

Beyond the Numbers: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Academic Behaviors Shaping Students' Performance in Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Academic performance is often assessed quantitatively through grades, test scores, and standardized examinations. However, such measures alone fail to capture the underlying behaviours, contexts, and daily realities that shape students' learning outcomes. This study explores the lived experiences, study habits, and contextual influences that determine students' academic trajectories. Using focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations, data were collected from tertiary institution students, teachers, advisers, and guidance counsellors in the selected institution. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among students from six faculties across varying academic performance levels with the aid of moderator's guide and semi-structured questionnaire for in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 5 Lecturers, 2 student affairs staff and 3 Students' Union Government. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in students' academic behaviour, including study time management, class attendance, peer influence, family obligations, and the use of technology. The findings provided nuanced insights into how students navigate challenges, adapt strategies, and balance academic work with socio-economic pressures. By going beyond statistical indicators, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of academic performance and offer recommendations for institutions, families, and policymakers seeking to foster supportive learning environments.

Keywords: Academic Threshold, Education, GPAs, Socio-economic Pressure, Peer Influence

INTRODUCTION

Academic performance has traditionally been measured through quantifiable outcomes such as test scores, grade point averages (GPAs), and graduation rates. While these numerical indicators are useful for benchmarking, they often provide a limited understanding of what drives student success. York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) argued that academic performance is a multidimensional construct that encompasses not only cognitive achievement but also behavioral and affective components. Education, after all, is not only about what students achieve on paper but also about the daily practices, habits, and environments that support or constrain their ability to learn effectively.

In this light, examining students' behaviors, habits, and socio-cultural contexts provides a richer and more holistic understanding of performance. Kuh et al. (2006) similarly emphasized that student engagement, class participation, and self-directed learning are equally important in shaping educational outcomes. This perspective establishes the need to move **"beyond the numbers"** by investigating the qualitative dimensions of performance, that is, **how students act, adapt, and respond to their learning environments**. We observed that a substantial body of research underscores the role of academic behaviors in predicting student success. Behaviors such as consistent class attendance, effective study habits, time management, and proactive reading practices have been positively linked with better academic outcomes. Credé and Kuncel (2008), in their meta-analysis, found that non-cognitive factors like study habits and motivation often predict performance as

strongly as cognitive ability. Similarly, Zimmerman (2002) highlights self-regulated learning, where students actively set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies as a critical determinant of achievement.

Conversely, poor study behaviors, procrastination, or last-minute exam preparation often result in underperformance. In many contexts, students may be capable but fail to realize their potential due to weak academic habits, underscoring the importance of understanding the behaviors that underlie performance trends.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) proposed that human development occurs through the dynamic interaction between individuals and their surrounding environments, conceptualized as multiple nested systems. These include:

- Microsystem (immediate environment such as family, peers, teachers, and classroom climate);
- Mesosystem (linkages between home and school, e.g., parental support for homework);
- Exosystem (indirect influences such as parental workplace conditions or community factors);
- Macrosystem (cultural beliefs, societal norms, and educational policies);
- Chronosystem (changes over time such as technological advancement or curriculum reforms).

In the context of schooling, this theory underscores how socio-economic challenges, family obligations, peer dynamics, and school structures converge to shape students' learning habits, motivation, and overall performance.

Integrative Conceptual Framework

This study adopts an integrative framework that combines Bronfenbrenner's ecological lens with self-regulated learning (SRL) theory to explain academic behaviour. While Bronfenbrenner's model accounts for the external influences shaping students (family support, peer groups, school environment, cultural expectations), SRL explains the internal processes through which students regulate their learning (motivation, study habits, coping mechanisms). Thus, academic performance is conceptualized as the outcome of a dynamic interplay between external systems and internal regulation. For example:

- A supportive family (microsystem) encourages effective self-regulation in study habits.
- Negative peer pressure (microsystem and mesosystem) may undermine motivation, but students with strong SRL skills can resist distractions.
- Broader socio-economic factors (exosystem, macrosystem) influence access to learning resources, but SRL enables adaptive coping strategies.

In many tertiary institutions systems, particularly within developing contexts, academic success is shaped by more than classroom instruction. Students navigate a wide range of factors including study habits, attendance patterns, peer influences, family responsibilities, socio-economic challenges, and the use of technology. For example, **a student's grades may decline not because of lack of ability, but because after-school responsibilities such as hawking, household chores, or family care reduce time available for study.** Similarly, while some students are motivated by peer networks and group learning, others may be distracted by **social interactions or mobile phone usage.**

Despite this recognition, much of the research on students' performance has remained focused on numbers such as grades, pass/fail rates, and statistical correlations. While such studies are valuable, they do not adequately capture the lived experiences of students or the subtle, day-to-day behaviours that contribute to academic success or struggle. A purely quantitative approach risks oversimplifying the story of performance and overlooks the voices of students themselves, who are the main actors in the learning process.

