

# An Interpretive Descriptive Study of Factors Affecting Academic Achievement of Underachieving Student Teachers in Nigeria

Kingsley Chinaza Nwosu, Cynthia Chisom Okoye, and Uchechukwu Hope Onah

**Abstract:** Reported incompetence of student teachers in Nigeria has become a national concern. However, little has been done to explore the mitigating factors to student teachers' academic success, especially from the generic qualitative approach. The present study adopted the interpretive descriptive qualitative design to examine factors affecting the academic achievement of underachieving student teachers in a Nigerian university. Semistructured interviews were employed in the data generation process. The study sample included 30 underachieving student teachers in the Department of Educational Foundations who were enrolled in the English/Education option. Using thematic content analysis, researchers reported factors such as lecturers' pedagogical incompetence, noisy and inadequate classrooms/libraries, negative influences from friends, students' lack of motivation and interest, procrastination, poor study habits, laziness and distractions, poor socio-economic background, and parental pressure contributed to students' underachievement. These factors were categorized as school, peer, personal, and home-related. Study results indicated that the interplay of forces outside the mental abilities of the students may have impeded their academic success, deepening our understanding that underachievement may not necessarily result from low mental ability.

Available indices on the performances of Nigerian universities project a very disturbing picture of the system (Jaja, 2013; Saint, Hartnette, & Strassner, 2003). There is insufficient empirical evidence that could help concerned stakeholders take appropriate intervention. Issues include inadequate funding, outdated research facilities, insufficient number of personnel, and poor remuneration leading to perennial brain drain, antiquated curricula, and inflexible pedagogical approaches (Saint et al., 2003). These contribute to limit the successes of students. Though institutional statistics are said to be unreliable and deficient, the percentage dropout rate has been noted as not less than 50% as of 2002 (Saint et al., 2003). This corroborates the public perception that the recent generation of Nigerian graduates is lacking the requisite knowledge, competencies, and skills that will help them survive in present society (Adeyanju, 2009).

Agu, Omenyi, and Odimegwu (2010) noted that Nigerian higher education institutions perform below expectation when weighed with national and international benchmarks of quality of output. Nwosu, Unachukwu, Achukwu, and Uzoechina (2017) stated the educational system in Nigeria is at crossroads in the 21st century and that stakeholders in Nigeria have shown their displeasure regarding the inability of the teacher education program to meet the demands of society. Teacher education in Nigeria has not been spared from this criticism, given the abysmal performance of its products in the workplace. Teachers trained recently in Nigerian institutions are seen to lack adequate competencies to function effectively (Adeyanju, 2009).

Students not attaining their maximum potential indicate that the system is dysfunctional for some (Balduf, 2009). This dysfunctionality is more disturbing when it occurs in a university system in which the student is expected to deepen critical thinking and research skills to successfully contribute to society. Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroufi, and Shokri (2013) noted that underachievement does not

always result from low cognitive abilities. Rather it may emanate from a mismatch between pedagogical approach and learning styles or the lack of awareness about learning strategies.

Underachieving students are those whose academic achievements are below expectations in comparison with their potential (Ford & Thomas, 1997). There is usually a significant performance departure from what is expected of them. This departure is occasioned by the interplay of several factors, including family, school, personal, and peer factors (Nomaan, Hanif, & Rehna, 2016). Other researchers note that performance below achievement expectation is linked to deficient study habits, attitude, interest, and time management (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2013; Suan, 2014). These factors have been summarized as "sociopsychological, family-related, peer-related, [and] school-related" (Ford & Thomas, 1997, p. 6). Also, Çakir's (2014) study involving gifted students who are underperforming indicated that underachievers have "low self-perception, low attitude toward their teacher and school, low motivation and goal valuation when they are compared to high achievers" (p.1037).

