

Strategies and Opportunities for Student Recruitment and Retention in African Universities: Lessons from Western Universities

Cosmos Nike Nwedu

Faculty of Law

***Corresponding author:**

Cosmos Nike Nwedu, Faculty of Law, Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI), Ebonyi State, Nigeria. E-mail: cosmosnike.nwedu@gmail.com

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Abstract

Student recruitment and retention are an important management and marketing strategy for higher education institutions such as universities. These strategies are increasingly becoming crucial terminologies in the education sector around the world today. Stakeholders, for example, parents and policymakers, see recruitment and eventual retention of students as both an effective part of measure and indicator of university performance and student success. While recruitment and retention strategies may relatively vary, such variation in most cases can inform a hallmark of management and marketing deficiency. This scenario typically characterizes African universities, where inclusive best practices of student recruitment and retention trends have been less receptive. This study aims to identify the gap existing between African universities student recruitment and retention strategies and that used at western universities. The study adopts a qualitative, analytical approach based on a review of existing literature, and a combination of the author's experience of past involvement in a somewhat student retention process. Findings show that recruitment and retention strategies at African universities are lacking. Further, their marketing strategies are riddled by lack of commitment, professionalism, and student diversity principles. This situation has impacted the education sector adversely. The study provides a conceptual analysis of recruitment and retention, but re-conceptualizes the latter more broadly, in the context of manifest current realities. Furthermore, it proposes principles of student recruitment and retention. The study overall argues that African universities can tailor western universities recruitment and retention strategies as opportunities for sustaining international best practices to compete globally in the international educational market.

Keywords: Student Recruitment and Retention, Higher Education Institutions, Universities, Western Universities, Africa, African Universities, Management and Marketing Strategies

Introduction

Traditionally, student recruitment and retention is unarguably an inevitable, typical business of every higher education institution (HEI) worldwide. This means no recruitment of students, no business of teaching and learning for universities in particular. Therefore, universities must recruit students to exist and operate as institutions of learning. Like any other dynamic business approaches, recruitment and retention strategies and methods are adaptable in meeting the current realities of time. Most universities combine ambition, prospecting, and innovation inside and outside the cocktail of professionalism and recruitment strategies, which cost them enormous amount of money and time for reaching specific goals of education, including student overall academic and professional expectations. Thus, student recruitment and retention have not only become an important management and marketing strategy, but are also now prisms for the empirical study of university performance and student success.

Global universities are actively seeking new strategies for recruiting and retaining students from across countries, as it is believed that effective student recruitment and retention provide great paybacks for universities and students. The benefits are increasingly being recognized in the education sector. Research shows that student recruitment and retention can be used for accountability reasons [1]. Besides, first-rate scholarship somewhat depends on the quality of recruited students. This analysis, of course, is indeed reinforced by the argument that a university degree is an identity rooted in student recruitment strategies adopted by the university to reflect its own intrinsic institutional identity though institutions can be creatively receptive to outside ideas and diversity [1]. More fundamentally, an institutional identity replicates a university's pedagogical and research practices. This makes an assumption for programs to be designed as unremittingly deliberative and reflective of current and innovative methodologies aimed at engaging with the stakeholders actively, especially as recruitment and retention management and marketing strategies broadly lie at the core of public affairs.

Basically, what, why, and how a university adopts particular recruitment and retention strategies is not simply an expression of

varied approaches, but similarly a reflection of student needs and university mission. That is to say, recruitment as well as retention strategies may, however, vary slightly across universities due to varying needs and context. This understanding promises a better understanding of a university's learning and research objectives, and how it interacts or engages with all stakeholders. But no matter how varying university missions and student goals may be, universities need to compete with their counterparts anywhere in the world through a responsive approach to, among other things, student recruitment and retention strategies symbolic of global best practices. This notion is suggesting a global likeness of educational objectives anywhere in the world. Thus, the process of internalization of higher education inspired mostly by universities in the developed countries or western universities, and which is a part of globalization, should be reflective of what other universities in other jurisdictions such as Africa, do with regards to recruitment and retention. Surprisingly, recruitment and retention strategies at African universities have remained marginally deficient with little or no innovative advancement as a hallmark, compared to western universities strategies. Literature shows that some African universities, for example, South Africa universities have been unprogressive in marketing their products to potential students [2]. The cause of this problem is perhaps arguable. Most African universities have not really had an all-inclusive, institutional harmonized marketing program, but rather inclined to an ad-hoc marketing [3]. They also have not truly become open to, or sensitive of the internationalization process of higher education policies and its benefits. Most notably, little or no competition with regard to student recruitment and retention exists among African universities, as they remain far-off from a really aggressive enterprise and unaccustomed to competition in a marketing environment that sees existence as a benefit to be won, much less of holding similar notion for performance [3]. African universities relatively face higher difficulty as opposed to other regions, especially those within the Commonwealth regions, with the UK having the lowest rate of struggle in recruitment and retention [4].