This study therefore takes a qualitative perspective to move beyond the numbers. By exploring the academic behaviours that shape performance, it seeks to uncover the routines, challenges, motivations, and coping strategies of students within their real-life contexts. Through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations, the research examines how students manage their time, engage with teachers, respond to family and peer influences, and use available resources to navigate the demands of schooling.

Research Problem

Educational research and school monitoring systems often emphasize quantitative indicators such as examination scores, grade averages, and completion rates to assess student performance. While these measures are essential, they failed to provide in-depth understanding of the behaviours, motivations, and contextual realities that drive or hinder learning outcomes. In many higher institutions, particularly in developing contexts, students face challenges such as household responsibilities, peer pressure, limited resources, and distractions from technology, all of which influence study habits and academic engagement. Despite the growing recognition of these factors, there remains a limited body of qualitative research that systematically examines how students' daily academic behaviours such as study routines, class attendance, use of resource materials, and coping mechanisms thus translate into academic success or struggle. Without such insights, interventions to improve performance risk being one-dimensional and ineffective.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore and understand the academic behaviours and contextual factors that shape tertiary institutions students' performance beyond quantitative measures of grades and test scores. Specific Objectives are to:

- i. investigate students' study habits and time management strategies within and outside school hours.
- ii. examine the influence of class attendance, participation, and Lecturer's feedback on academic performance.
- iii. explore the role of family responsibilities, socio-economic conditions, and home environment in shaping students' study behaviours.
- iv. assess the impact of peer influence, group study, and social networks on learning outcomes.
- v. identify how technology (e.g., mobile phones, internet use, educational apps) contributes to or distracts from students' academic routines.
- vi. examine students' coping mechanisms in managing academic stress, setbacks, and motivation.
- vii. provide insights for Lecturers, parents, and policymakers on how to strengthen academic behaviours that promote better performance.

Significance of the Study

This study is grounded in the need to shift focus from what students' scores to how they learn. By adopting a qualitative approach, the study provides an opportunity to capture the voices of students, teachers, and school counsellors, highlighting the lived experiences behind performance outcomes. Understanding academic behaviour through themes such as time management, motivation, peer influence, and other activities as enumerated previously, and resource accessibility generate a holistic picture of the factors shaping performance. The study is significant because it:

- a. fills a research gap by examining the behavioural and contextual dimensions of academic performance beyond quantitative data.

- b. provides schools and policymakers with actionable insights to design targeted interventions that address not only curriculum delivery but also student habits, study culture, and psychosocial challenges.
- c. empowers students' perspectives, ensuring that policies and programmes to improve performance reflect their actual needs and realities.

By uncovering the behaviours beneath the numbers, this study advances knowledge on educational improvement strategies and contributes to the broader discourse on holistic academic success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Academic Performance

Academic performance is often measured through grades, test scores, and graduation rates, but scholars have argued that such metrics provide only a partial view of student success. According to York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015), academic performance encompasses not just cognitive outcomes but also behavioral, emotional, and motivational dimensions. This broader view highlights the role of students' learning behaviors, self-regulation, and contextual influences in shaping performance outcomes.

Academic Behavior and Self-Regulation

Research in self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002; Pintrich, 2004) emphasizes that high-performing students are those who can plan, monitor, and regulate their learning. Behaviours such as consistent study habits, goal setting, time management, and self-reflection contribute to improved outcomes (Schunk & Greene, 2018). Conversely, students who lack effective self-regulatory behaviors often struggle with procrastination, last-minute studying, and poor retention.

Peer Influence and Social Learning

Peers significantly influence academic engagement and behavior. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) suggests that students model behaviors they observe in peers and lecturers. Studies by Wentzel (2017) and Ryan (2001) show that peer groups affect homework practices, classroom participation, and attitudes towards learning. Peer pressure can work positively encouraging diligence or negatively encouraging absenteeism or distraction.

Family and Home Environment

Parental involvement and home conditions play a major role in shaping students' study behaviors. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) underscores the importance of the microsystem family as a primary influence. Empirical studies have linked parental support, socioeconomic status, and household stability to students' academic motivation and persistence (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2016). Where students balance schooling with household responsibilities or income-generating activities, academic behaviors may be compromised (Adams & Sartori, 2020).

