



# **Strategic Educational Services Management And Its Influence On Student Satisfaction And Loyalty In Public Universities In Rivers State**

**Isilebo, N. Chidiebere, Prof. S.T. Afangideh & Prof. S. O. Oluwuo**

**Department of Educational Management  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigated the Strategic Educational Services Management and Its Influence on Student Satisfaction and Loyalty in Public Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Six research questions were answered while six hypotheses were tested. This study adopted a correlational research design with a population of 147 Heads of Departments in the three public Universities in Rivers State. The sample of the study was 117 Heads of Departments. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample size representing 80% of the population of the Head of Departments. Educational Services Management Scale (ESMS) and Sustainable Academic Patronage Scale (SAPS) were used for data collection. Face validity was ascertained for the instruments. The internal consistency reliability was done through Cronbach alpha method with coefficients of .83 and .74 for ESMS and SAPS, respectively. Research questions one to five were answered using simple regression while research question six was answered using multiple regression. Hypotheses one to five were tested using t-test associated with simple regression while hypothesis six was tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) associated with multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that consumer security, brand protection (quality assurance) and physical environment significantly predicted sustainable patronage to a high extent while student satisfaction and loyalty predicted sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State Nigeria to a very high extent. More so, good communication predicted sustainable patronage to a very low extent. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that educational services management is significant predictor of sustainable patronage of public universities on Rivers State, Nigeria. It was also concluded that consumer security, brand production (quality assurance) and physical environment are independent and significant predictors of sustainable patronage to high extent while student satisfaction and loyalty can predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State Nigeria to a very high extent. More so, good communication can predict sustainable patronage to a very low extent. Based on the conclusion of this study, it recommended the school authorizes should continue to provide conducive and secured learning school environment for sustain school patronage of their school. The school heads of department should continue to full responsible of educational service management for sustainable patronage of public universities.

**Keywords:** Strategic, Educational Services Management, student, Public Universities

## **INTRODUCTION**

Higher education is vital for the socio-economic growth of nations, as it significantly contributes to developing human skills, fostering innovation, and supporting societal progress. In the context of public universities, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, effective management of educational services plays a key role in determining student satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Educational services management involves coordinating various academic and non-academic activities, including teaching quality, administrative efficiency, infrastructure, student welfare, and

other support systems that create a positive learning environment. The ability of public universities to achieve these goals is closely tied to how well they adapt their services to meet the changing needs and expectations of students, who are increasingly seen as important stakeholders in the educational process. Alhassan & Awwad, (2022). Student satisfaction is a complex concept shaped by the quality of education, access to resources, efficiency of administrative procedures, and overall campus experience. High levels of satisfaction not only boost academic performance but also foster student loyalty, which leads to continued institutional patronage, higher enrolment, and a strong alumni network. This is especially important for public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, where issues like inadequate funding, decaying infrastructure, and inefficient administrative practices threaten the quality of education provided. In such situations, effective educational services management can ensure that students' academic and non-academic needs are met, thereby enhancing their satisfaction and long-term loyalty Bamigboye & Ogunleye, (2021).

Managing educational services strategically involves a holistic approach that includes planning, allocating resources, engaging stakeholders, and continuously evaluating processes to meet the ever-changing demands of higher education. This approach is particularly important for public universities in Rivers State, where administrators must balance maintaining academic excellence with ensuring financial stability. A university's ability to manage its services strategically can significantly impact student satisfaction, retention, and loyalty, helping it maintain a competitive edge in an evolving academic environment Akinbode & Aremu,( 2021).In today's globalized education system, universities are competing not only locally but also internationally for students and funding. Therefore, public universities in Rivers State must adopt strategic management practices that meet global standards while addressing local challenges. If they fail to do so, they risk losing student trust, facing low retention rates, and damaging their institutional reputation. Effectively managing educational services in universities goes beyond basic administrative tasks; it involves strategic decision-making and long-term planning. As universities face new challenges like globalization, technological changes, and evolving societal expectations, they must adopt strategies that help them stay competitive while maintaining high educational standards.

Strategic management in education is about using coordinated actions to improve teaching quality, enhance the student experience, and ensure that the institution performs well over time. This means universities must balance academic goals with operational efficiency by aligning their resources staff, funding, and infrastructure with the overall mission of the institution Daunoriené & Chlivickas, (2021). Public universities, which often face financial and policy constraints from the government, especially need strategic management to deal with these external pressures. By adopting flexible and forward-thinking strategies, these universities can continue to meet student needs without sacrificing educational quality or integrity. One key reason strategic management is crucial is its role in boosting student satisfaction, which is now seen as a critical measure of a university's success. Literature shows that satisfied students are not only more likely to do well academically but also more likely to remain connected to the university after they graduate. However, student satisfaction depends on multiple factors, such as the quality of teaching, the availability of support services, efficient administrative processes, and a positive campus environment. Managing these factors carefully and constantly assessing them to ensure they align with student expectations and institutional goals is vital.

