

Effect of Teaching Method, Choice of Discipline and Student-Lecturer Relationship on Academic Performance

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to provide new evidence on factors affecting students' performance. A sample of 192 students who have taken at least not less than four semesters examinations were considered. Student-Lecturer relationship, examination contents, students mode of study and assimilation, effort and students' CGPA were the parameters used for this purpose. The result of the findings reveals that choice of disciplines has negative effect on students' CGPA if unduly influenced by university authority or parents, and that student's CGPA rises as rapport between student and lecturer gets better. Although we obtained mixed, and sometimes controversial result when effort was compared with performance. Those students who make special effort in their studies but performed below those who do not take their studies seriously gave different reasons for the variation: 46% of female students reported rushed lectures while 29.69% of male reported lack of access to learning facilities such as internet. In order to encourage good performance, we suggest that lecturers should try to maintain good rapport with their students. However, they should ensure that moral hazard is not created in the process. Moral hazard is created when students believe they can pass examinations without making special effort to study.

Keywords: effort, assessments, examination, validity and reliability

INTRODUCTION

One of the most useful tools available to the Nigerian Universities in measuring students' performance is examination, be it written, oral or practical. This has been widely used by various examining bodies to test learners' understanding about the learnt material. The standard of examination questions used as instrument to determine the status or standards of learners' attainment with respect to expected outcomes is one of the criteria for measuring university standards.

In university system, which is the focus of this study, there are variations in standard maintained by each school. While some universities possess the necessary and sufficient facilities that guarantee sound education, others are striving to meet up with the minimum National Universities Commission's recommended standards. However, possessing the necessary and sufficient learning facilities does not in themselves mean graduates from such schools are better off than those not adequately equipped. It all depends on quality of staff and the candidates in question. In schools where staff are well motivated, students performance is expected to improve if such students are making special effort to learn.

Generally, the better the school, the more the academic performance means in terms of overall ability. Usually, one expects to see good grades in the less demanding schools than in group of old schools and respected universities. However, when seeking for ideal candidates, search should not be restricted to top universities. While candidates who went to old universities (popularly known as first generation universities in Nigeria) do claim they are the best compared with other ones in private and state universities, it has been evidence that there are some candidates in private universities in Nigeria who do better than those who privileged to attend prestigious universities.

Unfortunately, the present universities system of assessment which lacks the merit of exposing all students in the same field of studies to the same examination as being practiced in professional bodies like Society of Actuaries, Institute of Actuaries, Chartered Insurance Institute of Nigeria (CIIN), Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria (ICAN), Law school, etc., makes it difficult to easily identify which candidate is more intelligent. Since it is not possible to determine which student is good academically or less sound using institutional judgments, this paper attempts to examine how teaching method, choice of discipline and student-lecturer relationship mean on student academic performance.

Many studies have examined factors affecting student performance. Socioeconomic factors such as parents' income and education background have been identified as some of the most influencing factors affecting student performance (Graetz, 1995; Sparke, 1999; Haahr, Neilson, Hansen and Jakobsen, 2005 and Ilugu, 2007).

Rich (2006) determines performance by using examination, attendance and participation in class, attempting homework, and a group project.

However, in spite of the above authors' contributions to knowledge, none of them have directly examined how teaching method such as rushed lectures, choice of discipline and student-lecturer relationship affect performance. The present study is designed to fill this gap. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will be of great value to the government as well as policymakers on education system in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Examinations have been widely used to evaluate students' performance in formal school setting. Tobih (2012) defines examinations as organised activities aimed at determining the cumulative or broad knowledge in a students' educational development. Therefore, most educators see examination as a tool oriented towards helping the schools to improve, rather than simply publicising weak performance (Haahr, Neilsen, Hansen and Jakobsen, 2005:197). At a higher education level, it helps to establish the integrity of the degree or certificate awarded by any school, college or university (Tohbih, 2012). Although a range of appraisal methods can be used in order to assess students' progress in attaining academic objectives. Appraisal is a systematic assessment of how effectively task given to students is being performed. The appraiser (the person carryout the appraisal) will seek to identify the reasons for a particular level of performance and identify ways to improve future performance.