School Climate and Lecturer Support

School context such as quality lecturers, classroom practices, and overall climate all combined to affect students' learning behaviors. Research by Wang and Degol (2016) noted that a supportive school climate fosters engagement, while harsh or disengaged environments breed withdrawal. Lecturers who provide constructive feedback, encouragement, and mentorship positively shape academic behaviors such as persistence and help-seeking (Hattie, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011).

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Students also develop coping mechanisms to manage academic stressors. Qualitative research by Frydenberg and Lewis (2009) highlights that students employ strategies such as peer collaboration, relaxation, and spiritual

practices to manage academic pressures. Those with higher resilience are more likely to adopt positive coping behaviors that protect academic performance (Martin & Marsh, 2006).

Gaps in the Literature

While quantitative studies have extensively examined correlations between study habits, parental involvement, and academic performance, fewer studies have provided qualitative insights into how students themselves experience and interpret the behaviors shaping their academic outcomes. There remains a gap in understanding the lived realities of students, particularly in contexts where cultural, religion, social, and economic pressures intersect. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring academic behaviours beyond numerical indicators, focusing on personal narratives and contextual influences.

METHODOLOGY

Design: Qualitative Study Participants

Sixty (60) tertiary students were randomly selected from six faculties using grade point average (GPA) criteria such as: Low, Average, High, Outstanding. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among the participants. Each FGD has between 8 -10 participants provided they have spent at least a year in the university. An enabling central location, accessible and devoid of distractions to all the participants was identified and used for the FGDs.

Data Collection

The mode of data collection was through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) among 10 selected key officials such as Lecturers, students' union government (SUG) officials, and Student Affairs Directorate for deeper insights. Moderator, note-taker, and moderator's guide, were used throughout the field exercise.

Analysis: The analysis was conducted manually using thematic areas, themes, sub-themes, collages, and use of cards to organize participants views on each issue. The similar themes carrying the same message of views were sorted and classified as factors. Less catchy or less key messages identified during the FGDs were also grouped together to enhance comparison and other assessment. Quotes are extensively used to bring the perceptions of the participants to bear.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Perceptions of Lecture Attendance

When the participants (students) were asked about their beliefs on the importance of lecture attendance in achieving academic success, their response include: eagerness to learn, acquire knowledge, acquire skills to problem solving, gain more wisdom through listening to lecturers, and have good grade. Some of the students expressed their beliefs through the quotes below:

"The main aim of coming to school is to learn, acquire skill to be able to solve problems, be knowledgeable, and obtain a degree; not just a degree but a good grade that someone can be proud of and make him/her employable in the labour market", said by 200-level female Biochemistry Science student.

"When you attend lectures regularly, you are bound to learn new things, acquire knowledge, possess skills in analytical and problem solving as well as be useful to yourself and the society in life; Attending lectures enhance your ability as a student to interact with the lecturers and colleagues, seek clarification in areas that seem blue and also to identify good colleagues you can form alliance with in a study group"; said by a 300-level Female Environmental Management and Toxicology student.

"Regular attendance in class portrays you to be a good student who knows why he or she is in the four walls of university. We are here to learn and achieve our life dream or ambition of becoming a graduate that can be

reckoned with in the society and also to contribute our quota in the development of the country and the world. And if you are not attending lectures as the case may be, it means, such student does not have right mindset and just there to play without any ambition of becoming somebody of repute in future. Attending lectures enables you to learn and unlearn, take good notes, actively participate in class work, broaden your horizon, meet with equal minded students, read together and play together and prepare for examination together when time reach,” opined by the 200-level Male Administration and Management student.

Challenges Being Experience in Attending Lectures

In response to challenges students face by going for lectures, they claimed that transportation and finance are major challenge being faced in schooling. According to them, trekking from one campus to another to attend lectures is not easy. Far distance to lectures halls, and the timing of lectures is a challenge. Problem of inadequate finances to take shuttle bus to the campus two and to feed themselves is a challenge. Those students that have the money to take shuttle buses complained of gross inadequacy of the shuttle buses. Hence, they suggested that the school management should **procure and manage the school shuttle buses** so that **rebate can be given to students** which the current private operators of the shuttle buses are not doing. Alternatively, the school management can go into public-private partnership for effective running of the shuttle buses both within and outside the campuses to ease mobility of staff and students that stays in towns and neighbouring villages.

Handling of Lectures: The participants mentioned the modality of lecturing. They were of the opinion that if the Lecturer is friendly and make his/her teaching interesting using different strategies to ensure the class is participatory, students will be eager to come for lectures but if the lecture is boring couple with unfriendly attitude of the lecturer, students may be deterred from attending such lectures and prefer to copy notes from their colleagues that attend the lecture.

