

The Nexus between Postgraduate Students and the Directorate of Students Affairs of the Federal University Lafia: A Review

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.11.05.2021.p11304

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.11.05.2021.p11304>

Abstract- The establishment of universities was conceived to be a unified single institution that will have one arm of authority taking care and control of the entire programs of each university. This arrangement has been applied in other administrative directorates except that of the student affairs. Whereas vice-chancellors as heads of universities supported by deans of faculties, directors and heads of departments control student affairs of both the undergraduate and postgraduate students, the dean of the students' affairs is restricted to the welfare of undergraduates, while the dean postgraduate (PG) school handles postgraduate students. This compartmentalization has created a socialization problem such that there is separation between students-students, staff-staff and students-students versus students-staff mix thereby denying all the benefits derivable from such union. Data for the study were obtained using primary and secondary sources, while the descriptive and inferential techniques were adopted for analysis. The study revealed the division between PG school and the students' affairs directorate and recommended administrative harmony between both schools for a formidable academic relationship and administration. It concludes that universities should consider bridging this administrative lacuna to ensure equitable learning process between the young and the old; both staff and students.

Index Terms- Students, nexus, university

I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of postgraduate studies has become a global phenomenon such that in 1998, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made a World Declaration on Higher Education (WDHE) and calls for a major global effort to improve the delivery of higher education in every country in the world (Roger, Kenneth, Enrique, Danja, and Howard (2009). It maintains that this call was formulated for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the important role that higher education (postgraduate schools or education) plays in the improvement of the social, cultural, political, economic and environmental aspects of the global society. It added that postgraduate study ranges from programs emphasizing intensive training in a specific aspect of professional practice to degree programs of several years' duration, either in an academic discipline or a professional field (Osaheni, George and

Aminu, 2017). It is observed from the UNESCO declaration that many professions also require periodic postgraduate study in order to maintain certification for practice. Graduate schools generally award master's degrees or doctorates to those who have satisfactorily completed prescribed courses of study. In developed countries, as per capita income increases in a society, the demand for professional training in technical and human services also increases. In order to educationally uplift developing countries, developed nations and the United Nations occasionally provide foreign aid to support the expansion of their postgraduate schools. In this connection, many nations now include plans for the development of postgraduate studies as part of their own systems of higher education rather than supporting professional training abroad for citizens who may or may not return to their own countries (Roger et al, 2009). The resolve by developed countries and UNESCO to fund and expand the scope of postgraduate schools in developing nations explains why the Federal University Lafia conceived and hatched the program.

Postgraduate schools are like institutions within institutions and therefore are domiciled in Colleges (College of Education, Colleges of Agriculture, etc.), Universities, Professional Schools (Law) and other Post-Secondary institutions (Polytechnics) and their students are those who have successfully completed their undergraduate curriculum (Mathis, 2008). In other words, a postgraduate student is a person who already holds a first degree or a Higher National Diploma (HND), or Advanced Diploma (in the case of Nigeria) and who is doing advanced study or research for an advanced qualification or professional practice. They may also be called Mature Students. In the British context, a mature student is someone over 25 years who, unlike the majority of students who go to College or University immediately or shortly after leaving school, has become a student later in life after working or starting a family, being an applicant for some time, among others (UCAS, 2021). Their maturity explains why they are expected to reinforce the undergraduate programs. In general, the new experience and training received usually helps to have a positive impact on the university and others who may need their services.

The driving force to achieve the above objective is the student affairs unit. In some developed countries, it is named Student Affairs and Services Division (Roger et al, 2009). They also have an international organization supported by UNESCO called, The International Association of Student Affairs and Services Professionals (IASAS). UNESCO calls on all

universities' student affairs directorates to join the Association for global sharing of ideas for sustainable development of higher education especially post graduate schools. In the light of the above, the paper discusses a history of the Post Graduate School of the Federal University Lafia, its nexus with the Student Affairs Division and makes appropriate recommendations as seen below.

1.1 Postgraduate School Federal University of Lafia in Historical Perspective

The Federal University of Lafia established the School of Postgraduate Studies at its 45th Regular Meeting of Senate held on 7th September, 2016. The school is empowered by Federal University of Lafia Senate to enforce approved requirements and standards of postgraduate studies and to coordinate the postgraduate programs of the various faculties in the University (School of Postgraduate Studies, 2016).

