

INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SERVICES ON STUDENTS RETENTION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated Influence of educational management support services on students retention in public universities in Rivers State. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population stood at 12,543 which comprised 3,762 lecturers and 8,780 students across public universities in Rivers State. The sample size which stood at 745 respondents, was determined using Taro Yamen formula. Stratified sampling technique was use in selecting the respondents, comprising 362 lecturers and 383 students in public universities in Rivers State. The instruments for data collection were two self-structured questionnaires titled: "Influence of Educational Management Support Services Questionnaire (IEMSSQ) and Students Retention in Public Universities Questionnaire (SRPUQ)". The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation in Rivers State University. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the overall reliability index of 0.81. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while z-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that, academic advising services, Counselling and Psychological Services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends among others that, Heads of Departments and Deans of faculties in the various Universities should make academic advising, counselling and Psychological Services core components of student support services.

Keywords: *Educational Management, Influence, Students Retention, Support Services, Public Universities*

Introduction

Student retention has become a pressing concern in public universities across Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State. The ability of institutions to retain students from admission through graduation is indicative of a functional and student-centred academic system. Various factors contribute to student dropout, such as academic challenges, poor learning environments, lack of financial aid, inadequate support services, and low student engagement (Okereke & Onuoha, 2022). Educational management support services, ranging from academic advising, counselling, library services, to career guidance, play a pivotal role in enhancing students' academic and emotional well-being, thereby increasing their likelihood of staying in school and completing their programs (Nwosu & Okonkwo, 2023).

Educational management support services are essential institutional mechanisms that facilitate teaching and learning processes while ensuring that students receive adequate non-instructional support. Services such as orientation programs, mentoring, psychological counselling, and academic support have been recognized as influential in addressing students' diverse needs and challenges (Adeyemi & Ebere, 2021). When effectively implemented,

these services provide a framework that fosters a sense of belonging, academic satisfaction, and resilience among students, which are key indicators of retention and success in higher education. The type of educational management support services that influence students' retention in public universities include; academic advising services, counselling and psychological services.

Academic advising services refer to structured, student-centred guidance systems within higher institutions that support students in making informed decisions about their academic journeys. These services involve professional advisors or faculty members assisting students with course selection, academic planning, and goal setting, while also addressing personal or career-related challenges that may impact academic success (Nwosu & Okonkwo, 2023). Academic advising is not limited to registration or curriculum explanations; it is a holistic, developmental process aimed at fostering students' intellectual and personal growth. Through consistent and personalized interactions, students gain clarity about academic expectations, institutional policies, degree requirements, and future career paths. This proactive guidance cultivates a sense of direction and empowerment among students, significantly reducing the likelihood of academic failure or disengagement (Adebayo, 2022).

The connection between academic advising and student retention is widely acknowledged in recent empirical studies. Effective advising serves as critical intervention strategies that address issues such as poor academic performance, lack of motivation, and misalignment of academic and career goals, all of which are leading causes of student dropout in Nigerian public universities. Advising creates a structured support system where students feel heard, guided, and prepared to tackle academic challenges (Adebayo, 2022). Research by Okeke and Nwachukwu (2023) found that students who regularly engaged with academic advisors had significantly higher retention rates and academic success compared to their peers who lacked access to such services. Thus, institutional commitment to comprehensive academic advising is a strategic imperative for improving student retention and ensuring sustainable academic development in public universities.

Counselling and psychological services in public universities refer to organized professional support systems designed to assist students in managing emotional, psychological, and social challenges that may hinder their academic progress and overall well-being. These services include individual and group counselling, mental health awareness programs, crisis intervention, and psycho-educational workshops (Adeniyi & Afolayan, 2022). The goal of such services is to promote mental health, emotional stability, and adaptive coping mechanisms among students. Given the increasing pressures associated with university life, such as academic demands, peer relationships, financial stress, and family expectations, students often experience anxiety, depression, and burnout. By offering therapeutic support, counselling units help students build resilience and maintain psychological balance, which directly contributes to their ability to remain focused and persist in their academic journey (Ezeonu & Uwakwe, 2023).

