

Balancing Privileges and Responsibilities of University Students: A Case of Students of Veritas University Abuja

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Abstract

This paper presents a study conducted in Veritas University, Abuja. The motivation came from a passionate concern for a society that is unable to appreciate privileges and assume the responsibilities commensurate with privileges enjoyed. Being in the university is a privilege that is not enjoyed by every young person. Yet, Nigerian university students have been observed to be reluctant to execute responsibilities attached to the privileges they enjoy. The study employed a survey design involving 120 200 level students. The findings show that the students are ignorant of the fact that their being in the University is a privilege. They agree that they owe their sponsors, the institution as well as themselves a responsibility to study hard for their grades and assume leadership in preparation for their future roles as citizens of the country. They also agree that they need to be able to maintain facilities for the common good of all. They do not agree that the university is helping them to assume responsibility to develop holistically. The study concludes with recommendations to include that the university needs to do more to harness human and material resources to enhance a balance of privilege and responsibility among the students.

Keywords: privilege, responsibility, benefit, duty, and advantage.

Introduction

For a long time, the balancing of responsibility has been a vexed issue. The motivation for this paper stemmed from the observed lack of commitment to academic relationships among students and between students and university functionaries. People assume rights without recognizing that their state or position in life is a privilege and that something will be required of them in return. Students fail to realize that they are in a social and academic relationship with privileges and responsibilities that go along with being in the university. A lot is taken for granted when people do not accept their roles or the roles of other players in a relationship. And, unless this is addressed, the goals of such interpersonal relationship in an academic environment may never be attained. When one is in a privileged position, he/she hardly can appraise him/herself.

When the same person is in a deprived situation, he/she is able to see what privileges other people might be enjoying. Then, one can assess the performance of the other and proffer ways in which a person in that position should perform which is similar to what happens on the football pitch when a spectator thinks he/she can play better than the players. It is noteworthy that striking a balance between privilege and responsibility in young people would help in building stronger personalities for the future.

Privileges and responsibilities are two sides of a coin. Allusion to the two words are made in talks concerning parenting, child formation, social relationships issues bordering on justice and conflict management among others. The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary and The English Language Companion present privilege as a peculiar benefit to a person, an advantage or favour- a right or immunity not enjoyed by everybody in a group. It could also mean a special enjoyment of a good; a prerogative or advantage, a franchise, preferential treatment or exemption from an evil or burden. Fritz (2003) sermonises that people need to be told their responsibilities along with privileges so that they can assume ownership of the tasks they engage in to avoid wasting their opportunities.

In general, a privilege is a *right* or something to be expected by virtue of being in a particular situation. It may be a human right that one has (or should have) along with every other human simply because they are human. Or it may be a *civil right* that one has (or should have) because they are citizens of a community. Privileges should be the *earned rights* which are actually benefits accruing to people when they have faithfully served in some capacity and fall to people because of the efforts they have made to fulfil a responsibility. Shanmugan (2010) states that every responsibility well executed earns additional benefits or privileges such as rewards, commendation, promotion and so on which calls to mind Jesus' story about the servant who was faithful in little tasks and as a result earned a greater trust with responsibility and therefore, higher privileges.

A school is a privileged place where issues bordering on responsibilities take centre stage; learners are called upon to exhibit a sense of responsibility in several aspects of life such that they may assume greater responsibilities when they complete their schooling. Wallace Foundation points to the fact that in school, management, staff and students have a privilege to relate in a learning environment and a responsibility to each and one another in order to perform goal driving tasks which include:

- a) Creating a successful learning community ,
- b) Creating a conducive and hospitable climate to enhance learning,
- c) Cultivating good leadership at the various levels,

- d) Working to improve instruction as well as
- e) Managing inter-personal relationships,
- f) Managing data and processes that will bring about fulfilment in self and others in the community of practice

Smith (2008) presents a Queen's University programme that encourages within its students an understanding of, and commitment to good citizenship. The purpose of the student Code of Conduct is to acknowledge the academic and social responsibilities associated with students for reasons more compelling than tradition alone. The process of applying for admission, competing for finite spaces and accepting an offer to attend, all contribute to a sense of group identification that continues beyond the years of study. Smith's presentation is similar to what is obtainable in Veritas University, Abuja.