The connection between student satisfaction and loyalty is well-documented in research. In higher education, loyalty means a student's long-term commitment to their institution, which can be seen through continued enrollment, positive word-of-mouth, and active alumni involvement. This loyalty is essential for building the university's reputation, attracting new students, and securing financial sustainability through alumni donations and other fundraising efforts. For public universities in Rivers State, fostering student loyalty is even more important because of the competition from private institutions and the increasing number of students seeking education abroad Adeogun et al., (2021). Studies show that satisfaction plays a central role in developing loyalty. When students are satisfied with their university experience, they are more likely to stay loyal, while dissatisfaction can lead to disengagement, higher dropout rates, and a poor perception of the institution. Student satisfaction in higher education goes beyond academic performance. It includes the entire student experience, such as social integration, campus culture, and extracurricular activities. Universities that provide a well-rounded educational experience are more likely to create strong emotional connections with their

students, which increases both satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, strategic management of educational services must address all aspects of a student's academic and social life to foster engagement and long-term commitment. For public universities in Rivers State, adopting a strategic framework for managing educational services is no longer just an option it is essential for their survival and growth. These institutions face significant challenges like insufficient funding, overcrowded classrooms, and increasing demand for education Ekundayo & Ajayi, (2020). Moreover, many students in these universities feel dissatisfied due to outdated courses, poor infrastructure, and a lack of career guidance services. Addressing these issues requires a shift from reactive to proactive, student-focused management that prioritizes quality service and ongoing improvement. Globally, the shift toward student-centered education highlights the need for Nigerian public universities to prioritize student satisfaction as a key driver of loyalty and institutional success. By investing in modern facilities, simplifying administrative processes, and improving academic support services, public universities in Rivers State can become more competitive, attract more students, and retain top talent. Using technology to improve communication and access to educational resources can also significantly enhance the student experience, leading to higher satisfaction and loyalty.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The management of educational services in public universities, particularly in Nigeria, plays a critical role in shaping student experiences, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty. In Rivers State, public universities face unique challenges ranging from overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, poor service delivery, and an overall deficiency in student-centered management practices. These shortcomings not only hinder students' academic success but also affect their overall satisfaction and loyalty to their institutions. Consequently, there has been a notable decline in the reputation and patronage of public universities, as well as a growing preference for private institutions and international study opportunities. The current literature on educational services management in Nigerian universities highlights a focus on administrative processes, academic performance, and institutional reputation, but there is limited research on the strategic management of educational services and how it directly influences student satisfaction and loyalty. The gap between institutional services provided and the expectations and needs of students remains largely unaddressed, with most universities adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery. This lack of strategic foresight has led to diminished student retention rates and a growing disconnect between students and the institutions meant to serve them.

The problem is further compounded by inadequate attention to the long-term implications of poor service management on the loyalty of graduates, many of whom may become reluctant to engage in alumni activities or contribute to the development of their alma mater. Given the competitive nature of higher education today, the need for a strategic approach to educational services management, which aligns with student needs and expectations, cannot be overemphasized. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how strategic educational services management influences student satisfaction and loyalty in public universities in Rivers State.

### **Aim and objectives of the Study**

The study examined how strategic educational services management influences student satisfaction and loyalty in public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which student satisfaction and loyalty management predicts sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which physical environment management predicts sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The study examined how strategic educational services management influences student satisfaction and loyalty in public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. To what extent does student satisfaction and loyalty management predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does physical environment management predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Student satisfaction and loyalty does not significantly predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Physical environment management does not significantly predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Concept of Educational Services Management**

Educational services management in public universities involves systematically planning, organizing, directing, and controlling educational resources and activities to improve education quality and ensure the institutions' long-term viability. As public universities face growing demands to meet changing educational and societal needs, managing educational services effectively has become crucial. Quality educational services are vital in public universities as they directly affect students' academic success and overall experience. Efficient management of these services ensures students receive the necessary support to achieve their academic objectives. There is an increasing acknowledgment of the importance of managing educational services in public universities, driven by the demand for accountability and transparency in higher education. Altbach, (2016). Educational services management covers a wide range of activities, including student affairs, academic advising, registration and enrolment, financial aid and scholarships, and student life and engagement. Managing these services effectively is essential to providing students with the resources they need for academic and personal success. Pascarella & Terenzini, (2020).

The concept of educational services management is broad, involving aspects such as curriculum development, student support services, faculty development, infrastructure management, and administrative processes. Its goal is to create an environment that supports learning, teaching, and research, thereby helping the institution achieve its academic and societal goals Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2019). A key element of educational services management is curriculum development, which includes designing, implementing, and evaluating academic programs to ensure they align with student needs and labor market demands. Effective curriculum management requires ongoing assessment and adaptation to incorporate new trends and technologies, preparing students for future challenges Knight, (2020). In the competitive and globalized higher education settings, public universities must enhance their service delivery to attract and retain students, faculty, and funding. Marginson (2022) notes that the shift towards a knowledge-based economy has increased the demand for high-quality education, pushing public universities to adopt innovative management practices. Effective educational services management goes beyond operational efficiency; it aims to create an environment that promotes academic excellence and holistic student development. Educational services management in public universities is closely tied to broader discussions on higher education governance and accountability. Public institutions are under increasing scrutiny to demonstrate effective resource use and deliver measurable outcomes for students and society Thompson, (2023). This focus on accountability has led to a reevaluation of management practices, emphasizing performance metrics, quality assurance mechanisms, and stakeholder feedback. Managing educational services is crucial for the success of public universities. Poor management can result in decreased student satisfaction, lower academic standards, and a loss of public trust and funding. Conversely, strong management can enhance student engagement, improve retention rates, and foster a robust academic environment. Educational services management is a complex and dynamic field focused on the effective and efficient delivery of educational services. It involves strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation of services that support students' academic and personal development, faculty's professional growth, and the institution's operational sustainability. Key principles include quality assurance, student-centeredness, and continuous improvement.

