

# Study habits of Nigerian university students



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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to investigate the study habits of university students in Nigeria. The sample consists of 441 education students chosen from four federally owned universities in Nigeria. They responded to a 35 item (3 – point scale) questionnaire which elicited students' study habits. Time put into studies, method used in studying and contents of studies were used as the frame of reference for measuring study habits. Descriptive analysis of data showed that students put some reasonable length of time into reading; some students used memorization technique; majority of the students depended on their course hand-outs or lecture notes as the main sources of information and read mostly for the purpose of passing examinations or tests. They read to absorb information as given by their lecturers and not necessarily to search for new or additional information. It was concluded that although university students in Nigeria read mostly for the purpose of passing examinations and they do not seem to pursue their studies correctly and thoroughly, they were found to be diligent. Some recommendations were made as to how to make university education in Nigeria more beneficial.*

**Keywords:** *Undergraduates' study habits.*

## Introduction

Like any other country of the world, university education is one of the types of education given after secondary school education. University education is for duration of between four and six years depending on the course being offered by the students. For example it takes an average education, science or social science student a minimum of four years to complete the course after secondary education, whereas for medical students it takes a minimum of six years. As enunciated in the national policy on education, one of the goals of university education is to acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society” (FME, 1998). And Fonlon (1978) contends that the hallmark of studies in the university lies in their “quantity, quality ... and their intrinsic organisation”. He describes intrinsic organisation as “a body of knowledge that is scientifically and philosophically built up into a coherent system”. In this paper, intrinsic organisation stands for internalisation of knowledge. In university studies, while the aspects of quality and quantity are institutionally controlled, intrinsic organisation is largely dependent on the students. The students are charged with the responsibility of knowing their purpose for university education and adopting strategies that will lead to that purpose. If the purpose is right and legitimate, then the strategies must include study habits that promote internalisation of knowledge.

However, university education in Nigeria has been bedeviled by a number of factors. These factors include frequent campus unrest, strikes, political and socio-economic distractions and

more. The extent to which these factors have affected university education in Nigeria cannot be easily explicated in a study of this nature. But it can be said that these factors either act singly or jointly to account for students' disposition or readiness to respond to intellectual challenges demanded by university education. It may therefore be of interest to find out whether university students in Nigeria adopt study habits that promote internalisation of knowledge.

Study habits are learning tendencies that enable students work privately. Azikiwe (1998) describes study habit as "the adopted way and manner a student plans his private readings, after classroom learning so as to attain mastery of the subject". According to her, "good study habits are good asset to learners because they (habits) assist students to attain mastery in areas of specialisation and consequent excellent performance, while the opposite constitute constraints to learning and achievement leading to failure". Some researchers (Ikegbunam, 1998; Ikeotuonye and Bashmir, 1986; and Denga, 1982) point to poor study habits as one of the major causes of poor academic performances among Nigerian university students. Other researchers (Okonkwo, 1993; Gilmer, 1990; Fayley, 1989; Udom, 1987; Bakare, 1977; and Khan, 1975) agree that good study habits have positive effects on performance. Akinboye in Ikegbunam (1998) identified 'making of study time-table' as one of the study 'skills' for students.

The main thrust of this study is to examine the study habits of university students in Nigeria using 'time put into studies', 'method used in studying' and 'contents of studies' as the frame of reference. Nneji (1998) carried out a case study using the above indicators with the University of Lagos and found out that the study habits of students do not promote intrinsic organisation of knowledge. The pertinent question now is, will the replication and extension of the case study to include other Nigerian universities make a difference in the findings? In other words, can the findings of the case study be generalized for university students in Nigeria? It is therefore the author's purpose to find answer to this question.

### **Limitation**

Although data collection was segregated for gender and class level, data analysis and results presentation have not been segregated along these variables.

### **Method**

The sample for the study was drawn from four Nigerian universities. These universities are: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN); Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria; Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife; and University of Lagos, Lagos (UNILAG). The universities were chosen because they are the first generation universities in Nigeria, established between 1960 and 1962, owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria and thus have the most experienced and qualified lecturers. Moreover, they could effectively serve as representative of the younger universities in terms of wider coverage of courses, study facilities and geo-political spread. A total of four hundred and forty-one students (81 males, 360 females) drawn from the faculty/Institution of Education in the selected universities were involved in the study. The students were all Nigerians in their 200 – 400 levels (second – fourth years).