Limited Availability of Hostels: Inadequate hostels to accommodate students who are willing to stay in the campus for both male and female students have created bottle neck. This is the main reason why most of them are staying outside university premises. Those whose residential areas in towns have no bore-hole to fetch water often experienced shortages of water supply and this occasionally leads to going late for lectures slated for 8.00 am.

Perception of Reading Habits

When the students were asked about their reading habits and how often do they read outside the class hours, their response include: reading for 1 hour and 30 minutes, 1 hour only, 2 hours, 4 hours and some for 5 hours. The participants attributed the duration of study hours to **perceived strength and ability to comprehend** what they are reading. Some participants said, if their reading is above 1 and 30 minutes, the rate of assimilation diminishes and they will not be able to comprehend what they are reading, hence, prefer to drop the reading to rest. Some of the participants mentioned every day in having extra reading, while some said, 3 times in a week and some prefer reading immediately after school lecture hours before going home.

One of the participants said, “frankly speaking, I stayed back to do extra reading till around 6 p.m. before going home because once I reach home, there be no time for study. I help my mummy to sell market which leads to distraction,” said by 300-Level Female Accounting student.

“Of a truth, some students do not read outside school hours. Although, they pretend that they are going back to lecture hall to read in the evening, but on getting there, they continue to play, causing distraction, tuned their laptops or phones volume high and playing games or watching films and videos. And when they are tired at night falls, they retire back to their hostels to sleep. This I have witnessed in the Lecture Hall I used to read before I relocated to another smaller hall to read to avoid quarrelling with some unrepentant students,” said by 200-Level Male Administration and Management student.

“As for me, my personal study hours that I follow judiciously is between 4 to 5 hours daily outside school hours. This has given me an ample chance of consulting reference materials, browsing internet for more

information and use all the information obtained to form comprehensive notes for in-depth understanding of the courses I am undertaking and this has helped me academically. At present my GPA stands at 4.98,” said by 300-Level Male Statistics Student.

“Well, as for me I cannot read for long hours, hence, my study period after school is not more than 2 hours daily. When the student was asked, whether she is consistent with the 2 hours, she responded that sometimes she defaulted and reads for 1 hour and 30 minutes before closing her books to relax and switch to home chores,” said by a 300-level Female Statistics student.

“My study habit ranges between 2 to 4 hours daily depending on my mood and this is what I do as a routine. I ensure that the minimum study hour is 2 hours and maximum is 4 hours. You know in Engineering courses, there are a lot to be done, hence, if you rely on lecture notes only, to obtain a high grade, a person can meet Waterloo. But if you study hard, it pays on the long run; lecturers and your colleagues will recognize your useful contributions in the class and extra hours of thorough studying makes you to be sound academically and acquire very high grade,” said by a 300-level Female Mechanical Engineering Student.

Influence of Technology

In the course of the discussions, the participants were asked to speak on the influence of technology as it promotes or distracts students in their studies. Their response attracted both positive and negative influence.

“Well, the advent of technology has both good and bad side depending on the angle you view it from. The use of technology makes learning easy, ease of access to reference materials, learn new things to broaden your horizon, and a person can within a twinkling of an eye access a lot of information which ordinarily is difficult to achieve within a short-given time. Through judicious utilization of internet, you have access to your field of study materials and resources that can enhance your performance in your study. This is my secret of my high grade 5.0 which I hope to maintain; I prefer to have credit units in my phone to browse for more and new information rather than buying clothes to live big in the campus.” Said by a 300- Level Female Mathematic Student.

“The use of technology has increased my knowledge-based both academically and social-wise. I am abreast of what is happening around me locally, national and international communities. Although, sometimes I spend more time in football games, and current affairs than the time I put in my studies. However, I always try balancing everything so that I will not be backward in any area of life,” opined by 300-Level of Computer Engineering Student

“A student without real ambition of having good grade can be derail through the excessive use of technology. Yes, content creation to make people laugh is good but if you give more attention to it than your studies, average performance will be recorded,” said a 200-Level Public Administration student.

“One of the negative aspects of technology is abuse of it. Some students prefer watching tik-tok or unwholesome films through their phone. Most of the time of study is wasted and before you know the examine period is around. As a result, such students result into examination malpractices which could lead them to expulsion or carryover of many courses which invariably leads to extra year in the school”, said by a 300 Female Geology student.