In Nigeria, students apply for admission to all tertiary institutions through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). When they are offered a place, accepting the offer of admission to any university is based on each applicant's individual assessment of what the university has to offer in many different areas of personal interest. However, put simply, the procedure of offer and acceptance creates a contractual relationship between the institution and the student. Acceptance of the offer is optional and voluntary and as with most contracts, terms and conditions apply which are set out in University publications such as admission documents, Students Handbooks, and Code of Conduct documents. Academic and social privileges are conditional upon fulfilment of the responsibilities that come with membership. By way of the contractual relationship, jurisdiction to address academic and non-academic behaviour is established. The jurisdiction created is between the institution and the individual and not confined to university property because the university's interests are not confined by territorial boundaries. Nonetheless, it is necessary that there is a real and substantial connection between a university's legitimate interests and a student's actions. When there are breaches in a student's conduct, a University Disciplinary Committee is called upon to investigate. If however, students are able to act responsibly and balance privilege with responsibility, the breaches are reduced to a minimum or even eliminated completely. Conversely, misconduct by individual students reflects poorly balanced interests. It is in Universities that students imbibe the spirit of appreciation of privileges and gladly undertake the roles expected of them. The ages of students entering university are most impressionable. It is important that they learn the virtues that will serve them for life. It is necessary to impress on students from the time they enter university that failing to balance privilege with responsibility can tarnish the degree for which they have come to the university.

The very stake in the degree each student sets out to earn while at Veritas University creates a vested interest on the part of the students. They have to work for the grades that will earn them the degree. Meanwhile, in the non-academic context, a sense of integrity and responsibility among students is necessary for a holistic development. The holistic content of Veritas University life is as important as the academic content. The certificate awarded is one given as a testimony of character and learning.

Review of relevant literature

Scholars view responsibility through the interpersonal-relational perceptions. To Verrent (2013), responsibility relates to the constructing or forming of understandings with others. Rights and responsibilities balance each other. Responsibility is therefore, a state of being accountable or answerable. It is a heavy burden, a duty, obligation or liability for which someone is held accountable. To fulfil a responsibility is to carry out an assignment to a successful conclusion. With responsibility comes authority and authority invests in people the courage to execute responsibility. To fulfil a responsibility, Ben (2018) proffers that one needs to understand why a task needs to be done, perceive the benefits of doing it as well as to want to do it. In a university set-up, a student is provided with information concerning his/her role in the life of the academic community, the university serving as a transition between home and the wider world. Granting privileges and teaching responsibility is therefore the panacea to authorities' apprehension about the preparedness of young people to undertake adult roles. Once students link privilege to responsibility, they are able to grasp ownership of their roles and choices.

Schools are vested with a tremendous responsibility and it is therefore the responsibility of the university to foster trust, independence, and collaboration as well as celebrate achievement and responsibility appreciating team as well as the spirit of cooperation in individual students that enrol for degrees. To discharge that responsibility, the school needs to be appropriately oriented; then alone can they give the same orientation to their students. Balancing privilege with responsibility is one of life's great lessons. So many people who are successful at balancing are role-models to others.

Maintaining a balance of rights and responsibilities is essential to constructing and preserving healthy relationships. In some relationships it is a simple matter of knowing the rules. In a school situation, the families of students enter into agreement with the school. The school agrees with parents/sponsors to train their wards while the parents pay the bills. Hence, it is the right of the school to be paid and it is the responsibility of the school to train the students. It is equally the right of the parents to have their wards trained and their responsibility to

pay the bills. What are the terms involved in this sort of agreement? The various players of the contract- the parents, students, teachers, school management and the proprietors have roles that determine the success of such a contract.

