



Students' associated factors and programme completion tendency among postgraduate students in public universities in cross river state, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the associated factors and program completion tendency of graduate students in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two research hypotheses were developed to direct the investigation. The descriptive survey design was implemented for the study, which included a population of five thousand one hundred and fourteen (5,114) graduate students from the University of Calabar and the University of Cross River State. The Taro Yamane formula was employed to generate a cohort of 383 postgraduate students from the aforementioned population for the investigation. The "Students' Associated Factors and Programme Completion Tendency Questionnaire (SAFPCTQ)" questionnaire, which the researcher developed, was used to collect data. The questionnaire's reliability indices range from 0.070 to 0.082. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent t-test, one-way, two-way, and three-way Analysis of Variance) were employed to analyse the data collected. The findings of the study suggested that the likelihood of program completion among postgraduate students in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria is influenced by their gender, age, marital status, and employment status. Based on these findings, it was suggested that the school management should create a graduate program that is sufficiently adaptable to accommodate individuals who are employed at other institutions, thereby enabling them to complete their graduate programs.

Keywords: Employment status, graduate students, programme completion, employment status, gender, age

Introduction

Background to the study

The Nigerian university system has undergone significant transformation in the last three decades due to wave of globalization as well as the rapid permeation of information communication and technology in all sectors of the economy. This heralded the novel phenomenon of global knowledge economy, thus, to catch up with these global trends, government implemented rapid changes in the system such as deregulation, liberalization, massification and democratisation of university education. This made for massive private and faith-based organisations participation in the provision of university education thus, ending the elitist orientation of Nigerian universities that held sway. Consequently, a critical trend that grew alongside these reforms was the surging interest among Nigerian graduates to acquire higher degrees specifically masters' and doctoral degrees. Unfortunately, observation shows that more often than not, many graduate students drop out of their programme, and in most cases, complete their programmes long after the statutory stipulated programme duration.

Generally, several factors are critically determinant to the timely and/or successful completion of postgraduate programmes in Nigerian universities and the world at large. In the words of Worlu (2015) [29], students often encounter issues that strongly determine postgraduate studies' completion time. These factors have been described as variables that directly influence or predicts the completion time of the studies (Badmus & Omoifo, 2016) [3]. It therefore follows that, they include any factor or indices that could either enhance the timely and or result in the delayed completion of postgraduate programmes.

Some of the variables that are perceived to influence completion of postgraduate programmes have been identified by scholars, and categorized into three namely

student factors, supervisor factors and institutional factors (Muthukrishnan, Sidhu, Hoon, Narayanan, & Fook, 2022) [15]. On the other hand, supervisor related factors include supervisor's experience in research, workload, frequency of schedule supervision sessions, research interest, and relationship with supervisee, and research productivity. Thus, when supervisors lack adequate research experience or have different research interest from their students, it could affect the entire process of supervision, graduation time, and the decision to drop out of the programme completely. This could be more prevalent in institutions where departmental programme coordinators do not effectively track students' progress. Similarly, institutional factors include availability of research laboratories, libraries, internet access, information communication and technologies, power supply among others (Nouri, Larsson & Saqr, 2019; Omorobi, 2018) [18, 19]. These indices are very essential to carrying out quality and intensive research required for graduate programmes. Thus, their availability or inadequacy in any institution will affect the quality of research output, as well as the tendency to complete or drop out of the programme on the part of students.

Although, school related and supervisors' variables have been thoroughly researched; they seem to be a dearth of research information on some key student related causative factors to programme completion which are the focus of this study. Generally, student related factors that may cause programme delay include student motivation, communication and language skills, research skills, research collaboration with supervisor, time management, pattern of relationship with supervisor, capacity to understand supervisors' feedback, capacity for independent study, financial status and age. As a consequence, these aforementioned factors may also directly or indirectly lead to the delay in the completion of a program or the dropout

of graduate students in universities in Cross River State. Awodiji, Oluwalola, Ogbudinkpa, and Awotunde (2020) ^[2] observed that the programme completion tendency is the percentage of students who enrol in universities and subsequently exit the system at the specified period of their studies. Generally, completion tendency is a key index of the internal efficiency of a system (Omorogie, 2018). Therefore, the delay and or drop out of students from postgraduate programmes has negative implications for both the students and the institution. For instance, in most cases departments that have large numbers of backlog of students delayed in completing their programmes are barred from admitting new ones until those on the pipeline have graduated.