Motivation and Hinderance to Reading Habits

The participants were asked about the motivation or hinderance to reading habits; their responses revealed the following associated factors for motivation:

- Conducive learning environment,
- Friendly lecturer’s attitude towards students, manner or ways of teaching (interesting) and if the Class is lively and participatory, students will not want to miss such classes,

- Having right mindset,
- Enabling environment,
- Good peer group,
- Financial buoyancy, and
- Peace of mind can motivate a student to read without distraction.
- Lecturers' feedback to students centering on their performance and how they can improve upon it is very essential and necessary

Hinderance to Reading Habits

- Lack of finance and hunger can negatively influence reading habits.
- Peer influence: if you move with bad group or bad association, it will negatively affect the study habits and such student overtime learn the peer group evils behaviour and attitude.
- Lack of provision of food stuff and resource materials can also hinder study habits. Some parents could not adequately provide for their wards; hence, such students pick up menial jobs which could easily serves as a bait to distraction.
- Lack of settled homes, especially when the parents are poor and struggling to make end meets.
- Harsh or unfriendly lecturers can negatively influence the decision of students to attend lectures or not to attend
- Inadequate social infrastructures, and internet are some of the challenges facing the students in the campus.

Usage of Reference Materials

In terms of types of reference materials being utilized by students, the following were mentioned: textbooks, google web, artificial intelligence (AI), browsing internet for specific information or in-depth knowledge, past question papers obtain from friends, seniors, or from school library and the department; and other relevant materials such as journals, seminar papers, dailies, print media materials and attending seminars and conferences.

Accessibility and Effectiveness of Resource Materials

When the participants were asked about the accessibility and effectiveness of available materials, the overall opinions show that those reference materials are very accessible anytime they need

them in the library, and their contents are useful and effective which have enhanced their academic performance. The use of these resource materials makes them to be ahead of the class in certain areas of studies. Many of the participants claimed they have not encountered any challenges while trying to access and utilize resource materials. The occasional challenge bore down to lack of adequate data unit if they want to browse.

“Currently, I do not have any challenge in accessing reference materials. Any material I do not find in the library; I borrow from my friends, and return after the usage,” said by a 200 level Male Mechanical Engineering student.

“Of a truth, the school library is well equipped, and we have light from 9 .00 A.M. to 5.00 P.M. daily. A serious student can utilize this time to do extra reading when they are not having classes,” said by a 200 level Male Statistics Student.

Effects of Attending Lectures

When the participants were asked what effects does attending lectures play in their academic success, virtually, all of them mentioned: broaden the learning capacity, acquire skills in problem solving, enhance the understanding of things they do not know, unlearn certain myths in the areas of their studies, expand their knowledge, gives opportunity for asking questions and receive answers, enhances ability to take complete, good notes during lectures and coming out with good results. Apart from above response, some of the participants said,

“As for me, regular lectures attendance is the main thing while I am in the school. It makes me to learn, ask questions and receive answers and explanations to clarify grey areas of concern, which always enhances my academic performance,” said by 300-level Female Biochemistry student.

“Attending lectures enables me to learn and pass my examination. It makes me to be serious with my studies and also help me to identify who is who in the class so that I can select friends to move with and studying or reading together,” said by 200 level Female Environmental and Management Toxicology student.

“Ummh! without attending lectures, how can a student cope with his or her studies? Any student who wants to excel in life must take lecture attendance seriously. By so doing, he/she will take good notes while lectures are on, ask questions to clarify challenging topics and by so doing you acquire more knowledge to shine in your field,” opined by 300-level Male Business Administration student.

Managing Reading Time

When the participants were asked, how do they manage their reading time outside of the class? The following responses were given.

“I visit Library to read if I have up to 2 or 3 hours break before another lectures comes up. When school or my lectures for the day is over, I rest for three hours and pick up my books and go back to classroom to read. Most of the time, I spend between 4 to 5 hours before going to hostel to sleep,” said by a 300-level Male Electrical Engineering student.

“I only study for about 2 hours outside school hours. I discovered that after two hours of reading, my concentration declines and it affects the rate of my assimilation, hence, once I put in 2 solid hours in reading, I close my book to rest and prepare for the next school day”, said by a 300-level Female Food Technology student.

In your opinion, which of these factors (attendance, reading, references) has the greatest impact on your GPA? Why?

“In my opinion, I feel all of them have impacted my study life. That is, the combination of lecture attendance, reading outside school hours, and use of resource materials have greatly impacted on my GPA. They positively influence my academic performance. This is because, attending lectures only will not do the magic, neither reading alone without attending lecture will enhance student success nor using reference materials alone will give you good result. There is a need for a brilliant student to always attend lectures, create room for study hours and combine both with the use of reference materials to achieve excellence results,” said by a 300-level Male Statistics student.

“I don’t think any of the factors mentioned can stand alone on the pathway to success. Lectures attendance alone without taking your reading seriously cannot give you good result. You can achieve average result if you only attend lectures and read outside the school hours. But to have an excellent result, you must ensure that you regularly attend lectures, have study time and make use of library to source for materials that will further compliment the first two factors thereby guarantee academic success,” said by a 300-level Female Environmental Management and Toxicology student.