Commonly used methods include standardized tests, the assessment of student portfolios, judgemental ratings carried out by teachers, regular teacher-developed tests, and assessments of student assignments, projects, and homework (Haahr, et al, 2005:154). Assessments differ widely in nature and quality, and assessment policies as well as practices are often applied in different ways across school and programme types (Haahr, et al, 2005:175). It is a process prescribed for testing qualification, an exercise designed to examine progress or knowledge (Tobih, 2012). When used to find out students' level of understanding, the examiner must consider the validity and reliability of the test instruments used for this purpose. Anikweze (2005:2) suggests that "the purpose of test is to identify or discover what a person can do under certain controlled circumstances; for instance: to answer a number of questions either orally or written or perform a task or tasks within some limited time". Thus the examiner must not deviate from the objectives upon which the tests are based.

A number of efforts have been devoted to research on factors affecting performance especially in tertiary institution of learning. Studies of children's educational achievements over time have shown that '*social background remains one of the major sources of educational inequality*' (Graetz 1995:28). In other words, 'educational success depends largely on the socio-economic status of one's parents' (Edgar 1976, cited in Graetz 1995:25). Having high levels of unexplained absence at school has also been found to be associated with poorer early adult outcomes in the labour market (e.g. higher probability of being unemployed) and poorer adult health relative to non-truants (Sparkes 1999, cited in Zappala and Considine, 2001). The level of truancy or unexplained absence among students also relates to poor academic performance. Truancy tends to be higher among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Truancy, even occasional, is associated with poorer academic performance at school (Sparkes 1999).

Rich (2006) attempts to seek clarification whether additional effort harm or improves performance. One of his findings reveals that both ability and effort have a positive impact on student performance. Although, Pascarella and Terezini (1991) and Carroll (1963), cited in Rich (2006), find that most educators believe that effort is positively related to performance. Previous empirical studies of the link between effort and student performance find mixed, and often contradictory, evidence on whether additional effort improves or harm performance. In Nigerian universities system, there are two mode of assessments: continuous assessment (CA) and examination, used to determine the students' final grades. There are some students who devote most of their times to their studies and yet, performed below expectation in their final examinations. Can we say additional efforts harm performance? No. There may be intervening variables responsible for this. In fact, it has been noted that some students do over worked themselves especially during examination period and when they get to class they forget almost everything they have studied. Unfortunately, on leaving the examination hall they recall everything they have read but failed to put them in black and white while examination is ongoing. Therefore undue stress may be responsible for this situation.

Other factors such as parents' support could also account for variation in students performance. A high level of parental support has been found to be positively correlated with students' achievements as regards basic skills (Haahr et al, 2005). Parental support can be in the form of helping and motivating the students in doing their homework as well as active participation in school-home cooperation activities (Haahr et al, 2005). Thus a supportive family environment can help to improve academic performance. This seems reasonable because the

family background of students determine the type of upbringing which in turn determines or influences student choice of discipline. Parents' support for their children's education has been widely seen as an essential element of their success at school (Haahr et al, 2005).