Nevertheless, institutions strive to maintain their cherished hard-earned values and standards and thus cannot award higher degrees arbitrarily without ascertaining the quality of work done by graduate students, hence many students who do not meet the standard often dropout or spend more time on the programme before completion. However, despite the prevalence and overarching nature of this problem among students' few studies exists globally in respect to the phenomenon, and none seems to exist within geographic scope (Nigeria or Cross River State) of the current study. Consequently, it is imperative to evaluate how some of these indices affect programme completion tendency. For instance, Omorobi (2018) ^[19] identified age, gender, socioeconomic status, employment status and marital status as indices that influenced graduate students' satisfaction with service delivery. The source, further observed that these variables could to a large extent, influence time of graduation among graduate students. This however was merely left on the realm of speculation because it did not constitute the main focus of the study, and thus requires empirical validity which is the interest of this present study. Hossain and Hossain (2016) ^[10] indicated that parents' education and income are two personal traits which shows a student's social and economic background. Socioeconomic status is commonly used to depict economic difference in society as a whole. It is typically broken into three levels (high, middle and low) to describe the three places a family or individual may fall into (Wikipedia, 2017) ^[27]. It influences the capacity of students to pay for tuition and other critical services in their programme cycle. Employment status of graduate student could influence students' programme completion. Being employed sometimes may intervene with study time and being unemployed could result in financial hardship that may also affect the capacity to cope with the demands of the programme which may somehow affect the entire programme life.

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs (1943) ^[13]

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Maslow posits that individuals possess a variety of requirements, which are influenced by their biological, psychological, and social components. The hierarchical order of these needs, which can differ from person to person, evolves from basic physiological requirements to more complex social and psychological requirements. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which is at the

vanguard of the most significant studies on motivation, has also established the "hierarchy of Needs Pyramid" by organising the needs in a specific order. Psychological needs are the requirements that must be met in order to maintain an individual's biological structures, including the need for oxygen, food, water, sleep, leisure, and shelter. Safety needs; despite the relatively satisfactory satisfaction of physiological needs, new needs emerge that are classified as safety needs (Maslow, 1943) ^[13]. These are the necessities that include the absence of anxiety, confidence, and protection from peril. Economic security is one aspect of your safety requirements. the need for affection, commitment, and belongingness emerges once the physiological and safety requirements are entirely met. Maslow underscores the fact that humans are social creatures during this phase of the theory. A diverse array of needs, including sentiments of belonging (e.g., group membership, organisations, churches, business association), spouse, child, and material affection, are represented by the individual's requirements for belongingness and love.

Esteem requirements are classified into two categories. The first need is to be esteemed and acknowledged by others about one's reputation, encompassing prestige, acknowledgement, and admiration. The other is the need for self-appreciation and self-esteem, which includes self-confidence, autonomy, achievement, and competence. Although all the needs at the other levels of the hierarchy have been met, the individual will continue to experience feelings of unease and dissatisfaction. These are known as self-actualization needs. This is the reason why individuals should conduct themselves in accordance with their individual capabilities. An artist should engage in art, a musician should engage in music, and an author must write in order to be content. It is imperative that an individual embody their full potential. Self-realization is an endeavour by an individual to optimise their own capabilities, enhance their abilities, and achieve the ideal person they aspire to be. The relationship of this theory to the current study is that postgraduate programmes is a need which graduate students seek to achieve like every other need in the hierarchy of need and their motivation to pursue graduate study is based on a particular inner driving desire which needs to be satisfied by achieving or fulfilling it through completion of their programmes of study. Therefore, when they complete these programmes they have a sense of achievement and satisfaction for their mile stone. Adversely, failure to complete the programme results in dissatisfaction and lack of courage to undertake further or any other educational endeavour.

Statement of the problem

Postgraduate programmes exist in many universities to provide opportunities for further studies into professional cadres of every profession. Basically, these programmes lead to the award of Master and Doctoral degrees. More often than not, these programmes are research intensive, as each graduate student is expected to independently initiate and complete an original thesis or dissertation research. This and other complex activities of the programme usually presents severe challenges that sometimes hinder the completion of the programme. Similarly, many students enroll into graduate programmes in universities in Cross River State annually. Regrettably, a reasonable proportion of these students drop out of the programmes, while some

who dare to complete their programmes of studies are usually acutely very small in number. Moreover, those who finally graduate, sometime do so long after the statutory duration of the programmes have elapsed. These scenarios present profound challenges to students and the universities in general because, it translates to a huge loss of time, energy, resources and funds. This is very dangerous for the economy and higher education institutions that need such critical high and complex human resource at top managerial/Faculty positions for the smooth running of their organizations and tertiary institutions.