The influence of counselling and psychological services on student retention in public universities cannot be overemphasized. Empirical research has shown that students who engage with these support services are more likely to remain enrolled, perform better academically, and report higher satisfaction with their university experience (Ezeonu & Uwakwe, 2023). Counselling provides a safe, confidential space for students to express their struggles and receive professional guidance, thereby reducing the risk of academic withdrawal or dropout. Moreover, psychological services play a crucial role in early detection and management of mental health disorders that may affect concentration, motivation, and classroom participation. According to Nwankwo and Bello (2023), institutions that integrate

mental wellness programs into their student support frameworks experience a significant reduction in attrition rates. Therefore, the availability and accessibility of counselling and psychological services are essential strategies for improving student retention and fostering a supportive learning environment in Nigerian public universities.

Student retention in public universities refers to the capacity of an institution to ensure that students persist in their academic journey from the point of admission through to the completion of their programs. It encompasses the strategies, policies, and institutional support systems put in place to reduce dropout rates and help students successfully progress through various academic levels (Obasi & Eke, 2022). Retention is a critical indicator of institutional effectiveness and quality education delivery. Factors such as academic advising, financial aid, mentoring, student engagement, and campus support services play essential roles in determining whether students stay enrolled or withdraw. In public universities, especially in contexts like Nigeria where access to education is competitive and resources are often limited, high retention rates are crucial for national development, as they contribute to a more educated workforce and reduced wastage of educational investments (Olaniyan & Ojo, 2023). Retention is not merely about keeping students within the school system, but also involves creating a conducive learning environment where students feel supported, motivated, and equipped to overcome personal and academic challenges. Poor retention rates can result from issues such as inadequate student support services, poor teaching quality, financial difficulties, mental health problems, and a lack of institutional responsiveness to students' needs. Conversely, when universities prioritize retention by addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, such as counselling, academic support, housing, and career guidance, students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and commitment to completing their studies. Research by Nwankwo and Adebayo (2023) emphasizes that student-centred approaches significantly improve persistence and reduce attrition in public universities, ultimately enhancing both individual student success and the reputation of the institution.

In Rivers State, the retention rate in public universities has witnessed fluctuations due to several systemic and socio-economic factors. The implementation of educational support services, when aligned with students' evolving needs, can address the retention gap and improve institutional outcomes. Recent studies have emphasized the necessity of structured student support systems to enhance learning outcomes and reduce attrition (Chukwu & Ibiene, 2023). Unfortunately, many universities still grapple with under-resourced or poorly coordinated support services, leading to student dissatisfaction and premature withdrawal from academic programs. Therefore, examining the influence of educational management support services on student retention in public universities in Rivers State is critical for promoting sustainable development and academic success. This study highlights how such services, if properly harnessed, can influence significantly to student persistence, institutional efficiency, and overall educational quality.

Statement of the Problem

Student retention remains a critical concern in public universities across Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State. Despite increased enrolment rates in higher education, a significant number of students fail to complete their academic programs, leading to high dropout rates and wasted educational investments. Educational management support services, such as academic advising, counselling, financial aid, health services, mentorship programs, and learning support centres are designed to enhance the student experience and improve academic success. However, there is growing concern that the availability, accessibility, and

effectiveness of these support services in public universities are either inadequate or inconsistently implemented, thereby contributing to low retention rates. The persistent attrition among undergraduates raises questions about the level of support students receive in navigating academic, financial, social, and emotional challenges during their university education.