A 35 item (3 – point scale) questionnaire was used to elicit the study habits of the sample. The questionnaire focused on three selected indicators of study habits. (Time, Method and Contents). Each indicator however, had sub-indicators that were used to draw up the stems for questionnaire items as follows:

<b>Study habit Indicators</b>	<b>Sub-Indicators</b>	<b>Stems</b>
Timing	Period	When most serious studies take place: whether at weekends; weekdays; day-release (free period).
	Duration	Average length of time spent on each study time: less than one hour; 1-2 hours; 2-4 hours 4-6 hours; or/and more than 6 hours.
Method	Technique	How assimilation is best achieved: summarisation; self test; memorisation; or whole reading
	Planning	The guide to what is read: Use of study timetable, reading choice subjects; reading pressing or other subjects.
	Place	Where studies are mostly done: In the library; classrooms; hostel (rooms) or in transit (transport)
Contents	What read	Materials read: Whether textbooks, lecture handouts, lecture notes, or periodicals.
	Purpose	Reasons for studies: Whether to search for new information; confirm given information, absorb given information; solve problems (assignments) or leisure.
	Drive	The main drive for studies: To pass examinations, tests, or personal knowledge.

**Table 1: Selected Indicators of Study Habits**

In developing the questionnaire, the first draft of the items was written by the author. This draft was given to three experts in students' learning to rate the validity of the items. The experts worked independently. Their comments were used to write the second draft of the questionnaire. In doing so, items that had at least  $\frac{2}{3}$  agreement were retained, some were modified while others were completely replaced.

The second draft was tested twice on a sample from a university that was not involved in the main study (3 months interval). This was later adjusted to produce the final version: Study Habits Questionnaires (SHQ) – see sample items in Figure 1.

The inter-rate validity and test-retest reliability coefficients were computed at 0.07 and 0.75 respectively. Questionnaires were administered directly on the students during their normal lectures in their respective institutions. All retrieved questionnaires were scrutinized for response validity and usability.

Usability was determined by the success of at least 75% of the items in the Questionnaires to the inbuilt test of response reliability using the 3-point scale of responses. Respondents were to indicate how each of the items reflected in their study habits using the words “Mostly” “Occasionally” or “only”.

## SHQ SAMPLE ITEMS

The statements on the left side indicate habits that students adopt in their private learning. On the right side are the response options that reflect how the statements apply to students' private learning characteristics.

You are to study the statements on the left and place a tick (✓) on just one of the options that agrees with what you actually do.

Example in item one, tick (✓) on

- 'mostly' if you do your serious studies mainly at weekends;
- 'occasionally' if you do your serious studies sometimes at weekends and;
- 'only' if you do your serious studies at weekends alone.

S/N	STATEMENT OF HABITS	Tick (✓)		
		MOSTLY	OCCASIONALLY	ONLY
1.	I do my serious studies at weekends			
2.	I do my serious studies at weekdays.			
11.	I assimilate best through summerisation.			
14.	I assimilate best through whole reading i.e. reading the whole text verbatim.			
15.	I use timetable to plan my studies.			
16.	I read choice subjects i.e. subjects that I like best			
17.	I read subjects that are pressing for examination i.e. subjects that are slated for examinations or test.			
33.				
35.	I read for examinations			
	I read for personal learning.			

**Figure 1: Sample items**

Example: In item I;

I do my serious studies at weekends (mostly, occasionally, only). In this item the respondent is expected to place a tick (✓) on

- i) 'Mostly' if his/her serious studies are done mainly or often at weekends.
- ii) 'Occasionally' if his/her serious studies are done sometimes but not often at weekends.
- iii) 'Only' if his/her serious studies are done (exclusively) at weekends alone.

This strategy helped to weed off frivolous responses. For instance, it would be frivolous for a respondent to indicate 'only' for reading at weekends and also for reading at weekdays in the next item. The responses adjudged reliable were then computed for analysis. Study habits were indicated through response frequencies to items attached to each sub-indicator.

## Results

The results indicated that 35% of the respondents read mostly at weekends while 65% read mostly during the weekdays. Again, 60% indicated that they read mostly at night, 32% early morning and 8% during their free time in the day (day-release). For duration of study, half the sample (50%) read mostly for two to four hours, 20% read for just 2-4 hours while no student read for less than one hour.

