

## School Culture and Academic Administrative Performance of Students at Universities in Abia State: Exploring Collegial Support and Unity of Purpose

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### **Abstract**

*The study examined school administrative culture and the academic performance of students in universities in Abia State, exploring collegial support and unity of purpose. The study was carried out at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Two research questions were posed, as two corresponding null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study was 823 academic staff from 9 Colleges in the 2022/2023 academic session. A sample of 400 respondents was derived using the Taro Yamane sampling formula. The instrument used for data collection in this study was the School Culture Scale (SCS) "Academic Performance Proforma" (APP). The Academic Performance Proforma was used to collect the students' CGPA from their 200-level results. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) and Cronbach's alpha reliability method were used to determine the stability and internal consistency of the instrument, respectively. 400 copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents, and the 400 copies were retrieved. The research questions were answered. Multiple Linear Regression analysis and the F-test were used to test its significance at the 0.05 level. Findings revealed that there was a moderate, positive and significant correlation between unity of purpose and the academic performances of students in universities. Based on findings, the study recommended that the school authorities should, from time to time, organise workshops for their teaching staff to promote collegial support so as to help them in cross-breeding of ideas towards enhanced teaching effectiveness that would improve students' academic performances in the future.*

**Keywords:** School administrative culture, collegial support, unity of purpose and academic performances.

### **Introduction**

Tertiary education is the education given after the post basic education in institutions such as universities and inter-university centres such as the Nigerian French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic village, National institute of Nigerian languages, institutions such as innovation enterprise institutions and colleges of education, monotronics, polytechnics and other specialised institutions such as colleges of agriculture, schools of health technology and the National Teachers Institutes (NTI). According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013), the goals of tertiary education shall be to:

- i. contribute to national development through high-level manpower training
- ii. provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians

- iii. provide high-quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and a world of work
- iv. reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market
- v. promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service
- vi. forge and cement national unity and
- vii. promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Taking into cognisance of the goals of tertiary education as they serve as the fulcrum of development through the production of manpower who are not only capable of causing economic prosperity, technological advancement, and political stability internally, but also ensure global competitiveness in all ramifications, tertiary education is very imperative and plays a prominent role towards national development and manpower training. Hence, the achievement of these goals is reflected in the various tertiary institutions producing graduates who are worthy in character and in learning. Students who are deemed worthy in character are students who exhibit a high sense of moral values, integrity and diligence in their interaction with man and society, while students who are deemed worthy in character are those who exhibit a high level of academic performance in their chosen field of study. However, for the purpose of this study, the focus is on the academic performances of students in tertiary education.

Academic performances of students at the tertiary institutions, to a reasonable extent, show whether or not the students have achieved the goals of tertiary education. Academic performance of students is a determinant and one of the prerequisites for students to graduate from the tertiary institution and enter the competitive world of the labour market. Hence, preparing the graduates of a tertiary institution for entry into the competitive world of labour, which is one of the goals of tertiary education, requires good academic performance on the part of the tertiary education graduates.

### **Literature Review**

The study is guided by the concept of school culture, which encompasses collegial support, a sense of unity of purpose, and other factors that influence students' academic experiences. School administrative culture has been built over the years on students' learning gains through studies of school and classroom variables, singly or in combination, to enhance students' academic performance. Hence, it is believed that a good school administrative culture and academic advising or guidance and counselling would correlate with students' performance and or lead to high academic performances of the students. The study would then proceed to discuss other basic concepts that relate to the topic of this study.

**School Culture:** School culture refers to the shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices that shape the social and academic environment of an educational institution. It encompasses the relationships, interactions, and experiences among students, teachers, administrators, and staff, influencing the overall atmosphere and climate of the school (Epunam, 1999; Uremadu, 2024).

School culture can be described as the "personality" of the school, reflecting its unique character, tone, and spirit. It includes aspects such as:

1. Collegiate support: Collaboration, mutual respect, and support among students, teachers, and staff.
2. Unity of purpose: Shared goals, vision, and mission that align students' and teachers' efforts.
3. Communication: Open, transparent, and respectful communication among all stakeholders.

4. Trust and respect: Trusting relationships, respect for diversity, and inclusivity.
5. Learning environment: A safe, supportive, and stimulating environment that promotes academic achievement.

A positive school culture, therefore, fosters academic excellence, social growth, and emotional well-being, while a negative culture can hinder success and overall school effectiveness.

