be traced back to 1906[44]. Madurapperuma reported a positive relationship between internships and academic performace[44]. Mendis and Arachchige observed that students, who started college with the same abilities, and even same grades on the graduation, interns get better classes than non-interns[45]. Students develop many skills during the internship and those skills help them to perform well within the classroom.

Administrators identify and liaise with organisations/industries and initiate memoranda of understanding with these organisations for students have their internships. Administrators most often manage the students' internship programmes.

VII. Conclusion

Students are key stakeholders of every HEI. As customers, products and/or partners, the welfare of students must be of critical concern to the managers of every HEI. Good academic performance is not only critical and beneficial to students but also to the HEI. There are many factors that impact students' academic performance, many of which must be addressed by HEIs through designing programmes and coming out with appropriate strategies and procedures. Administrators in HEIs play various roles, some of which directly or indirectly impact students' academic performance.

VIII. Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that HEIs in Africa in general and Ghana in particular should make the conscious effort to come out with strategic plans with clear deliverables, which fully recognises and integrates the role of University Administrators in enhancing Student Life and Academic Performance.

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