Undergraduate-Fresher’s Behavior on a Choice of Course and Classroom Engagement in Universities in Rivers State: Lecturers’ View

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Authors’ contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Received 28 December 2020
Accepted 04 March 2021
Published 16 March 2021

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the lecturers’ view on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in the universities. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. A correlational survey design was adopted in this study. The population of this study comprised one federal and two state universities in Rivers State having 5,025 lecturers from whom information was generated. A sample of 400 lecturers was drawn using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique representing 8% of the population. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires titled "Undergraduate Fresher's Behavior on Choice of Course Questionnaire (UFBCQ) and Undergraduate Fresher's Behavior on Classroom Engagement Questionnaire (UFBCEQ)". The instruments were validated, and the reliabilities of the instruments were established using the test-retest method. In analyzing the data, the mean scores, standard deviation, and linear regression analysis were used to answer the research questions. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis of relationship at 0.05 alpha level. The results revealed among others that, undergraduates’ fresher’s behaviour on a choice of course determined their engagement in classroom activities. The findings indicated a significant relationship between undergraduates’ fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Rivers State. Based on the findings, the study recommends proper sanitization of students, and a robust relationship between fresher’s students and lecturers.

Keywords: Lecturers’ view; undergraduate fresher’s behavior; choice of a course; classroom engagement.
1. INTRODUCTION

The extent of successes obtained by students in their academic activities hinges on their participation in classroom instructional activities. Most lecturers are persistently working to connect students deeply in school because they feel that classroom engagement is fundamental towards the purposiveness of the school since there is a nexus between student behavior and classroom engagement. This is because maximum engagement of students replicates in self-motivation on the choice of course. Student’s morale tends to be high when they are intrinsically focused in school. Hence, there is a high tendency for deep connection with classroom activities. On the contrary, the student tends to disengage in the classroom when they are not affectionately inspired. Although some lecturers are less concerned about the behavior of students in classroom activities, some even spend considerable time trying to show concern and engage the students in activities. Lecturers are trained personnel who facilitate and transfer knowledge to the learners for quality outputs from tertiary education institutions. They explore various means to direct, guide and instruct a group of students who converge to learn in the classroom.

The term ‘classroom engagement’ can be described as the active participation and compliance of students in classroom instructional activities. It is the key indicator of students’ motivation, learning potential, and persistence of completing the school [1]. The use of reorientation, follow-up, feedback, and referral services by lecturers may serve as an indispensable method of managing undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course for improved classroom engagement. In Nigerian universities for example, freshers are the newly enrolled undergraduate students whose academic activities have just begun in the universities; their behaviors can be a determinant to their academic achievement.

Filade, Bello, Uwaoma, Anwanane and Nwangburuka [2] were of the opinion that, a focus on students’ engagements simply means that, an educator can intervene when students disconnect from school; and that, proactive steps are essential to provide students with the engagement battle [3]. Taylor and Parsons [4] noted that building respectful and interactive relationships with students are very important to improve students. The study of Fried and Konza [5] revealed that students’ engagements could be seen as vital components of academics at school, which may be a worthy outcome of school in its own right.

The Student’s choice of course of study depends upon the personal characteristics of each student such as personal goals, interests, needs, and values, physical, academic, and social characteristics of an institutional environment. In the Nigerian university system, it is very clear that, the majority of the students end up studying courses that are contrary to their choice. This could be as a result of poor performance during Joint and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and Post-University Matriculation (PUM) Examinations, insufficient funds needed to pursue the individual choice of course, etc. Sometimes, even the cut-off point for the choice of course may equally deny the student the opportunity of studying such a course. Students’ choice for a course of study is a function of the reputation of the course, entry to course, graduate employment rates, graduate’s satisfaction, and quality of teaching, learning, assessment methods, and teaching approach [6].

For instance, teaching, learning, assessment methods, and teaching approach could be seen as classroom engagements which is usually conducted in the classroom and involves the face-to-face interaction between lecturers and the students. In such an interface, students are perceived by some lecturers to be passionate about their choice of course while some appear to dislike their choice of course. Dimson [7] indicated that classroom interaction behavior determines the success or order of classroom engagement. A study conducted by the Oxford Royale Academy reported that students who choose courses preferable to them genuinely have the pleasure to learn and easily get motivated. Contrarily, in the case where students lack motivation and connectedness, the potential is usually high for disinterest in the university [3]. Although, Xerri, Radford & Shacklock [8] attributed that, the factors influencing student’s engagement in academic activities are still largely unknown, but observed that a sense of purpose was found to moderate the relationship between the lecturers and their students. This is why Robbins and Judge [9] postulated that highly engaged individuals have passion for their work and feel deeply connected.