The choice of parents to send their wards to Veritas University means that they were ready to be responsible to the school and to the wards. The students are basically members of families and what uses they make of the opportunities offered in university are their responsibilities to their parents as well as to the school when they are out. Cohen-Imagor, (2017) believes that if parents perform their responsibility and support the school to perform theirs as 'in-loco-parentis', they will enjoy the full benefits of the services offered by the school. The active role of parents in choosing a school for a child should not end with secondary education. The choice of university becomes an opportunity for parents to also guide the child to develop in the spirit of independence and grow in the university as well as transiting from the home.

School Managers for their part have a task and enormous responsibility. A university Vice-Chancellor (VC) as the head of management is responsible for the effective general management of a school, ensuring the provision of academic leadership strategic vision and the quality of students' experience. The VC performs his/her responsibilities with the participation of a selected team as representative of proprietors, It is the responsibility of the school to help youngsters in everything that they need to learn so that they can run their lives and not need parents for every situation. Once the management of a university has received students into the institution, all institutional functionaries need to work in harmony to help in the character formation of students as well as enhance their pursuit of academic excellence in line with the vision statement of the school. Together with teachers, managements serve students "in loco parentis"

Ben (2018) observes that parents keep indulging youngsters by granting them privileges without commensurate responsibilities. He adds that children will not do for themselves, anything parents have been doing for them but they are young adults and to succeed as adults, they need the confidence of knowing they can do things for themselves. Students should therefore see that they settle into university routine and look up to university functionaries as they play the "locos-parentis" role.

Statement of the problem

Some students get into a university and cannot manage their lives on campus. They are unable to take simple decisions and cannot bear basic roles such as washing their clothes, cleaning up and so on. They keep longing for home where daddy, mummy or nanny is probably waiting to step in and perform

such roles for them. Many students in Nigerian Universities and especially in Veritas University find themselves in the University without the realisation that they are privileged to be there and that they have some responsibilities toward their sponsors, the university and to themselves, so they hardly commit themselves to academic work as a mark of reciprocating their being in the institution. They behave as if they owe no body any responsibility.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- i. Establish the view of university students regarding privilege and responsibility.
- ii. Ascertain the perceptions of students regarding their roles towards parents/sponsors, teachers and the university.
- iii. Determine to what extent university students accept that they too have responsibility to themselves.
- iv. Solicit students suggestion on how the university can help students balance privilege and responsibility.
- v. Get students' perceptions on possible benefits of balancing privilege and responsibility.

Research questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent do university students accept that being in their institution is a privilege?
2. To what extent do university students accept that they have responsibility towards parents/sponsors, teachers and the university?
3. To what extent do university students accept that they too have responsibility to themselves?
4. To what extent do university students agree that the university can help them balance privilege and responsibility?
5. To what degree do university students perceive the possible benefits of balancing privilege and responsibility?

Methodology

The study employed a survey design. This method served to collect data that could be generalised. The population consisted of 365 second year students of Veritas University, Abuja. This group was selected because they have spent a year to in the university and are expected to appreciate the opportunity to be in a tertiary institution as well as know and undertake their responsibilities. A

sample of 120 was drawn through a purposive technique whereby students of Political Science and Diplomacy, History and International Relations and English and Literary Studies in their intact classes participated.

The instrument for the study which was a questionnaire was designed to get the necessary information from the students. For item 1, respondents were required to give their answers in sentences. For items 2-15, the respondents only had to study the statement and indicate a choice between Agree and Disagree. The first item was documented and discussed as a qualitative data to answer Research Question 1. Responses to items 2 and 3 helped to clarify item 1, Responses to the remaining 12 items were recorded and analysed using simple percentages. Finally, the results were discussed and used to answer the research questions raised.

Presentation and discussion of data

Research Question 1: To what extent do university students accept that being in their institution is a privilege? Answers to items 1, 2 and 3 in the questionnaire were used to respond to research Question 1.

Table 1: Percentage of responses to Items 2 & 3

Item	Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Being in this university is a privilege	40	33.3	80	66.7
2	Your parents/sponsors chose this university	90	75	30	25

For Item 1, the respondents opined that privilege is a right, a favour, and a position in a group. This means that Veritas University students recognize that a privilege is an attribute of relationships. They also perceive it as something possible within their status. In the same vein, they proffered that responsibility is something imposed by one's status or position in a group. This means again that the respondents recognized the relationship dimension to responsibility. Some even explained responsibility as an act of belonging to a group with a sense of having to work for the common ownership of the group.

