

ACADEMIC PROBATION IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA: IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

This study, which was guided by three research questions, used the qualitative method of a case study to explore the level of implementation of the academic probation policy in North-Western Nigeria, and how it impacted on academic performance of students. The population for this study included examination officers. The population is not intended to statistically represent a group on campus but is instead a group of individuals who shared a specific educational experience. Data was collected through interviews with Examination officers in the selected colleges and analyzed using the thematic data analysis technique. Findings of the study revealed that the colleges are implementing probation on students whose CGPA is less than 1:00 point in line with NCCE probation policy. It further revealed that the implementation of probation has positively impacted the probating students by making them work harder to remedy their deficiencies, improve their performances and subsequently pass their examinations to meet their graduation requirements. The study also found out that most of the probating students see probation as a punishment, a very difficult process, and an unpleasant situation. The study, therefore, recommended that Guidance and Counselling Units of colleges of education should always guide probating students on the importance of the policy for the improvement of their academic performances, and colleges of education should always make sure that experienced and qualified lecturers handle students on probation.

Keywords: academic probation, colleges of education, implementation, impact

INTRODUCTION

The constant withdrawals of students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, especially in colleges of education as a result of poor performance informed the introduction of probation by National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in colleges of education in its minimum standard. However, after over 17 years of the introduction of probation, it is worthy to ascertain whether there is an improvement in students' performance after probation or not. A qualitative case study was performed in this research to explore the level of implementation of the academic probation policy in the area of study and how effective it is in enhancing the academic performance of students.

Academic policies are introduced with the sole aim of ensuring and maintaining high academic standards in educational institutions.

One of such policies is academic probation. Academic probation is a term that defines the status given to a student whose academic performances fall below a "cut-off" in a semester or session. Educational regulatory bodies are mostly saddled with the responsibility of setting up a minimum level or "cut-off" points for academic probation, but individual institutions can set up their "cut-off" points. Academic probation is a policy in which students are placed on academic probation if they fail to achieve the institution's basic academic standards. Institutions provide a number of student services to aid in institutional retention and student persistence to graduation; yet, limited study was conducted on academic policies and their impact on college student achievement [1]–[4].

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) is the regulatory body for all colleges of education in Nigeria and is therefore

responsible for setting up the policy on academic probation which came into effect in 2002. Colleges of education, therefore, uses academic probation, not as a punitive measure, rather, a corrective measure to enable the students to “catch up” with academic deficiencies. Academic probation is not viewed as a punishment in this program; rather, it is viewed as a form of school support. Students will be able to learn about campus resources that will aid their achievement, according to the organizers. During the probationary period, students continue to attend classes, but if they do not demonstrate progress, they may be suspended from school.

Despite all yearnings and aspirations of students to acquire higher qualifications, standards must be set for not only completion of studies, but creating an enabling environment that will accommodate individual learning abilities. To this end, education regulatory bodies came up with set policies and standards that will maintain standards in the system. The National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are responsible for setting the standards for universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education respectively.

The colleges of education adopt the course credit system in line with the NCCE’s derive towards “ensuring that teachers earning the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) are professionally and intellectually qualified for the task of servicing the 1-6-3 Basic Educational system” [5], [6]. The course credit system is therefore a quantitative system of organizing in which subject areas are broken into units that are examinable and for which students earn credit(s) if passed. In line with this, courses are assigned weights called credit units. Credit units consist of a specified number of student-teacher contact per week per semester, which are used as a measure of course; and as an indicator of student workload.

It is pertinent that students meet minimum credit requirement before graduation, but it is equally important that students not only graduate, but they do so with good results. There is very little or no empirical work on the performance of the academic probation policy since its introduction in 2002. So many reasons account for students’ inability to complete their courses of study in good time. While [7] attributes it to lack of preparedness; [8] and [4] ascribe it to weak academic skill; others identified dissatisfaction with an instruction [9], low motivation [10], personal issues [7], not using academic advising resources [8], or being a first-generation college student and from a low-income family [7].

When students do not meet the minimum academic requirements of the institution, they may be placed on academic probation, risk failing, or be dismissed from the institution [4], [7], [11]. Institutions offer services to students to retain them and help them improve their academic performances. This policy is what is termed “academic probation”. Despite all these, there is little or no empirical evidence to show that the level of implementation, as well as the impact of this policy, has been ascertained. It was intending to ascertain the level of implementation as well as the impact of this policy that this study was undertaken.

