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# **CHANGE OF COURSE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN, NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Admission into higher institutions (especially universities) in Nigeria has become an issue of competition of a sort. This is as a result of the high number of admission seekers compared to the admission capacity of universities. Over the years, the scramble for 'big-name' courses and low interest in other courses has led the universities to offer admission to candidates in courses different from their choices of application. As a result of this, admission seekers are usually in some cases willing to part with their selected course just to get to the 'promised land'. They are usually so gripped with unbridled joy that they have been provisionally admitted such that they hardly think of the consequences of settling for a career that is not of their choice. Not only can the student find out later that he/she cannot cope with the course academic-wise, there is also the danger of disillusionment in which the student derives no satisfaction from the career choice. If the student ends up working for an organization, not only is this preventive to the achievement of self-actualization, but also hazardous to the realization of the organizational goals. It is in line with this that this research was conducted in the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria to find out if the change of course of students has in anyway contributed to poor performance in their studies. The rational choice theory was used to explain this phenomenon. The purposive sampling technique was employed in the selection of 235 respondents. The study revealed that a significant relationship exists between the change of course of students and academic failure. Based on this, the study recommends that universities should organized orientation programmes for students whose given courses were different from their choices of application.

**Keywords:** Change/ Course/ Socio-psychological/ Impact/ Academic/ Performance

## Introduction

The sacredness of education to the development of a nation cannot be overemphasized. The progress of humanity from the primitive to the modern age has been intricately linked with the quest to acquire knowledge. Indeed, this is reflected in the saying that education serves as the most commanding weapon through which the world can be changed (Mandela, 2003). Education entails erudition, particularly in schools, to advance one's knowledge and cultivate prized skills. Aremu and Sokan (2003) assert that the decisive purpose of education is to endow an individual with the required capacity to excel in a selected career or field of endeavour, and to be capable of positively impacting his/her environment.

Academic performance refers to the yardstick of measuring educational success. This comprises of skills and knowledge gained via the teaching spaces (Epunam, 1999). Essentially, it is a blend of studiousness and grit of the students in the search for knowledge. Pandney (2008) conceptualized academic achievement as determining the students' status in the class. This affords them a chance to advance their performance.

The University of Ilorin was founded by a verdict of the Government in 1975 and represents a tertiary institution owned by the federal government located in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. It started out as a University College associated with the University of Ibadan in 1975 guided under the headship of former principal, Dr. T.N. Tamuno. The University of Ilorin is one of Nigeria's best higher institutions, as current statistics would have it. Information recently surfaced in this regard from the computer-based test piloted by the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) from May to June, 2017 across 540 centres in the nation. As was stated by the examination body, the University of Ilorin has, in the last few years, outdone other institutions in the list of Nigeria's 'most sought after' Universities in the UTME. The university recorded the highest number of admission applications for any university in Nigeria between the years of 2012 and 2017, as shown by admission statistics from the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (Ngstudents, 2017).

The implication of this is that as the years go by, the university has far more applicants than it can absorb. While addressing the subject of admission, the immediate past Vice-Chancellor of the university, Prof. Abdulganiyu Ambali, stated that out of the 104,000 JAMB candidates that applied for admission into the university, only about 11 per cent would end up being admitted. He further explained that the university could only admit about 11,000 students out of those who seek admission into the university. The vice chancellor, speaking during the 40th anniversary of the Department of History and International Studies, bemoaned that even those admitted might not even get their preferred course of study (Ambali, 2017).

Furthermore, it has been documented that certain courses (e.g. Medicine, Accountancy, Engineering, Law, etc.) are the most sought after by admission seekers in Nigeria. However, the authorities of universities in Nigeria have to resort to the changing of courses originally applied for by the admission seekers in a bid to grant them the chance of being admitted. There are also cases of some candidates who applied for this change of course on their own accord when they realize that they do not meet up with the cut off marks for a particular course.

The change of course phenomenon could exhibit a chain reaction of great consequences on the society at large. A student who is unable to study his/her course of choice could end up losing that spark of academic inquisitiveness. This could result into a general loss of interest in the course of study. This phenomenon ends up in the grooming of lacklustre students, even if they achieve academic distinction. If these individuals secure employment, they would tend to work without vigour, having no real interest in their work. In essence, they would have no real passion for their work. With the lack of appropriate inspiration, underperformance would be common place. This goes a long way in influencing the success of an organization.