The major research question addressed herein is: Whether African universities are on a par with their western counterparts in terms of student recruitment and retention strategies. This question has been answered from side to side analysis and comparison of western universities student recruitment and retention strategies with that used at African universities, which method has identified a gap. The rationale is to draw insights from the context of western universities recruitment and retention practices for effective management and marketing of African universities. This introduction precedes a literature review section of the study. The next sections describe the research methodology used, the findings, various strategies for effective student recruitment and retention, and principles of student recruitment and retention, respectively. Overall, key points and lessons are summarized in the conclusive section.

Literature Review

Student Recruitment

Academic literature on student recruitment is sparsely lacking. There is also a problem as to what the term means exactly in itself. At its core, student recruitment has been defined as an effort to sell a college or university to students by convincing them to buy their product, in this sense, the education [5]. This effort involves a process to find and recruit first-rate students from either within or outside an institutional jurisdiction, and begins once a contact is established with a prospective student, and continues well into retention. The

process of recruitment may depend on an institutional arrangement; it may be handled internally by a university recruitment department or admissions office, or externally by hired international or overseas student recruitment agents or agencies. Finding a perfect university always lies on a prospective student. Nevertheless, universities may prospect for students and encourage them to apply to their educational programs. Thus, student recruitment underlines a value proposition as much in the same way as in the routine business parlance. Thus, student recruitment is no less a usual commodity in ordinary sense, yet university education is far more than a mere commodity for contemporary students.

Frolich and Stensaker examined institutional development of student recruitment strategies, their characteristics and relations to the institution's profile and objectives [1]. But student recruitment is more than just a corresponding match between student and university profiles. One primary concern of every university is usually to determine why a particular student should be recruited into its program. The background, qualities and qualifications of student, and whether such student can make an active learning and research environment are key considerations which university institutions place high emphasis on in determining whether they will be able to succeed academically and make meaningful impacts or contributions within and outside the learning environment. The intellectual and leadership prospects of prospective students are, therefore, determinant factors for their recruitment, which prospects extend to larger society in terms of social responsibility. On the other hand, students want to know why a particular university is indeed an ideal choice for their program and what the university can offer them in return. Contemporary students have become conscious more than ever about the ability of universities to help them achieve their long-term academic goals. But modern education is more than simply an undertaking to achieve academic goals; it must be a rounded edification for personal, professional, and social developments, which recognizes leadership as a core constituent. Therefore, providing 'unique, personal, and memorable educational experience' remains key considerations that students scout from universities, as well as programs likely to enhance career progression [6]. The foregoing analysis informs a somewhat synergetic relationship between universities and students. The former markets the identities of their students. The latter in turn promotes the former's achievements. This mutual relationship involves a set of communication and marketing activities intensified by globalization and digital technology resulting in simplified student recruitment and retention strategies. The ability of a university to realize its strategic long-standing ambitions and have global visibility and impact depends on effective student recruitment strategies, although effective communication with students and alumni remains an essential correlate of such long-term ambitions [7].

Retention

The concept of student retention has significantly attracted much attention in recent time. Policymakers, accrediting bodies, taxpayers, general public, and mostly students, their families and alumni have become highly interested in student retention [8]. Considered the most widely reviewed segment of higher education, retention is now a hot educational concept for stakeholders [9]. Though, the concept lacks a precise authoritative definition despite its growing body of literature. This problem can perhaps be attributed to researchers using retention interchangeably with words of different implications [10]. For example, it has been used synonymously with words

such as 'persistence' and 'attrition' [11]. The concept has also been used to refer to dropout. Consequently, student retention has been defined variously as 'students' continued study until successful completion', the length of time that students continue to study at a particular institution' and is employed as a metric in gauging the ratio of students whose studies endured until completion of a specific qualification the measure of students' direct involvement in the academic and social life of their universities meeting well-defined goals of education, be it course credits, career advancement, or achievement of new skills, a correspondence between student's enthusiasm and academic aptitude, as well as their educational and social personalities, student's successful academic and social assimilation of the college community which is followed by the impression that one fits at the institution with positive learning mindsets and understandings [10,12-16]. Hagedorn also defined retention as a degree of institutional success level, and that persistence is a gauge of student achievement level [17]. The legitimacies of these definitions are arguably based upon the premises scholars have constructed their discourse of theoretical models of student retention [14,16,18-22].