Sociologists regard factors like family background including parental socio-economic status and environment has been found to be contributory factor in determining a vocation (Ubangha and Oputa, 2007). Ainley et al (1995) cited in Zappala and Considine (2001) defines *socioeconomic status* as a *person's overall social position...to which attainments in both the social and economic domain contribute*. When used in studies of children's school achievement it refers to the SES of the parents or family (Zappala and Considine, 2001). On the other hand, Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) and Super (1957) both cited in Ubangha and Oputa (2007) observed that psychologists believe basically that characteristics such as intelligence, interest, self concept, personality, values and needs are factors that influence vocational aspirations and choice. Hoppock (1987) also believes that individuals choose their careers in order to meet individual needs whether physical, psychological or emotional. Ilogu (2007) finds that "achievement motivation, attitude of students and teacher's teaching method have significant relationships with academic achievement". In other words, good interaction between students and lecturers enhances better performance of the former. It is very important at every stage of evaluation to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument used to assess the students. The validity of test, refers to whether the test measures what is intended to measure. A valid test must measure accurately and consistently what it is designed to measure and nothing else. On the other hand, reliability indicates the degree of accuracy with which a test measures what it is designed to measure. Hence, a reliable test may not be valid although every valid test must also have the property of reliability (Anikweze, 2005).

Consequently, examination questions or test designed too cheap below the students' standard or too difficult above their standards by course lecturer, is invalid and unreliable for measuring student academic attainment. (See for instance, Anikweze (2005) for details of factors affecting validity and reliability of student performance). If examiner ensure that his/her questions in relation to content of area covered in class are comprehensive and appropriate with reference to the standard of appraises when preparing for examinations, then such arrangement is valid. This means that examination questions are representative of standard of all the material taught by the lecturers and learnt by the students, and that, the use of vocabulary in question is adequate for the learners' standard. On the side of reliability, the testing conditions such as light, heat, ventilation seats and seating arrangements, noise as well as introspective factors in candidates' scores when test are repeated, must be brought under control. These also affect student performance. Holland and Mclean (2004) have suggested that when appraisal exercise is being carryout, the appraiser must ensure that the instruments used for this purpose are specific, developmental and motivational to the appraise.

This days, it is not uncommon for students to blame their lecturers when they failed and sometime claim that '**examination is not a true test of knowledge**'. If we are to agree to this assertion, then there should not be need for teaching because examination as method of evaluation is used to get the feedback of progress from the learners. No wonder, Nwana (1979) cited in Anikweze (2005) argues that evaluation is a pertinent aspect of good teaching and learning because "no matter how efficient the teacher, how intelligent the students, how adequate the auto-visual equipment, if no provision is made for some evaluation of progress, the teaching effort may be completely invalidated". Abodurin (1986) cited in Tobih (2012) noted that the test can be rendered invalid and unreliable if not administered under a favourable condition no matter what effort went into the preparation of the test.

Thus examinations serve evaluation purposes and is meaningful to both the appraisees and the appraisers if it is used to motivate average learners. Using the Tomdike' Stimulus-Response theory of learning, test act as a stimulus for learning in that most average students are gingered into studying whenever tests are proposed. If the stimulus is good that is, if the test is well designed – and it gives the true picture of the learner's achievement, it provides knowledge of result of reinforcement which propels the learners to hard work. Learners with good results work hard to keep the standard while students with poorer result work harder to improve (Anikweze, 2005).

METHOD

The population for this study covers all students from Faculty of Administration in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Simple random sampling was used to select 192 students (96 male and 96 female) in three departments: Accounting, Business Administration and Public Administration. We used examination contents, student mode of learning, effort and student-lecturer relationship to determine the intervening factors which may affect students' CGPA. The participants in this survey exercises were limited to students who have at least taken four semesters

examinations. Their reported CGPAs were used to determine average performance. The mid-CGPA used in the study to calculate average performance was arrived at as follows. $1.00 - 1.49 = 1$ point, $1.50 - 2.39 = 2$ points, $2.40 - 3.49 = 3$ points, $3.50 - 4.49 = 4$ points, and $4.50 - 5.00 = 5$ points. These points represent the x-values in the tables. Apart from factors affecting students' performance directly examined in this study, we intuitively provide possible explanations on how assessment approach by the course lecturer may affect students' CGPA.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 69.79% of male students on current course of study were motivated by passion (43.75%) and employment opportunities (26.04%). Similarly, 42.71% of female entered into present course of study for similar reason: passion (36.46%) and employment (6.25%). The university authority (14.58%) and other undisclosed reasons (15.63%) were also reported to have influenced 30.21% of male student choice of disciplines. Likewise, 57.29% of female students reported that university authority (40.62%) and other undisclosed factors such as prestige (16.67%) influenced their choice of disciplines. On the balance of probabilities, it can be inferred that passion (40.62%) and university authority (27.60%) – a situation where students are offered admission to study courses they did not applied for, are two major influencing candidates choices of discipline. It is evidence in Table 1 that 73.58% (i.e. 39/53) of students that have their choice of discipline influenced by university authority represent female population. In this case, it is very likely that students who find themselves in disciplines other than their choices may not perform as expected. Though there are some students who do exceedingly well in courses decided by the university authority.