“As for me, attendance in class, having good reading habits, usage of library as well as use of other resource materials in conjunction with group study all have influence in achieving good academic performance of students. I do not think each of them standing alone can perform the magic of ensuring a higher GPA. I stand to be corrected,” said by a 300-level Female Administration and Management Student.

What strategies do you put in place to enhance academic perform and improve on your GPA?

“As for me, I first developed right mindset, that is, right attitude toward my education. I set clear goals that will guide by reading and everything I do per week. I engage in self-reflection on what I have achieved and not achieved every week and why. From this assessment, I am able to tell whether I consistently follow my time-table by achieving what I intend to or not. I also spend 2 hours per subject before I switch to another subject for reading. Any aspect of the topic I do not know I will take it to a group study where we put heads together and jointly proffer solution”, said by a 200 Level Administration and Management Student.

“I created a study time-table for each subject and I allocated time per subject which is between 1 to 2 hours daily. I consider most difficult subjects first while drawing up my time table, and ensure I practice the subjects with calculation regularly to get acquainted with the strategies of solving and using different formulae to solving such difficult subjects. I identified a group of colleagues who are serious minded in their studies and join them to study together with the view of helping ourselves academically”, said by a 200 Level Statistics student.

Other participants mentioned setting goals, drawing up of study schedules, prioritizing learning, group work, regularly solving problems, taking good notes and consistent in lecture attendance. They also claimed to always sit in the front during lectures so that they can see the board clearly

as well as solutions on the board and avoid distraction during lectures. These were some of the strategies devised by the students to excel in their studies.

Barriers to Regular Attendance

When the students were asked what are the associated factors that impinged on regular attendance of lectures in tertiary institutions, the following points were enumerated.

Mindset: According to them, mindset is crucial because if they know why they are in the university, they will focus on their academic activities. They claimed a serious-minded student will not joke with lectures attendance, study hours, use of Library, judicious use of internet, and group study. Such students always have right mindset of coming out with outstanding academic performance in every semester. Their beliefs are that a good student who knows the reason of being in school will have good notes, ask questions both in class and/or outside the class from the lecturers or his class mates.

Peer Influence: Evil communication corrupts good manners, say an old adage. Bad peer groups will negatively influence their peer, while good peer groups that know why they are in higher institution will always encourage themselves the need for regular attendance in class, reading hours, use of reference materials, use of Library and group study with the aim of having good academic success.

Social Vices: The FGDs participation said the bad eggs among the students have the notion that they will always have their ways and have it to the top without any obstruction. For instance, they gave example of Cult members in the schools which have the confidence or belief that there is nothing they cannot achieve either through negotiation or by threats. And since, some of the lecturers belong to the same group, they fall back on such lecturers when there is a serious challenge, hence, they entertain no fear of anybody.

Some unserious ladies' belief that having lecturers as their man friend, they can easily get good marks and grade, hence, giving themselves to serious reading will be out of place. They put making money and enjoyment before their academic activities which most of the time always cause heartache to them. They claimed also that their boyfriends will lobby their lecturer colleagues to pass their babes. Hence, some ladies who go after men outside the institutions have the beliefs that once they make money, they can buy some

lecturers over so that marks will be given to them on platter of gold. This perception might not be the case all the time because most lecturers that know their onions will not support ideas of awarding marks to students arbitrarily without attending lectures, having good notes, doing their assignments and able to write examinations before they can pass their courses.

Low Family Background: The participants in the focus group discussion made mention that if a student come from poor family background that is struggling to provide basic needs for the household members may likely not be meeting up with his/her studies. He/she will be burdened with how to pay his or her school fee, fear of hunger, burden with many thoughts, and consider future brink. In an effort to meet up and pay school fees and also take care of his/herself will end up in taking menial jobs which most of the time may not be easily come by and once he /she succeeded in securing one, his/her attention will be more on the job instead of his/her education.

Self-Image Driven: Participants also mentioned that some students just want to make name and not because they actually need certificate to secure job. In such scenario, the student wants to be called a graduate since he/she has made money and still making money before coming to enroll for a degree programme but shy away from the goal of being in higher institution.

Unsettled Mind: According to the group participants, unsettled mind is a barrier to learning. According to the participants, a student can be in class but his/her mind is far away due to many challenges he/she is facing either financially or crisis at home. Such students are absent minded in the class which influences low assimilation, lack of comprehension and low retention of what they are taught. By the time these thoughts get to the peak, the student will start skipping lectures and if care is not taking, will end up abandoning the schooling. They suggested that such students should be identified and the Lecturer to have one-on-one discussions to find out the root-causes of the problem and be able to counsel him/her appropriately. Lecturer can also refer such students to Counselling and Guidance Officer of the university for further advice and assistance.