The foregoing definitions, if closely examined, however, point to a common characteristic of student success or a successful completion of program either. But this does not give a broad view of retention with regards to current realities, in the context of student and university needs. For the purpose of this study, retention is defined as an overall measure of student academic progression and success rate following ex-matriculation in relation to continuous supports from their alma mater. This definition provides a rounded understanding founded upon sustainability notion since the overall aim of student recruitment invokes sustainable outcomes that connect university and student long-term ambitions together. Of course, graduation prospect is perhaps a primary correlate of success. Thus, retention is a success factor, a yardstick by which policymakers and parents not only determine program effectiveness, but also university and student performances with regard to percentage of graduated or graduating students. The percentage measure of student success is now a great factor influencing decision on choice of a university as parents, or students make informed study decisions based on a high rate of graduating students [23]. Therefore, retention has an implied connotation with service quality and satisfaction [6].

The path to the finish route in a program could be fraught with insurmountable challenges for many students [24]. This is so as it is one thing to enroll in a program, and another thing to successfully complete it and thrive professionally, both in principle and practice. This means student retention transcends a mere successful graduation, but extends to the prospects of employability and future supports from universities. Falcone has argued that a successful recruitment of students whether international or domestic, demands that students having been recruited and enrolled on a program should be able to attain graduation and post-graduation work [25]. Thus, in essence, the justification of recruitment lies in retention, which is arguably symbolic of either short-range or long-term success for both students and universities.

Ensuring student continuous retention in programs is now a major concern of universities and university administrators likewise [9,26-28]. In some jurisdictions, such as United States, retention rate has become the mainstream education policy whereby policymakers mandate requirements for completing and retaining data for the

purpose of measuring institutional effectiveness of supports from both federal and state levels [8]. There is no doubt that creating conditions for student flourishing has never been more critical [29]. Experts in the field of educational research have over the past years argued that the ability of an institution to entice and recruit prospective students and ensure their ultimate success is interlaced [30-35]. Universities, despite their size and undertaking, have come to terms with this argument that institutional success and of their students are inextricable [14,36]. So, exodus of students despite the situation, whether deliberate or unintentional occasions enormous loss for HEIs [10]. This could be monetary loss, wasted time and unsatisfied potentials, rather than being counted as gainful in terms of greater prospect for employability, substantial income level, improved well-being, and lengthier life expectation [24].

There are factors likely to impair student completion of a program and student retention rate. One such factor is poverty. Poor students usually lack the required resources and freedom to study at first-rate universities, or otherwise universities offering their desired programs mainly due to high cost of tuition fees. They still face the highest risk of dropping out even when enrolled on a program in a low tuition fee university. This scenario generally affects their learning and research performances or outputs. Unfortunately, a large number of universities pay little or no consideration to such scenario when assessing a prospective student for further studies, say master's or doctorates. They have rather commonly linked poor performance or low grades to lack of intelligence. This is an overly generalized notion that continues to affect the visions and prospects of many prospective students to improve their mental and academic capacities and performances. Experience shows that students with poor financial background and assistance are more likely to succeed, and even perform better than their rich-counterparts in a corresponding learning environment. The effect of genetic factors on human intelligence has received vast research [37-39]. This means genetic factors can undermine retention prospect as they affect a student's ability to succeed academically in a program no matter how much supports given to them. This group of students tends to be naturally birdbrained. They have no prospect for intellectual improvement, and are likely to withdraw from their programs for failure to meet a certain required standard or grade. The influence of environment can also affect student retention especially in the context of international studentship [40]. Environmental influence constitutes variables such as climate, socialization, culture, et cetera. These variables could trigger exodus of a student from a program, leading to non-completion. Take for instance; international student exposed to extreme weather faces the risk of dropping out of a program due to inability to cope with the new environment. Overall, students who are exposed to new culture face the risk of culture shock and their inability to adapt to such culture will ultimately trigger their withdrawal from a program. Therefore, effective retention should be process oriented, combining timing at its core. There is a need for problem-oriented student culture for identifying needy and at-risks students and providing intervention timeously.

