

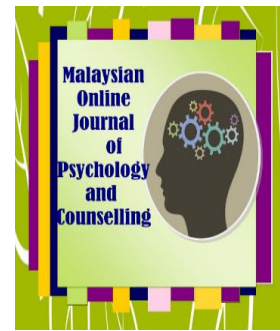
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND UNDERGRADUATES' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN A FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITY IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceived influence of a faith-based learning environment on students' academic performance at Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria. The study used an "ex-post-facto" descriptive survey research design. The population for the study included all the undergraduate students of Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was utilized to select various faculties, while a proportional stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 414 undergraduate students who participated in the study. The researchers made use of a self-designed questionnaire tagged "Learning Environment and Academic Performance Questionnaire" (LEAPQ), which was structured in three sections. Four research questions were raised and tested using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Selected participants were four hundred and fourteen (414). The findings showed that the perception of undergraduates on a faith-based learning environment is high (75.8%); the level of academic performance is also high; and the faith-based learning environment has a significant influence on the academic performance of students. The study concluded that every educational institution has a climate that distinguishes it from others, which influences the behaviour and feelings of students.

Keywords: *Academic performance, faith-based, higher institution, learning environment, undergraduates.*



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INTRODUCTION

The learning environment is highly important for the overall development of students in institutions of learning. The learning environment plays a highly essential role in shaping the happiness and readiness of students to either learn or become a deviant. The environment must be such that every aspect of human endeavours and behaviour is well accommodated. Education has also been regarded as the catalyst for social, political, and economic development of societies and nations, and also the conduct of such educational activity is affected by the environment where such endeavours take place (Adediran et al., 2015). Certainly, the physical environment can also determine the level of comfort of the students, and by extension, their ability to learn (Falsario et al., 2014). Any situation or environment that makes students uncomfortable will result in distraction and make them likely to learn more slowly than their counterparts in other environments where the feeding arrangements are better arranged.

According to Amaechina and Ezeh (2019), the learning environment determines to a large extent how a student behaves and interacts; that is to say that the environment in which one finds oneself tends to mould one's behaviour so as to meet the demands of life, whether negatively or positively. It is believed that a well-planned school will gear up expected outcomes of education that will facilitate good social, political and economic emancipation, an effective teaching and learning process and academic performance of the students.

Wagner (2017) asserts that students' behaviour in relation to their academic achievements is directly influenced by the availability of a balanced environment that can control and stimulate the five human sensory organs: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. This is better amplified by what the learners see, what they hear, the temperature of the environment, the smell that aids or discourages learning, and the food and drinks that will eliminate hunger, which can disrupt learning. Wagner (2017) further confirms that there exists enough evidence to confirm that educational objectives such as reading speed, multiplication, and comprehension can be hampered by the environment where learning occurs.

According to Olufemi, Adeniran and Oyediran (2018), several factors are responsible for students' academic performance. These include school environment, peer influence, teacher's skills and quality, instructional resources, and a lot more. Institutions' environment aids attainment of academic knowledge. Institutions' environment is basically the quality of and characteristics of the institutions' life, which include the social and physical environment of the institutions, which also has the capacity to promote or mar the emotional development of the students. A serene institutional environment can encourage learning and promote academic performance.

Academic achievement or performance refers to the ability to achieve or attain educational objectives set down by an institution of learning (Owan, 2012). This means that students' academic performance evaluates the extent to which students can achieve the desired educational objectives. Erun and Zahoor (2011) are of the view that students' academic achievement and graduation rates have been of serious concern to scholars, which has made the investigation into the factors responsible for this to be on the front burner of researchers' inquiry, especially at the level of secondary school education. While contributing to this issue, Egunsola (2014) opines that poor academic achievement at all levels of education in Nigeria remains a recurring problem in spite of the intentions and all the attempts by various governments at different levels in order to improve the quality and content of education.

Several factors may impair educational pursuit and performance of learners. Such factors can be classified as school-related, home-related and teacher-related (Fajar, Hussain et al., 2019). Another important factor that is connected with the above factors is society-induced problems. It is generally accepted that institutions' environments that are conducive with adequate facilities will surely support good academic performance and engender good and effective teaching and learning.