Bad Association: “When you follow bad friends, you will on long run do bad things which are alien to you before moving with this group. There is a saying that goes, “show me your friend and I will tell you who you are”. Bad peers negatively influence their friends without them knowing, hence, keeping bad company can easily derail a student and may likely forget the main purpose why he/she is in the school. Therefore, school management should have zero tolerant to evil and unwholesome associations within the tertiary institutions so that it will not be a bait for unsuspected students”; said by a 200 Level Male Cyber Security student.

Lukewarm attitude of the lecturer to his/her duties: “Some lecturers do create fear in the heart of students by the way they speak and threatening students and even sent them out when students came late to class. So, unserious students can stop attending such lecturer’s classes when the lecturer is very harsh or just come to class to dictate notes without taking time to explain to the understanding of the students. This attitude of the lecturer can lead to discouragement and deter waving mindset to stop coming for lectures and depend on copying of notes from those that attended”; opined by a 300 Level Female Environmental and Management student.

Poverty: “Socio-economic challenges at home can lead to some students not attending lectures. Irregular payment of school fee and no upkeep allowance can make students to miss classes; hence, schooling will not be his/her top priority. What occupies such minds is how to assist their parents and themselves financially by taking up menial jobs when they ought to be attending classes. We had some colleagues that lost their lives due to menial jobs they engaged in to cater for their education school fees and upkeep. This category of students will skip lectures with mindset of studying whenever they return from the job that is keeping them afloat”, said by a 200 level Female Statistics student.

“In our faculty, we also lost a 300-level male student that engaged in menial job to earn money to sponsor his education due to the scourge of poverty”, said by a 300 level Male Electrical Engineering student.

Fire brigade Approach to reading and studying after school hours- “Formerly, I used to believe that I can easily read two weeks to examination with full concentration but I met Waterloo in one of the semesters’ examinations. Since then, I had a rethinking and changed from that negative perception and start studying after school hours to compliment what I have learnt in class. As I speak now there are still some students who still have this negative mindset of depending on last minute reading, saying two weeks to examination preparation is enough to study hard and pass the examination which does no student good, hence, they prefer to play and enjoy themselves without giving appropriate attention to their studies. Well, I thank God that I learned my ugly lesson early enough to have a change of heart”, said by a 200 Level Male Statistics student.

Student-Lecturer Relationship: “There are some Lecturers that make their lectures interesting, active participatory, and lively; hence, students are ever willing not to miss such classes. Lecturers can cultivate the habits of making their lectures lively, participatory and operate open door policy in order for the students to have access to them”, said by a 300 Level Female Engineering student.

The following views were enumerated during in-depth interviews.

Emotional Imbalance: When emotionally a student is not balanced psychologically, he/she is at variance from normality, hence, difficult to judiciously spend up to 2 hours in reading.

Inconsistent Electricity Supply: In Nigeria electricity is generally problematic and erratic to lecturers and to the students’ productivity. Some serious-minded students want to read in the evening and night but because lack of power, most of them engage in doing other things that do not require electricity. The use of technology is impossible if there is no electricity to power systems and of charging their phones.

Poor Infrastructure and Learning Facilities: According to the in-depth participants, many schools lack adequate classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and modern teaching materials, unlike in developed countries with well-equipped educational learning materials and enabling environment. The availability of different equipment in the institution has positive impacts on studying.

Limited Access to Technology and the Internet: If the institution is situated in rural areas, students struggle with limited internet access, making online research and digital learning difficult compared to developed countries with widespread high-speed internet made available in schools. Although, the little time some students have access to internet their attention is switched from reading to download of unprofitable things. Many of them will chat for hours and engage in Tik-Tok.

Shortages Lecturers, and Quality of Education: A high student-to-lecturer ratio, poorly trained educators, and low motivation among lecturers (due to poor salaries) negatively impact the quality of education, invariably affects the teaching and knowledge transfer.

Economic Hardships and Child Labor: Many students engage in hawking in campuses, farming, or other income-generating activities to support their families, engages in weekend vocation training with the view to help themselves with in school hence, reduction in study time, self-reflection, and lack of focus on academic-based activities.

Political Instability and Insecurity: Conflicts, terrorism (e.g., Boko Haram in Nigeria), and political crises disrupt schooling, forcing students to drop out or experience prolonged academic interruptions.