Research Methodology

This study has adopted a qualitative research methodology, seeking a real-life inquiry for in-depth-understanding of the strategies and methods of student recruitment and retention at higher institutions in Africa and developed or western countries. Thus, in every case, secondary sources of information are used, which primarily constitute journal articles, books or book chapters, blogs, and

technical reports. Though an argument suffices that the primary-secondary variance is indistinct, it is safe to argue that the distinction is clear as long as primary sources are taken to be the inventive written resources derived from the author's experiences, including observations [41]. Therefore, this study examines and compares various western universities recruitment and retention strategies with those utilized at African universities, based on a robust review of existing literature on student recruitment and retention strategies and a blend of the author's experience of past involvement in a somewhat student retention process. The justification of the method adopted derives from the understanding that qualitative studies are indeed very informative about the methods and meanings, replicating how events and the world are viewed and distinguished by the people.

Results

Findings are revealing, showing that student recruitment and retention strategies used at African universities are marginally poor and ridiculously riddled with lack of commitment, professionalism, and diversity principles, as opposed to western higher institutions' practices. The scenario has negatively impacted quality and equity in higher education, mobility rate of international students in Africa, and global visibility of African universities. They also lack equal competition and access to the share of global talents in the global educational market. This disharmony further reflects an unsurprising imbalance of the discourse of student recruitment and retention and demographic distribution of researchers, with western authors taking a lead. There is little or no evidence to show of what student recruitment and strategies used at African universities. One major factor attributable to this scenario is a lack of competition in a truly open enterprise environment. Little or no strong local competition exists among African universities, in the context of student recruitment and retention. They also compete much less with other universities in Europe, America, or even Asia, perhaps due to a growing demand for higher education and increasing number of populations seeking admission into African universities. Therefore, less concern about strategic, innovative approaches for attracting or even retaining prospective students, including talented students arguably remains one of typical characteristics of African universities.

Discussion

There are generally, existing theories of student retention [16]. These theories have, however, tended to isolate recruitment as an underpinning of retention models. One would argue that student recruitment strategies have not quite attracted academic attention despite its age-long existence [19-22]. But the reality is that student recruitment and retention have relatively continued to undergo a monumental transformation in the developed or western jurisdiction, as opposed to practices at African universities. There are various recruitment and retention strategies widely used at western universities, the majority of which have not been adopted by African universities to attract not just prospective students, but also talented students from various jurisdictions globally. These strategies are discussed to include the following [14].

Open Days

Open Day is one of management and marketing strategies at western universities, typically designed as an event to allow prospective students to visit and experience directly the academic activities of a university where they want to study. The event, in most cases, can be open to student's parents as well as visitors. Open Days are no less market days, providing a real market opportunity for

universities and students. Universities at such events demonstrate the uniqueness of their products (education and services), commitment and professionalism while prospective students are provided with a real-life occasion to make an independent evaluation, followed by choice. This choice is about what programs to study and where to study it best, by relatively comparing universities and courses, including costs and other critical socio-cultural issues. The most common approach has been touring a university to learn or make inquiries about its programs, culture and student life on campus, academics and non-academic staff, facilities such as library, hall of residence and student opportunities and activities in terms of clubs and societies. This sort of event-based marketing strategy is scarcely seen in African, save for some universities in South Africa such as University of Cape Town. Open Days can operate with success stories, in the context of African universities. This can be achieved through events designed to allow prospective students from within and outside Africa to tour and explore universities offering programs they are interested in studying. The designing of such events should emphasize on creating a welcoming environment for students and can be fostered by media campaign. But meeting student expectations and university objectives should be at the centrality of Open Days marketing events in Africa.

Campus Tour

Campus Tour means touring a university's campus by prospective students and their parents as the case may be, for the purpose of learning about the university's programs, facilities, culture, student life, academics and non-academic staff. The difference between Campus Tour and Open Days is arguably not always easily distinguished, perhaps as a result of their similar underlying goals. Thus, an Open Day event may sometimes include an activity of campus tour, and as such, both may be regarded as recruitment partners and marketing baits. Despite any commonality, Campus Tour or Open Day either, is likely to be an independent event with comparable benefits of student recruitment and retention; each is predominantly used at western universities. Like Open Days, universities in Africa need to incorporate Campus Tour into their management and marketing strategies. The event could be designed to create a real-life interactive environment for prospective students to be able to make direct enquiry about a university at which they want to study.

Application Fee Waiver

Though application fee is seemingly a source of revenue for universities, it often constitutes a significant burden on prospective students especially international students. The fee can vary not only in amount, but also nomenclature. For example, in most African universities such as Nigerian universities, it is called 'acceptance fee'. But on average, application fee can be \$50. Occasionally, it can cost as much as \$100 or above. The intensification of such cost is likely to occur if an applicant is paying in local currency equivalent to the fee. There is good news, however. Most western universities now allow prospective students from different parts of the world to submit applications on a waiver basis, known as application fee waiver. The fee waiver can be granted to different categories of applicants, for example, applicants who are indigent. This tendency implies that eligibility for any particular application fee waiver depends on certain criteria. Contrarily, application fee waiver is rather a lucrative business for most universities in African. There is a need for African universities to embrace application fee waiver for different categories of applicants, as recruitment strategy. This is highly desirable for attracting people from low economic

backgrounds, and will spur student diversity in the continent.