Academic performance refers to excellence in all academic disciplines, in a class as well as extracurricular activities; thus, academic performance refers to how well a student is accomplishing his other tasks and studies (Scottt, 2012). Academic performance is the ability to study and remember facts and being able to communicate one's knowledge verbally or written on paper (Answers, 2010). The academic performance of a child could be defined as the learning outcomes of a child (Avila, 2016). This includes the knowledge, skills and ideas acquired and obtained through their course of study within and outside the classroom situation (Epunam, 1999). It is the outcome of determination, hard work, of a student in academic pursuit, as it also refers to the outcome of education; the extent to which the student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals (Ward et al., 1996)

Academic performance refers to a person's performance in a given academic area (e.g. reading or language arts, mathematics, science and other areas of human learning. Academic performance relates to the academic subjects a child studies in school and the skills the child is expected to master in each (Katryn, 2010). It includes excellence in sporting behaviour, confidence, communication skills, and others. Steinberger (2005) posits that academic performance encompasses students' ability and performance; it is multidimensional; it is intricately related to human growth and cognitive, emotional and social physical development; it reflects the whole child; it is not related to a single instance, but occurs across time and levels, through a student's life in public school and into post-secondary years and working life. Academic performance refers to how well a student is accomplishing his/her tasks and studies.

Grades are certainly the most well-known indicators of academic performance. Grades are the student's "score" for their classes and overall tenure. Grades are most often a tally or average of assignment and test scores and may often be affected by factors such as attendance and an instructor's opinion of the student, as well. Grading systems vary greatly by education type. In Nigeria tertiary education system, the common scales include the Grade Point Average (GPA). Higher institutions, especially the University Education system, for which the present study is focused, adopt the grade point average where the pattern of grading lettering systems from A-F is presented on a point. The grades letter A-F are represented as follows: A = 5 points, B = 4points, C = 3points, D = 2points, E = 1 point and F = 0 point. Thus, the letter grades are represented by the percentage scores of the students in each of the courses, where the grade A represents 70-100, B represents 60-69, C represents 50-59, D represents 45-49, E represents 40-44 and F represents 0-39.

These Grade Point Averages (GPA) are used to compute the Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA) of the students over the course of their study in the university. The CGPA of the students at the end of the programme determines the class of degree the students are to graduate with, as the class of degree sometimes determines the academic performance of the student in the programme, which in turn determines the student's entry into the labour market or progression to postgraduate studies. The classes of degree used by the university system are First Class represented by 4.50-5.00. Second Class (Upper division) represented by 3.50-4.49, Second class (lower division) represented by 2.50-3.49, Third Class represented by 1.50-2.49 and pass degree

represented by 1.00-1.50. The classes of degree needed for entry into the labour market are the second class (Gola, 2012).

Over the years, there has been a record of poor academic performances of the students in Nigerian universities, which has questioned the credibility of the universities in producing the needed manpower to drive the Nigerian economy. This poor performance is evident as a larger number of students now graduate with Second Class (Lower Division) and Third Class Degree, with very few graduating with Second Class Upper Division and First Class Degrees in most public universities in Nigeria (Nigeria Universities Commission, 2017). This trend of poor performance of university students usually starts from their first year in school, as most of them are still trying to understand the culture guiding university education in Nigeria. Hence, this situation is particularly disturbing when it was realized that one of the broad aims of tertiary education as stated in the National Policy of Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), is to provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programmes that prepares students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and a world of work thereby discrediting the productivity and functionality of the University Education System.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which posits that individuals learn and develop through social interactions and observations. Thus, the theoretical underpinnings of the study on school administrative culture and students' performance in universities in Abia State are rooted in the concept of organisational culture and its impact on academic performance.

The study's theoretical framework is based on the idea that culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects, including:

- i. **Collegial Support:** Collaboration and mutual respect among students, teachers, and staff.
- ii. **Unity of Purpose:** Shared goals, vision and mission that align students' and teachers' efforts
- iii. **Communication:** Open, transparent, and respectful communication among all stakeholders.
- iv. **Trust and Respect:** Trusting relationships, respect for diversity, and inclusiveness.

Besides, in this paper, three key concepts that are relevant to this study are briefly discussed hereunder.

1. **School Culture:** Shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices that shape the social and academic environment.
2. **Organisational Culture:** The unique character, tone, and spirit of the school.
3. **Leadership Style:** The approach to leadership, including autocratic, democratic, or laissez-faire styles. In addition, there is a theoretical perspective of this study.