In Table 3, students whose CGPA fall to second class lower and upper class divisions constitute 50.52% and 23.44% of the sample respectively. Insignificant percentage of students in passed and first class degrees constitute just 2.08% and 1.56% respectively. The rest of the students (22.40%) are in third class degree. The overall mean CGPA students' performance is 3.00. When considering the effect of student-lecturer relationship on students performance, our study shows that as student-lecturer relationship improves, the students CGPA also rises: students with poor lecturer relationship have 2.89 CGPA; those with fair have 2.98 CGPA and those with good relationship have 3.03 CGPA. Based on this Table 3, it can be said that student-lecturer relationship is fairly good (80.25%) in the sampled population.

Table 4 reveals that 19.27% of students with a CGPA of 2.97 reported not very busy with academic work. Also, 19.79% of students with CGPA of 3.03 reported partially busy with their studies, while 60.94% of the remaining student that reported always busy with academic work has a CGPA of 3.00. With these reported CGPAs, it is difficult to conclude whether effort harm performance. Intuitively, there are many possible explanations why student who don't get busy with their studies may perform better than those who are serious. One possible explanation may be due to level of intelligent among students. Another possible reason may take a form of situation where serious students fall sick during examination period. It is also possible for lecturer to serves into unserious students' hands. A lecturer serves into students hands when his examination questions covered a portion of the course contents read and memorized by the students. So serious students who are making special efforts to cover the entire course contents may not read the portion where examination questions are based.

Table 5 shows that 33.85% of students indicated that rushed lectures lowers their performances. Most female students suffer from this effect when compared with 20.83% of the male students' performance. Also, while 10.42% and 32.81% of students reported that they learn by memorization and understanding respectively, it can be seen from this Table 5 that 56.77% of the students combine memorization and understanding as mode of assimilation. It must be mentioned that student rate of assimilation play an important role in student performance. This is evident in Table 2 where 57.29% of students do not understand what is taught in class until after lectures. That suggests that they need to revise their lecture notes before they comprehend what is taught in class. Sometimes, especially in quantitative courses, some lecturers gives class work to test whether students are following progressively. However, these lecturers often end up using such class work as part of continuous assessment forgetting the fact that some students – the slow learners understand better outside the class. This situation, of course, invalidates student performance.

On the other hand, Table 4 reveals a strange result whereby students who rarely take their studies seriously have better CGPA (3.03) than those who devote most of their time to study. That is why Rich (2006) contemplated whether additional effort harm or improve performance. In fact, there are some students who devote less time to their studies and still perform better than those who devoted most of their time. This situation should not be misunderstood that additional effort harm performance. Any of the factors identified in Table 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 could be responsible for this. However, whether additional effort improves or harms performance is still a subject of controversy.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on factors affecting student's performance. Our study revealed that good student-lecturer relationship improves performance. In light of this, we suggest that lecturers should try as much as possible to maintain good rapport with their students. However, they should ensure that moral hazard is not created in the process. Moral hazard takes place when students realize that they can pass examinations even without making special effort in their studies.