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the level of implementation and the impact of academic probation as a tool for enhancing academic performance among students in colleges of education in North-Western Nigeria. Specifically, the study (1) determined the perceptions of college examination officers on whether academic probation is implemented in colleges of education; (2) explored the major factors that cause students to find themselves on academic probation; (3) find out the impact of academic probation on students on probation; and (4) determined the level of implementation of the

NCCE introduced a policy on probation in the selected colleges of education.

METHOD

This study used the qualitative method of a case study to explore the level of implementation of the academic probation policy in the area of study, but how effective it is in enhancing the academic performance of students. Qualitative research allows for a holistic and flexible approach to studying a phenomenon in a real-world setting [12]. It also allows for an in-depth and rich investigation into the understandings and perceptions of people involved in certain situations.

Qualitative research allows for a holistic and flexible approach to studying a phenomenon in a real-world setting. It involved the use of six purposely selected participants from 6 colleges of education in North-Western Nigeria to ascertain the level as well as the effect of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation in colleges of education in the country. A qualitative research method was employed through the use of interview protocol. The case study confirms the qualitative objective of research by allowing investigators to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and industry maturation [13].

Case studies allow the researcher to investigate an array of resources, including “documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” [13]–[15]. Balbach [15] Observed that “the purpose of a case study is to study intensely one set (or unit) of something - programs, cities, counties, worksites—as a distinct whole”. The case study method can also be evaluative; that is, it can be used to determine the value of achieving institutional goals [16]. It is also meant

to assess how effective a program is by being concerned with how well it works “a question that is central to much policy-related investigation” [16].

The area of the study was North-Western Nigeria. It covers seven states of Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kabbi, Sokoto and Zamfara in Nigeria. The population for this study included those examination officers who were charged with the responsibility of examination administration, conduct, and result computation. They are fully responsible for the identification of students who should be placed on academic probation. From such a population a “non-probability” [17] sample that allows the researcher to select participants was drawn to reflect particular features of or groups within the sampled population. The sample was not designed to be statistically representative: the probability of selection for each element were unspecified, so the characteristics of the population were employed instead. This characteristic makes them ideal for small-scale, in-depth research. The association of the group members with the policy of academic probation was a defining aspect of the participants in this study. The population isn't meant to statistically represent a group on campus, but rather a group of people who had a particular educational experience.

Data was collected through interviews with Examination officers in the selected colleges, and through a review of the policy of academic probation as it is written in the colleges' handbook. An analysis of the data generated was carried out using the thematic method of data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic Analysis of Interview/ Questionnaire Responses

The qualitative data analysis was conducted by listening to the recordings, transcribing on

paper, and proofreading the interview transcripts [18]; as well as making use of the completed questionnaires. Here, the qualitative data was arranged following the perceptions of college examination officers on the purpose of academic probation by re-examining the interview protocol, categorizing and differentiating between each

question the participants answered as well as that of each student on academic probation. Transcript data were quoted and organized according to participants' responses (SRCOE, A-IKCOE, A-JSCOE, A-FCEKT, A-FCETG, A, and ZSCOE, A) as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Presentation

S/N	Participant	Address	Response (In Vivo Coding)	Theme	Code Generated
1	Husaini Abdullahi P ₁ (School/Department Officer)	Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education, Kumbotso, Kano	Participant/ Interviewee 1. Coordinates examination activities at both School and Departmental level, preparation of results, membership of examination related committee such as timetable, malpractice committees. 1500 students. Academic probation is fully implemented in the College for students who's CGPA is 1.00 and the implementation impacted positively on most the students by making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby meeting the graduation requirements. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as very difficult. But having understood that they only given the chance to improve, they accept it wholeheartedly. It is mostly caused by late admission and incomplete registration.	Level, Impact and Implementation of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation	EOLI EOII IPAP
2	Mal Bashir Aliyu, P ₂ (School Officer)	Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin Ma, Katsina state	Participant/ Interviewee 2. Coordinates examination activities at School level, preparation of results, and works with 1400 students. Academic probation is fully implemented in the college for students who's CGPA is 1.00 and the implementation impacted positively on most the students by motivating them and making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby remedying their academic problems. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as a punishment.	Level, Impact and Implementation of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation.	EOLI EOII IPAP
3	Malam Ya'u Ado, JSCOE, P ₃ (Acting Chief Examination Officer)	Jigawa State College of Education, Gumel	Participant/ Interviewee 3. Coordinates examination activities the school level, preparation of results, membership of examination related committee such as timetable, malpractice committees. Academic probation is fully implemented in the college for students who's CGPA is 1.00 and the implementation impacted positively on most the students by making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby meeting the graduation requirements. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as unpleasant situation. College should establish a functional Guidance and Counselling Centre to enable proper counselling of students on Probation.	Level, Impact and Implementation of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation.	EOLI EOII IPAP