Even though respondents viewed privilege and responsibility to be related, they could not align the relatedness to their own situation. To them, privilege is a right to having what one wants while responsibility is when one has to work for what he/she wants. They gave examples of privilege as it concerned those born with the proverbial silver spoon. To further buttress the point that being in a university is a privilege to be reciprocated by responsibility, items 2 and 3 of the questionnaire provided an opportunity for respondents to affirm their perceptions. For this, only 40 respondents representing 33.3% agreed that being in this university is a privilege while 80 (66.7%) disagreed. Again, 90

respondents (75%) agreed that their parents/sponsors decided for them to come to this university while 30 (25%) chose the institution. The implication of the responses concerning students' perception of privilege and responsibility is that they seem to not have a say in deciding which school to attend so there is no need for them to attempt assuming any responsibility.

Table 2: Responses of students' perception of Privilege and Responsibility.

Item	Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
3	There are great benefits to individual and society if privileges are adequately balanced with responsibility	90	75	30	25

Research Question 2: To what extent do university students accept that they owe responsibility roles towards parents/sponsors, teachers and the university.

Table 2: Percentage of students on their responsibility to sponsors and Institution

Item	Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
4	You have responsibility to study hard to reciprocate your sponsors	100	75	30	25
5	You have responsibility to the university	60	50	60	50

Table 2 shows responses to Items 4 and 5. For item 4, 100 respondents agreed that they had responsibility to study hard to reciprocate their sponsors while 60 agreed they had responsibility to the university. 20 and 60 disagreed with the two statements respectively. This means that the respondents accept that they owe both their parents and the university the responsibility to work hard and to pass the degree they were enrolled to pursue.

Research Question 3: To what extent do university students accept that they too have responsibility to themselves?

Table 3: Percentage of responses on Students. Perception of responsibility to themselves

Item	Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
6	You have a responsibility to yourself	120	100	00	0
7	I should assume leadership roles while in the University	120	50	00	0

Table 3 presents responses for Items 6 and 7, All the respondents (100%) agreed that they have a responsibility to themselves and should assume some leadership while in the university. 100% in agreement means that the students realise that their success in life depends on them. This is significant in that the students owned up to their unique role as being responsible for their choices. This is a critical indicator that the students can be conscripted to assume responsibility and a reason to create the environment for students to develop balanced personalities.

Research Question 4: To what extent do university students agree that the university can help them balance privilege and responsibility?

Item	Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
8	The University gives me opportunity to exercise responsibility through caring for common property	80	66.6	35	29.1
9	The University has given me opportunity to exercise responsibility through regularly monitoring my academic progress	120	100	00	0
10	The University has given me opportunity to exercise responsibility through organized spiritual exercises	120	100	00	0
11	The University has given me opportunity to exercise responsibility through sporting activities.	50	41.6	70	58.4
12	The University has given me opportunity to exercise responsibility through social engagements.	40	33.3	80	66.6
13	The University has given me opportunity to exercise responsibility through mentoring	80	66.6	40	33.3
14	The University has given me opportunity to exercise responsibility through counselling.	90	75	30	25

Table 4: Percentage of responses to items suggesting University roles

Table 4 presents the responses for Items 8-14; concerned the university's role in helping students to balance the privilege of being there and the responsibility they owe to themselves and to the society.

For item 8, it was noted that 80 respondents (66.6%) agreed, 35 (29.1 %) disagreed while 5 representing less than 5% did not respond to the statement "The University gives me opportunity to exercise responsibility through caring

for common property". However, the significant 66.6% is sufficient to say that the students acknowledge the university's provision of opportunity for students to exercise communal roles.

For item 9 which states that the University gives students the opportunity to exercise responsibility through regularly monitoring their academic progress, all 120 respondents representing 100% agreed that the university gives them the opportunities to exercise responsibility to earn their academic degrees.

Regarding the opportunity to exercise responsibility through organized spiritual exercises, all 120 respondents representing 100% agreed that the university gives them the opportunities to exercise responsibility to develop themselves through spiritual activities as stated in item 10.