The profound nature of these problems has resulted in general brain drain, intellectual and capital flight to foreign countries through high patronage of overseas studies by many young highly intelligent Nigerians particularly for postgraduate studies. If this trend is not abated, it might inflict negative outcomes on our institutions which might lead to a deficit of professional in all sectors of the Nigerian policy. However, some efforts have been made by institutions and lecturers to facilitate seamless processes of students' academic progress and completion of graduate programmes. They include introduction of research seminars to graduate students, encouraging students to write and publish in learned academic journals, conference attendance and provision as well as timely release of stipend to supervisors. Additionally, some institutions have furnished electronic libraries providing ICT services to supervisors and students, provision of campus-wide WiFi network and improved power supply to promote a sound and congenial environment that provides support to research activities. Yet some students seem to leave their programmes of studies halfway. This could be attributed to the poor attention of critical variables traceable to students and supervisors that profoundly hinders students' academic progress and timely completion of graduate programmes.

However, these ignored variables, which seem to be most critical to the internal efficiency of graduate programmes include student's socioeconomic status and employment status. Therefore, if these indices are judiciously managed, there is high probability that students' progress and programme completion tendency might improve significantly. Hence, the study seeks to examine the puzzle. How does students' associated factors influence programme completion tendency among post graduate students in Public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' associated factor and programme completion tendency among post graduate students in Public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine how student's employment status influence their programme completion tendency;
2. Determine how gender, age and marital status influence programme completion tendency.

Research questions

The following are the research questions formulated to guide the study;

1. To what extent does students' employment status influence their programme completion tendency?
2. What is the influence of gender, age and marital status influence programme completion tendency?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were employed to guide the study:

1. There is no significant influence of students' employment status on postgraduate programme completion tendency
2. There is no significant influence of gender, age and marital status on programme completion tendency

Literature Review

Students' Employment Status on Postgraduate Programme Completion in Cross River State

The employment status of graduate students may also affect the completion of their programs. Occasionally, employment may interfere with study time, while unemployment may lead to financial hardship that could also impact the ability to meet the program's requirements, potentially affecting the duration of the program.

A study by Hyder (2018)^[11] sought to assess determinants of students' Grade Point Averages (GPAs) enrolled in associate degree nursing programs. The investigator gathered evidence of participants taking nursing courses within five institutions within a community-based environment of the state of Virginia. The institutions were within rural or suburban areas of the western part of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The investigator had assumed that full-time nursing students' outside job weeks were most likely to have had the most influence on GPAs, hence supporting findings of earlier literature on GPAs of the overall students within colleges. Some of the determinants that were seen to contribute were social support, levels of stress, differences of career-oriented versus non-career-oriented outside jobs, and non-traditional versus traditional students' differences. The outcomes of this research were that, unlike previous literature, social support had its most distinct positive contribution on GPAs, while that of stress had negative contribution compared to outside jobs within this group of students. Specifically, social support had seven percent of mean grade point variance, while that of stress had three percent of variance.

The motivation of postgraduate students to graduate on time (GOT) were explored by Muthukrishnan, Sidhu, Hoon, Narayanan, and Fook (2023)^[16]. A questionnaire-based survey was employed to gather evidence on 191 postgraduate students of three Malaysian institutions of higher learning. The employing of the use of PLS-SEM approach analyzed on the accumulated quantitative evidence. The findings of findings were that postgraduate students' motivation to engage on GOT were considerably driven by research skill, students' management skill, and institutions' supporting environment. The most prominent predictor of students' ambition to engage on GOT were evidenced to be research skill. Apart from that, students' ambition to continue postgraduate studies were mediated by students' competency of conducting research through its relationship with students' competency of managing themselves, along with institutions' supporting environment. The supervision processes of GOT were evidenced to have no supporting evidence of its impacts, neither immediate nor indirectly. The findings have critical implications on postgraduate students, institutions of higher learning, and supervisors.

Saddique, Khurshid, and Raja (2023)^[23] have done a study on how part-time jobs impacted students' GPAs. The

researchers had surveyed a sample of 150 students taken from three reputable institutions of the public sector. The population sample represented individuals of arts as well as science streams of students. A quantitative approach was utilized to determine how part-time jobs impacted students' GPAs. The specific measures that were used to determine how part-time jobs impacted students' achievement were students' GPAs, how many hours students spent on part-time jobs daily, what kind of part-time jobs students had, and how much burden students' part-time jobs created on students' shoulders. The outcomes of this study indicated that part-time jobs had a positive effect on students' GPAs, reported values of which were greater than 2.6. It was also seen that students doing part-time jobs on occasions needed a greater amount of time to achieve their degree compared to students doing no part-time jobs. Even though respondents were content regarding doing jobs, there were also reservations regarding what pay students were receiving on doing jobs. The most students enjoyed doing jobs on their own without much authority of others on students' shoulders. Besides that, students were of view that part-time jobs will make students' employability better after graduating, many of the respondents were of view that students will continue doing part-time jobs after graduating too. Students also enjoyed doing part-time jobs on weekend times, along with job timetables' flexibility. Students were of view that such jobs will make students' integration into workplaces better, along with increasing students' probabilities of better job facilities after graduating. Finally, students enrolled in educational institutions will immensely benefit by gaining part-time jobs.