As common as the problem is in schools, researchers have only recently come to agree that a single definition of the term underachievement seems unattainable (Smith, 2003; Gallagher, 2005). The lack of a single definition has made it difficult to develop a comprehensive and all-inclusive psychometric instrument to help teachers identify underachievement in their classes (Smith, 2013). Ford and Thomas (1997) have noted that in a bid to identify underachievement, the teacher should address such pertinent concerns as determining if underachievement is chronic, situational, or temporary; determining if it is subject-specific or general; and determining the factors responsible for it. Stones (2016) pointed out that it is appropriate to base the definition of underachievement on a student's own prior academic attainment because it will reduce the likelihood of outright inability from

interfering with what is referred to as underachievement. A comparison that has to do with students and their peers is likely to introduce unnecessary variables that could make underachievement cumbersome to define and identify for appropriate intervention programs.

A key factor in underachievement is motivation. Underachieving students are motivated in other areas quite apart from getting good grades in school, and when they are motivated to learn, they are able to attain their potential (Rahal, 2010). What this finding implies is that to turn the underachievement of undergraduate students around, the school system and others must be involved in determining the best instructional strategies and learning environment for each learner, while also giving the underachiever great hope for success in their academic endeavor. However, research has shown that universities are not doing enough to help underachievers (Hans, 2014). Undergraduate underachievers, most of the time, are left to their own peril; and teachers and parents may see underachievers as never-do-wells, lazy, and unteachable (Rahal, 2010).

Agu and colleagues (2010) elaborately described the pattern of relationships between students and teachers in a typical Nigerian setting. They noted that the university environment in Nigeria is one in which students perceived as adults are left to cater for themselves without the needed support from the adult community. Adult students are seen as people who can take full responsibility for their actions. As such, little or no attention is given to their needs, even though recently, Nigerian universities have witnessed the admission of students who are sixteen years old and younger (Agu et al., 2010). This attitude that they are a part of a self-sufficient adult community may estrange students. Lecturers may believe that these students are equipped to take care of themselves, and little may be done to help those who may not respond to the academic pressure in the university environment (Hans, 2014). It is little wonder, then, that learner support services and student personnel services in both regular and open universities in Nigeria are either poor or lacking (Adegbile & Oyekanmi, 2009; Ogundele & James, 2014; Eje, Okenjom, & Chiziwoko, 2016).

Surprisingly, there is inadequate research concerning factors perceived by undergraduates that make them underperform in Nigerian universities. Most of the existing body of work is foreign-based and in a cultural context different from the culture in Nigeria. Efforts made in Nigeria to explore factors leading to underachievement are more or less focused on secondary and primary school students (Obomanu & Adaramola, 2011).

Suan (2014), however, found that teacher factors, student factors, and environmental factors were reported by university students as affecting their achievement. Suan (2014) also pointed out that teacher factors that affect student achievement include the teachers' mastery of the subject matter, instructional techniques and strategies, classroom management, communication skills, and personality. Student factors affecting achievement were comprised of study habits, time management, and attitude and interests towards mathematics. Environmental factors

included parents' values, attitudes, classroom settings, and peer groups. Balduf (2009), in a study with college students, found that inadequate study skills, poor time management, and internal versus external motivation contributed to the students' underachievement.

Robust empirical evidence is inadequate in Nigeria regarding factors perceived to cause underachievement. Using a qualitative approach, this study addresses the continued outcry and national concern regarding the poor performance of student teachers in Nigeria. In doing so, specific school-related, personal, and peer- and home-related factors which impede the academic performance of students in the university were ascertained.

## Method

The particular design adopted in this study is the generic qualitative research of the interpretive descriptive (ID) family. Generally, a qualitative approach aids the exploration of participants' understanding, experiences, and perceptions of the phenomenon being investigated (Hancock, Windridge, & Ockleford, 2009). Through qualitative research, a wide range of the social world is investigated, including the weave of everyday life experiences and how they are understood and imagined by research participants (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research gives the researcher the opportunity to understand the experiences of the participants.

Within the qualitative paradigm, a number of established genres have emerged. Generic qualitative research is one of the qualitative research approaches adopted for pragmatic reasons (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). The beauty of generic qualitative study lies in the fact that it can draw on the strengths of established methodologies while maintaining flexibility in its approach, taking into consideration particular interests that may not fall neatly within the realm of a particular established methodology (Kahlke, 2014). The interpretive descriptive study, which is a genre of generic qualitative approach, is "epistemologically based in constructivist and interpretive naturalistic orientations" (Shaw, 2015, p.32). Its flexibility and practical applicability offer the opportunity for in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in a naturalistic setting.