Alumni Network

The concept of alumni has been defined to mean individuals who have left from any organization or program [42]. This definition seems a bit vague. For the purpose of this study, alumni is defined as a cohort of former students of a university or college who have been graduated upon successful completion of their programs. Thus, alumni network is by implication a network of successful graduates or former students of a university. This network constitutes talented professionals of diverse backgrounds, wealth of experience and expertise. Academic research on alumni network remains quite little. But scholars, HEIs and even graduates have begun to acknowledge the significance and benefits of alumni. This awareness has triggered a call urging universities to build a robust rapport with their alumni [43]. A shared concern among western universities is to getting their alumni involved with university events and progress. They reach out to their alumni for various purposes such as inquiring about the alumni's post study experience (PSE), achievement or progress made or are being made in their respective careers since graduation. Providing update on the progress or achievements made by the university itself has always been part of this objective. This practice exists because it is increasingly believed that alumni are universities' most valued assets [44]. The practice has further inspired the internationalization of alumni agenda, leading to the establishment of alumni movement, alumni associations and alumni offices in different countries by western universities. The internationalization process of alumni certainly provides a point of contact between universities and alumni.

There are benefits of alumni network, which can come in forms: cash or kind. First, alumni have been considered dependable fans or good ambassadors of the universities they graduated from years back [45]. Regarded as talented professionals, alumni impart practical and theoretical experience and skills to current students and can help them launch their careers through job placement [45]. They share informed opinion and practical experience with both prospective and current students, provide them with careers support through initiatives such as mentoring programs, annual reunions, and networking opportunities. They also create capacity for students and help to awaken their awareness about the opportunities in the labor market [42]. Their experience during studies consequently determines what advice or information; whether negative or positive they can pass on to current and prospective students. Thus, alumni can be very instrumental to recruitment of new students [46]. Furthermore, alumni network provides an important platform for professional networking opportunities and a boost to the personal and professional development of the alumni. There is an existing argument that alumni experience has a correlation with the prospect of charity to their alma mater [47]. This means that alumni contribute to the mission of their alma mater. Several western universities often solicit funds from their alumni for supporting causes such as scholarships or grants to economically disadvantaged students. These universities do have alumni funds, and donations from alumni can be put into an endowment fund or re-invested for incremental benefits.

Effective and productive alumni network is a function of an effective institutional management and marketing strategy. This means building and maintaining a dynamic alumni relationship could enormously benefit universities and alumni [45]. The relationship goes down the retention memory-lane, as retention *per se* does not just end with completing programs, but also involves making graduates feel

connected to their alma mater afterwards. But the key to effective alumni is systematic communication, which can be facilitated through social network sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Friendster, as well as other innovative information and communication technology (ICT) tools [48]. This requires effective alumni database or records containing detailed information such as names, phone numbers, email addresses, profession and professional titles, country of origin and residence, marital status, and require regular update. University-alumni relationship can be enhanced and made more productive if the former maintains a more regular contact with the latter, for example, by sending out messages to the alumni on occasions of their birthdays. University of Dundee, United Kingdom where I had worked as an Alumni Student Caller is a perfect example of how a university runs and benefits a network of alumni.

There is little attention given to alumni networks by African universities. But in most cases, alumni networks are formed independently of the alumni, rather than done by their alma mater. Therefore, much is needed for an alumni oriented culture at African universities. The starting point is to ensure timeous data collection and storage from current students who would form the future alumni of their universities. Secondly, African universities would need to design effective recruitment and retention strategies, recognizing alumni as potential assets and good ambassadors. This sense needs to be fostered by effective, routine communication between university alumni or students affairs departments and alumni themselves.

Disability Support

Evidence shows that west universities continue to demonstrate noticeable commitment to disability concern, providing various effective on-campus and off-campus-disability-based supports for both current and prospective students. There are enacted disability laws in most western countries or states, and a good number of universities within the jurisdiction have also adopted university-based disability policies complementing state laws on disability treatment. The provision of disability-based services in the western jurisdiction can be a policy requirement of a university, or in accordance with relevant disability law of particular country either. One way of providing on-campus disability supports to students is by ensuring physical accessibility on the campus as well as in the classrooms. For example, buildings on the campus are always constructed to have accessible entrances for students with disability aids such as wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and crutches. Disabled students are also provided with quiet rooms for exams, 'assistive learning devices' (ALDs), hired certified interpreters, note takers, text to speech software such as 'Kurzweil 3000' and 'word-processor' for easy exams. Generally speaking, the provision of disabled services by universities to students is at the core of equity, equal access to and participation in learning and research. Accordingly, providing supports to disabled applicants and current students is indicative of a university's ethical concern for humanity.