**Theoretical Perspectives:** The study draws on various theoretical perspectives, including:

1. **Managerialist Viewpoint:** Culture is seen as a variable that can be manipulated to achieve goals.
2. **Critical Perspective:** Culture is viewed as a complex and dynamic relationship and social context.
3. **Fragmentation Perspective:** Culture is seen as a pluralistic and composite entity, comprising multiple expressions and subcultures.

Hence, these theoretical underpinnings provide a foundation for understanding the complex relationships between school administrative culture and students' performance in universities in Abia State.

The poor performance of the students over the years could be attributed to a lot of factors, such as a lack of a conducive environment, poor teaching methods, teachers' attitude to their job, peer pressure, students' time management, among others. To this extent, Morakinyo (2003) believes that the falling level of academic performance is attributable to teachers' non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy, as Welsh (2007) also found that the attitude of some teachers to their job, poor teaching methods and the like influence students' academic performance. In a similar vein, many researchers such as Adeyemo (2005), Aremu (2004), Adepoje (2001) and Alabi (2000) have established the fact that certain teacher, school and home factors play a part in predicting the academic performance of students.

However, students' learning gains through studies on school variables, students' variables or classroom variables, singly or in combination, so as to enhance students' academic performance, have not yielded the expected significant results as evidenced in various examinations of university students every year. It is on this basis that the present study investigates the extent to which variables such as school culture and academic advising correlate with the academic performance of the students. As such, some researchers have argued that some elements of school culture and organisational processes, which may improve students' academic performance, need to be examined accordingly (Akinsola, 2002 and Maslowski, 2001).

Thus, School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the "persona" of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges, and, at times, cope with failures. For example, every University has a set of expectations about what can be discussed at staff meetings, what constitutes good teaching techniques, how willing the staff is to change, and the importance of staff development (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

School culture entails that schools also have rituals and ceremonies-communal events to celebrate success, to provide closure during collective transitions, and to recognise people's contributions to the school. School cultures also include symbols and stories that communicate core values, reinforce the mission, and build a shared sense of commitment. Symbols are an outward sign of inward values. Stories are group representations of history and meaning. In positive cultures, these features reinforce learning, commitment, and motivation, and they are consistent with the school's vision. In summary, school culture is a common set of beliefs, values, and behaviours delineated as a descriptive apparatus in the school (Silverman, 2005). A realistic view is the "set codes that guide the daily work of teachers" (Firestone and Louis, 1999).

Expectedly, when the school has a set of belief norms and a value system on which the activities of the school are anchored, it will create an enabling academic environment that will foster high academic performances of the students. In view of this, many researchers such as Vislocky (2005), Swindler (2009), Odongo (2013), Emunemu et al. (2013) and Yeboah (2015) in their separate studies have established empirical evidence that revealed that positive school culture enhances high academic performances. It is on this basis that the present study seeks to investigate how this common set of beliefs, values and behaviour which characterises a typical University Education system correlates with the academic performances of the students.

To adopt a comprehensive approach in investigating the extent to which school culture influences the academic performances of secondary school students, the present study must explore the two components of school culture, which are collegial support and unity of purpose and their

relationships with the academic performances of university students. Collegial support describes the degree to which lecturers work together effectively, trust each other, value each other's ideas, and assist each other as they work to accomplish the tasks of the school organisation (Gruenert, 1998, cited in Abdullahi & Arakiasaxny, 2016). In collegial support, teachers work together to teach or discuss ideas for school growth towards ensuring enhanced academic performance of the students. Concerning this, Abdullahi & Arakiasamy (2016) in their studies found that collegial support significantly contributed to and enhanced high academic performances. Meanwhile, this finding was contradicted by the findings of Swindler (2009), whose studies revealed that collegial support does not significantly contribute and enhance high academic performances. It was based on these inconsistencies that the present study sought to determine how collegial support as a factor of school culture correlates with the students' academic performances.

Another factor or element of school culture which the present study sought to investigate its influence on the academic performance of students is the Unity of purpose. Unity of purpose describes the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school. Teachers understand, support, and perform in accordance with that mission (Abdullahi & Arakiasamy, 2016). An important determinant of whether schools reach their goals is unity of purpose. The unity of purpose is often written and displayed as the school's mission statement. Normally, the mission statement is a phrase to depict the values and beliefs of the principal, teachers, parents, and community members. Thus, unity of purpose is "unified and opening with a mutual sense of purpose" (Ward, 2005). When lecturers are unified with a mutual sense of purpose, it is expected to bring out the best in them, which would ensure high academic performance of the students. To this extent, findings of Abdullahi & Arakiasamy (2016) showed that the unity of purpose significantly contributes to and enhances high academic performance. Meanwhile, this finding was also contradicted by the findings of Swindler (2009), whose studies revealed that the unity of purpose did not significantly contribute to or enhance high academic performances. It was based on these inconsistencies that the present study sought to determine how the unity of purpose as a factor of school culture correlates with the students' academic performances.