Daniels (2016)^[7] researched the relationship of academia to undergraduate students' employments within a moderately-sized Midwestern institution of learning. The researcher created questions that were meant to clarify how these issues were connected, though literature on this subject had differing views on how strong this relationship is. Hypotheses were created to test how likely job engagement might have on students' experience of academia using evidence taken from previous research on how academia intersects with jobs. A questionnaire sent to well over 8,000 students was utilized to gather evidence that reflected what students had to say on this subject matter. The SPSS software assessed 421 of those responses, resulting in concluding that the null hypotheses held, meaning that no meaningful relationships were seen regarding undergraduate success within academia compared to jobs. Even though no meaningful evidence within analyzed data were seen, there have been ideas that can make exploring academia versus jobs on a much deeper scale possible within the future. Neyt, Omev, Verhaest, and Baert (2017)^[17] had done a review of multi-disciplinary literature on how student jobs have been researched to determine correlations of educational outcomes, including how hypotheses were supposed to form, how things were researched, and what findings were taken using evidence-based measures. By systematically contrasting literature that had been produced on this subject matter, new findings of great importance to academia were created that went far beyond previous reports of negative consequences on students that result from greater levels of strenuous jobs. A prominent finding within this review is that students' jobs have a greater

negative effect on what choices students make regarding school or continuing school versus how well or poorly students do within school on things like graduating or graduating unsuccessfully.

Cheng and Alcántara (2020)^[5] also analyzed the role of job holding on students' collegiate life experience, including social life experience, academic experience, job holding attitudes, and how job holding impacts students' lives on campus through the use of combined quantitative and qualitative measures. The findings of this study were that there is no statistically significant difference between employed students' social life experience compared to nonemployed students' social life experience, but there is observational evidence that employed students have lower GPAs compared to nonemployed students' GPAs. A very high percentage of employed students believed that job holding had experiential benefits outside of financial reward, whereby employed students continually sought meaning and purpose through job holding. Job holding added order to students' daily lives, together with overall greater confidence overall compared to extracurricular activities.

Douglas and Attewell (2019)^[8] identified that students of traditional ages that held jobs throughout the process of earning their college degree had, on average, better pay upon graduating compared to students that were not employed throughout their educational experience. The conclusion that students that held jobs throughout had better pay upon graduating compared to students that were nonemployed throughout educational experience was developed through an integration of students' transcript files that attended a big multi-campus school within America combined with earnings files that were accessed through state-level administrative files. Even after students' background factors were controlled through educational achievement, this post-grad earnings advantage remained identical to that of degree completion benefits, applicable to students within subpopulations that were diverse, including models that adjust for selection bias.

Simón, Diaz, and Costa (2017)^[24] also surveyed students using questionnaire-based measures to gather individual-level data on a sample of N=464 individuals that were complemented by school records. The researchers created estimates that controlled for a wide range of determinants that were composed of socio-economic attributes, along with discrete measures of motivation and educational engagement that were differentiated by levels of job intensity. The estimates were analyzed using instrumental variables, logistic regression, and ordinary least squares techniques. The findings first establish that a considerable proportion of students studying in Spanish universities are employed, holding jobs for extended durations of time. It is also frequent that employed students have motivation by necessity, along with engaging activities outside of interests. Expatriates, older students, along with students that have greater levels of motivation have greater probabilities of finding jobs. Finally, contrary to students' perceptions, there is no apparent relationship that is visible regarding students' performance and how frequent they are employed.

In 2016^[20], there was also a study by Richardson, Evans, and Gbadamosi that targeted full-time students seeking part-

time jobs within academia. The objective of this study was to establish how part-time jobs were impacting students' performance academically, along with how students were managing up with combined responsibilities of dual jobs using a qualitative mode of inquiry to achieve this objective. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews of a sample of 30 undergraduate business students. The findings identify that students have a habit of neglecting most of life's essentials, including set times of preparation of tasks and reading, that are substantially sacrificed to ensure that part-time job responsibilities are attended to. The discussion is on likely actions that institutions of higher learning may have to take to rectify and curb this trend.

