

MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING OF FRESHERS' ORIENTATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA: THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

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Corresponding Author Eniang-Esien, Obia Ekpenyong Department of Educational Management Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria Article History Received: 06 / 11 / 2024 Accepted: 21 / 11 / 2024 Published: 26 / 11 / 2024	Abstract: The study deals with a theoretical exposition of management and planning of freshers' orientation for quality educational administration in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria: The University Experience. It informs that orientation programs are structured initiatives designed to integrate new students, employees, or members into an organisation or institution by familiarising them with its history, policies, culture, and resources. The study highlights the basic roles of orientation programs, such as a university or workplace, by providing information, fostering social connections, and introducing them to the culture and resources of the organisation. While crucial for newcomer adjustment and retention, the design and effectiveness of these programs, including their content, delivery methods (such as online options), and duration, should be continually evaluated and adapted to best meet the needs of diverse participants for optimal success in their new academic endeavours. Several issues and possible solutions from the researcher's perspective were also highlighted in the paper. Keywords: Management and planning, freshers' orientation, quality educational administration.
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Introduction

Orientation programmes in tertiary institutions are of great importance for quality educational administration.¹ This is because, if properly managed and planned, such programmes can bring about significant improvements, especially in ameliorating the plight of new students.² Ababio and Commey (2021) note that quality orientation programmes can assist students in easing into college life and increasing comfort with interaction among peers.³ Some other benefits include adapting to a new life in an entirely new environment, integrating into the academic life, and fitting into the social life on campus.⁴ Evensen (2017) stated that the orientation programme is intended for students to interface with the university as a whole before the actual commencement of their academic activities.⁵

It is a well-known fact that new students face numerous challenges in adapting to the university environment. As new students become actively involved in the orientation process, they become more acquainted with friends with whom they share information about their new environment. They begin to feel a connection to the new school community. Integration into a new environment is often not an endeavour, but it is necessary for familiarising oneself with the new surroundings. The orientation programme enables students to become familiar with their new lecturers, departmental and faculty staff members, lecture halls,

library, laboratories, workshops, and other facilities, thereby making their stay on campus a worthwhile experience.

Adjusting to campus life for new students can sometimes be cumbersome, as they may find themselves in an entirely new environment that is completely unfamiliar to them. The issue of students' adaptation in the learning environment occupies an important place in university education management. Adaptation, as a process, involves an interaction between several psychological components that work together, sharing a common purpose: to avoid imbalances, inconsistencies, and conflicts⁶(Gonta & Bulgac, 2019).

It has been established that student orientation programmes contribute to student academic and social development. It has been observed that in public universities in Cross River State, it appears that the management of these institutions does not organise proper orientation programmes to help students integrate into academic life on campus, thereby exposing them to the danger of negative influence within the campuses. In some institutions, the student orientation programme is merely organised just to fulfil all righteousness without adding expected value to the new students. A proper student orientation should cover all aspects of a student's life, including academic, social, personal, security, financial, and other ethical principles. It is a fact that most students, even in their final year, do not know how to calculate or compute their

Cumulative Grade Point Average. Others are unsure of how to register for their courses and track their academic progress. Lack of social orientation has led many students to join cult groups that have ruined their lives. Also, some students who never smoked before have become addicted to smoking and the illicit use of hard drugs due to wrong associations on campus. All these negative attitudes have been attributed to improper orientation at the beginning of university life for freshers. Based on this theoretical backdrop, the study examined the management and planning of freshers' orientation for quality educational administration in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria: The University Experience.

Some common areas of orientation in the academic environment

The study pinpoints some common areas in which orientation management and planning in public tertiary institutions are thus:

Management of academic orientation programme

⁵Evensen (2017) say that if a student's foundation is not properly laid through deliberate orientation programmes at the early stage of study, they may find it difficult to meet the academic standard expected of them

The academic orientation programme is designed to cover a variety of activities, including: the number of courses a student is expected to register in a single semester and a session, the core/electives courses expected to be registered in a semester, the appropriate pass mark on every course, the calculation of CGPAs, course requirements for graduation and mandatory class attendance requirements. However, despite the huge acceptance of orientation programmes among students, tertiary institutions of learning still struggle with the challenges of integrating new students through these programmes. As it stands, most students rely on self-advice or that of their friends for important academic choices, which in most cases have landed them in trouble. ¹³Gentry et al (2006) and Booker (2006) agreed that relevant studies have shown that most students lacked comprehensive information regarding curricular requirements and had a limited understanding of their institutions' policies, programmes, services, courses, requirements and even available resources that could help them transit smoothly or help them achieve their academic goal, if they are lacking in proper academic orientation.

Management of campus life orientation programme

The daily routine of university life brings new sleeping and eating habits, increased workload, and new responsibilities. ¹⁴Wright (2017) opined that tertiary institution students are prone to stress due to the transitional nature of university life. They must adjust to being away from home, perhaps for the first time, and maintain a balance between a high level of academic success and a new social environment. ¹⁸Zurilla and Sheedy (2011) commented that the amount of stress experienced may be influenced by the individual's ability to effectively cope with stressful events or situations. Campus life is completely complex and different from what the new fresher is already used to. It includes both positive and negative activities such as romantic relationships, drug or substance use, peer group influence, cult related activities, religious groupings etc. Suppose a new student is not properly guided through the orientation programmes. In that case, they may end up associating with the wrong peers, who could lead them into activities that may endanger their academic pursuits.