Oweikpodor and Onafowope (2022) observed that some of the notable factors that may influence students' academic achievement include: school climate, instructional materials, discipline, physical facilities, teacher quality, type of location of school and class size. This is because schools with a good and conducive environment that have the best type of teachers, instructional materials, and physical facilities will produce better school leavers with high achievement.

In Nigeria, several private universities were established by religious organizations and as such their institutions are faith-based. Most parents have shown open preference for these faith-based universities in the education of their children. The reasons for this preference may be diverse. It may be due to their religious beliefs on one hand or for the fact that staff of these institutions are not unionized and therefore such institutions are insulated from the perennial problems of industrial disputes with the attendant long strike actions associated with public universities. The extent to which the above reasons will aid academic performance of undergraduates in these institutions remains a subject of research. Hence, this study is therefore primed to examine the extent to which faith-based learning environment (university atmosphere, learning experience, perception about teachers, students' social self-perceptions, and academic self-perceptions) may foster or influence students' academic performance at Babcock University.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Environmental Learning Theory (ELT), which is an offshoot of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1997). It is instructive to also note that Social Learning Theory is part of the traditional behavioural learning theory (behaviouristic). The theory of social learning is based on the principles of behavioural learning theories. However, greater emphasis is placed on the effects of internal mental processes and human behaviour. One of the many assumptions shaping the theory of social learning is that humans are generally flexible and capable of behaving in a generally acceptable standard in society. ELT is seriously dependent on the environment that is made available to the learners in the teaching-learning process. It is concerned mostly with the type of modelling that occurs to the learners while stressing the importance of observation and modelling behaviours as a veritable way of learning. Students learn by observing the actions, achievements, and failures of others to enable them to gain knowledge before moving into the learning phase of the content that will be taught. The principle of the theory encompasses some elements, which include the idea that students will be more inclined to adopt a behaviour if the modelled behaviour they have witnessed is capable of producing the outcomes they long for, and that students are more likely to adopt a behaviour if it has a functional purpose or value.

The theory is appropriate for the study due to the fact that school policies, programmes and security arrangements have the capacity to dictate the school climate and thereby influence the academic performance of students. If a school is able to demonstrate a feeling of safety for students, guarantee teachers' competence, and the students are able to model these appropriately, they can be successful in their academic pursuit despite their family background.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this study:

- i. How do undergraduates perceive a faith-based learning environment?
- ii. Can the level of academic performance of undergraduates in a faith-based learning environment be determined?

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

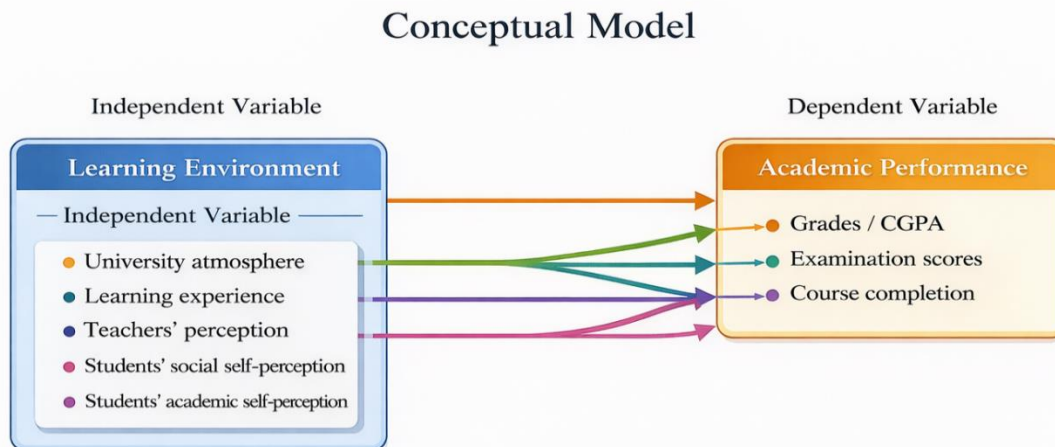
Ho1: There is no significant relationship among the components (university atmosphere, learning experience, teachers' perception, students' social self-perception, and students' academic self-perception) of faith-based learning environment.

Ho2: Faith-based learning environment will not significantly influence the academic performance of undergraduate students.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The diagram below shows the conceptual model guiding this study. The model proposes that the learning environment – comprising university atmosphere, learning experience, teachers' perception, students' social self-perception and students' academic self-perception, dimensions directly influences university students' academic achievement.