Jewell (2014) ^[12] reports that students are increasingly taking on jobs while studying in the UK, owing to the increasing availability of higher education and changes to funding, although this is also seen to have negative impacts on educational achievement. While part-time jobs within terms can provide financial resources, this also takes up precious study time. Such jobs might also be seen as investments in "informal" human capital that make graduates better attractive to employers. Do part-time jobs within terms have negative impacts on educational achievement? Does this negative effect compensate by including wage benefits that result from transferable skills and experience of work? With conflicting evidence on how part-time jobs within terms can have negative impacts on educational achievement, our findings point out that students will work for necessity rather than for investments, and we have confirmed that there is a negative effect of part-time jobs within terms on individuals that work solely out of necessity or of greater intensity, using survey evidence of students within one UK university. It concluded that there is evidence that suggests that students that have engaged in part-time jobs within terms have better pay upon graduating.

Gender, Age, and Marital Status on Programme Completion Tendency

The educational process is developed to establish psychological, social, and ethical values that will remain useful throughout one's life. Nevertheless, there is a great shortage of emphasis on its priority within plans of development of Pakistan. The educational process has never adapted its teaching-learning processes to meet contextual requirements, although there have been numerous reasons behind its neglect.

A report by Comedis (2014) ^[6] stated that social activities, rest periods, socioeconomic conditions, and gender and age have impacted trends of completion. Traditionally, researchers have shown greater interest regarding women's issues compared to issues of men, indicating that although there is greater enrollment of women in institutions of higher learning in Pakistan, levels of discrimination on the basis of gender have diminished considerably. It has been seen that women have gained admission to institutions of higher learning at a much greater pace compared to men within fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine, indicating that women have had greater success compared to men, according to researchers Chaudhry and Lodhi (2018) ^[4]. Nevertheless,

there is a dominant patriarchic culture within Pakistan that poses unique challenges to women, including greater domestic responsibilities like care of children and home management compared to male counterparts. Thus, women of Pakistani origin face challenges balancing educational responsibilities along with career obligations (Khan, Altaf, & Kausar, 2018). More importantly, researchers have demonstrated ongoing interest in issues of gender throughout history.

Ekundayo (2010) ^[9] employed ex-post facto survey to test marital status, gender, and age on Nigerian education students' achievement. A random sample of 367 Nigerian students of education were drawn using two institutions of learning. The sample had 96 males, 271 women, and 165 married persons, ranging in ages of 17 to 33 years old. The findings reported that achievement on the critical educational programme had statistically non-significant differences regarding marital status, religious denomination, or gender.

The weak relationship that Wilson (2016) ^[28] identified regarding perseverance on gender, marital status, resources, and demographic factors like motivation, marital status, and educational background implies that perseverance is weakly linked to most of its determinants except motivation.

The effects of marital status, age, and gender on America's Community Colleges students' achievement were estimated by Yess (2009) ^[30] using 240 students of America's Community Colleges. The findings reported that marital status was a predictor of success among graduating students within America's Colleges. Besides that, female students who were married were called upon to rewrite examinations more times compared to male students or female students without children or husbands. The difference reported was statistically non-significant.

Finally, Robert, Wooster, and Chen (2019) ^[21] evaluated marital status, gender, and ages' effects on students' achievement enrolled on America's colleges' students' achievement. The findings of 374 students' sample reported that students without husbands had lower grade levels compared to students who were husbands. Nevertheless, it was reported that female students of advanced ages that had children did not have better CGPA compared to students without children or husbands.

In a survey by Rooij, Fokkens-Bruinsma, and Jansen (2021) ^[22], psychosocial, project, and supervision factors concerning contentment, advancement, and leave intentions were explored among 839 PhD students of a Dutch university. Regression findings point out that contentment and advancement are linked to gender, age, marital status, and leave intentions, whereas satisfaction is linked to the supervisor-supervisee relationship, PhD students' feeling of belonging, degree of freedom within the project, and correspondence of the project to the supervisor's research. Conversely, leave intentions were linked to each of the aforementioned factors' opposites. Universities need to make it a priority to alleviate PhD students' tremendous burdens in order to improve their chances of degree completion and contentment levels. Lastly, compatibility of PhD students' interests to those of their respective supervisors is of great importance on interpersonal levels like building good relations, but also on intellectual levels

where PhD students' interests coincide well with those of their respective supervisors.