Meanwhile, the academic performance of students in public universities has been poor and inconsistent on average over the past ten years. Thus, these poor performances of the students, especially the first-year students, usually lay the foundation for an unimpressive class of degrees the students graduate with at the end of their academic programme. These have raised incessant complaints and comments from the public on the quality of Nigeria's university education system in producing the needed manpower to drive the economy of Nigeria. Meanwhile, efforts by many researchers to proffer solutions to the problem of poor academic performance through variables such as teachers' qualifications, school organisational climate, teaching method, and school environmental factors have not yielded the expected significant results. Also, even though most of the students are learning in an environment that is characterised by strong values, belief systems, and regulations, the problem of poor academic performance of students persists.

It is in view of these issues that the present study investigates, through empirical evidence, to provide answers to questions on the extent to which school culture (collegial support and unity of purpose) correlates with the academic performance of university students.

## Research Questions

Two research questions were posed for the study:

1. To what extent does collegial support correlate with the academic performances of the university's students?
2. To what extent does unity of purpose correlate with the academic performances of the university's students?

## Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant correlation between collegial support and the academic performances of university students.
2. There is no significant correlation between the unity of purpose and the academic performances of university students.

## Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey design. This study was conducted at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike's Colleges and Departments in Abia State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 823 academic staff from 910 colleges in the 2022/2023 academic session (Academic Planning Unity of the various universities in Abia State. A sample of 400 respondents was derived using the Taro Yamane sampling formula. The two-stage sampling technique was adopted. The first stage involved the use of a stratified proportionate sampling technique to select the students. The second stage involved the use of a simple random sampling technique to select the required sample size from each department. The instrument used for data collection in this study was the School Culture Scale (SCS) "Academic Performance Proforma" (APP). The Academic Performance Proforma was used to collect the students' CGPA from their 200-level results.

The instrument was first validated by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and one from the Department of Science Education (Educational Measurement and Evaluation), all from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Their corrections and recommendations were duly effected. The stability of the instrument was 0.81, which was derived using the Pearsons Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) as the internal consistency of the instrument was 0.79, which was derived using Cronbach's Alpha. The data for the study were collected through the administration of 400 copies of the School Culture Scale (SCS) to the academic staff and the CGPA of their 200-level results. Research questions were answered using the Simple and Multiple Linear Regression analysis to find a relationship between the independent variable (School Culture) and the dependent variable (Academic Performance). The hypotheses were tested using the Multiple Linear Regression analysis, and the F-test was used to test its significance at 0.05 level. The Multiple Linear Regression analysis was used since it is one of the statistical tools that can be used to determine how an independent variable (school culture) predicts the Dependent variable (academic performance).

**Research Question One:** To what extent does collegial support correlate with the academic performance of students in Universities?

**Table 1: Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing the Extent of Correlation between Collegial Support and the Academic Performances of Students in Universities**

| R     | R. Squared | Adjusted R-squared |
|-------|------------|--------------------|
| 0.667 | 0.445      | 0.443              |

a. Predictor: (Constant), Collegial Support

The data in Table 1 revealed that there was a moderate positive correlation of  $r = 0.567$  between collegial support and the academic performances of universities. This is because they reached the criteria recommended by Ebere (2015) that a correlation index that ranged from 0.40-0.69 is moderately correlated. The calculated  $R^2$  of 0.445, which also indicates that the 44.5% variance observed in the academic performances of students in universities was accounted for by collegial support.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant correlation between collegial support and the academic performance of students in universities.

**Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Simple Linear Regression Analyses Showing the Significant Correlation between Collegial Support and Academic Performances of Students in Universities**

| Model      | Sum of the squared | Df  | Mean square | F       | Sig.   |
|------------|--------------------|-----|-------------|---------|--------|
| Regression | 772.321            | 1   | 772.320     | 318.639 | 0.000* |
| Residual   | 964.677            | 398 | 2.424       |         |        |
| Total      | 1736.998           | 399 |             |         |        |

- a. Dependent Variables: Academic Performances  
b. Independent Variable: Collegial Support

Data in Table 2 shows an F- value of 318.639 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant correlation between the collegial support and academic performances of students in universities was rejected. Hence, this implies that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between the collegial support and academic performances of students in universities, since the corresponding research question one revealed a moderate positive correlation between the collegial support and academic performances of students in universities.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent does unity of purpose correlates the academic performances of students in universities?