Figure 1.
Conceptual Model



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in a Faith-Based Higher Institution in Ogun State, Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

The study used an “ex-post-facto” descriptive survey research design. The population for the study included all the undergraduate students of Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was utilized to select various faculties, while a proportional stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 414 undergraduate students who participated in the study. The researchers made use of a self-designed questionnaire tagged “Learning Environment and Academic Performance Questionnaire” (LEAPQ), which was structured in three sections. The first section collected demographic information about the respondents and their present CGPA status, while the second section gathered information on the school learning environment, and the last section measured the undergraduates' academic achievement using their CGPA score.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling in Babcock University who provided feedback on the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a pilot sample of 20 students of the same university who were not part of the main study. The pilot test helped to identify and correct any errors, ambiguities, or difficulties in answering the questions. The questionnaire was checked for completeness, consistency, and accuracy before data analysis. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire returned a value of 0.82, which indicated a high level of reliability.

The data collected were analysed using descriptive (frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (PPMC and regression analysis) at a 0.05 level of significance.

The study complied with established ethical principles, which included, but were not limited to, informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any point. No personal identifiers were recorded, and they were assured that data collected were used mainly for research purposes. Ethical clearance was also obtained from the relevant institutional review board before the commencement of fieldwork.

RESULTS

Table 1.

Perception Of Undergraduates on Faith-Based Learning Environment

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Faith-based Learning Environment	414	102.00	250.00	189.55	24.12

Table 1 reveals that the undergraduates had a mean score of 189.55, which is significant. This is because it is higher than the minimum score of 102. It could then be deduced that the perception of undergraduates of a faith-based learning environment is high. This might be caused by some factors inherent in the students or circumstances around them (their experience and exposure within the school).

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Table 2.

The Level of Undergraduates' Academic Performance in a Faith-Based Learning Environment

Category	Criteria	Frequency	%
4.50-5.00	First class	15	3.6
3.50-4.49	Second class upper	264	63.8
2.50-3.49	Second class lower	121	29.2
2.00-2.49	Third class	14	3.4

The result presents the level of undergraduates' academic performance in a faith-based learning environment. Their academic performance was assessed through their CGPA and categorized as first class with a CGPA of 4.50-5.00, second class upper with a CGPA of 3.50-4.49, second class lower with a CGPA of 2.50-3.49, and third class with a CGPA of 2.00-2.49, all on a scale of 0.00 -5.00. Almost two-thirds of the respondents, 264 (63.8%), were with CGPA between 3.50 and 4.49, 121 (29.2%) were with CGPA between 2.50 and 3.49, 15 (3.6%) were with CGPA between 4.50 and 5.00, and 14 (3.4%) were with CGPA between 2.00 and 2.49. It could be deduced from the results that there exists good academic performance of the students at Babcock, University as many students are in their second class upper. This result could be attributed to the school environment and the services encountered.

Table 3.

The Relationship Among the Components of Faith-Based Learning Environment

		University atmosphere	Learning experience	Teachers Perception	Students Social Perceptions	Students' SelfAcademic Self Perceptions
University Atmosphere	Pearson Correlation	1	.500**	.389**	.451**	.347**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	414	414	414	414	414
Learning experience	Pearson Correlation	.500**	1	.598**	.431**	.605**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	414	414	414	414	414
Teachers Perception	Pearson Correlation	.389**	.598**	1	.364**	.530**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	414	414	414	414	414

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Students' Social Self Perceptions	Pearson Correlation	.451**	.431**	.364**	1	.375**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	414	414	414	414	414
Students' Academic Self Perceptions	Pearson Correlation	.347**	.605**	.530**	.375**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	414	414	414	414	414

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results, as shown in Table 3, indicated the interrelationship among the variables of the faith-based learning environment. On the relationship of university atmosphere with learning experience the table above depicts positive correlation ($r = .500$, $p = .01 < .05$). Also, university atmosphere positively correlated with teachers' perception ($r = .389$, $p = .01 < .05$); students' social self-perceptions ($r = .451$, $p = .01 < .05$); and students' academic self-perceptions ($r = .500$, $p = .01 < .05$).

Table 4.