African universities have given almost no consideration to students or applicants with disabilities, even as disabled people require educational supports more than every other normal student. This laxity is manifest in all respects, from their management and marketing strategies, support systems, to basic academic planning. African universities need to consider disabled applicants and students at the core of their recruitment and retention strategies. One way of achieving such goal is by designing marketing strategies, offering study opportunities such as grants, bursaries, and tuition or application fee

waiver to disabled students. Also, there is a need to provide various in-class and on-campus supports for various categories of disabled applicants and students, and ensuring that infrastructures such as classrooms, hall of residences, and libraries have appropriate spaces for disabled students. The creation of disability policy is critical for supporting disabled students, or applicants at African universities.

Recruitment of Underrepresented and International Students

Respect for human race, gender and social class is a hallmark of equal educational opportunity. This concern demands an all-inclusive recruitment and retention of underrepresented and international students. Most western universities have risen to this concern, and at the same time, unsurprisingly scouting a market share of the global education growth. The competition has created a route and increasing concern for recruiting students from different regions, whether underrepresented, locally or internationally. There are usually various programs such as scholarship programs designed to encourage students from underrepresented regions to participate in western educational opportunities. The recruitment of underrepresented and international students is arguably a strategy supporting institutional success. Yet, it may indicate implicit efforts towards ensuring equal access to education as a global cause, and universities benefit from it in terms of attracting talented students and creating intellectually stimulating multicultural learning and research environment.

There are really so many countries in Africa with a seemingly disappointing rate of underrepresented and international students enrolments. Most unfortunately, research is lacking in this area. The marketing strategies of Africa universities can be designed in such a way that international and underrepresented applicants are good targets. The inflow of local and international students in and out of African universities demands accurate documentation, which is very likely to inform policy on higher education. The provision of incentives such as full or partial tuition fee or application fee waiver should be a design element of the marketing strategies at African universities.

Student Loan and Scholarships

Literature shows that recruitment and retention opportunities for supporting student ambition and institutional growth or education sector growth, have not been well documented. The use of scholarships programs to attract and increase access, skills, and training of students for university qualification is one such strategy [49]. Western universities have proven remarkable efforts in the use of scholarships to attracting prospective applicants and supporting current students well into retention. This is one reason western jurisdiction has become a global destination for learning and research. These universities offer prospective and current students various grants or bursaries, and in some cases, designed for diverse need-based and underrepresented students, with minimal nationality limitation. As a particular scholarship may depend on its purpose, scholarships vary in nomenclature, form and content. For example, there are usually fully funded scholarships, partial or tuition fee discount scholarships, and sometimes, students are offered loan-based scholarship for which they will be required to repay upon graduation.

The development in terms of scholarship opportunities for both current and prospective students or applicants still remains significantly low at most African universities. Their marketing strategies need to be honed by considering various categories of

need-based scholarships and other study opportunities as a design element. For example, establishing interest free, soft loan for African nationals would really make a difference for universities that take on such initiative. There is also a demand to provide scholarship study opportunities, including funded summer schools aimed at encouraging international students to study in the continent. Funds can be raised from different means not limited to seeking donations or endowments from individuals, alumni, and engaging in some sort of partnerships with other universities, governments, and independent organizations. These funding opportunities exist in addition to university statutory allocation.

Internet Recruitment

The Internet has brought a defining moment of development for universities especially in the western jurisdiction. This development is partly evident in the use of website for student recruitment, and it remains the backbone of western universities management and marketing strategies. The use of website and associated social media or social network platforms such as Facebook, has virtually helped western universities recruit not only local students, but also international students at the comfort of their home countries. Social network platforms help for quick dissemination of information to alumni, current, and prospective students, and to get them connected. Distance Learning (DL), a sort of onshore or offshore education provided remotely through an interactive virtual platform for students who would ordinarily not be physically present at a school is certainly a transformation that the Internet has brought in the education sector. This transformation continues to shape how education is offered to various categories of need-based students across the world. For western universities, it is an important recruitment strategy.

Presumably, it may be argued that every university in Africa has a website and conducts its recruitment and other registrations online. Even if it is true, students in most parts of the continent still face unbearable challenges of Internet services, not to talk of being provided with free, reliable Wi-Fi and related internet services by their universities. For example, student recruitment process in Africa remains complicated, as the majority of universities still combine website recruitment with traditional mode of recruitment. These universities have websites that lack basic features and platforms not functional enough to allow students, for examples, complete registration online, pay tuition fees, and acceptance or application fees. Therefore, students after online registrations are still required to make some payments at the bank, or as the case may be, in a university office. Contrastingly, a university website in the western jurisdiction is nearly, predictably user-friendly at all times, and provides applicants with every information they would need, and are able to make online enquires, submit online applications, and pay required fees without any hitches.

To compete both locally and internationally, universities in Africa must see Internet as a one bus stop for the marketing of higher education, in particular, for student management and recruitment. This means a commitment to providing enhanced, reliable, user-friendly websites with basic features, allowing prospective students or applicants to remotely browse about a university products, make enquiries, and complete online registrations, including executing other desirable tasks online. The universities also need to recognize some services such as providing free Wi-Fi and email services for students, and effective platforms that support DL.

Study Experience Testimony

The use of student or alumni study experience testimony (SET) is one important marketing strategy of western universities. Study experience can be past or current, depending on its purpose and who is giving it. On the one part, it is past if alumni are asked to give objective view of their experiences during a course study. The other part takes a different dimension, in the context of end-of-course student evaluation, a system of gathering informative, positive or negative feedbacks from students about their instructors and courses taught them by the instructors, usually at the end of every semester [50]. Nevertheless, in both cases, SET and end-of-course evaluation constitute strategies for higher education management and marketing. For example, testimonies are made available in online platforms, including online or printed prospectus, and are used as baits for recruiting prospective students. At African universities, no attention is given to study experience of alumni. For current students, very few universities conduct end-of-course student evaluation at the end of semester courses. Both SET and end-of-course student evaluation can provide African universities with an effective student recruitment strategy. The universities will need to request study experience from alumni and current student, which can be made available online or offline either, for the purpose of attracting prospective student applicants.

Prospectus and Flyers

The use of online and printed prospectus, as well as flyers is one of marketing strategies with which western universities sell their products to potential students. Likewise, printed flyers providing a brief program, and or university information could be kept at foyers for picking by anyone. As marketing materials, prospectus and flyers provide wealth of information for prospective applicants and new current students regarding a university and its programs. Remarkably, attention is being shifted from printed prospectus to online prospectus because the latter is cost-effective. Nonetheless, it is a hard truth to argue that not even printed prospectus can be seen at very many African universities. The use of printed posters to advertise for admissions recruitment is rather a common trend in some of the universities. Therefore, it is imperative for universities in the continent to adopt a prospectus-based recruitment strategy, among every other strategy reviewed herein. This calls for designing a prospectus providing a variety of information on a university, its products, and any information necessary to assist prospective applicants make a comparative choice for their studies.

Principles of Student Recruitment and Retention Commitment

The fountain of effective student recruitment and retention is commitment. This has been particularly viewed as the first principle of efficient retention agendas, which is contingent on an institution's scholastic mission [14]. By implication, a university's mission is, in part, a determinant of its level of commitment. Accordingly, effective recruitment and retention may depend on what mission the university professes. Though commitment is arguably one typical characteristic of a world-class university, current students as well as alumni are the hallmark of a world-class university. Furthermore, prospective students are also part of this hallmark since the reputation and growth of a university is likely to be influenced by the quality of future students to be recruited. This impliedly means that students, including alumni are at the centrality of an overall learning and research objective of a university. Therefore, for a university to attain a world-class status, it must show a level-rounded commitment to the

needs and success of their students and alumni. This in turn supports the university to achieve its own institutional success and growth.

For western universities, commitment to institutional mission and student expectations is a core principle of management and marketing strategies. This is one primary reason almost every western university still maintains reputation and topping world university rankings. These universities have clear programs durations with no likely hitches. On a contrary note, commitment to institutional mission and student goals is a major problem of most African universities. The lack of which has resulted in so many consequences such as unproductiveness in learning and research outputs and unpredictable period of program completion especially for postgraduate programs. These issues are most disappointing in Nigerian universities where research outputs in particular, do not have any meaningful impacts on policy, and postgraduate programs can last 3 to 5 years for master's and 7 to 15 years for doctorates. Most Africans now prefer to study overseas due to a more highly reliable and predictable educational system.