On method used for studying, majority (40%) of the respondents adopted the technique of 'whole reading' (reading the whole text verbatim) for assimilation of knowledge, 29% still adopted the old memorisation technique, 25% summarised while only 6% used self-testing. Only 8% planned their reading to cover all subjects by using the 'time-table' most of the time, 21% read choice subjects (subject liked best), while 71% read subjects that needed immediate attention (for tests, assignments or examinations). Also 45% preferred to read mostly in the classroom, 37% read in their rooms, only 15% made use of library facilities and even 3% claimed they could read while in buses, or cars to and from schools.

On content of studies, 86% read their lecture handout most, 10% read lecture-notes, 1% read textbooks and 3% read periodicals. They read mostly to absorb information (62%) as given by the lecturers in the handout or notes, 23% read in order to solve a given problem, 9% to confirm given information, 5% read with the purpose of searching for new information and 1% read for leisure. Nearly all the respondents (90%) had examination as the main drive for reading. 9% read to pass test, while 1% read for personal learning.

## **Discussion**

The above results represent the study habits of university students in Nigeria. Although these results are not exactly the same as the results from the case study Nneji (1998) conducted, the trends are consistent. This empirical consistency lends much to the credibility and reliability of the results obtained and the inferences drawn. In both studies, timing recorded the same trend. Most studies are done during the weekdays at night and for 2-4 hours at a sitting. Timing is an important indicator for effective studies in the universities. Both period and duration of studies are of serious considerations in the student's ability to manage his or her time and cope with the volume of studies expected at this level. The habit of reading at night and for 2-4 hours has been described as favourable to intrinsic organisation (Nneji, 1998) arguing that it requires determination and discipline to operate. These can also be described as the attributes or habits of diligent students. On method of reading, the technique, planning and place adopted by respondents in both studies cannot be described as favourable. Most students preferred to read subjects that are slated for examinations. Callahan and Clark (1977) have described Reading for examinations as mechanical. It has a dead-end. It is done for immediate intents and once the intents (usually, tests or examinations) are over, such readings are forgotten and the student is once again left blank. Again 'whole reading' as a technique adopted for assimilation of knowledge is popular among the undergraduates. This technique is not favourable to the quality and quantity of work expectations at this level, whole reading is like 'reading the lines' and it is at the most basic level of comprehension. It does not enable the students to interpret thought, and clues, derive implication, make speculations and draw generalisation not stated by the author. Moreover, experiments on study habits have shown that "Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite and Review" are the main features of effective studies particularly when the purpose is thorough understanding of content (Thomas and Robinson – 1972).

Perhaps, the observed 'whole reading' habit can be explained by the high dependency of students on handout as the main source of information in the university. With handouts or lecture notes, students probably read verbatim and absorbed as much as possible the given information thoughtlessly. Most students do not use the library probably because the incentives are not there as the libraries lack current books and Internet access. So even if the students wanted more information, they do not have the resources to do so. All the readings done are therefore based on handouts and driven by examination or test performance rather than intrinsic organizations. Considering the duration and frequency of reading, done by the students, it can be said that studies in the universities are diligently done but for examination

purposes. This habit is not completely favourable to intrinsic organisation of knowledge as Fonlon (1978) puts it “Studies at the tertiary level when pursued correctly, diligently and thoroughly, provide the students in a specific field, with a body of knowledge that is scientifically and philosophically built up into a coherent system”. This is to say that studies in the universities here lack some aspects of intrinsic organisations.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

An attempt has been made in this paper to investigate the study habits of university students in Nigeria. From the findings, although studies in the universities can be described as diligent they do not seem to be thoroughly and correctly done. Therefore it can be argued that some aspects of intrinsic organisation are lacking. Therefore, studies in the universities nowadays can only be described as examination centred.

As a fall out of this situation students on their part are not thorough in their pursuit of learning. Most of the time they tend to depend on handouts for their search of knowledge at the expense of standard course textbooks where available. Because the students have been found diligent, it can be contended that they (students) are willing but they lack the resources to carry out their studies, as they ought to.

Universities in Nigeria do not have adequate books and access to Internet. This paper therefore calls the international communities and agencies to assist. Help stock Nigerian libraries with books, provide Internet access, and stock the bookshops with current books at low cost. So doing, the international communities may impact positively on the quality of university education in Nigeria.

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