Balain and Sparrow [10] described engagement as the individual’s involvement and satisfaction as well as the enthusiasm for work. More so, Armstrong [11]
described engagement as the willingness to go the extra mile.

Student’s engagement is globally recognised as an important influence on achievement and learning in higher education [12]. So, student’s engagement is being widely theorised and researched [13]. Students’ engagements in the classroom through teaching, learning and research are desirable because students learn more when they are engaged in classroom activities. The value of student’s engagement and its impact on student’s achievement can no longer be questioned [14]. Student’s engagement has been stated as the systematic process of becoming active in classroom activities for improved performance [15]. The study of Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris [16] identified three elements of student’s engagement as behavioural, emotional and cognitive, which are shaped by a multitude of factors related to teachers, institutions, students, families and communities, as well as curriculum and resources. Kahu (2016) extended the Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris [16] concept to incorporate both its antecedents (structural and psychosocial) and consequences (proximate and distal) while clearly distinguishing the state of engagement.

Thus, student’s engagement in classroom activities with a university undergraduate course may improve a student’s confidence with the content of the course, and it may improve their academic performance on the course. A student may learn by being more engaged, and this may have positive effects on persistence, student satisfaction, and academic success [17]. Collectively, these may contribute positively to the overall student experience in the undergraduate course, benefiting not only students but also, institutions as they can potentially demonstrate by engaging a student on a course, as they are adding to value of the education they provide [18]. Also, increased students’ engagements in classroom activities may encourage them to complete their chosen programmes of study and graduate from university with good grades.

However, the levels of students’ engagements with undergraduate courses at the university level are rarely measured and this may be partly due to lack of appropriate instruments to quantify courses engagements. Students who become engaged participants in the classroom may be motivated to engage more meaningfully in both their individual study and chosen course of study Miller & Metz, [19]. This includes a student’s willingness to engage in class discussion by putting forward his opinions and offering comments [20]. Students’ engagement can also be increased through the use of collaborative active learning, and by using a technique that has a group of students solving the same academic problems together Zhao & Kuh, [21]. This collaboration between students may increase individual academic performance by fostering both behavioural engagement (improving study skills) and emotional engagement through commitment and connecting with colleagues Brown, White, Bowmar & Power, [17]. Consequently, students exhibiting negative behaviors are more likely to disengage from progressive tendencies in classroom activities.

This narrative is however linked to the dislike of the choice of course accepted due to the candidate’s deficiency and the university policy for admitting students on courses contrary to their choice and based on merit. Besides, these students appear not to be passionate about such development; hence, classroom disengagement tendencies set in. However, this problem is evident as some of these students become distracted and go about in search of admission within and outside the university environment. Thus, certain attributes and characteristics develop prominent such as disregarding deadlines, coming late and leaving early from class, as well as inappropriate use of social media platform while teaching is going on. Such student even goes on duplicating fellow student’s assignment (intentional plagiarism) and indulging in ill attitude among other things. Witbooi [22] pointed out that, students found disengaging display behavior such as lack of participation in classroom and school activities, as well as not becoming cognitively involved in learning and exhibiting counterproductive behavior. In the same vein, Krause [3] indicated that close to ten (10) percent of full-time campus first-year students reported frequently coming to class without preparing adequately or skipping classes’ altogether.