The gap between the existence of support services and actual student retention outcomes suggests that these services may not be adequately structured, monitored, or aligned with the specific needs of students in public universities in Rivers State. For instance, poorly organized counselling services, insufficient academic advising, lack of career guidance, and bureaucratic delays in financial aid disbursement may discourage students from remaining committed to their studies. Additionally, large student populations, limited staff capacity, and funding constraints may further hinder the delivery of personalized and impactful support. Consequently, many students feel disconnected, unsupported, and overwhelmed by institutional demands, ultimately leading them to withdraw from their programs prematurely. Previous research on student retention in Nigerian universities focused primarily on factors such as academic performance, socio-economic background, infrastructural deficits, and lecturer-student relationships. For instance, studies by Okolie and Igwe (2021) and Adebayo (2020) have emphasized financial hardship, lack of accommodation, and academic stress as key contributors to student dropouts. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often treat educational support services as peripheral or secondary issues, rather than as central components of institutional responsibility and strategic planning. Moreover, many of these earlier works have not sufficiently examined how the systematic management and coordination of support services through policies, leadership structures, and funding directly influence students' decisions to remain in or leave university.

This study addressed the gap by focusing explicitly on the influence of educational management support services as a strategic management function on student retention in public universities in Rivers State. Unlike previous studies that treated support services as isolated or background variables, this study positioned them at the centre of institutional effectiveness and student success. Therefore, the researcher investigates;

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of educational management support services on students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study:

1. determined the extent Academic advising services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.
2. examined the extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do academic advice services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State?
2. To what extent do counselling and psychological services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent academic advising services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent counselling and psychological Services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population stood at 12,543 which comprised 3,762 lecturers and 8,780 students across public universities in Rivers State, which include University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University. The sample size which stood at 745 respondents, was determined using Taro Yamen formula. Stratified sampling technique was use in selecting the respondents, comprising of 362 lecturers (135 lecturers from University of Port Harcourt, 130 lecturers from Rivers State University and 97 lecturers from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education) and 383 students (145 students from University of Port Harcourt, 138 students from Rivers State University and 100 students from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education) in public universities in Rivers State. The instrument for data collection was two self-structured questionnaires titled: "Influence of Educational Management Support Services Questionnaire (IEMSSQ) and Students Retention in Public Universities Questionnaire (SRPUQ)". The questionnaire was structured using a five-point summated rating response scale of: Very High Extent (VHE) = 5 points, High Extent (HE) = 4 points, Undecided Extent (UE) = 3Points, Low Extent (LE) = 2 points, Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 point. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by two experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation in Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method. A cumulative reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the research questions. The criterion mean that was used in scoring the instrument is 3.00 which signify that the respondents Agree to the item (to a High Extent), as items below 3.00 denotes (Low Extent). It was gotten by summing up the weighted points and divided by 5. The hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was to accept the null hypotheses where the calculated z-value is less than z-critical value of ± 1.96 , but reject the null hypotheses where the calculated z-value is greater than z-critical value of ± 1.96 .

Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent do academic advice services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 1

Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Extent Academic Advise Services Influence Students' Retention in Public Universities in Rivers State

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Lecturers N= 362		Students N=383		Average mean	Std	RMK
		\bar{X}_1	Std ₁	\bar{X}_2	Std ₂			
1.	Academic advising helps students develop structured academic plans tailored to their goals and abilities, ensuring they stay on track and complete their programs successfully.	3.65	0.89	3.69	0.87	3.67	0.88	HE
2.	Advisors detect early signs of academic or personal challenges through regular interactions, allowing timely interventions that prevent dropout or failure.	4.19	1.33	4.20	1.29	4.19	1.31	HE
3.	By helping students align their courses with long-term career aspirations, academic advisors enhance students' sense of purpose and motivation to persist in their studies.	3.00	0.68	3.02	0.67	3.01	0.68	HE
4.	Advisor's guide students in selecting appropriate courses that match their interests and program requirements, reducing academic frustration and delays in graduation.	3.07	0.78	3.09	0.78	3.08	0.79	HE
5.	Through advising sessions, students receive guidance on managing time effectively and developing study strategies, which contribute to academic success and retention.	3.00	0.75	3.03	0.74	3.02	0.75	HE
Aggregate Mean/SD for Lecturers and Students		3.38	0.89	3.41	0.87	3.39	0.88	HE