Studies have recorded a myriad of factors that could impinge a student's academic performance. For example, Weinfield (2010) proposed that a student's academic performance is due to his/her mental capacity. Hartney (2011) documented a connection amid students' academic performance and peer pressure. In another view, Akanbi (2010) maintained that academic performance is swayed by educational policies set forth to regulate education. This is however merely a tip of the iceberg in terms of the cornucopia of studies that have sought for the factors that can influence students' academic performance worldwide. However, it is critical to note that little to none of these studies examined the socio-psychological impact of the change of course on students and how it tends to impact on academic performance. This hiatus is what this paper filled.

## **Literature Review**

Academic performance indicates the degree of a student's triumph in his or her studies. A common gauge of academic dexterity lies in grades which reveal the student's performance in their subjects as well as overall tenure in school. According to Akanbi (2010) success is determined by academic prowess in most educational institutions. The performance of a student can be viewed as the outcome of the student's learning process. This comprises of the ideas, knowledge and skills obtained and acquired via the period of learning outside as well as within the class area (Epunam, 1999). It is in essence the aftermath of studiousness and determination of students in their academic quest. Pandney (2008) conceived academic achievement to be a depiction of the students' performances in the courses they study while in the school. This defines the students' position in the class. It also provides students with an avenue to hone their scores as well as to prepare for future

academic endeavors. Steinberger (2005) posits that academic performance is multidimensional: it is associated with human growth-cognitive as well as human growth, social, physical and emotional development.

Academic performance in school is assessed through numerous means. For mundane grading, students exhibit their deftness through oral and written tests, executing presentations, the submission of assignments and partaking in class discussion and activities. Teachers assess through the means of tests, assignments as well as examinations to ascertain the students' performance. Izundu (2005) cited that certain variables at home sway the learning capacities of a child either in a positive or negative manner, thereby affecting their results. Out of the variables, we have parental socioeconomic status, parental supervision of children, availability of library facilities, etc. In the view of Akanbi (2010) adolescents who hail from homes considered to be of affluent status may perform better than the ones from poor homes. Also, the study showed that inadequate parental financial earnings, family types as well as the lack of funding by government are some of the factors influencing the student's academic performance.

### **An Overview of Choice of Course**

The choice of the selection of courses while seeking admission to the university is one of numerous critical choices confronted by students. This decision will, without doubt, influence them throughout their lives while in school and as well after the completion of their studies. The jeopardy of changing courses initially applied for by students can be colossal. It could result into horrid academic performance of students and as well impinge upon the attainment of a successful career come posterity. Akanbi (2010) set forth that the development among Nigerian universities now is that students have no choice but to take whatever is offered, rather than to wait for their interested choice to become available again. Akanbi also posited that after obtaining degrees, a large proportion of the graduates become job seekers with low grades or skills, lacking the inclination to thrive in a competitive labour market like that of Nigeria.

Studies have equally indicated that students are usually drawn to pursue tertiary education as a result of the career prospects it may offer (Sevier, 1998). In the same vein, Paulsen (1990) detailed that students largely make college decisions based on the available job opportunities for graduates. Consequently, most parents and guardians of admission seekers into Nigerian universities are individuals who are cognizant of economic woes of the country. There are copious amounts of evidence that universities in a bid to make opportunities available for several applicants, new departments tend to be fashioned resulting into the change of most students' choice of course to occupy spaces created in the new departments. According to a study by Rawe (2002), one in ten students dropped out of school as a consequence of the wrong choice of course.

The changing of course of study in itself affects the careers of students. In the view of Ibrahim (2012), when students are victims of the change of course phenomenon, it influences their studying habit and employment choices.

According to Tillman (2015), parental influence is a significant factor that affects students' choice of course at the university. Malgwi, Howe and Burnaby (2005) cited the students' interest in a course to be a factor that also influences students' choices. They further revealed that male students are influenced by the potential of the course in the advancement of future goals, whereas female students are influenced by the displayed aptitude for the given course.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The core of rational choice theory lies in elucidating social occurrences by citing rational decision-making by the actor (Coleman, 1990; Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997). Also, it has been debated that the theory makes room for the explanation of actors' actions as well. The basic premise behind the rational choice theory is the making of rationally calculated decisions by the actor. The theory reveals that the actor selects an alternative that he/she trusts to bring about an aftermath that heightens his/her predilection. This inclination is commonly tagged as 'utility'. There are five relevant concepts embodied in the assumption: alternatives, constraints, utility, social outcome as well as belief (Sato, 2013). The concept of "constraints" influences an actor's viable choice in particular manners. Specifically, it can lead to some of the conceivable alternatives being unachievable.