In item 11, respondents had to assess the University's provision for sporting activities. It is to be noted the students are not all satisfied with the provisions made for their development through sports. This is reflected by the 50 (41.6%) who agreed and 70 (58.4%) who disagreed with the statement.

For item 12, University's provision for social engagements received a poor rating as again, students are not all satisfied with the provision made for their development through social activities. 40 (33.3%) of them agreed while 80 (66.6%) disagreed.

Item 13 presented the University's mentoring initiative which seems to have been accepted by 80 (66.6%) of the respondents while 40 (33.3%) did not agree that the individual mentoring was an opportunity for them to exercise responsibility.

In item 14, the University's counselling services were appraised and 90 (75%) of the respondents agreed while 30 (25%) disagreed that the university's provision for counselling was helping them to develop a sense of responsibility.

Taken collectively, the data shows 69% agreed while 30% disagreed that the university gave them adequate opportunity to exercise responsibility. An insignificant .7% did not care about what the university was doing. It is noteworthy that the students realize that the university is doing something to help them develop the sense of responsibility. It is also critical to bring the 31% on board. They are a significant number that need to realize that the university is there for their benefit.

Research Question 5: To what degree do university students perceive the possible benefits of balancing privilege and responsibility?

Table 5: Percentage of responses on the benefits of balancing privilege with responsibility.

Item	Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
15	There are great benefits to individual and society if privileges are adequately balanced with responsibility	90	75	30	25

Table 5 presents responses given to item 15. Here, 90 respondents representing 75% realise possible benefits of balancing privilege and responsibility while the other 30 (25%) implied that there were no possible benefits which seems to give the impression that the students who do not see the privileges they enjoy equally do not realise why they should take responsibility for their success or failure. This is another reason for the university to devise ways of helping these students to recognise their privileges as well as realise the benefits of assuming ownership of their activities in the university.

Conclusion

When asked to give back to the community that has awarded any privilege, the beneficiary should take this responsibility seriously. One can have more impact than he/she realizes by sincerely playing their role in the very capacity of their privilege. All stakeholders at their various levels need to recognize and play their roles at balancing their privilege of being and their responsibilities to being what they are, where they are and when they are. Each person is capable of being a role model to others. University functionaries especially management, academic and support staff can help students to settle down to the academic business with relative ease if they are empowered to balance and exercise rights, privileges and uphold responsibilities.

Chomsky (2018) states that he believes responsibility accrues through privilege. To him, people who have an unbelievable amount of privilege equally have a huge amount of responsibility. If the Nigerian university students apply themselves to balancing their privileges equitably with commensurate responsibility, the society will become a more ideal one. Veritas University (The Catholic University of Nigeria) is setting the pace in this direction. All that is needed is the concerted will by all stakeholders to implement the various strategies set down for helping the students balance privilege with responsibility. Balancing the rewards and burdens represented by their position is a tricky game and only God who vests responsibility and awards benefits also is capable of endowing them with the wisdom and courage to successfully live the roles they are saddled with. The Management needs a team with the spirit of constructive collaboration that the home and school may work

in concert for the benefit of all and preservation of Catholic legacies which have attracted parents and students to the University.

Recommendations

Privilege bestows power, and with power comes responsibility – the three are inextricably linked. There is a lot of pressure involved in balancing privilege with responsibility. University students should realise that they have reached an age when they cannot and should not rely on parents or loco-parentis to think and act for them. By recognising their privilege, they should claim ownership of their progress and assume responsibility for earning their degrees. The university has set in place counselling and mentoring initiatives for the students to be guided through this phase of formation. People involved should talk about values and expectations early on; so that as students register for their programmes in the university, the existence of core values should be explained. And from time to time, students should be reminded of their responsibilities and if there is need for review, feedback from the students should be encouraged.

When there is a balance between privilege and responsibility, relationship in school becomes rewarding. It is hoped that the university can find the balance needed in order to raise a generation of people who can make informed decisions while being invested in their communities to take personal responsibility for their words, attitudes and benefits.

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