Also, lecturers need to plan ahead of lectures to create rooms for effective coverage of course contents and avoid rushing the students which may not produce the required result. Since a key aim of any appraisal system is to find mutually agreed ways of improving performance, it is vital that the appraiser and the appraisee agree not only on current performance but also on what needs to be done to improve it (CII, 2003). It is also recommended that examination questions should cover the course contents taught by the lecturers and not just randomly basing their examination questions on some part of the course contents. We specifically suggest that lecturers should ensure that the questions used to get the students feedback meet the following criteria in that it must be:

- *Specific - looking at the performance achieved, what was good and not as good.*
- *Developmental - the appraisee is aware of the training, support and guidance they will receive to develop or improve performance.*
- *Motivational - the appraisee is motivated by the appraisal experience.*

As part of the way forward to improving student performance, it is recommended that neither parents nor university authority should impose courses on candidates. The students should be given the course of their choices. In addition, authority owe the students the responsibility of creating a conducive learning environment and access to learning facilities as the absence of these may negatively affect students performance.

In course of our investigation, we asked students when they really get serious with their studies. Most of the respondents said when examination time table is pasted. In order to assist student especially the slow learners to improve on their CGPA, it is recommended that they revise their lecture notes immediately after class to reinforce learning. They don't need to wait till examination or test is announced by the course lecturer.

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Tables

	Male	Female	Total
Passion	42(43.75%)	35(36.64%)	77(40.10%)
Employment	25(26.04%)	6(6.25%)	31(16.15%)
University	14(14.58%)	39(40.62%)	53(27.60%)
Others	15(15.63%)	16(16.67%)	31(16.15%)
Total	96	96	192

Authors computation

	Male	Female	Total
During lecture time	45(46.88%)	37(38.54%)	82(42.71%)
After class	51(53.12%)	59(61.46%)	110(57.29%)
Total	96	96	192

CGPA	Mid-CGPA(x)	Poor Px	Fair Fx	Good Gx	Total Tx	Percentage
1.00-1.49	1	2 2	2 2		4 4	2.08
1.5-2.39	2	8 16	18 36	17 34	43 86	22.40
2.40-3.49	3	18 54	41 123	38 114	97 291	50.52
3.5-4.49	4	8 32	18 72	19 76	45 180	23.44
4.50-5.00	5		1 5	2 10	3 15	1.56
Total		36 104	80 235	76 234	192 576	100
Mean		$P_x = 2.89$	$F_x = 2.98$	$G_x = 3.08$	$T_x = 3.00$	
Percentage		18.75	41.67	39.58	100	

$$P_x = 104 / 36 = 2.89, F_x = 238 / 80 = 2.98, G_x = 234 / 76 = 3.08, T_x = 576 / 192 = 3.00$$

CGPA	Mid-CGPA(x)	No(N) Nx	Partially(P) Px	Yes (Y) Yx	Total Tx
1.00-1.49	1	1 2	1 1	2 2	4 4
1.5-2.39	2	8 16	8 16	27 54	43 86
2.40-3.49	3	19 57	19 57	58 177	97 291
3.5-4.49	4	9 36	9 36	27 108	45 180
4.50-5.00	5		1 5	2 10	3 15
Total		37 110	38 115	117 351	192 576
Mean		$N_{-} = 2.97$	$P_{-} = 3.03$	$Y_{-} = 3.00$	$T_{-} = 3.00$
Percentage		19.27	19.79	60.94	100

	Male	Female	Total
Financial problem	19(19.79%)	3(3.13%)	22(11.46%)
Learning Facility	29(30.21%)	6(6.25%)	35(18.23%)
Power outages	10(10.42%)	15(15.62%)	25(13.02%)
Rushed lectures	18(18.75%)	27(28.12%)	45(23.44%)
Total	96	96	192
Mode of learning			
Memorization	5(5.21%)	15(15.62%)	20(10.42%)
Understanding	39(40.62%)	24(25%)	63(32.81%)
All above	52(54.17%)	57(59.38%)	109(56.77%)
Total	96	96	192

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