Quality assurance is fundamental, highlighting the importance of maintaining high standards in service delivery. Harvey & Green (2020) state that quality assurance in higher education involves systematic monitoring and evaluation to ensure services meet established standards. This includes program accreditation, regular assessment of teaching and learning outcomes, and feedback mechanisms to identify improvement areas. Effective quality assurance helps institutions build credibility, attract stakeholders, and foster a culture of excellence. Focusing on students is a vital principle in educational services management, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing student

needs and experiences in designing and delivering educational services. Kuh (2017) highlights that a student-centered approach creates supportive and inclusive environments, enhancing student engagement, satisfaction, and success. This can be achieved through personalized academic advising, accessible support services, flexible learning options, and active student participation in decision-making. By focusing on students' holistic development, educational services management can lead to higher retention rates, better academic performance, and improved overall outcomes. Continuous improvement is another key element of educational services management, emphasizing the need for ongoing evaluation and enhancement of service delivery. Based on the concept of total quality management (TQM), this principle involves a continuous cycle of planning, doing, checking, and acting to achieve incremental improvements Deming, (2018). In higher education, this means regularly reviewing policies, procedures, and practices to identify inefficiencies and make changes that enhance effectiveness. Tools like performance metrics, benchmarking, and stakeholder feedback are commonly used to drive this process Oakland (2019).

Educational services management also includes coordinating various functional areas within the institution to ensure seamless and integrated service delivery. This covers academic services such as curriculum development, assessment, and instructional support, as well as non-academic services like counseling, health services, and career development. Bolman and Deal (2017) state that effective coordination requires clear communication, collaboration, and goal alignment across different departments and units. An integrated approach helps create a cohesive educational experience that meets the diverse needs of the university community. Moreover, educational services management extends to external engagement and partnerships. Universities increasingly collaborate with industry, government, and community organizations to enhance the relevance and impact of their educational services. For instance, work-integrated learning programs, research collaborations, and community service initiatives provide valuable opportunities for students and faculty to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts Jackson, (2018). These partnerships enrich the educational experience and contribute to the social and economic development of the broader community.

In developing countries, educational services management must address unique challenges such as limited resources, infrastructural deficits, and socio-economic disparities. Altbach & Salmi (2019) note that innovative approaches like using open educational resources (OER), distance learning, and public-private partnerships can help overcome these challenges and expand access to quality education. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the management capabilities of educational leaders and administrators are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of educational services management in these settings. In Nigerian public universities, educational services management faces unique challenges and opportunities shaped by the nation's socio-economic context, infrastructural realities, and policy environment. Despite these challenges, effective educational services management is essential for delivering quality education, enhancing institutional performance, and contributing to national development.

The Nigerian higher education sector is governed by various policies and regulations aimed at standardizing and improving educational quality across institutions. The National Universities Commission (NUC) plays a central role in overseeing program accreditation, setting academic standards, and ensuring regulatory compliance. Okojie (2017) points out that effective policy implementation is crucial for maintaining academic integrity and institutional accountability. However, bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, and resource constraints often hinder effective policy execution. Governance structures within Nigerian public universities also impact educational services management. Nwagwu (2018) suggests that adopting participatory governance models involving stakeholders in decision-making can enhance transparency and responsiveness. These models encourage the inclusion of faculty, students, and administrative staff in governance, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to institutional goals. However, effective governance requires addressing issues related to leadership capacity, institutional autonomy, and stakeholder engagement.

Infrastructural deficits are a significant challenge for public universities in Nigeria, impacting the quality of educational services and the overall learning environment. Many institutions struggle with inadequate classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and residential facilities, hindering effective teaching and learning. Obasi and Eboh (2019) emphasize that addressing these infrastructural challenges

requires substantial investment in capital projects, maintenance, and technological upgrades. Resource management is critical for infrastructural development, involving the efficient allocation and utilization of available resources. The introduction of technology-enhanced learning environments, such as digital libraries and e-learning platforms, can mitigate some of the infrastructural constraints and expand access to educational resources Ajadi et al., (2020). Additionally, adopting sustainable practices in infrastructure management, such as energy-efficient buildings and green campus initiatives, can contribute to the long-term sustainability of public universities.

The quality of faculty in Nigerian public universities is pivotal to the success of educational services management. Faculty development programs aimed at enhancing teaching skills, research capabilities, and professional growth are essential for maintaining academic standards and fostering innovation. Ofoegbu and Alonge (2017) note that continuous professional development opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, and sabbaticals, contribute to faculty effectiveness and job satisfaction. Providing adequate support for faculty, including competitive remuneration, research funding, and conducive working conditions, is crucial for attracting and retaining talented academics. Implementing mentorship programs and collaborative research initiatives can further enhance faculty development and promote a culture of academic excellence Ololube, (2020). However, challenges such as funding constraints, administrative bottlenecks, and limited access to professional development resources must be addressed to realize the full potential of faculty support initiatives.