Vadivel, Alam, Nikpoo, and Ajanil (2023) ^[26] sought to establish relationships between marital status, gender, and age concerning educational achievement and psychological impacts, including their contribution to students' success and completion of programs, hence promoting early integration into the job market. The population of this study entailed 50 students and one guardian of each of the students. The use of random sampling greatly promoted achievement of the goals of this study. The process of collecting data entailed focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and observational methods. The findings of the study were that marital status, gender, and most students' ages had great impacts on students' success and completion of programs, hence promoting early integration into the job market. The researchers also learned that guardians of lower social classes were likely to discourage students from pursuing educational advancement. The findings of this study infer that vocational and technological courses should be offered free of cost to children to improve children's chances of sustainable livelihood.

Once again, Hauge, Bendtsen, Reneflot, Mykletun, and Aarø (2016) explored how much of a contribution marital status, gender, and age make to completing programs. The population of interest were 10,149 people aged 30-46, sampled using Nord-Trøndelag Health Survey (HUNT 3), held in 2006. Depression and anxiety symptoms were rated using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), measuring outcomes. The measures of educational success were taken using Norway Educational Database measures of educational success. Linear regression estimates were utilized to test educational success, late school completion, and measures of depression and anxiety symptoms in adulthood. Late school completion is linked to elevated levels of depression and anxiety. The authors concluded that marital status, gender, and age have considerable impacts on completing programs.

Aina, Baici, Casalone, and Pastore (2018) ^[1] surveyed people and offered thorough discussion of theoretical and empirical literature on determinants of success of programs of universities. Theoretical framework is defined by postsecondary educational investments that have increasing certainty regarding expected benefits of investments on educational spending. Students undergo a process of learning that refreshes annually each subject of stock of knowledge by recalibration of estimates of benefits versus costs of pursuing tertiary schooling. The authors proved that marital status, gender, and age have key impacts on completing programs.

Trends in completion of tertiary programs, reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022) ^[25], reflect how effective tertiary institutions are. Such trends reflect how many students begin a tertiary program but actually complete it. Low completion levels, though, do not reflect ineffectiveness of a tertiary system but merely that students can leave courses behind through dissatisfaction on finding no interest in the subject or career, or seeking better job options that make students leave school without graduating. It is possible within some educational institutions that

students can register courses without advancing to program completion but continue to stay within courses that focus on continuous learning or skill acquisition. The determinants of students' completion can be wide-ranging and diverse, including but not limited to gender and age.

Research Method

Research Design

The research design that was adopted for this study is the survey descriptive design. The choice of this design is linked to the fact that descriptive design describes a population, situation or phenomena that is being studied.

Population of The Study

The population of this study consisted of all the 5,114 post graduate students. The total population from the University of Calabar, between 2018-2022 academic session stood at 4498 (male =2646 and female are 1852). While UNICROSS stood at 616 (male= 301 and female are 315).

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. This sampling technique is often adopted by researchers when seeking for respondents or subjects with specific unique characteristic of interest to the study.

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 383 post graduate students of UNICAL and UNICROSS who were admitted from 2018-2022 as obtained from the field survey 2023. UNICAL stood at 292 (male =153 and female are 139), UNICROSS stood at 91 (male= 53 and female are 38). The target and accessible population and sample are presented in tables 2 and 5 respectively.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire known as the Students' Associated Factor and Programme Completion Tendency Questionnaire (SAFPCTQ). Developed by the researcher with the assistance of the project administrators and other specialists in the field of test and measurement in the Educational Foundations UNICAL and UNICROSS unit. The instrument was divided into two divisions, A and B. Section A was intended to procure demographic data from the respondents, including their gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status, university affiliation, and employment status. Section B: was introduced as a scale that assessed the components of programme completion tendency (PCT) in the following categories: class work tendency (6 items), health/financial tendency (6 items), thesis/dissertation tendency (6 items), and communication tendency (6 items). In total, 24 items were assessed on a four-point Likert-type scale, with options that were phrased both positively and negatively. Additionally, the responses were rated on a scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) to Strongly Disagreed (SD) based on the number of points allocated to positively worded items, which ranged from 4 to 1. The reverse was also true. The respondents are required to thoroughly review each statement and select the appropriate alternatives from the four responses.

Validity of The Instrument

To validate the instrument, “Students’ Associated Factor and Programme Completion Tendency Questionnaire (SAFPCTQ)” the researcher gave the instrument to three experts including the researcher’s supervisor to ensure adequate face validation. The experts were from the units of Test and Measurement in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar and Cross River University [UNICROSS] Calabar respectively. This was for them to check for the appropriateness of items, content coverage, clarity of language and suitability of items, ambiguous items as well as items measurability [or items not measurable] to be that are not measurable were identified and expunged; such were then replaced with valid items.