Cultural and Gender Barriers: In some regions in Nigeria especially in the North and South-South regions, early marriage, gender discrimination, and societal expectations prevent girls from completing their education, whereas developed countries have stronger policies promoting gender equality in education. According to the participants, there should be a strong policy to prevent early marriages and reduction in gender discrimination.

Poor Health and Malnutrition: Malnourishment, diseases (e.g., malaria, typhoid), and inadequate healthcare services affect students’ concentration, attendance, and thereby affect cognitive development. Nigeria government should reintroduce feeding of students in the higher institutions knowing fully well that once the

issue of hunger is solved, students especially from poor and average homes would be able to concentrate on study and their productivity will improve.

Limited Government Funding and Corruption: Education budgets are often insufficient or mismanaged, leading to poorly equipped schools, shortages of instructional materials, and delayed in lecturers' salaries. Sometimes the money meant for development projects in the institution are diverted to individual purses.

Frequent Academic Strikes and Disruptions: Constant academic strikes lead to disruption of academics and affect the behaviour of the students even the most brilliant students may temporarily lose focus.

DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that academic success is beyond numbers but composite of other activities which include lecture attendance, study time, use of materials, mindset, socio-economic issues, enabling environment and responsibility of the students. All these variables combined influence academic performance.

The results of the qualitative study analysis demonstrate that educational successes were not only numbers that influence it but socio-economic, family challenges, and enabling environment play significant role in student success. This aligns with evidence from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) which underscores the importance of the microsystem family as a primary influence. Findings of this study support the empirical studies that have linked parental support, socioeconomic status, and household stability to students' academic motivation and persistence (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2016).

Academic performance is a multifaceted that include regular lecture attendance, study time after school, utilization of the resource materials and use of library, group study, having right mind set, plan, consistently follow the study time-table, support of the parents, peace at home and socio-economic factors. The findings are in consonant with the academic behavior and self-regulation theory which emphasizes that high-performing students are those who can plan, monitor, and regulate their learning (Zimmerman, 2002; Pintrich, 2004). It also stressed the need of consistent study habits, goal setting, time management, and self-reflection contribute to improved outcomes (Schunk & Greene, 2018). The study also supports the assertion of Schunk and Greene (2018) that students who lack effective self-regulatory behaviors often struggle with procrastination, last-minute studying, and poor retention.

The research findings indicate that enabling environment and lecturers' attitude toward students also influence the behaviour of student toward their academic performance. This aligns with the result of qualitative research conducted by Wang and Degol (2016) that a supportive school climate fosters engagement, while harsh or disengaged environments breed withdrawal. Lecturers who provide constructive feedback, encouragement, and mentorship positively shape academic behaviors such as persistence and help-seeking (Hattie, 2009; Roorda et al., 2011).

This study indicates that students who can manage academic stressors through group study, relaxation with colleagues, and read together most of the time are always successful academically irrespective of their challenges. This confirms the findings of qualitative research by Frydenberg and Lewis (2009) who highlights that students employ strategies such as peer collaboration, relaxation, and spiritual practices to manage academic pressures. According to the findings of this study, ability of the students to cope and forge ahead academically are more likely to adopt positive coping behaviors that protect academic performance which align with qualitative research findings (Martin & Marsh, 2006).

CONCLUSION

While Nigerian students face significant educational barriers compared to their peers in developed countries, their strong cultural emphasis on education, resilience, and access to informal learning resources help many of them succeed despite aforementioned challenges. Lectures halls should not be far from faculties to avoid exhaustion from trekking long distance from one lecture hall to another which could lead many to skipping of lectures among students. Lectures should be scheduled within the faculties and not leaving their domain except

borrowed courses. Parental support, socioeconomic status, and household stability also play significant role in shaping students' behaviour toward academic performance. Provision of hostels to accommodate majority of the students in the campus will reduce expenses on transportation and accommodation. Provision of soft loan to students to ease their suffering while in the tertiary institution should be encouraged. Parents should cultivate habits of checking and visiting their wards regularly to see to their welfare and correct any act of indiscipline that could negatively affect the students' educational attainment.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies can explore further the role of Government and Parents in promoting effective and qualitative education devoid of distraction among the tertiary institutions' students in Nigeria.

Contribution to Knowledge

The insights generated in this study provide holistic understanding of performance that goes deeper than grades. In particular, the study contributes to knowledge by:

- Giving voice to students' experiences and perceptions of learning.
- Identified the behavioural and contextual factors that underpin performance.
- Informing schools, families, and policymakers on how to strengthen supportive environments for students' academic success.

By situating academic performance within the broader realities of students' lives, this study not only enriches educational research but also provides a more grounded foundation for designing interventions that are responsive to the actual needs of learners.

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