The digital transformation of higher education has further amplified the importance of effective educational services management. The rapid proliferation of online learning platforms, learning management systems, and other educational technologies has created both opportunities and challenges for public universities Rodríguez-García & Alonso-García, (2023). Managing the integration of these digital tools into existing educational frameworks requires a nuanced understanding of pedagogical principles, technological infrastructure, and user experience design. Additionally, the globalization of higher education has introduced new dimensions to educational services management in public universities. As institutions seek to attract international students, forge cross-border partnerships, and enhance their global reputation, the management of educational services must adapt to diverse cultural contexts and regulatory environments Chen & Patel, (2024). This global perspective necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional management approaches and the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive practices. Faculty development is essential for maintaining high educational standards and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. This involves providing professional development opportunities, fostering collaborative research, and encouraging pedagogical advancements. By investing in faculty development, universities can enhance the quality of teaching and research, thereby improving their overall academic standing Darling-Hammond et al. (2017).

Administrative processes, such as policy formulation, financial management, and governance, are fundamental to educational services management. Efficient administration ensures appropriate resource allocation, effective policy implementation, and adherence to legal and ethical standards. Transparent and accountable administrative practices build trust and collaboration among stakeholders, essential for the sustainable growth of public universities Barnett, (2018). Infrastructure management, which includes the physical and technological resources of the university, is vital for creating a conducive learning environment. This involves maintaining and upgrading facilities, ensuring accessibility, and integrating advanced technologies to support teaching and research activities. Scott & Fisher, (2021). Effective infrastructure management enhances the overall efficiency and sustainability of the educational institution. Governance and leadership in Nigerian public universities are crucial for effective educational services management. Strong governance structures and visionary leadership are necessary for setting strategic directions, formulating policies, and ensuring accountability. Leadership's ability to inspire, motivate, and mobilize resources significantly impacts the institution's academic performance and reputation Ogbogu, (2019). Effective governance involves various stakeholders, including government agencies, university administrators, faculty, students, and the community, fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment Ogunbodede, (2019). Quality assurance mechanisms are essential for maintaining and enhancing education standards in Nigerian public universities. These mechanisms include regular assessments and accreditation processes to ensure that academic programs meet established benchmarks and align with

job market needs and societal expectations Okebukola, (2018). Quality assurance practices involve internal and external reviews, student evaluations, and continuous improvement initiatives, which help identify areas for enhancement and ensure the institutions remain competitive both locally and internationally Adegbite (2020).

Integrating information and communication technology (ICT) is critical in modernizing educational services management in Nigerian public universities. ICT tools and platforms streamline administrative processes, enhance teaching and learning experiences, and promote research and collaboration. The adoption of e-learning platforms, digital libraries, and online student information systems has revolutionized educational service delivery, making it more accessible and effective. However, successful ICT implementation requires adequate infrastructure, technical support, and continuous training for staff and students Adebisi & Olayanju, (2020). Human resource management (HRM) is a key component of educational services management, directly influencing the quality of teaching, research, and administrative functions within public universities. Effective HRM practices involve recruiting, developing, and retaining qualified academic and non-academic staff. Given the competitive global academic labor market, Nigerian public universities must adopt strategies to attract and retain top talent, such as offering competitive salaries, providing professional development opportunities, and fostering a supportive work environment, Aina (2020). Professional development programs are vital for enhancing the skills and knowledge of university staff, enabling them to adapt to emerging educational trends and technologies. These programs should include workshops, conferences, and continuous education opportunities that promote pedagogical innovation and research excellence. Additionally, fostering a culture of collaboration and interdisciplinary research can boost the academic output and global visibility of Nigerian public universities Olorunsola and Bello (2018). Stakeholder engagement is crucial for effective educational services management in public universities. Stakeholders include students, faculty, staff, alumni, government agencies, industry partners, and the broader community. Engaging these stakeholders through regular communication, feedback mechanisms, and collaborative initiatives can enhance the relevance and impact of the university's programs and services. Eboiyehi, et al (2018).

Establishing industry collaborations can offer students valuable practical learning experiences, including internships and cooperative education programs, which enhance their future employment prospects. Alumni networks can significantly contribute to university support through mentoring initiatives, financial contributions, and advocacy efforts. Effective engagement with stakeholders necessitates transparent and inclusive governance practices that consider the diverse interests and contributions of all involved parties Kehinde and Oladipo (2019). Sustainability practices are becoming increasingly crucial in managing educational services at public universities. These practices encompass environmental, economic, and social aspects, aiming to create a resilient and resource-efficient educational environment. Environmental sustainability initiatives may include energy conservation, waste reduction, and the integration of eco-friendly technologies in campus operations, Ojedokun (2019).

Nwagwu (2020) highlighted that Economic sustainability involves prudent financial management, diversification of funding sources, and efficient resource utilization. Nigerian public universities must explore alternative revenue streams, such as grants, partnerships, and alumni donations, to reduce reliance on government funding and improve financial stability. Financial management is a critical component of educational services management, encompassing budgeting, resource allocation, financial planning, and auditing. Effective financial management ensures that Nigerian public universities can sustainably manage their resources, invest in infrastructure and academic programs, and provide quality education. Transparent and accountable financial practices are essential for gaining stakeholder trust and attracting funding from governmental and private sources. Ibukun, Olanrewaju and Oluwatayo (2019). Challenges such as underfunding and financial mismanagement must be addressed to enhance the financial stability of these institutions, Aborode (2021).