The post graduate school is established among other things to promote global staff development programmes, produce high level human resources for the country and reinforce the undergraduate programmes of the University. It admits students that may be referred to as special students whose research outcomes will contribute to issues of National development which will in turn shape the Nation's National Policy. It is evident that Lafia and indeed the Nation is facing many developmental challenges. Postgraduate school students of the University will therefore interrogate these issues and proffer solutions that will go a long way at solving Africa's and worldwide problems; one of which is to provide manpower needs both in public and private sectors.

FULAFIA's focus is in compliance with the National Universities Commission (NUC) broad objectives which states that Postgraduate Studies are meant to "further development in graduate Students the spirit of enquiry through training in research in an atmosphere of intellectual independence and individual creativity combined with a strong sense of group cooperation" (SPGS, 2016). The Postgraduate School of the University is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring among others that the broad objectives are attained. The benefits accruable by the establishment of a Postgraduate School explains why in less than six years of the take-off of the Federal University of Lafia and about five months in office, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Muhammad Sanusi Liman was passionate to establish the postgraduate School. As earlier mentioned, by its nature the postgraduate school is like an institution within an institution. The Vice-Chancellor was also aware of this enormous implication; hence, he paid attention to everything that was humanly possible to realize this dream. The Postgraduate School has three main types of postgraduate programs offered in the foundation faculties of Arts, Science and Social Sciences; namely: Postgraduate Diplomas, Masters Degrees and Doctor of Philosophy Degrees. Lectures commenced on 5th April, 2017.

The two specific objectives of establishing the School of Postgraduate Studies FULAFIA are:

- i. To adequately train qualified Staff for Fulafia and other universities and also Staff for both public and private sectors.
- ii. To encourage individual or group researches in any areas that will supplement/complement local

government/state/ national effort for socio-economic and technological development (SPGS Handbook, 2016)

- iii. The explanation shows that postgraduate schools are sine qua non (a necessary condition) in the desire to establish a university. In absence of a school of postgraduate school a university maybe like an advanced or glorified secondary school. This observation is in keeping with the Nigerian culture of establishing universities. Otherwise, elsewhere in advanced countries like the United States of America, not all universities are designed to offer postgraduate degree programmes.

Postgraduate students constitute a major segment of the key stakeholders in the university, FULAFIA is not an exception. The University on the other hand expects that all the major stakeholders should contribute positively to the attainment of its mandate of teaching, research and community service. In all these the Directorate of Student Affairs is central in driving the Vision. The Directorate is to mobilize students to harness available resources and ensures that the right culture and values are inculcated into the Students so as to get the best of them in order to respond appropriately to national and global challenges. It is on account of its strategic position that the paper seeks to discuss the relationship between the Postgraduate Students and the Directorate of Student Affairs.

II. POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE DIRECTORATE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Directorate of Students' Affairs in any university is the unit designed to attend to the welfare and general wellbeing of students of the university. The mission of the Unit in FULAFIA like others is to advance the programs, services and facilities that foster academic success and development. The Unit may be called by different names such as: Student Affairs Division (as in the case of FULAFIA), Student Affairs Department, Student Affairs Unit, and so on (Nicholas, 2019). Within the context of the organizational structure of the university, the Student Affairs directorate is housed directly under the office of the Vice-Chancellor. The Dean of students who is the head of the unit is directly answerable to the Vice-Chancellor.

The primary objective of the division is the student welfare; undergraduates and postgraduates alike. To this end, it serves as a counseling unit where students can comfortably receive assistance and advice on matters affecting them including hostel accommodation, orientation, financial aid, career, health care, physical education (sports), moral education (circular and religious) and personal problems (SPGS, 2016). The Division handles problems confidentially if they are made known to it irrespective of age, sex, religion, social status, etc. In fact, none of these is a handicap to counseling. In the University, some welfare issues are handled by the Student Welfare Committee (BSU Students Information Handbook, 2015). It is in recognition of this broad-based concern on students' welfare that the Federal University Lafia thought it wise to include the position of the Dean, Student Affairs as a member of the Board of Postgraduate School in the University.

Also included in the assignment of the Student Affairs Directorate is the enforcement of the rules and regulations guiding students' successful stay in the University; whether they are on-campus or off-campus. The enforcement of these rules falls under Students' Disciplinary matters which have been categorized into three (3) namely; Examination Malpractice, Offences in the Hall of Residence and Specific Offences (*Students' Handbook*, Federal University Lafia, 2012).

