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## **Difficulties and Motivation of Postgraduate Students in Selected Nigerian Universities**

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### **Introduction**

Motivation energizes people to overcome setbacks. Study motivation helps students to stay focused and psychologically empowered to overcome obstacles and difficulties during study. Motivation drives students to achieve goals. Postgraduate students should be interested in the area of study and full of enthusiasm that should not wane as the study advances and as problems are confronted.

One theory of motivation is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow identified lower needs that have to be met before higher needs at the top. The starting point of Maslow's hierarchy theory is that people have needs that must be satisfied in the following order:

- Physiological: food, sleep, etc.
- Safety: Stable environment relatively free from threats
- Social: Affectionate relations with others and status within a group.
- Esteem: Self-respect, self-esteem, and the esteem of others; desire for confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, recognition, and reputation.
- Self-actualization: Self-fulfilment

The Nigerian postgraduate student may desire to move up the hierarchy to attain the level of self-actualization but this progress may be hindered by difficulties which could hamper the desire, zeal, and goal. Apart from these areas of needs in Maslow's theory that postgraduate students must overcome, this study will also look at other difficulties and obstacles confronting Nigerian postgraduates students in the areas of

- Prolonged semesters or sessions due to strikes and student unrest
- Getting research materials
- Interaction between lecturers and students.
- The need to for understanding and knowledge to satisfy curiosity, explore, and discover and to find solutions, look for relationships, and seek intellectual challenges.
- The postgraduate student needs self-fulfilment, development, and use of potentials.

### **The Nigerian Postgraduate Student and Maslow's Theory**

Motivation is key to overcoming difficulties and setbacks in the postgraduate level. Postgraduate students must take initiative in seeking resources, assistance, managing time, and forming good reading habits. Postgraduate education must motivate students to serious work. University authorities and other

stakeholders in Nigerian postgraduate education systems must consider student needs in the hierarchical order. Priorities should be given to these motivational needs so that postgraduate students can reach their potential.

Problems include:

- Lack of study time
- Poor use of study time
- Procrastination
- Lack of good study space

Postgraduate students also influence motivation through factors such as desire, values, and beliefs that make them act. Postgraduate study is a goal-oriented venture and value is attached to it (Wilkinson 2006). In considering issues such as family relationships, grades, career, aspiration, achievement status, money, and social life, the postgraduate student gradually understands motivational needs. Goals and desires grow from values and beliefs.

Motivation is related to commitment. Postgraduate students must be committed to good study habits and staying motivated. Activism and some aspects of social life may have to wait, even if these are part of students' values, beliefs, and pleasures.

### **Maintaining Motivation and Goals**

Postgraduate students must realize their strengths and weaknesses. Informal assessment of ability should be done, along with reflection on lectures and discussion with lecturers and fellow students. Reading and writing skills should be self-assessed and critiqued. This prevents under-estimation or over-estimation of one's skills and helps in attaining goals.

The establishment of both short- and long-term personal goals is crucial. Postgraduate students often aim toward a particular project, degree, graduate program, and professional career. These can be supported with goals such as living a healthy lifestyle, maintaining personal integrity, and working hard.

A short-term goal can support or lead to long-term goals. For example, a postgraduate long-term goal to become a university professor might start with series of short-term goals related to good study habits and commitment to academic activities. Short- and long-term goals have common attributes such as :

- Realistic
- Flexible
- Measurable (University of Melbourne, n.d.)

### **Method of Data Collection and Discussion**

To gather data for this study, two hundred questionnaires were distributed to five postgraduate schools in Nigerian universities, with 40 administered to postgraduate students at each university. A total of 38 questionnaires were retrieved from Delta State University, 24 from University of Benin, 32 from University of Port Harcourt, 27 from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and 25 from Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. A total of 156 (78 percent) questionnaires were returned and used for this research. The findings are presented in tables using percentages.

## Difficulties in Study

Respondents were asked whether they were encountering difficulties in their studies.

Table 1 shows their responses.

Difficulties in Studies	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Do you find difficulties in study	121	77.6	35	22.4	156

A vast majority of respondents were encountering difficulties. Table 2 shows the The areas of difficulties.

Table 2: Area of Difficulties

Area of Difficulties	Number	%
Lectures	20	12.8
Prolonged semesters/sessions	53	34.0
Research materials/topics	48	30.8
Prolonged semesters/sessions and research materials/topics	5	3.2
Lectures and prolonged semester/session	5	3.2
Lecture, prolonged semester/session, research materials	2	1.3
No response	23	14.7
Total	156	100

The most frequently reported difficulty is the prolonged semester or session. This is followed by research materials and research topic difficulties which were more than one-third of responses.