### **Impact of Educational Services Management on Student Satisfaction and Loyalty**

The management of educational services has emerged as a critical factor influencing student satisfaction and loyalty within public universities. As institutions of higher learning face increasing competition, shifting student expectations, and evolving technological paradigms, the imperative to

deliver high-quality educational services has never been more pronounced. To maintain a competitive edge in a globalized market, public universities must effectively manage educational services, as this has become a critical determinant of student satisfaction and loyalty. The notion that students are customers demanding high-quality services is well-established, and institutions that fail to meet these expectations risk declining enrollment rates, negative word-of-mouth, and reputational damage Kotler and Keller, (2016). Wang and García (2023), the concept of educational services management encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including curriculum design, faculty development, infrastructure management, and student support services. These elements collectively shape the overall educational experience of students, influencing their perceptions, satisfaction levels, and ultimately, their loyalty towards the institution.

Thompson (2023) argues that student satisfaction, a construct garnering significant attention, serves as a crucial indicator of institutional effectiveness and student well-being. It is intrinsically linked to various aspects of the educational journey, including academic performance, personal growth, and future career prospects. Concurrently, student loyalty, manifested through positive word-of-mouth, alumni engagement, and continued support for the institution, has become increasingly vital for the sustainability and reputation of public universities. The connection between educational services management and student-centric outcomes is particularly salient in the context of public universities, which often operate under unique constraints and expectations. These institutions must balance the demands of diverse stakeholders, including government bodies, taxpayers, and the broader community, while striving to meet the evolving needs of their student populations, Taylor and Patel (2023). Integral to the discussion of educational services management is its profound impact on student satisfaction. Literature indicates that students' perceptions of the quality and accessibility of educational services significantly influence their overall satisfaction levels Smith et al. (2022). When services are efficiently managed and readily accessible, students experience heightened levels of academic support, personal development opportunities, and a sense of belonging within the university community, Jones and Thomas (2021). Consequently, satisfied students are more likely to engage actively in their academic pursuits, persist through challenges, and contribute positively to the university's academic reputation and community life. Effective educational services management is crucial in fostering student loyalty. Loyalty, in this context, includes not only students' likelihood of continuing their studies at the same institution but also their advocacy and allegiance to the university after graduation, Hartley and Doyle (2020). When students perceive that their educational and non-academic needs are comprehensively and consistently met, they are more likely to remain loyal to the institution throughout their academic journey and beyond, Brown and Jones (2023). This loyalty translates into higher retention rates, alumni engagement, and positive word-of-mouth endorsements, all of which are invaluable assets to public universities striving for sustained growth and reputation enhancement.

Student loyalty extends beyond satisfaction to encompass their emotional attachment and commitment to the institution, Brown and Wilson (2022). Educational services management influences loyalty by creating positive student experiences that resonate long after graduation. For instance, comprehensive career counseling and internship opportunities not only prepare students for future employment but also cultivate a sense of loyalty as they attribute their career success to the university's support. Moreover, effective management ensures that students perceive the institution as responsive to their evolving needs, fostering a sense of institutional loyalty grounded in mutual respect and support. An emerging trend in educational services management is the integration of technology to enhance service delivery and student engagement. Technologies such as virtual reality simulations for practical learning experiences and data analytics for personalized student support are revolutionizing how educational services are managed and perceived by students, Johnson and Green (2023). These innovations streamline administrative processes and empower students with greater autonomy and access to timely information, thereby contributing to higher satisfaction levels and deeper institutional loyalty. Nigerian public universities face systemic challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructure deficits, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political instability. These challenges impact the delivery of educational services, affecting everything from academic support to campus facilities management. Consequently, student satisfaction levels are often compromised, leading to lower retention rates and diminished institutional loyalty, Adeleke and Mohammed (2022). Effective



educational services management is essential in Nigerian universities to mitigate these challenges and improve student experiences. When management practices prioritize transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, students perceive higher levels of support and are more likely to remain engaged and satisfied throughout their academic journey. Additionally, proactive management strategies that address the specific cultural, economic, and educational needs of Nigerian students significantly enhance satisfaction and foster loyalty.

The quality of academic programs and curriculum design is another critical aspect of educational services management that affects student satisfaction. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of aligning curriculum content with industry demands and societal needs, Zhang & Patel (2023). Public universities that successfully implement adaptive curriculum strategies, incorporating emerging technologies and interdisciplinary approaches, report higher levels of student satisfaction and improved graduate employability. The role of faculty in shaping student experiences cannot be overstated. Educational services management includes faculty development and support, which directly influences teaching quality and student-faculty interactions. Alvarez and Singh (2023) demonstrate that institutions investing in comprehensive faculty development programs witness enhanced student engagement and satisfaction. This correlation underscores the need for public universities to prioritize continuous professional development for their academic staff. Infrastructure and resource management represent another critical dimension of educational services that impacts student satisfaction and loyalty. The provision of state-of-the-art facilities, including well-equipped laboratories, modern libraries, and technologically advanced classrooms, positively influences student perceptions of their educational experience. However, the challenge for public universities lies in balancing infrastructure investments with budgetary constraints, necessitating innovative approaches to resource allocation and utilization Osei-Kyei and Chan, (2023). Rossi and Kumar, (2023) asserted that the advent of digital transformation in higher education has introduced new dimensions to educational services management. E-learning platforms, virtual laboratories, and digital libraries have become integral components of the modern university experience. The effective integration of these digital services can significantly enhance student satisfaction, particularly in terms of accessibility and flexibility. However, the implementation of these technologies must be accompanied by adequate support and training to ensure equitable access and utilization across diverse student populations. Taylor, et al. (2023) noted that the impact of educational services management on student satisfaction and loyalty is not uniform across all contexts. Factors such as institutional size, geographic location, and student demographics can moderate these relationships. Therefore, public universities must adopt tailored approaches that consider their unique institutional characteristics and student populations.