Reliability of The Instrument

The reliability estimates of the instrument “Students’ Associated Factor and Programme Completion Tendency Questionnaire (SAFPCTQ)” was established through pilot testing of the instrument which was administered to 40 respondents (postgraduates’ students) in UNICAL and UNICROSS who were part of the population but were not included in the final sample of the study. The completed questionnaire was collected and coded accordingly. The copies of the questionnaire were administered once to the respondents after which the coefficient of internal consistency was estimated and the reliability index ranged from .70 to .82 accordingly which shows that the instrument was highly reliable for data collection. The result of the data analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 1: Coefficient of Internal consistency for Programme Completion Tendency Questionnaire (PCTQ) (n=40)

S/N	VARIABLE	N	Mean	SD	$\sum S_i^2$	SD ²	∞
i.	Course work tendency	10	32.06	2.09	3.09	4.37	.79
ii.	Health/financial tendency	10	31.12	2.00	3.09	4.00	.82
iii.	Thesis/dissertation tendency	10	31.41	2.18	3.92	4.75	.70
iv.	Communication gaps tendency	10	31.48	2.11	3.17	4.45	.75
v.	Overall scale for PCTQ	40	86.98	5.72	3.56	32.72	.76

Procedure for data collection

The researcher visited each of the sampled institutions (UNICAL and UNICROSS) with a letter of introduction from the department where the study was embarked on. Each of the school visited by the researcher with the assistants obtain permission from the school authorities to use the School for the study, then the questionnaires entitled “Students’ Associated Factor and Programme Completion Tendency Questionnaire (SAFPCTQ)” was administered to the students. The researcher with the help of the trained research assistants gave the students orientation of how to complete the questions and the duration for submission. The research assistants also ensured that the environment was conducive for the students to be comfortable while filling the items in the instrument. This helped to reduce the incidence of bad items and to also ensure that 98 percent return rate was achieved. The completed copies of the instrument were collected from the respondents at the end of the exercise. This was done on a direct delivery method in which all completed instrument were collected at the spot. The exercise was done repeatedly within an interval of three weeks.

Procedure for data preparation and scoring

To prepare the data that was collected for statistical analysis, a coding formula was be designed to code the responses of the respondents. Completed questionnaires were scored according to the assigned codes, Strongly Agree (SA) Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) Strongly Disagreed (SD).

- Strongly (SA) - 4point
- Agreed (A) - 3point
- Disagreed (DA) - 2point
- Strongly Disagreed (SD) - 1point.

Procedure for data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to test

and establish hypotheses and questions framed within the research. The t-test, two-way analysis of variance, three-way analysis of variance, and one-way analysis of variance were used to test the null hypothesis, whereas use of mean and standard deviation on a 0.05 significance level solved issues that were brought out.

Hypothesis one

There is a significant influence of students’ employment status on postgraduate programme completion tendency in public universities in Cross River State

Independent variable: Students’ employment status

Dependent variable Programme completion tendency

Statistical analysis technique: Independent t-test

Hypothesis two

There is no significantly influence of gender, age and marital status on programme completion tendency in public universities in Cross River State.

Independent variable: Gender, age and marital status

Dependent variable Programme completion tendency

Statistical analysis technique: Three way-ANOVA

Results and discussion

Presentation of results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of students’ employment status on postgraduate programme completion tendency. The major independent variable in this hypothesis is students’ employment status, categorized in terms of employed and unemployed. While the dependent variable is programme completion tendency. To test this hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was employed and the result is presented in Table 17.

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of Students employment status on programme completion tendency (course work tendency, health/financial tendency, issues with thesis/dissertation and communication gaps tendency)

Students employment status (course work tendency)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	LS	t-value	p-value
Employed	162	23.9568	3.41962				
				377	.05	5.139	.000
Unemployed	217	26.4286	5.36067				
*p<.05							
Students employment status (health and financial tendency)							
Employed	162	22.8519	3.53724				
				377	.05	8.265	.000
Unemployed	217	25.8664	3.49412				
*p<.05							
Students employment status (thesis/dissertation tendency)							
Employed	162	26.2778	3.46813				
				377	.05	3.228	.001
Unemployed	217	25.1705	3.17593				
*p<.05							
Students employment status (issues with communication gaps tendency)							
Employed	162	25.7469	5.42402				
				377	.05	1.076	.283
Unemployed	217	26.2350	3.37269				
*p<.05							

Table 2 revealed that a total of 379 respondents that constitutes the study sample for students’ employment status. In all the categories, unemployed dominated the study with a total of 217 respondents, while the remaining 162 were respondents drawn from the categories of those who are employed. At 377 degrees of freedom with .05 level of significance, the p-value are .000, .000, .001 and .283 accompanied by a t-value of 5.139, 8.265, 3.228 and 1.076 for programme completion tendency (course work tendency, health/financial tendency, thesis/dissertation tendency and communication gaps tendency respectively). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected for course work tendency (*p=.000 <.05), health/financial tendency (*p=.000<.05), thesis/dissertation tendency(*p=001<.05), but accepted for communication gaps tendency (p=.283>.05).