Table 1. (Continued)

S/N	Participant	Address	Response (In Vivo Coding)	Theme	Code Generated
4	Malam Lawal Ahmed, FCEKT, A P ₄ (Examination Officer)	Federal College of Education, Katsina	Participant/Interviewee 4. Coordinates examination activities the school level, preparation of results, membership of examination related committee such as timetable, malpractice committees. Academic probation is fully implemented in the college for students who's CGPA is 1.00 and the implementation impacted positively on most the students by making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby meeting the graduation requirements. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as unpleasant situation. College should establish a functional Guidance and Counselling Centre to enable proper counselling of students on Probation.	Level, Impact and Implementation of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation.	EOLI EOII IPAP
5	Victor O. Olowonisi, P ₅ , Examination Officer	Federal College of Education (Technical) Gusau, Zamfara state	Participant/Interviewee 5. Coordinates examination activities the school level, preparation of results, membership of examination related committee such as timetable, malpractice committees. Academic probation is fully implemented in the college for students who's CGPA is 1.00 and the implementation impacted positively on most the students by making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby meeting the graduation requirements. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as unpleasant situation. College should establish a functional Guidance and Counselling Centre to enable proper counselling of students on Probation.	Level, Impact and Implementation of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation.	EOLI EOII IPAP
6	ZSCOE, AP ₆ (Examination Officer)	Zamfara State College of Education, Maru	Participant/Interviewee 6. Coordinates examination activities at both School and Departmental level, preparation of results, membership of examination related committee such as timetable, malpractice committees. Academic probation is fully implemented in the college for students who's CGPA is 1.00 and the implementation impacted positively on most the students by making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby meeting the graduation requirements. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as unpleasant situation.	Level, Impact and Implementation of the NCCE Policy on Academic Probation.	EOLI EOII IPAP

Key for codes:

EOLI – Examination officers were satisfied with the level of Implementation of the NCCE policy on Academic Probation.

EOII - Examination officers were satisfied with the impact of the Implementation of the NCCE policy on Academic Probation.

IPAP - There is an Implementation of the NCCE policy on Academic Probation in the Colleges.

The study also revealed that students who were placed on academic probation did not feel they had sufficient knowledge of the policy before they were placed on probation. But having understood that they are only given the chance to improve, they accept it wholeheartedly. It is mostly caused by late admission and incomplete

registration. This also agrees with the works of [11] who discovered that several factors affect student performance. For some students, a single factor may be causally important, for others a combination of factors may contribute to poor performances.

The results also show that the implementation of the policy on academic probation has impacted positively on most of the students by making them work hard and subsequently passed their various examinations thereby meeting the graduation requirements. This has also agreed with requirements of the National Policy on Education (as amended) [19] on the course credit system and Grade Point Average Phenomenon. Despite this, students mostly viewed the policy as very difficult, unpleasant, or as a punishment. But having understood that they are only given the chance to improve, they accept it wholeheartedly. The result also shows that students finding themselves on academic probation is mostly caused by late admission and incomplete registration. The respondents were, therefore, of the view that the colleges should establish a functional Guidance and Counselling Centre to enable proper counseling of students on Probation.

The findings from the study in the selected colleges of education in the North West Zone of the country showed that the colleges are implementing probation on students whose CGPA is less than 1:00 point in line with the NCCE probation policy of 2002. It further revealed that the implementation of probation has positively impacted the probating students by making them work harder to remedy their deficiencies, improve their performances and subsequently pass their examinations to meet their graduation requirements. The study also further found out that most of the probating students see probation as a punishment, a very difficult process, and an unpleasant situation. However, the students later understood that the policy is a favor to them to try again instead of being withdrawn from the college for poor performance. Late admission and registration contribute to students being placed on probation.

CONCLUSION

The study was able to establish that the selected colleges of education in the North West Zone of the country have been implementing the NCCE policy on academic probation. The policy has impacted positively on the academic performances of probating students by making them work harder to remedy their deficiencies, improve their performances and subsequently pass their examinations to meet their graduation requirements, although the students view the policy as a kind of punishment. Probating Students initially viewed probation policy as a punishment, a very difficult process, and an unpleasant experience. But later, they all realized that the policy was in their favor. Therefore, they accepted the policy, work harder, improved their academic performances, remedy their deficiencies, passed their subsequent examinations, and made graduation requirements. Guidance and Counselling Units of Colleges of Education should always guide probating students on the importance of the policy to the improvement of their academic performances. Colleges of education should always make sure that experienced and qualified lecturers handle students on probation.

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