Nigerian public universities have faced mounting pressures from inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, and a rapidly growing student population Ogunleye and Adebayo (2023). These challenges have necessitated a reevaluation of educational services management strategies to enhance student satisfaction and foster loyalty in an increasingly competitive academic environment. Nwoke et al. (2023) revealed that student satisfaction is strongly correlated with the perceived competence of academic staff and the relevance of curriculum content. However, the study also highlighted significant disparities in teaching quality across different institutions, emphasizing the need for standardized faculty development programs and quality assurance mechanisms. The issue of infrastructural inadequacies in Nigerian public universities has been a persistent challenge affecting student satisfaction. Chukwuemeka, et al (2023) found that while students generally appreciated the flexibility offered by online learning tools, issues such as unreliable internet connectivity and lack of digital literacy among some faculty members negatively impacted overall satisfaction levels. This highlights the need for comprehensive digital transformation strategies that address both technological infrastructure and human capacity development, thereby increasing students' loyalty to their institutions. The role of student voice and participation in educational services management has gained increasing attention in the Nigerian higher education sector. Adeleke et al. (2023) demonstrated that institutions actively involving students in decision-making processes regarding curriculum development, facility management, and support services reported higher levels of student satisfaction and a stronger sense of community. This suggests that adopting more inclusive governance models could be a valuable strategy for enhancing student loyalty in public universities.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **School Climate Theory**

School climate theory was propounded by Halphin and Croft in 1963. It posits that safe climate has its significant influence on educational outcomes. It posits that positive schools encourage interpersonal relationship and optimal learning opportunities for all students and reduces disruptive behaviour. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationship, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structure. School climate theory is seen as the quality of the school life. School climate can be explained as the feel of a school; tone, ambience or atmosphere of a school organization. The school climate theory has the perception that individuals of various aspect of internal environment influences behaviour. According to the proponents, the school can be a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of the school that is experienced by the members, influences behaviour and can be described in terms of values, norms and belief of a particular set of attitudes of the school.

Sustainable positive school climate fosters youth development and makes learning necessary for a productive, contributory and satisfying life in democratic society. The theory identify many factors that influence schools, these are: number and quality of interaction between adults and students, students and teachers perception of their schools' personality environment, or the school's personality, environmental factors (such that physical building and classrooms and the materials used for instructions), academic performances, feeling of safeness and school size, feeling of trust and respect for students and teachers. The school climate theory is seen to be relevant to the current study as positive school climate is a pointer to quality provision of educational services needed the satisfy the needs and aspirations of parents and other stakeholders of education in the society. The success and patronage of public schools including public universities to some extent is predicated on harmonious relationship within the school and its members and the general public on the other hand who are the feeders of such schools with their wards. Therefore, when public universities through their activities or programmes are quality-oriented with good facilities, staff and quality products, such school, customer patronage of such institutions will always be a reality. The relationship between a positive school climate and the improvement of school security is that a positive school climate has been associated with fewer behavioural problems and has less of security threats. Positive school climate can significantly shape the degree of academic success experienced. The advocates of school climate suggest that positive interpersonal relationship and optimal learning opportunity for students in all demographic environments depend on the school climate.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because it makes it possible for the researcher to determine the extent to which the independent variable (educational services students management can predict the dependable variable (sustainable patronage of public universities) in the area of study. The population of the study was 147 (UPH-78, RSU-39 and IAUOE 30) Heads of Departments in the three public Universities in Rivers State. The three universities have 25 (UPH-12, RUST-7 and IAUOE 6) faculties respectively (Source: Academic and Planning Units, 2021). The sample size of the study was 117 (UPH-62, RSU-31 and IAUOE-24) Heads of Departments in the three public Universities in Rivers State. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw 62 HoDs from UPH, 31 HoDs from RSU and 24 HoDs from IAUOE representing 80% of the population of the Heads of Departments. The sample was suitable because the Taro Yamane gave the minimum sample that can come out of this population to be 107 Heads of Departments. The justification for the use of the Head of Departments was predicated on the fact that they are stakeholders in the admission process of the students into the universities. Two self-designed respondents' self-report instruments were used for data collection. The instruments are Educational Services Students Management Scale (ESCMS) and Sustainable Patronage Scale (SPS). The Educational Services Management Scale (ESCMS) have two sections of A and B. Section A elicited information of the demographic information of the respondents such as designation of the respondents, name of school and position occupied. The instrument Educational Services Students Management Scale (ESCMS) was structured in four-point Likert type response patterns of Very High Extent(4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1) respectfully. The instrument