**Table 3: The Mean, Standard Deviation and Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing the Extent of Correlation between Unity of Purpose and the Academic Performances of Students in Universities**

| R                  | R Squared | Adjusted R Squared |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 0.603 <sup>a</sup> | 0.304     | 0.362              |

a. Predictor: (Constant), Unity of Purpose.

The data in Table 3 revealed that there was a moderate positive correlation of  $r = 0.603$  between the unity of purpose and the academic performance of secondary school students. This is because they reached the criteria recommended by Ebere (2015) that a correlation index that ranges from 0.40 to 0.69 is moderately correlated. The calculated  $R^2$  of 0.304 also indicates that the 30.4% variance observed in the academic performance of senior secondary school students was accounted for by unity of purpose.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant correlation between Unity of Purpose and academic performances of students in universities.

**Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Simple Linear Regression Analyses Showing the Significant Correlation between Unity of Purpose and Academic Performances of Students in Universities**

| Model      | Sum of squares | Df  | Mean square | F       | Sig.    |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|---------|
| Regression | 632.369        | 1.1 | 632.369     | 227.844 | 0.000 * |
| Residual   | 1104.629       | 398 | 2.775       |         |         |
| Total      | 1736.998       | 399 |             |         |         |

a. **Dependent Variables: Academic Performances**

b. Independent Variable: Unity of Purpose.

Data in Table 4 shows an F- value of 227.844 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant correlation between the unity of purpose and academic performance of students in universities, was rejected. This implies that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between the unity of purpose and academic performance of students in universities, since the corresponding research question two (2) revealed a moderate positive correlation between the unity of purpose and academic performance of students in universities.

## **Discussions of Findings**

### **The extent to which collegial support correlates with the academic performance of students in universities**

The analysis of research question one (1) and corresponding null hypothesis one (1) revealed that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between collegial support and academic performance of students in universities. However, findings from Emunemu et al. (2014) found that professional development significantly contributes to and enhances high academic performance. Also, Zoma et al. (2017) found that collegial support significantly correlates with students' academic performance. This finding was also supported by Shah (2012), whose findings revealed that a high achievement suggests that schools with higher levels of teacher collegiality had higher achievement scores. Meanwhile, this finding was contradicted by the findings of Swindler (2009), whose study revealed that professional development does not significantly contribute and enhance high academic performances. Thus, perhaps it is the most fundamental reason for pursuing collegiality among school staff members. It is believed that higher collegial relations among teaching staff lead to higher quality instruction and, in turn, increased student academic achievements. Collegial support is the strength that is displayed by other staff members to help achieve the school's mission. Support can come from administrators, teachers, or other staff members. Collegial support is cultivated and nourished. In schools where collegial support is prominent, teachers feel valued. They work cooperatively and take the initiative to help each other in times of trouble.

### **The extent to which unity of purpose correlates with the academic performance of students in universities**

The analysis of research question two (2) and corresponding null hypothesis two (2) revealed that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between the unity of purpose and academic performance of students in universities. This finding was supported by Zoma et al. (2017), whose findings revealed that unity of purpose significantly correlates with students' academic performance. This finding was also supported by Shah (2012), whose findings revealed that a high achievement suggests that schools with higher levels of teacher unity of purpose had higher achievement scores. To this extent, Abdullahi & Arakiasamy (2016), found that unity of purpose significantly contributes to and enhances high academic performance. Meanwhile these findings were also contradicted by the findings of Swindler(2009), whose studies revealed that the unity of purpose does not significantly contribute and enhance high academic performances.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to improve the operation of the Nigerian Educational System.

1. The Government of Nigeria should formulate a school culture policy which will guide and mandate University Vice-Chancellors to inculcate the habit of forming a mission statement for their schools, which will guide the culture of the school. Universities in the country should emphasise imparting information to lecturers under training regarding organisational culture vis-à-vis school culture, while newly promoted school-heads/principals should be given short refresher courses on teachers' collaboration.
2. Appropriate school authorities should, from time to time, organise workshops for their teaching staff to promote collegial support to help them in cross-breeding ideas towards enhanced teaching effectiveness that would improve student-academic performances.

3. The school administration should keep a mechanism that would ensure that the school's mission statements, as well as the unity of purpose of the universities always guide its staff for effective service delivery, which will consequently improve their academic achievements

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