Summary of Analysis of Variance on The Influence of Faith-Based Learning Environment on Undergraduates' Academic Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.131	.304		10.283	.000
Faith based Learning	.006	.002	.192	3.976	.000
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9.643	1	9.643	15.808	.000 ^b
Residual	251.325	412	.610		
Total	260.969	413			

$R = .492$; $R^2 = .242$; Adj. $R^2 = .240$; Std. Error = .781

- a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance
b. Predictor: (Constant), Faith-based Learning Environment

Faith-based Learning has a beta value of .192 and a t-value of 3.976, significant at .000 alpha level. The calculated value of $f = 15.808$ significant at the 0.000 alpha level indicated that undergraduates' academic performance was significantly influenced by faith-based learning (t-value = 3.976, $f_{(1,412)} = 15.808$, $p = .000$). The results in Table 4 further indicated that when the predictor variable (Faith-

based Learning) entered into the regression model, it predicted undergraduates' academic performance ($R = .492$; $R^2 = .242$; $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .240$; $F_{(1, 412)} = 15.808$; $p = .000 < .05$). This showed that the predictor variable accounted for 24% of the variance in the undergraduates' academic performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The outcome of this study revealed that the perception of undergraduates of a faith-based learning environment is high, which may be a result of some factors inherent in the students or circumstances around them (their experience and exposure within the school). This is in line with the findings of Waldman (2016), who reported that students who feel mentally and physically safe are more likely to succeed in their academic pursuits. For the students to be both mentally and physically safe, the learning environment must be safe, while the students should be respected, supported, and welcomed into the learning environment. The findings are also supported by Racoon (2018), who asserted that learning that is personalized improves students' skills such as critical thinking, solving complex problems using information and knowledge, collaborative working, and developing academic skills that aid students' engagement.

The result showed that the academic performance of the students at Babcock University is not bad, as many students are in their second class upper. This result could be attributed to the school environment and the services encountered. This is in support of the findings of Mudassir and Norsuhaily (2015) that undergraduates from institutions with adequate physical and social facilities, skilled teachers, and a conducive learning environment perform better than those from institutions with scanty facilities, low-quality teachers, and a less conducive environment. Also, Duruji et al. (2014) came up with a report that the state of learning environment and standard of infrastructure, accompanied by the maintenance culture of such institutions, has a strong influence on the academic performance of the students. Similar to this are the findings of Ezike (2018), who reported significant relationships between institutional environment and academic performance of students.

The outcome of the first research question indicated that learning environment accounted for 24% of the variance in the undergraduates' academic performance. This alludes to the fact that there is a significant influence of faith-based learning environment on undergraduates' academic performance. The above lends credence to the work of Eimuhi and Ogedengbe (2016), who reported that environmental factors have significant effects on teaching and learning and concluded that the more conducive a learning environment is, the more the benefits for academic performance and other students' outcomes. In addition, Odeh et al. (2015) found that school climate, discipline, and physical facilities have a significant influence on the academic achievement of students. This indicates that when institutions fail to make available all the necessary learning and teaching facilities and generate a conducive teaching and learning environment, students hardly put in their best, and this may hamper their academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The university learning environment is a significant determinant of students' academic achievement. Physical, psychosocial, and technological dimensions collectively shape students' learning experiences and outcomes. Creating supportive and well-resourced learning environments should be a strategic priority for higher education institutions seeking to improve academic performance and student success.

The current study assessed the extent to which a faith-based learning environment may foster or influence students' academic performance at Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria. It is therefore concluded that every educational institution, especially universities, has an environment that differentiates it from others, which affects the behaviour and feelings of students in such an institution. Institutional environment is the perceived subjective effects of the formal system and other important environmental factors on the attitudes, beliefs, values, and motivation of students to succeed in their academic endeavour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings stated earlier, the following recommendations were therefore made:

1. The university management should pay more attention to the institutional environment so as to make it more conducive for teaching and learning, while there is also a need for teachers to improve their job effectiveness.
2. Staff development should be on the front burner of the university management policy. Staff should be exposed to staff training and retraining programmes.
3. Instructional materials and other modern facilities such as IT facilities and others should be made available by the proprietor, management of the university, and other crucial stakeholders to engender a better environment for effective teaching and learning.
4. Good teacher-student interaction should be encouraged so that the student can have a rapport that will enable teachers to know the emotional and psychological state of their students

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