The study of Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie and Gonyea [18] revealed that many students who begin school leave before completing the degrees. Nonetheless, Fresher’s in Nigerian Universities are not farfetched from this phenomenon. Negative behaviors that tend to mar classroom engagements in schools are as
follows: late coming to class, leaving early from class, insubordination, disregards for deadlines, indulging in the unethical act, among others. Allagoa [23] observed that students in most Nigeria tertiary institutions put up several unacceptable behaviors, and it lies on the onus of the lecturers to guide and build them towards positive behavior. Students' positive behaviors replicate in punctuality, regularity and deep connection to classroom activities.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The negative behaviors exhibited by undergraduates in classrooms could be attributed to external interferences that make students become disengaged in their academic pursuits as a result of offering courses that are contrary to the student's willingness or choice. This issue is based on admission offered against the choice of the department due to the candidate's deficiency and invariably social pressure. In spite of the effort exerted by the lecturers to organize instructions, provide relevant assessments and fair evaluations, students seem to show negligence and ill-attitude towards their studies in the classroom which appears in terms of absenteeism, tardiness, intentional plagiarism, and classroom disconnection. This phenomenon may have resulted to counter academic performance which is evident in the urge to indulge in examination malpractices, unethical behaviors, insubordinations, misuse of tuition fees that may eventually lead to students drop out. In view of the above, the study seeks to investigate the lecturers' view on undergraduate fresher's behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagements in universities in Nigeria.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the lecturers' view on undergraduate fresher's behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities. The study specifically sought to:

1. examine the lecturers' views on undergraduate fresher's behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities; and
2. investigate the relationship between undergraduate fresher's behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagements in universities.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the lecturers’ views on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities?
2. What is the relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities?

Hypothesis: The study answered the above questions using the following hypothesis which was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

H0: There is no mean significant relationship between lecturers in the state and federal owned universities on their views on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities.

2. METHODOLOGY

The correlational survey design was adopted in this study. The population of this study comprised one federal and two state-owned universities in Rivers State, Nigeria having 5,025 lecturers from whom information was generated. Precisely, there are 2,220 lecturers at the University of Port Harcourt (Federal) and 2,805 lecturers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Rivers State University (State universities). A sample of 400 lecturers was drawn using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique representing 8% of the population. The instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire titled “Undergraduate Fresher’s Behavior on Choice of Course Questionnaire (UFBCQ) and Undergraduate Fresher’s Behavior on Classroom Engagement Questionnaire (UFBCEQ)”, developed by the researchers. The modified four-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree were adopted to gather the information needed for data analysis. The instruments were validated, and the reliabilities of the instruments were established using the test-retest method. The scores were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, which yielded reliability indexes of 0.81 and 0.79 respectively. In analyzing the data, mean scores, standard deviation, and linear...
regression analysis were used to answer the research questions. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis of no significant relationship at 0.05 alpha level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What are the lecturers’ views on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Rivers State?

Table 1 showed the mean scores and standard deviations of lecturers in state and federal universities on their views on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities in Nigeria. The findings revealed that undergraduate fresher's behavior on a choice of course they make determine their engagements in classroom activities. This implies that students normally have positive engagements in classroom activities when they study the course of their choices in universities, but develop negative engagements/attitudes in classroom activities when they are given a course of study different from their choices. This positive relationship between state and federal lecturers resulted in high mean responses above the criterion mean of 2.50 obtained from the lecturers who are the study respondents.

Research question Two: What is the relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behavior on choice of course and classroom engagements in universities in Rivers State?

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of state and federal lecturers on their views on undergraduate fresher behavior on choice of course and classroom engagement in universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Deviation</th>
<th>Aggregate Mean</th>
<th>Sum of Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choice of course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>Positively Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary of linear regression analysis on the relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares (SS)</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F. Ratio</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>46.521</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46.521</td>
<td>1.603</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>11548.741</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>29.017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11595.262</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple R (r_p) = .854
R. Square (r^2) = .755
Adjusted R^2 = .697
Standard Error of Estimate =5.8211

Source: Author(s)

Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>8.379</td>
<td>.546</td>
<td>15.338</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom engagement</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.858</td>
<td>42.523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Classroom Engagement
b. Predictors: (Constant), Undergraduate Fresher Behavior on Choice of Course
Classroom Engagement = CE
Undergraduate Fresher Behavior on Choice of Course = EMR
EMR = 8.379-0.869COL
The data in Table 2 showed a coefficient of 0.854 and a P-value of .000 which indicated a positive and significant relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behaviors on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Rivers State. From the regression equation, students’ engagements in classroom activities could be determined by Undergraduate Fresher’s Behavior on Choice of Course. The $R^2$-value of 0.697 indicated a contribution of 69.7% to classroom engagement in universities which can be determined by the independent variable, undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course. Furthermore, the F-value of 1.603 showed that there is a positive and significant contribution of undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course to effective classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria.