The qualitative research approach is suitable for the present study which addressed students' perceptions of the factors underlying their underachievement in English language and literature. It helped the researchers describe and interpret participants' opinions on factors causing underachievement in English language and literature in a natural setting. In describing these experiences, we tried to gain understanding of directly expressed perspectives. In addition, we explored the deeper meanings of the expressed perspectives of participants (Shaw, 2015).

## Participants

In conducting this research, first, we purposely sampled students of English Education in the Department of Educational Foundations, given the fact that available records in the department show that less than 60% of those students graduated on time within the last three

years. Second, 30 out of 75 fourth-year students were purposely sampled. These were students whose grade point average (GPA) was poor and who agreed that they were underachieving in their studies. Permission was sought to obtain their academic records from the academic adviser who is also the first author of this work. Informed consent was obtained from the students. The essence of the study was explained to them, and they agreed to participate. All participants were over 18 years old. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information obtained from them and that it would be used exclusively for research purposes. They were coded based on gender and respondent number as respondent one (female) or respondent one (male), respondent two (female) or respondent 2 (male), and so on.

### Data Collection

The researchers collected qualitative information on the perceptions of school factors, peer factors, personal factors, and home factors that cause undergraduate student teachers attending university in Nigeria to underachieve in English language and literature. Semistructured interviews were employed in the data generation process. Before interviews were conducted, interview point guides were developed and reviewed among the researchers. Also, the researchers consulted an educational psychologist in the Department of Educational Foundations at the university where the students are enrolled. He noted his corrections which were taken into consideration. These point guides were used as guides and not as dictates to the interview process. Ethics and mannerisms that have to do with interviewing were discussed among the researchers and rehearsed. The interview sessions started with conversations aimed at relaxing the interviewees and creating an opportunity for discussion. The conversations were also used to inform the participants about the interviews' purposes. The interviews were conducted to elicit the interviewees' opinions and to gather sufficient information regarding the factors that cause the students to underachieve in their studies. This structure allowed both researchers and respondents to engage in productive dialogue.

The interviews took place in the participants' school environment and were individually conducted. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes for each participant during the participant's lecture-free period. After introductions, participants were asked to discuss the factors that contribute to their underachievement in their studies. Respondents were allowed the freedom to divulge their concerns related to the issues. In some instances, startling revelations were made by the respondents. A little probing was given in that direction when this occurred to ensure that the researchers set aside their everyday understanding and preconception about the issues discussed. Respondents' consents were obtained to audio record the interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded using Samsung Galaxy J5 SM-J500H and transcribed word-for-word. Efforts were made to report each respondent's experiences in a manner that took into consideration the context of the data generated to ensure authenticity of the data.

### Data Analysis

In data analysis, the researchers adopted both interpretative/inductive and descriptive analyses. This approach ensured that, while researchers tried to remain close to data, inferences were made to arrive at a deeper understanding of the perspectives expressed by respondents. Data were transcribed verbatim and examined using thematic content analysis. Data were also concurrently analyzed and included in vivo codes (Kahlke, 2014) because the process of data analysis began as the data were being collected. This process helped the researchers to reflect on the data collected. Also, in the coding process, some exact expressions of the respondents were used.

The researchers read the transcripts several times and coded the data line-by-line to identify emerging concepts that addressed the research questions. These concepts were derived from the data. There was no restriction on the number of concepts to be considered, given the idiosyncratic experiences that could result in such situations. Hence, the concepts were identified as they emerged (Hancock et al., 2009). These concepts formed the themes presented in the results section. Before the coding of the data started, the researchers pre-coded the data by underlining a participant's significant quotes that struck their attention. These were reflected on and meaning assigned.

The data from each participant were considered separately to get an overview of the views of each participant. After identifying major emerging concepts, specifics were grouped into subthemes and these subthemes were drawn together to form themes. For example, under school-related factors, themes such as pedagogical incompetence emerged which was comprised of subthemes, such as lecturers' attitudes to classes and the adoption of deficient instructional strategies. When the final list of themes had been compiled, the transcripts were reread and a key words search was performed to ensure no relevant aspect of the themes had been overlooked.