Higher education is a crucial driver of progress in advanced nations, fostering technological advancements and quality product development. A serene learning environment, despite socio-cultural, political, religious, and racial diversity, is essential for students and lecturers to thrive. This diversity, when managed effectively through positive lecturer-student relationships, prepares individuals to navigate complex global environments and promotes knowledge generation, advancement, and dissemination.

Campus life, while memorable, can be stressful, with social factors like romantic relationships, extracurricular activities, and sports influencing students' attitudes and academic performance. Research highlights the impact of these factors on students' time management and psychological balance, underscoring the need for effective support systems to ensure academic success..

Management of security orientation

Security is a fundamental aspect of life, protecting individuals' well-being, property, and peace of mind. It's essential for fostering a sense of safety and promoting harmonious coexistence among people. While security can't be purchased, it can be cultivated through awareness, education, and proactive measures. In universities, security orientation programs play a vital role in teaching students how to safeguard themselves and others, promoting a culture of safety and responsibility. Security orientation for new students is a training that focuses on creating awareness about dangers and actions that may pose a threat to the completion of students' academic programs. Security orientation is given in the school as part of programmes to induct new students into the school community. Educational International in Oguzie (2014), enlightenment in the form of security education is a bold step in the right direction for bringing about peaceful coexistence within the institution and society at large. Oguzie (2014) points out that an environment that has promoted the consciousness of peace among the youths will be free of crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, theft, corruption, child abuse, drug trafficking, discrimination, political irony, electoral malpractices, murder, terrorism, and religious rivalry. Security orientation will enable the new students to know how to avoid problems and enhance the protection of life and property. Security challenges can arise from students, the host community, lecturers, political issues, religious conflicts, and the state of educational facilities within the school.

Management of health orientation programme

Health orientation programs have a profound impact on students' healthy lifestyles and academic success. By promoting health-enhancing attitudes and beliefs, these programs empower students to make informed decisions about their well-being. Despite their importance, there's a lack of research on the specific influence of orientation programs on students' health and academic achievement in higher institutions. This knowledge gap is concerning, especially given the trend of institutional management cutting health-related programs due to perceived lack of importance. More empirical evidence is needed to inform decision-making and ensure that health orientation programs continue to support students' development and academic success.

The need for proper management and planning of freshers' orientation

Proper management and planning of freshers' orientation is essential for students' academic progress. This is because a well-planned orientation clarifies institutional culture, policies, and educational expectations, helps students form peer connections,

and fosters a sense of belonging, ultimately preparing them to thrive academically and socially. Key benefits include promoting a connection to the institution, providing essential survival skills, building confidence, and helping students avoid feeling overwhelmed or lost during their initial college experience. This implies that to plan a successful freshers' orientation, it is essential to clearly define its goals, customise content for new students, and make it interactive and engaging through a mix of online and offline activities.

Common Issues with students' orientation

When conducting orientation exercises, there are some common problems encountered, which are as follows:

- i. **Insufficient Support:** A lack of continuous, ongoing support after the initial orientation sessions leaves students feeling alone and struggling to adapt.
- ii. **Unclear Communication:** Ambiguous messages about university systems, regulations, and resources can leave students confused and unprepared.
- iii. **Focus on Information Over Experience:** Some orientation programs prioritise delivering facts over creating meaningful experiences that foster social connection and belonging.

Possible way forward (overcoming the problems) for proper planning, administration and management of orientation exercises in tertiary institutions

- iv. **Segmented Information Delivery:** Break down orientation content into smaller, digestible sessions spread over time, rather than cramming everything into a short period.
- v. **Interactive and Experiential Learning:** Incorporate interactive activities, themed blocks, and social events to keep students engaged and help them build connections.
- vi. **Continuous Support Systems:** Implement programs that provide ongoing support through student mentors, academic advisors, and easy access to university resources.
- vii. **Clear, Accessible Resources:** Provide clear manuals, student portals, and digital platforms where students can find information and revisit important details.

Conclusion

Orientation programs conclude that they are vital for helping new employees or students transition into their new environments, fostering a sense of belonging and community, and improving long-term success and retention. However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on their design; they should be tailored to meet specific audience needs, be comprehensive yet adaptable, and use interactive, student- or employee-centred approaches to achieve their full potential. Orientation programs provide significant benefits by helping newcomers integrate into a new environment, increasing their confidence, and improving retention for both students and employees.

Implications of management and planning of freshers' orientation in management of education

Effective planning and management of freshers' orientation are crucial components of educational settings. By designing a thorough orientation programme, institutions can facilitate a smooth transition for new students, allowing them to integrate into academic life and institutional culture. A well-planned orientation provides students with vital information about campus resources, academic expectations, and support services, enabling them to navigate their new environment with confidence. A well-structured orientation programme also plays a vital role in reducing student anxiety and uncertainty, setting a positive tone for their academic journey. By fostering a sense of community and belonging, orientation programmes can boost student engagement and motivation, ultimately contributing to improved academic outcomes. The benefits of effective orientation programmes are far-reaching. Not only do they promote student retention and academic performance, but they also lay the groundwork for a positive and productive academic experience. Institutions that invest time and effort into planning and delivering effective orientation programmes can reap long-term benefits, including increased student satisfaction and success. By prioritising orientation programmes, institutions demonstrate their commitment to supporting students' academic and personal growth. A well-designed orientation programme can have a lasting impact on students' academic journey, setting them up for success and empowering them to reach their full potential.

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