The results further indicated that undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of study accounted for 69.7% of the variance in classroom engagement in universities. This means that 30.3% of the variation in classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria cannot be explained by the undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course alone, but by other extraneous variables that may have contributed to that. Hence, undergraduate fresher’s choice of course can enhance effective classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria.

### 3.1 Test of Hypothesis

**Hypothesis:** There is no mean significant relationship of lecturers’ views in state and federal universities on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria.

The data in Table 3 presented the mean significant relationship of lecturers’ views in state and federal universities on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria. Results showed that the relationship between the mean scores of lecturers in state and federal universities on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria was 0.77. This means the null hypothesis was rejected indicating that there was a positive and significant relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities. The coefficient of determination associated with 0.77 is 0.65. The coefficient of determination (0.65) also known as the predictive value means that 65% of undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course accounted for the variation in their classroom engagement in universities. This is an indication that 35% of the variation in classroom engagement in universities is attributed to other factors other than undergraduate fresher’s behavior on choice of course. Therefore, there is a positive significant relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria.

### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that, undergraduate fresher’s behaviour on a choice of course they make determine their engagement in classroom activities. This implies that they normally have positive engagements in classroom activities when they study the course of their choices in universities, but develop negative engagements/attitudes in classroom activities when they are given a course of study different from their choices. This positive relationship between state and federal lecturers was a result of the mean responses above the criterion mean of 2.50 obtained from the lecturers who were the study respondents. The test of hypothesis also showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria. The results were determined by the coefficient of determination (0.65) also known as the predictive value indicating 65% of undergraduate fresher behavior on a choice of course accounted for the variation in their classroom engagement in universities. The findings were in favor of Armstrong [11] that described engagement as the willingness to go on extra mile, which was contrary to the notion for positive behavior in classroom engagement; and this is clearly an aspect that energizes the lecturer’s commitment to duty. This implies that there is a need for more effort to be exerted by lecturers across the various universities to adopt reorientation, follow-up, feedback, and referral services as a mechanism of managing undergraduate fresher behavior on a choice of course for improved classroom engagements. The adoption of reorientation as a measure helps the lecturers with humanistic tendencies to persistently indulge in having a rapport with students towards changing the directions that trigger negative behaviors among the newly enrolled students.
Table 3. Pearson’s product moment correlation analysis of lecturers in universities on undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course and classroom engagement in universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choice of course</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom engagement</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

α = 0.05, \( R^2 \) = coefficient of determination

The findings also showed that, students’ engagements in classroom activities could be determined by Undergraduate Fresher’s Behavior on Choice of Course. This result further indicated that undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course accounted for 69.7% of the variance in classroom engagement in universities in Rivers State. This means that 30.3% of the variation in classroom engagement in universities in Rivers State cannot be explained by the undergraduate fresher behavior on a choice of course alone but by other extraneous variables that may have contributed to that. Hence, undergraduate fresher choice of course can enhance effective classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria. The F-value of 1.603 further showed that there is a significant contribution of undergraduate fresher’s behavior on a choice of course to effective classroom engagement in universities in Nigeria. Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris [16] identified three elements of student engagement as behavioural, emotional, and cognitive, which are shaped by a multitude of factors related to teachers, institutions, students, families, and communities, as well as curriculum and resources. Student’s engagement in classroom activities with a university undergraduate course may improve a student’s confidence with the content of the course, and it may improve their academic performance on the course. A student may learn by being more engaged, and this may have positive effects on persistence, student satisfaction, and academic success Brown, White, Bowmar & Power, [17].

5. CONCLUSION
This study had shown that lecturers see the undergraduate fresher’s behaviour on a choice of course they make as a predictor for positive engagement in classroom activities. This implies that students show positive engagements in classroom activities when they offered the courses of their choice in universities, but develop negative behaviour in classroom instructional activities when they are given a course of study different from their choices. This can be concluded that, studying hard by students and proper guidance by lecturers improve students’ engagements in the classroom and performance.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. University management and lecturers should organise sensitization programmes for undergraduate fresher’s to prepare them for the need to be seriously engaged in classroom activities.
2. There is a need for a positive and robust relationship between lecturers and students to improve undergraduate fresher’s behavior on their choice of course to enable positive classroom engagements in universities in Rivers State.

CONSENT
As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS
Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES


