Focus Learning Support: Rising to Educational Challenges

III ISCEST Conference, Nigeria, December 2016

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Focus of this paper:

- **Context:** the role of education in national development of Nigeria;

- **Role and activities of Focus Learning Support (FLS),** which supports students from overseas to study in UK universities and colleges;

- **Students’ views** on how the support provided by FLS has helped them to realise their academic and career goals.
Context: Nigerian perspective

- Despite economic challenges, education still viewed as key to national development.
- Government and parents invest heavily in the education of the youth, at home & overseas.
- Nigerian education system and programmes have expanded rapidly since the 1960s.
- Recent reforms aim to bring Nigerian universities in line with international good practice in Higher Education.
Rising education standards in Nigeria from 1960s – 1980s supported by:

- Regular federal and state government scholarships for home and overseas studies.
- Easy school access from north to south and vice versa.
- Organised extra-curricular activities.
- Healthy peer-group ‘academic competitions’.
- A clear commitment from school administrators and teachers/instructors/professors to students’ academic success and overall development.
- Intercollegiate sports were well-funded (Torulagha, undated).
Globalisation, Technology and Education

- Globalisation has provided new opportunities and incentives for students to study overseas.
- ICT has key role to play in bridging skills gaps and supporting educated, professional workforce.
- FLS recognises this as key area for intervention and action.
UK Higher Education student numbers increased by 28% in decade to 2011.

Of 1.8M full-time undergraduates in 2011, over 100,000 were from overseas.

Overseas student attracted by the quality of UK universities, gaining quality-assured and recognised ‘English’ qualifications, and multi-cultural learning environment.
FLS Mission

- FLS works to **educate** and **empower** students, families and interested persons by **bridging the educational gaps** that prevent them from realising their fullest potential.

- FLS emphasises that educational development is a **lifelong learning** venture that merits continuous support from various societal organisation and institutions.

- FLS, with assistance from **community alliances**, embarks on a variety of **teaching and learning activities** to help it to fulfil its aims.
FLS Activities

- Recruitment of international students
- Saturday School
- Educational TV Programmes
- Panel discussions
- Tutorials and supervision
- Seminars and conferences
Challenges students face

- ICT skills
- Financial barriers
- Institutional issues
- Culture shock
- Integration into a new academic environment
- Racial discrimination
- Personal problems
- Family issues
- Tier 4 immigration rules and regulations.
Methodology

- Current and past data from FLS students
- Quantitative and qualitative data including:
  - Questionnaires
  - Focus groups
  - Interviews
Student X: “Like every other student that has just arrived from Africa for the first time, I faced many challenges. These challenges were mainly centred on adapting to both social and educational life here in the United Kingdom. This was mainly as a result of the wide difference between the African and the British society… The challenges I faced was very much reduced when I was introduced to the Focus Learning Support Limited.”
Student Y: “I came from Nigeria as a mature student with no ICT skills. I found it rather difficult to cope with my studies because I had to use computers to do my assignments and class presentations. In fact, everything I did revolved around ICT.”
Conclusions

- The recruited students face numerous challenges in the UK.

- These challenges have been overcome by FLS support and dedication by the students to gaining a British qualification.

- FLS has been making a positive impact on some students’ educational progress.

- To continue to make meaningful gains, FLS should consider all costs involved in their support to boost education for all and retain a Nigerian cultural direction in all its dealings.


Literature