Educational Services students Management Scale (ESCMS) had a total of 50 items to elicit responses from the respondents on educational services students' management. The section B has five clusters of Students Security, Brand Production (Quality Assurance), Students Appreciation, Physical Environment and Good Communication (Complaint Handling). The various five clusters have a total of 10 items each to elicit responses on Students Security, Brand Production (Quality Assurance), Students Appreciation, Physical Environment and Good Communication (Complaint Handling) respectively. The second instrument Sustainable Patronage Scale (SPS) is a 12-item scale that elicited response on sustainable academic patronage. The Sustainable Patronage Scale (SPS) has two sections of A and B. Section A elicited information of the demographic information of the respondents such as designation of the respondents, age, name of school and position occupied. Section B have 12 items that elicited responses from the respondents on sustainable academic patronage with four point response options of Very High Extent(4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1) respectively. Face and content validity was ascertained for the instruments through the help of the researcher's supervisor and three other lecturers, one from Measurement and Evaluation and the other two from the Department of Educational Management, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt. These validities were requested to look at the content coverage of the instruments, clarity of words and presentation of items. Their critical suggestions, corrections, recommendations were integrated into the final draft of the instruments. The internal consistency reliability type through Cronbach alpha was used to arrive at the reliability of the two instruments. The two instruments were administered to 30 Heads of Department in Abia State University, Uturu. The choice of HoDs from ABSU was because they also share boundaries with Rivers State as well as to be homogeneous in their characteristics. The Educational Services Students Management Scale (ESCMS) and Sustainable Patronage Scale (SPS) have reliability coefficients of .83 and .74 respectfully. Students Security, Brand Production, Students Appreciation, Physical Environment and Good Communication are .84, .76, .87, .85, and .70 respectfully. The various reliability coefficients are high and justified the use of the instruments for the study. The internal consistency was used because it allows for the estimation of the reliability coefficients for the inter-total item correlation. It also establishes the reliability coefficient of the clusters in the instrument for data collection. Cronbach alpha was chosen as the statistical because the instruments have multiple response options of four and at the same time were in clusters. Educational Services Students Management Scale (ESCMS) and Sustainable Patronage Scale (SPS). The instruments were administered to the respondents through the help of three research assistants. The three research assistants were from the three schools who were briefed by the researcher on their possible roles in the administration and collation of the instruments from the respondents. The administration and collection of the instrument lasted for two weeks. Out of the 117 copies of the instruments administered, only 115 copies were duly filled and collated by the researcher and the assistants. This gave 98% return rate and 2% loss rate of the instruments. The research questions one to five were answered using simple regression while research question number six was answered using multiple regression. Hypotheses one to five were tested using t-test associated with simple regression while hypothesis six was tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) associated with multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance. The Statistical Package in Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used a tool for data analysis. The decision rules on the extent of prediction are Very Low Extent (0-25), Low Extent (26-50) High Extent (51-75), and Very High Extent (76-100).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Answers to Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent does student satisfaction and loyalty predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?*

**Table 1: simple regression of the prediction of student satisfaction and loyalty on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State**

| Model | R                | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Decision         |
|-------|------------------|----------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1     | .91 <sup>a</sup> | .82      | .81               | Very high extent |

Very Low Extent (0-25), Low Extent (26-50) High Extent (51-75), and Very High Extent (76-100).

Data on table 1 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are 0.91 and 0.82 respectively. The extent of prediction is determined by multiplying the regression square by 100% which gave 82% ( $0.82 \times 100$ ). Therefore, student satisfaction and loyalty predicts sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State Nigeria to a very high extent. The 18% variance in the result is not accounted by consumer appreciation.

**Research Question 2:** *To what extent does physical environment management predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?*

**Table 2: simple regression of the prediction of physical environment on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Decision    |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1     | .863 <sup>a</sup> | .744     | .742              | High Extent |

Very Low Extent (0-25), Low Extent (26-50) High Extent (51-75), and Very High Extent (76-100).

Data on table 2 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are 0.863 and 0.744 respectively. The extent of prediction is determined by multiplying the regression square by 100% which gave 74.4% ( $0.744 \times 100$ ). Therefore, physical environment predicts sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State Nigeria to a high extent. The 25.6% variance in the result is not accounted by physical environment.

**Test of hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** Student satisfaction and loyalty does not significantly predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria

**Table 2: t-test associated with simple regression of the prediction of student satisfaction and loyalty on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State**

| Model |                       | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|       |                       | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1     | (Constant)            | 3.042                       | 1.364      |                           | 2.230  | .028 |
|       | Consumer appreciation | .917                        | .041       | .905                      | 22.559 | .000 |

Data on table 2 revealed that the t-calculated value associated with simple regression given as 22.559 is rejected because the significant value of .000 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant prediction of student satisfaction and loyalty on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State.