Hypothesis two

There is no significant influence of gender, age and marital status on programme completion tendency. The major independent variables in this hypothesis are gender (male and female) age (Below 25 years, 26-40 years and 41 years and above) and marital status (single, married, divorced, separated and widowed/widower). The dependent variable is programme completion tendency. To test this hypothesis, three-way analysis of variance was adopted with gender, age and marital status as factors and programme completion tendency as the dependent variable. The F-ratio test was employed to test the significance of main influence while the Fisher’s Least Significance Test (LSD) was employed to as Post-hoc comparison.

Table 3. Three-way ANOVA of gender, age and marital status on postgraduate programme completion tendency

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2585.134 ^a	9	287.237	7.789	.000	.160
Intercept	288010.908	1	288010.908	7809.974	.000	.955
Gender	521.671	1	521.671	14.146	.000	.037
Age	25.185	2	12.593	.341	.711	.002
Marital status	718.116	2	179.529	4.868	.001	.050
Gender* age* marital status	449.234	3	224.617	6.091	.002	.032
Error	13607.732	370	36.877			
Total	476835.000	379				
Corrected Total	16192.865	378				

a. R Squared = .160 (Adjusted R Squared = .139)

Table 3 shows the results of the three-way ANOVA of gender, age and marital status on postgraduate programme completion tendency. The main effect of gender has a p-value of .000, for main effect of age also has a p-value of .711, and the main effect of marital status has a p-value of .001. While for interactive effect for gender, age and marital status the p-value was .002. These values were accompanied by an F-values of 14.146, .341, 4.868 and 6.091. At .05 level with 9 and 370 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is rejected for main effect of gender on postgraduate programme completion tendency. Rejected for main effect of age on postgraduate programme completion tendency, accepted for main effect of marital status on postgraduate

students programme completion and rejected for the interactive effect of gender age and marital status on postgraduate students’ completion.

Discussion of findings

The results from the findings are discussed hypothesis by hypothesis as follows;

Employment Status and Programme Completion Tendency Among Graduate Students

The research found that there is a significant influence of employment status on postgraduate programme completion tendency in public universities in Cross River State. It

therefore follows that more unemployed graduate students tend to complete their programmes than their employed counterparts. This could be attributed to the fact that unemployed graduate student more often than not believe that obtaining higher degrees could improve their chances in the labour market as well as give them a competitive edge when searching for top management jobs. Additionally, some of them could have interest in the academic career thus fueling their resilience and determination to pull through their programmes of study regardless the challenges and inconveniences. Similarly, some of them are also conscious of the financial implication of a prolonged graduation. Meanwhile, employed graduate students on the other sometimes suffer demotivation and see pursuit of graduate studies an avoidable stress. Thus, making them to sometimes end half-way or finish at a longer period than necessary.

The findings corroborate the results of Muthukrishnan, Sidhu, Hoon, Narayanan, and Fook (2023)^[16] who examined the impact of institutional support, supervisory practices, and students' self-management and research skills on the motivation of postgraduate students to graduate on time (GOT). The findings indicated that the motivation of postgraduate students to participate in GOT was influenced by institutional support. Nevertheless, the most significant predictor of motivation to GOT was identified as research abilities.

Gender, Age, Marital Status on Programme Completion Tendency

The study held that marital status, gender, and age have considerable impacts on programme completion probability of students in Cross River State-based public universities. The same is supported by Ekundayo (2010)^[9], where marital status, religious denomination, and gender were shown not to have impacts on students' enrollment of educational courses on programme completion. The findings also showed that female students who were married, together with students of advanced ages, had greater proportions of re-sit examinations compared to male students and female students who were not married.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of results

The results can be summarized as follows

1. There is a significant influence of employment status on postgraduate programme completion tendency in public universities in Cross River State
2. There is a significantly influence of gender, age and marital status on programme completion tendency in public universities in Cross River State

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research clearly outlines reasons behind students graduating on time challenges. The recognition of this challenge is there, no matter what uncertainties there might have been concerning causation or variations on what extent or form of suitable instruction is appropriate to meet a diverse population of students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for the study:

1. The school management should design graduate programme to be flexible enough to cater for

individuals who are employed in other establishment such that it does not interfere with their work schedule.

2. There is need for adequate counselling of students by trained counsellors and teachers in advising students to improve the levels of interest in programme completion in tertiary institutions.

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