With this in operation, a student that does not meet up to the cut-off mark is liable to have his/her course changed. Second, constraints alter the costs and benefits of alternatives. For instance, raising the cut-off mark increases the cost of studying a particular course. This reduces the chances of students meeting up with the cut-off mark. It should be noted that constraint on the actor is subjective in nature. In essence, what a certain individual might perceive as a constraint might be viewed otherwise by another. Therefore, it is subjectively perceived constraints, and not objective ones that influence the actor's array of choices. As a consequence, the actor therefore selects an alternative that he/she considers would result in a social outcome that increases his/her utility. As it relates to course change, an admission seeker is constrained by the stated cut-off mark. This efficiently filters out the course that can be selected. The inability to meet up with the cut-off mark results in course change. The admission seeker is therefore left with a choice to study whatever course is given to him/her or forfeit the admission.

### **Research Methodology**

The survey research technique was employed in the course of this research work. The target population are the undergraduate students who had their courses changed in the University of Ilorin. The purposive sampling procedure was used in the

selection of 235 respondents. The selection was based on students with changed courses. Also, the selection was restricted to 300 level students and above. This is because these students have gone significantly far in their studies. Chi-square was employed with the use of statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) software to examine the collected data. A total number of 230 questionnaires were completed and found to be useful. The analysis was therefore based on it.

## Data Presentation

**Table 1: Presentation of Socio-demographic Data**

Socio-demographic data	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
15-19	46	20
20-24	97	42
25-29	73	32
30 and above	14	6
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	123	53
Female	107	47
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	112	49
Islam	118	51
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	195	85
Married	30	13
Divorced/widowed	5	2
<b>Faculty</b>		
Agriculture	25	10
Arts	20	9
Basic Medical Sciences	20	9
Communication and Information Sciences	15	7
Education	25	10
Engineering	15	7
Environmental Sciences	10	4
Law	14	6
Life Sciences	20	9
Management Sciences	21	9
Physical Sciences	15	7
Social Sciences	16	7
Veterinary Sciences	14	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2017)

From the table, it was discovered that 46 (20 %) of the respondents are in the age range of 15-19 years, with 97 (42%) aged 20-24 years, then 73 (32%) aged 25-29 years and 14 (6%) aged 30 years and above. It was as well discovered that 123 (53%) of the respondents are males with the remaining 107 (47%) being females. Also, from the gathered data, it is indicated that 112 (49%) of the respondents are Christians with the remaining 118 (51 %) being Muslims. Finally, the gathered data shows that 195 (85%) of the respondents are single, with 30 (13%) being married and 5 (2%) being divorced/widowed.



**Hypothesis one:**

$H_0$ = There is no significant relationship between students' passion for the newly given course of study and class attendance levels.

$H_1$ =  $H_0$  is false.

**Table 2:**

Class attendance	Passion for the newly given course		Total
	Yes	No	
High	57	1	58
Low	37	135	172
<b>Total</b>	94	136	230

Researchers' fieldwork (2017)

$\chi^2 c$ - 105.763,  $\chi^2 t$ - 3.841, DF-1 Alpha level-0.05

**DECISION RULE**

Since the  $\chi^2 c$  is greater than the  $\chi^2 t$ , the alternate hypothesis is accepted and the null is rejected.

**Hypothesis two**

$H_0$ = There is no significant relationship between students' satisfaction with the change of course phenomenon and academic performance level.

$H_1$ =  $H_0$  is false.

**Table 3:**

Satisfaction with the course change	Academic Performance Level		Total
	High	Low	
Yes	50	8	58
No	51	121	172
<b>Total</b>	101	129	230

Researcher's fieldwork (2017)

$\chi^2 c$ - 56.328,  $\chi^2 t$ - 3.841, DF- 1 Alpha level-0.05

**DECISION RULE**

Since the  $\chi^2 c$  is greater than the  $\chi^2 t$ , the alternate hypothesis is accepted and the null is rejected.

**Discussion of Findings**

Table 2 indicates a significant relationship between students' passion for the newly

given course of study and class attendance levels. This means that students who are not passionate about the newly given courses are more likely to not attend classes. Table 3 shows students' non-satisfaction with the change of course phenomenon to be the cause of low academic performance levels. This means that a student who is not satisfied with the change of course is more likely to record low academic performance levels.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the research findings, the study recommends that Universities should organize orientation programmes for students whose courses were changed. This would ensure that the students develop an interest in, and are able to adapt to, the newly given courses. The success of these orientation programmes would subsequently be measured by class attendance.

Also, the study recommends that students, who are not satisfied with the changed courses of study, after receiving the orientation lectures, be advised to withdraw. However, this should only occur after the students undergo therapy sessions with the university's Guidance Counsellors.

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