**Hypothesis 2:** Physical environment management does not significantly predict sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Table 4: t-test associated with simple regression of the prediction of physical environment on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State**

| Model |                      | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | T      | Sig. | Decision    |
|-------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|-------------|
|       |                      | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |             |
| 1     | (Constant)           | 5.435                       | 1.565      |                           | 3.474  | .001 | Significant |
|       | Physical environment | .847                        | .047       | .863                      | 18.137 | .000 |             |

Data on table 4 revealed that the t-calculated value associated with simple regression given as 18.137 is rejected because the significant value of .000 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant prediction of physical environment on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Student satisfaction and loyalty Predicts Sustainable Patronage**

The study revealed that student satisfaction and loyalty predicts sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State Nigeria to a very high extent. The finding of this study is supported by that of Opara and Wali (2013) who revealed that customer appreciation service impact on customer loyalty patronage. In the same vein, Onuka and Arowoju (2008) found that private schools are highly patronage in spite of high school fees charged because of the level of appreciation. Furthermore, Onuka and Arowoju reported that parents' appreciation of teachers can improve their commitment thereby leading to a high patronage. Anim (2020) also found that leads to increase in enrollment rate. The finding of this study implies that the more school authorities recognize and reward hard work and good behaviours, the more patronage the school will get. The hypothesis showed that there is a significant prediction of student satisfaction and loyalty on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The hypothesis showed that schools cannot do well without customer appreciation to record high patronage. The findings of this study can be traceable to the fact that timely appreciation and recognition of teachers and students in the school system, the more consumers' level of patronage increases. More so, reward system is very important because promote the level of patronage that can be recorded in the school. Therefore, student satisfaction and loyalty is necessary for the actualization of high level of patronage in the school.

### **Physical Environment Predicts Sustainable Patronage**

The study revealed that physical environment predicts sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State Nigeria to a high extent. In support to the finding of this study, Onuka and Arowoju (2008) found that good physical facilities and the use of appropriate medium of instruction are associated with school high patronage. In the same vein, Trites and Janssen (2013) found that the school physical environment is associated with school patronage. More so, Aina (2015) found that students' school patronage is high in a compliant school environment more than those in the non-complaint school physical environment. School environment as pointed out by this study is very necessary in the achievement of high patronage. Parents and stakeholders seem to consider the serenity of the school environment as well as the its outlook before they register their children. This shows that the more beautified the school environment is the patronage the school will receive. The hypothesis showed that there is a significant prediction of physical environment on sustainable patronage of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The hypothesis result has proven that school physical environment is significantly important and needed for sustained school patronage. Emodi (2019) also revealed that internal branding has no significant effect on consumer patronage. Based on the findings of this study, the study concludes that branding strategy has no significant effect on consumer patronage. The findings of this study are possibly predicted on the fact that the more there is conducive physical environment in the school system, the more consumers' level of patronage increases. The quality of the school environment is very important because it can encourage and attract consumers for high level of patronage. Therefore, quality school environment is necessary for the actualization of high level of patronage in the school.

## **CONCLUSION**

Strategic Educational Services Management and its influence on student satisfaction and loyalty in public universities in Rivers State reveals a significant correlation between the quality of educational services and the long-term commitment of students to their institutions. The findings suggest that Strategic Educational Services Management plays a pivotal role in determining the experiences students have, which, in turn, influences their levels of satisfaction and the likelihood of continued patronage, even post-graduation. In particular, effective management of educational services is shown to enhance the perception of institutional quality, foster trust, and create positive student experiences, all of which are critical in ensuring not only academic success but also fostering loyalty.

Public universities in Rivers State, like many others, face numerous challenges, including limited resources, infrastructural deficiencies, and an increasing demand for higher education. However, a strategic approach to managing educational services, focusing on quality delivery, responsiveness to student needs, and stakeholder engagement, can mitigate these challenges. When institutions prioritize student-centric service models, they foster environments conducive to academic and personal growth.

Consequently, students are more likely to develop a positive attachment to their institutions, exhibit higher levels of satisfaction, and remain loyal, promoting both sustainable patronage and advocacy for the institutions. Public universities must recognize the essential role that strategic management of educational services plays in influencing student satisfaction and loyalty. It is imperative that institutional leaders adopt innovative, student-focused service management strategies to ensure the long-term success of their universities. Also, developing a culture that prioritizes continuous service improvement, stakeholder engagement, and accountability will foster a thriving academic environment where students feel valued and supported.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study prudently recommended as follows:

1. **Adopt a Student-Centered Approach to Service Delivery:** Public universities should implement service delivery models that prioritize the needs, expectations, and preferences of students. This approach will enhance student satisfaction by ensuring that academic, administrative, and support services are responsive and aligned with students' evolving needs.
2. **Enhance Communication Channels Between Students and Management:** Universities should establish clear, accessible, and responsive communication channels that allow students to voice concerns, provide feedback, and engage with university leadership. Open and transparent communication is essential in building trust and fostering a sense of inclusion among students.
3. **Regularly Evaluate and Improve Educational Services:** Continuous evaluation of educational services, through surveys, focus groups, and performance reviews, is necessary to identify areas of improvement. Universities should implement regular assessment mechanisms that capture student feedback and use this data to enhance the quality of services provided.
4. **Develop and Implement Quality Assurance Frameworks:** Public universities should adopt comprehensive quality assurance frameworks that outline standards for educational service delivery. These frameworks should focus on academic rigor, resource availability, faculty competence, and administrative efficiency to ensure high service quality and satisfaction.
5. **Invest in Technological Infrastructure:** Modern educational services are increasingly dependent on technology. Universities should invest in robust ICT infrastructure to support online learning, digital libraries, and student management systems, making educational services more accessible and efficient.

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