### Results and Discussions

The results are presented in terms of themes that emerged from interview analyses with supporting quotations from interview transcripts. Discussions of themes were conducted in place. The themes identified were to address the research questions with specific themes emerging from analysis of the transcripts.

#### *School-Related Factors Contributing to Underachievement*

Study participants mentioned lecturers' pedagogical incompetence, defined as a negative attitude toward classes and the adoption of traditional methods of teaching in the classroom, and inadequate facilities, defined as over-crowded, overused, or noisy classrooms and an ill-equipped library, as two school factors that cause them to underachieve in their studies.

#### *Pedagogical Incompetence*

Pedagogical competence has been conceptualized broadly as encompassing teachers' (lecturers') skills

exhibited in teaching; the knowledge required of teachers to teach in the most appropriate way; and the attitudes, dispositions, and values that teachers embrace and apply in the classroom (International Organization for Migration, 2014). Therefore, for a teacher to be pedagogically incompetent that teacher is lacking in one of or all the areas emphasized in the above definition. A majority of the students interviewed saw pedagogical incompetence as one of the school factors impeding their success in school.

#### *Lecturers' Attitude to Classes*

The attitude of lecturers was identified as one school-related factor that impedes students' academic successes. Lecturers were described as having negative attitudes about classes and lacking the disposition to help students as they teach. Lecturers were described late to classes and unavailable to students. This was identified by most participants underachieving in their studies. Speaking about lecturers not being available to attend to students' problems, a female respondent said, "Most times the lecturers are not always available to put you through difficulties."

Another female student described lecturers' lateness to classes as "teachers not coming to class when they are supposed to" while another female respondent stated that "the lecturers coming late to class when the students must have gotten tired of waiting for the lecturer and the lecturer just shows up, for me whatever the lecturer teaches that day, I don't assimilate it."

These responses are in line with the findings of Adaeyemi and Adeyemi (2014) in which institutional factors such lecturers' interest and commitment predicted the academic achievement of college of education students in Nigeria. Lecturers were unconcerned about students' academic welfare and were not able to attend lectures punctually, which resulted in decreasing students' motivation. When lecturers are interested in students' academics, there is the tendency that they will put in more effort toward teaching students, and they will have that pedagogical patience and tolerance with those who are not doing well.

#### *Lecturers' Adoption of Deficient Teaching Strategies*

Another form of pedagogical incompetence exhibited by lecturers that affected students' achievement is lecturers' adoption of deficient teaching strategies. This was identified as one of the factors that negatively affected study participants' performance in school. Undergraduate students noted that their lecturers adopted methods that alienated them from the learning process. Students were passive in class and that made them become bored with the class itself. This passiveness could have led to their seeing their lecturers as doing nothing in class. One respondent, a male, said that "sometimes the way the lectures are structured and the approach of lecturers, because you find out that most lecturers just come to class and basically do not give you the opportunity to participate actively in the class" can cause underachievement.

Respondents noted that not only are lecturers unable to integrate students into the learning process, but also that lecturers could digress and tell stories unconnected to the lesson of the day. This, to some, is annoying and leads to academic frustration. For example, a female respondent stated that "most times the lecturers don't go straight to the point; they tell stories not related to the topic and the lecture itself" while another, also a female, said, "And the lecturers sometimes do not teach us. They lecture what is not in the syllable [sic]." A third female respondent said:

Actually I will say the lecturers. They come to class and instead of teaching the related course outline, they will divert, telling us things from their houses and ancestors, what happened in 1999 and so on. It is always very frustrating and it makes me lose interest from the course and it is annoying.

Some lecturers were seen to be inefficient in classroom management and are most times seen as incompetent to elucidate terms that require explanation. This was stated by a female respondent, "Some lecturers are inefficient in classroom management and then lack explanations when it comes to terms you don't understand."