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 1 in response to research question 1 which states, to what extent do Academic advise services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State had the following opinion scores for both lecturers and students. Mean scores of the lecturers to questionnaire items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were 3.65, 4.19, 3.00, 3.07 and 3.00 with standard deviations of 0.89, 1.33, 0.68, 0.78 and 0.75 while the mean scores of the students were 3.69, 4.20, 3.02, 3.09 and 3.03 with standard deviation of 0.87, 1.29, 0.67, 0.78 and 0.74. Furthermore, the mean set representing the average mean scores for both lecturers and students were 3.67, 4.19, 3.01, 3.08 and 3.02; with standard deviation of 0.88, 1.31, 0.68, 0.79 and 0.75 respectively. The

readings which were higher than the criterion mean of 3.00 indicated that Academic advice services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent do counselling and Psychological Services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Lecturers N= 362		Students N=383		Average mean	Std	RMK
		\bar{X}_1	Std ₁	\bar{X}_2	Std ₂			
6.	Counselling services help students manage stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges, promoting emotional well-being and reducing dropout tendencies.	3.75	0.86	3.75	0.83	3.75	0.85	HE
7.	Through psychological support, students develop stronger coping strategies to handle academic, financial, or personal pressures, increasing their ability to stay in school.	4.34	1.18	4.44	1.12	4.39	1.15	VHE
8.	By addressing psychological barriers to learning such as low self-esteem or test anxiety students become more academically focused and less likely to withdraw.	3.72	1.65	3.78	1.48	3.75	1.32	HE
9.	Counselling promotes interpersonal effectiveness, helping students form healthy peer and faculty relationships that support a positive and inclusive campus experience.	3.59	0.96	3.63	0.90	3.61	0.93	HE
10.	Psychological services offer guidance on managing substance use, risky sexual behaviours, and violence, all of which can derail academic pursuits if not addressed.	3.72	0.87	3.82	0.82	3.77	0.85	HE
Aggregate Mean/SD for Lecturers and Students		3.83	1.10	3.88	1.03	3.85	1.02	VHE

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Table 2 in response to research question 2 which states, to what extent do Counselling and Psychological Services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State had the following opinion scores for both lecturers and students. Mean scores of the lecturers to questionnaire items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were 3.75, 4.34, 3.72, 3.59 and 3.72 with standard deviations of 0.86, 1.18, 1.65, 0.96 and 0.87 while the mean scores of the students were 3.75,

4.44, 3.78, 3.63 and 3.82 with standard deviation of 0.83, 1.12, 1.48, 0.90 and 0.82. Furthermore, the mean set representing the average mean scores for both lecturers and students were 3.75, 4.39, 3.75, 3.61 and 3.77; with standard deviation of 0.85, 1.15, 1.32, 0.93 and 0.85 respectively. The readings which were higher than the criterion mean of 3.00 indicated that Counselling and Psychological Services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Hypotheses Testing

1. There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent academic advising services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 3

Z-test Analysis on the Extent Academic Advising Services Influence Students' Retention in Public Universities in Rivers State

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	Std.	df	z-cal	z-crit	LS	Decision
Lecturers	362	3.38	0.89					
				743	0.79	±1.96	0.05	
Students								Accepted
	383	3.41	0.87					

Source: Field Survey (2025).