2.1 The Role of Students' Affairs Directorate

The students' affairs division play an active advisory role on issues that gets to the University Senate Student Disciplinary Committee. The committee adjudicates cases on the bases of rules and regulations and Sanctions attached to it which is expected to mold the character of the students to be good ambassadors of the Institution wherever they find themselves. Postgraduate students see themselves as mature people; indeed, majority of them are. As such, they imbibe the tenets of what is popularly called "Academic Freedom" and feel strongly that they may not come under the strict supervision of the Directorate of Student Affairs in the same manner undergraduate are treated. This impression is completely erroneous as the University discipline does not confine itself to particular categories of students.

According to Fischer et al, 'academic freedom' includes the right of teachers/students to speak freely about their subjects, to experiment with new ideas and specifically on the part of teachers; to select appropriate teaching materials and methods. In a democratic society like Nigeria, it protects both rights to evaluate and criticize existing values and practices in order to allow for political, social, economic and scientific progress. However, it is not absolute and must be balanced against competing interests. Postgraduate students should note that, forbidding conducts that substantially interfere with school discipline and has created significant disruption to the educational process will urgently call for limitation of academic freedom. Moreover, it is the enabling environment used to control the undergraduates that provides a conducive learning and research atmosphere for postgraduate students. It means obedience to all rules and regulations explicitly stated in the two Student Handbooks are for all students. The essence of these rules is to polish students, that is why the University provides a Code of Conduct Form to be filled by all students which is domiciled in the Student Affairs Division. In essence, the Division is directly responsible for the promotion of discipline which is a pre-requisite for academic excellence (Nicholas, 2019).

To achieve the objective of molding student's characters, the Directorate supervises all activities of the Students and provides support services and grooms the students into disciplined, studious, and well-nurtured citizens.

On assumption in office on February 15, 2016, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Muhammad Sanusi Liman, rolled out his development plan and noted that it will not be possible to accommodate all Students into the Hostel at the Permanent Site of the university. He stressed that some students would have to live off campus. And as part of support services, he directed that a Student Support Committee be created in the Student Affairs Division to promote synergy between students and their immediate community. The Students/Host Communities forum has held several meetings with Landlords and Vigilante to

promote understanding and security of students which is yielding fruitful results. The committee intervened in rent disputes, secured accommodation for some students; regularly had update of vacancies for accommodation, and collects phone numbers of landlords for ease of communication when the need arises. Similarly, the Vice-Chancellor gave specific instruction to the Division that those who were to be accommodated on Campus must include Postgraduate Students as mentioned in the 2012 Student Handbook and a Memo on Procedure for Registration by Postgraduate Student. The Vice-Chancellor had also signed a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with a Firm to construct a Postgraduate Lodge which the Directorate of Student Affairs offered to voluntarily supervise and report to the Vice-Chancellor and the Senate regularly, if the project would take off. It was believed that the keen interest shown would encourage the contractor to complete the work on time and Postgraduate Students will be ushered into the Lodge as soon as possible.

To expand the scope of Security for all Students, the Vice-Chancellor approved a courtesy call on all Security Agencies in Lafia Town headed by the Dean, Student Affairs during which they all pledge to collaborate with the University to address its security challenges anytime a whistle is blown (FULAFIA, 2017). It is important to note that in FULAFIA, there is a dress code meant for Staff and Students which is jealously been supervised by the Student Affairs Division. The Division with the approval of Management constituted a War Against Indecent Dressing (WAID) Team which monitors daily appearances of staff and students. Hence, its motto is "Personality depends on what you wear". Postgraduate Students were expected to align themselves with this laudable program. It was heartwarming to note that in the meeting of 13th May, 2017, it was reported that Postgraduate Students were found worthy of their Status; both in character and fashion. The Undergraduates Handbook Page 78, 130 and 134 as well as WAID Operational Guidelines are very clear on the mode of dressing and Sanctions against offenders.

Another area of relationship between Postgraduate Students and the Directorate of Student Affairs is in locating appropriate Channel of Communication. Students are expected to address all their letters or memos to the Vice-chancellor or Registrar through the Dean, Student Affairs (FULAFIA, 2019). The same applies to other publicly organized activities in the University. Similarly, any public statement on University affairs must be vetted by the Dean, Student Affairs on behalf of the University. In general, Postgraduate Students are expected to find information in the Directorate on all matters concerning the University and their welfare.