Professionalism

Professionalism is a principle of student recruitment and retention, and has three elements: competence, honest judgment, and good comportment. The first element demands that university admissions recruitment officers or managers need to be people who are adept in student recruitment and retention strategies. They must be people with specialty skills and knowledge in university management and marketing, and whose qualifications resonate with their expertise. On the second element, admissions officers or managers ought to be capable of demonstrating a highly acceptable level of independent good judgment. This means admissions need be offered to prospective students on the basis of merit determined by laid down criteria. Overall, admissions recruitment officers or managers ought to demonstrate best acceptable behavior and appreciable sense of receptiveness and respect towards every prospective applicant, irrespective of their gender, race, social status, political, and regions affiliations. These virtues create a self-influencing market for universities, and are ethically one characteristic hallmark of an effective management and marketing strategy.

The problem with some African universities is that the majority of admissions officers or managers do not always keep abreast of recent recruitment strategies in the market. They hardly lead any innovation in their roles, perhaps as some of them are non-specialists in management and marketing of universities. This situation is in contrast to western universities' practice, where student recruitment is a critical role of admissions recruitment managers who have cognate experience and skills in higher education management and marketing. Thus, universities in Africa have an obligation to ensure that people who man recruitment role are human resources experts with cognate experience in higher education marketing.

Student Diversity

One other principle of student recruitment and retention is diversity. This concept simply refers to a diverse group of students possessing individualistic personality, ability and disability from different socio-economic, political, cultural and religious backgrounds. Diversity is a recipe that combines openness, equity, transparency, inclusiveness, gender sensitivity, and respect inside and outside the cocktail of management and marketing strategies. As a principle, it brings candor to modern education and fosters an active learning and research environment. Furthermore, it enhances retention if a

diverse group is allowed to engage with manifold perceptions and enrich the classroom and educational outcomes by adapting relevant multicultural teaching practices [51].

Most universities in the western jurisdiction can be seen to have prioritized diversity principle in their recruitment and retention strategies, and providing special programs for a range of applicants, including underrepresented and disabled students from various part of the world. The uniqueness of such diverse group can significantly shape learning, research and experience in an academic environment [52]. On the contrary, diversity principle has left a void in the recruitment and management strategies of African universities. Majorly, recruitment strategies in Africa target primarily local applicants of a country [53]. There is hardly a good mix of African nationals, much less of students from other parts of the world, say Europe, America, and Asia in African universities.

Conclusion

Student recruitment and retention strategies constitute a usual, but critical aspect of university management and marketing, no matter the jurisdiction of any university in the world. The internationalization of higher education with globalization has indeed transformed how early universities recruited and retained prospective students. This shift has brought about global talent competition among world universities. Most importantly, it has spurred a pathway for realizing and sustaining long-term educational objectives of universities, students, and alumni alike. The reality of course is that while student recruitment and retention have endured remarkable rejuvenation at western universities, little progress has been made regarding recruitment and retention strategies at the universities in Africa. There is an observed stark disproportionate benefit of higher education marketing, occasioned in part by less transformation in the recruitment and retention strategies of African universities. The rejuvenation of recruitment and retention strategies in the western jurisdiction has, however, activated interest among African universities to a minimal extent noticeable.

This study has broad implications for African universities, in the context of management and marketing, research and learning. Theoretical models and literature imply that student recruitment and retention should be addressed within the academic and social contexts. African universities, in attempting to realize their own educational objectives, will need to ensure student and alumni long-term academic and professional success by integration into a social system that recognizes student backgrounds and demographics. This requires managers who are professionally adept in management and marketing of higher education. Effective communication, professional development, quality and equal access to educational opportunities, and most importantly, scholarship and training opportunities for students that are extremely vulnerable are at the centrality of such need. Most importantly, university vice chancellors, administrators, or managers in Africa universities, will need to increase commitment and efforts by making significant investment in new, innovative student recruitment and retention strategies to offer services that lead to equal competition and recruitment and retention of best talented students in the global educational market. Accordingly, vice chancellors, administrators, managers, student recruitment and student affairs departments or admissions offices, including alumni departments need to look beyond African context and learn from the experience of western universities. They will also need to ensure commitment, professionalism, and diversity principles are

embedded in their management and marketing strategies.

This study is, however, not directed on any particular university's context of management and marketing strategies. Again, it does not claim to have examined every single student recruitment and retention strategy used by western universities. But due diligent effort has been made for a holistic examination of various recruitment and retention strategies prevalently used in the western jurisdiction. The study provides a prospect and framework for future studies on educational policy issues, planning of student recruitment and retention strategies and methods, and the overall management and marketing of higher education in Africa. Therefore, stakeholders in the education sector such as policymakers, governments, HEIs and parents, including graduate alumni and current students will find this study an invaluable source material.

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