The result on Table 3 above shows Z-test Analysis on the extent Academic advising services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. The result on the table showed that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent Academic advising services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. The result on the table further showed a z-calculated value of 0.79 which was less than the z-critical value of ±1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and with a degree of freedom of 743, since the z-calculated (0.79) was less than the z-tabulated (±1.96), the null hypothesis was accepted which states that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent Academic advising services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

2. There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Table 4

Z-test Analysis on the Extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Respondents	N	\bar{x}	Std.	df	z-cal	z-crit	LS	Decision
Lecturers	362	3.83	1.10					

			743	0.69	±1.96	0.05	Accepted
Students	383	3.88	1.03				

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 above shows Z-test Analysis on the extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. The result on the table showed that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. The result on the table further showed a z-calculated value of 0.69 which was less than the z-critical value of ±1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and with a degree of freedom of 743, since the z-calculated (0.69) was less than the z-tabulated (±1.96), the null hypothesis was accepted which states that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent counselling and psychological services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 in response to research question 1 which states, to what extent do academic advising services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. Indicates that; academic advising helps students develop structured academic plans tailored to their goals and abilities, ensuring they stay on track and complete their programs successfully. Through advising sessions, students receive guidance on managing time effectively and developing study strategies, which contribute to academic success and retention. The findings are in line with Adebayo (2022), who opined that, effective advising serves as a critical intervention strategy addresses issues such as poor academic performance, lack of motivation, and misalignment of academic and career goals, all of which are leading causes of student dropout in Nigerian public universities. Through consistent and personalized interactions, students gain clarity about academic expectations, institutional policies, degree requirements, and future career paths. This proactive guidance cultivates a sense of direction and empowerment among students, significantly reducing the likelihood of academic failure or disengagement. Research by Okeke and Nwachukwu (2023) found that students who regularly engaged with academic advisors had significantly higher retention rates and academic success compared to their peers who lacked access to such services. Thus, institutional commitment to comprehensive academic advising is a strategy that plays a crucial role in early identification of at-risk students and timely referral to necessary support services, imperative for improving student retention and ensuring sustainable academic development in public universities.

Table 2 showed that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of lecturers and students on the extent Counselling and Psychological Services influence students’ retention in Public Universities in Rivers State. In simple terms. The study looked at what lecturers and students think about how much counselling and psychological services help keep students from dropping out of public universities in Rivers State. This result was in line with that of Ezeonu and Uwakwe (2023) who opined that, given the increasing pressures associated with university life such as academic demands, peer relationships, financial stress, and family expectations students often experience anxiety, depression, and burnout. By offering therapeutic support, counselling units’ help students build resilience and maintain

psychological balance, which directly contributes to their ability to remain focused and persist in their academic journey. Also, Nwankwo and Bello (2023) opined that, institutions that integrate mental wellness programs into their student support frameworks experience a significant reduction in attrition rates. Therefore, the availability and accessibility of counselling and psychological services are essential strategies for improving student retention and fostering a supportive learning environment in Nigeria public universities.

Conclusion

The influence of educational management support services on student retention in public universities in Rivers State cannot be overstated. These services ranging from academic advising, counselling, financial assistance, mentorship, to health and wellness programs play a crucial role in shaping students' academic journeys and ensuring they stay engaged and committed to completing their studies. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that, academic advising services, counselling and psychological services influence students' retention in Public Universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Building on the results of the study, the researcher discovered that academic advising services and counselling and psychological services have a strong positive influence on keeping students enrolled in public universities in Rivers State. This means that when students receive proper guidance on their academic journey, as well as emotional and psychological support, they are more likely to stay in school and complete their studies. Thus, these support services, especially academic advising and counselling, greatly contribute to student retention. In simpler terms, students are less likely to drop out when they receive help with their academic choices and have access to professionals who can help them manage stress, anxiety, and other personal issues.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Heads of Departments and Deans of faculties in the various Universities should make academic advising, counselling and psychological services as core components of student support services.
2. Academic advising, counselling and psychological services should not be treated as occasional or emergency services but integrated into the student lifecycle
3. Regular workshops, mentorship programs and check-ins should be held to proactively address academic stress, mental health issues, and personal development needs.

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