2.2 Extracurricular Activities

All work without play makes Jack a dull boy. In recognition of this adage and being aware of the importance of exercise to health, the University has set aside Wednesdays, 6:00am-10:00am as sports hours. It has gradually been providing sports and recreational facilities for students to participate in games after a demanding and stressful academic work. The exercises are expected to renew their energy and refresh their minds to research more and reduce their temptation to engage in social vices which are inimical to the core values of the University; which is Integrity, Innovation and Excellence. The Directorate of Student Affairs and the Directorate of Sports are responsible for organizing sports

activities in which Postgraduate Students are expected to participate (FULAFIA, 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

The population of the study is generally the staff and students of the Federal University, Lafia. However, the focus is the post graduate students and directorate of students' affairs of the institution. Both primary and secondary sources of data were adopted for the paper. The primary sources include interviews and field observations, while the secondary sources are written records, published or unpublished literatures. The descriptive and inferential techniques were adopted for the analysis / discussion, and the results presented.

IV. THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE NYSC SCHEME

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme stipulates that graduates who are below 30 years are eligible to serve. By this guideline, a Student who graduates at the age of 24 or 25 years can proceed to do his/her master's degree in a minimum of two years or maximum of three years and still qualify to proceed on his/her NYSC at the age of 27 or 28 years. According to Mrs Ekponubi, A.U., Director, NYSC Headquarters, Abuja, the NYSC Directorate calculates year of graduation which does not exceed 30 years (FULAFIA students handbook, 2012). Which means a day after 30 years disqualifies a graduate from serving. In this connection, she further says, if a graduate did not serve immediately upon graduation and is later compulsorily required to present an NYSC discharge certificate for postgraduate admission or appointment, he/she can still go back to serve provided he/she had the first degree or HND before or within the age bracket of 30 years. This mostly applies to those who undertake undergraduate and postgraduate studies abroad or those who fail to serve upon graduation due to personal reasons. Such graduate will fall into one of the responsibilities of the Division which is to coordinate the posting of graduates of the University for the NYSC programme (Ekponubi, 2017). In the light of the above; the inseparability of the two schools falling into the jurisdiction of the Student Affairs Division can without doubt be established.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper suggests that a Postgraduate Students' Association(s) (PGSA) at the departmental, faculty or Campus levels be formed. This will enhance interaction by Postgraduate Students at faculty, departments or University-wide level which will later lead to the formation of a Postgraduate alumnus. If this is in place, the Directorate of Students Affairs which is the registration and supervisory organ of the University for Student Associations on Campus will have an opportunity to educate postgraduate alumni/alumnae on the intricacies of the university system as it affects PG students. The paper recommends that Postgraduate Students should use their privileged positions in the society to contribute meaningfully to the development of the University individually, in groups or through linkages with

governmental and non-governmental organizations. Through this association, Postgraduate Students will have the opportunity to assist those in need in areas such as transportation, celebration of memorable days, Father's Day, mothers' day, National Day celebration, coronation ceremonies, etc.

The Postgraduate School should educate PG students on the necessity to collaborate with the Student Affairs Division to benefit from their welfare concern on students generally and the counselling services in particular. This association will help them to achieve their short and long term aims and objectives in life. As earlier stated, no age, sex or social status is above professional counselling. In addition, through guidance and counselling, PG students will be able to realize their status as key stake-holders of the University.

5.1 Conclusion

The paper had a brief look at the concept of postgraduate school globally. It revealed a history of the establishment of the Postgraduate School and its role to assist the growth and development of all Programs of the University. It also emphasized the importance of Postgraduate Students' research to human development. It stressed the wisdom of the Vice-Chancellor in establishing a Postgraduate School in less than six years of the existence of the University and barely five months into office. The paper identified key areas that will enhance the relationship between Postgraduate Students and the Directorate of Student Affairs to include; concern for the welfare and general well-being of the students; counseling, accommodation, orientation, financial assistance, career guidance, health care, physical education (sports), registration of associations, dress code, the channel of communication and information gathering. The paper concludes that there is a compelling need for a cordial relationship between the Postgraduate Students and Student Affairs Division to enable the university system (FULAFIA inclusive) to function properly so that peace and harmony will reign supreme. Thus, the benefits for which universities were/are established will be achieved.

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