It is not surprising that prolonged duration of programmes is the most frequently reported difficulty for postgraduate students in Nigerian universities. This has become a major problem with public sector university education in Nigeria where students are admitted but do not usually know when they are likely to graduate. Most public sector universities find it difficult to adhere to advertised calendars because of unpredictable strike action by staff unions or violent student demonstrations, all of which result in frequent closures. This is why one of the advertisement lines for private universities in the country is “you know when you are admitted and you know when you will graduate.”

About 35 percent of responses have difficulties with research topics and materials. They find it difficult to select a research topic. This could be attributed to lack of computer and Internet knowledge and the fact that most libraries are not interlinked in Nigeria. Students can access relevant materials more easily and select related topics for research if they have access to the Internet and the work of others working in similar areas.

Table 3: Interaction with Higher Colleagues

	Yes	No	No Response	Total
When in difficulties do you find it easy interacting with higher colleagues/lecturers	119	13	24	156

Most students find it easy to interact with their colleagues and lecturers when they encounter research difficulties.

Table 4: Reasons for inability to interact with others when in research difficulties

Reasons	Number	%
Know not of any one to interact with	2	15.4
Shyness on telling others the difficulties	2	15.4
Non-readiness of colleagues/lecturers to attend to research students	7	53.8
Proud nature of the lecturers posed hindrance to approach them	2	15.4
Total	13	100

Nearly 70 percent of the difficulties in research interaction is attributed to others (colleagues and lecturers) and only 30 percent is attributed to self (lack of knowledge and shyness). This would seem to indicate that there are major problems in interaction between lecturers and students and between postgraduate students themselves that the postgraduate school must focus on and correct.

Table 5: Factors that have most negative effects on postgraduate programme

Factors	Number	%
Prolonged programme due to unnecessary departmental delay	90	57.7
Due to personal financial difficulties and affects concentration	29	18.6
Due to relationship with someone, which affects concentration	9	5.8
Prolonged programme due to unnecessary departmental delay and personal financial difficulties that affects concentration	8	5.1
Prolonged programme due to unnecessary departmental delay, personal financial difficulties that affects concentration and relationship with someone, which affects concentration	6	3.8
Total	156	100

Well over half of respondents identify institutional failures (Prolonged programme due to unnecessary departmental delay) as the factor that has most negative effect on them. This also contributes to the second factor: financial difficulties. Nigerian universities must take immediate and urgent steps to remove the sources of delay at the institutional level.

Table 6: Postgraduate motivation

Ways the students could be motivated	Number	%
The stipulated period for the programme should be strictly adhered to	39	25

Moderate school fees/government subsidizing of students school fees	18	11.5
Provision of accommodation/electricity for the students	2	1.3
Study materials should be made available in the library	13	8.3
Good and conducive reading environment (school hostels)	-	-
Lecturers and colleagues should derive interest in correcting postgraduate students' mistakes in research	3	1.9
Humility of the postgraduate students in accepting criticism and correction	1	0.6

The vast majority (87 percent) of students who identified only one motivator see the university institutional level as the place where motivational factors are lacking and where they should be instituted. The motivational factors cited related to programme duration, fees, municipal facilities, and study materials. The proprietors of Nigerian universities must take these very seriously to improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of their programmes. These motivational factors are peculiar to Nigerian postgraduates and developing nations generally. These are added problems for those in developing nations apart from the task of meeting the needs of motivation as enumerated by Maslow.

The Nigerian government should move postgraduate education forward by adhering so that they will be of same standard with those of the developed countries. Postgraduate study should be immensely rewarding. It should be an environment that allows students to develop the skills and abilities needed to succeed.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that Nigerian postgraduate students are facing difficulties and lack of motivation. These have led to the prolonged duration of courses of study. The government and university authorities of Nigeria should establish a workable calendar for the university postgraduate schools. The government should motivate postgraduate students by given them special grants, Internet study facilities, electronic information resources, and a conducive study environment. Postgraduate motivation should not be handled passively by any university stakeholder. Academic conditions and environmental factors should be well-coordinated to favor postgraduate students so that they can develop skills that will enhance their career educational experiences for the nation's human resource development.

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