Students also reported a kind of incongruence between what lecturers teach in class and what they ask in their examinations. Students are most of the time shocked to observe that what is taught in class is not actually what is set in examination. One male respondent stated that "some of the lecturers give you what they like after reading your brain out, as regards grading of the examination." This statement agrees with the International Organization for Migration (2015) that reports more than 50% of Nigerian lecturers are pedagogically incompetent and that 25% are lacking in evaluation skills, both likely factors in their adoption of approaches that alienate students from the teaching and learning process. Some lecturers are also deficient in assessing students' learning at the end of the lecturers' teaching. That is why students reported a mismatch between what lecturers teach in class and what they ask during examination.

#### *Noisy and Inadequate Classrooms and Libraries*

Inadequacy of physical facilities was another impediment to students' academic success. This exacerbated students' academic challenges. In such discomforting situations, many students found themselves unable to hear what the lecturer says in class. To compound the problem, students also reported that there were inadequate libraries for study as well. A male participant said, "The school environment, lack of classroom, as we can see, we are suffering from classroom problems, there is not enough accommodation where the students can relax and read and this affects me." Another respondent, a female, stated:

The classroom environment, the lecture halls are usually small. When you come late for a lecture you will find yourself sitting at the back of the class and

sometimes the lecturers have low voice. When I sit at the back, I don't hear them.

Further, the classrooms are small and lack adequate ventilation as described by a female respondent when she noted that "the major one [inadequacy], I think, is the classroom size and the conduciveness in terms of ventilation and the sitting arrangement" while another respondent, also a female, noted "inadequate structures and overcrowding of classes."

These findings concur with other findings that adequate facilities in school are strongly and positively related to school achievement (Baharin, Othman, Azizan, & Isa, 2015). Various reports have shown that facilities in Nigerian universities are inadequate, dilapidated, poorly ventilated, and overstretched (Abdullahi, Yusoff, & Gwamna, 2017). Students must be provided with the essential facilities that will help them study comfortably in schools.

A follow-up report indicates that the school environment is noisy which contributes a great deal to the distraction of students during lecture hours. Excerpts from interview transcripts of the participants demonstrate the theme. A female respondent, notes, "For example, in my department, the school environment itself is always very noisy, students walking up and down, sometimes the classrooms are too noisy that you don't hear what the lecturers are saying" while another female respondent notes a "lack of adequate facilities, not having enough books in the library that are relevant to what I am studying."

This lack stems from the fact that these facilities are overused (Abdullahi et al., 2017). Findings have shown that lack of good reading places could impede undergraduate students' achievement (Mersha, Bishaw, & Tegegne, 2013) and that school-related factors such as comfortable and strategic classrooms and well-equipped libraries were significantly related to undergraduate students' academic achievement (Baharin et al., 2015).

### Peer-Related Factors Contributing to Underachievement

A number of peer factors were identified by the participants as factors that affect their achievement, such as negative influences from friends, keeping friends who are unserious academically, and discouragement from friends.

Negative influences from friends that cause a major distraction and encourage students to underachieve in their studies can be seen in excerpts of interview transcripts where a female participant said, "I have camera-freak friends, so when I come to school, we like to look good in front of the camera, so we do this even when the lecture is going on." Another participant, male, stated: "Iron sharpens iron. I have friends that are not academically sound, so they influence me negatively towards my academics." A female noted, "In class, most of my friends will talk while the lecture is going on. They bring up one topic or another, talk about the latest make up, clothes, and hairs and I am easily distracted and influenced by this."

Bursztyn and Jensen (2015) noted that students are highly responsive to their peers and what the prevailing norm is when they make decisions and are likely to change

their beliefs to conform to the acceptable norm to avoid social penalty. This is why students could be derailed by what their peers say and do.

Keeping friends who are dull academically was seen by respondents as influencing them gravely. Some of students had an unhealthy affinity with their peers that prevented the students from concentrating on their studies. Also, some productive scaffolding that could come from social interactions existing among peers was lacking because of an affinity with unserious peers. For example, one participant captured the fact that most of her friends choose to be absent from school and she copies this attitude from them. She said, "If my peer group or group of friends do not want to go to school, I find myself being influenced by them and, therefore, would not also want to go to school." Another participant added that "I like to study together. I find it difficult to study alone, so when my friends do not want to study, it is a challenge on my side. Seeing that I cannot study alone for a very long time, it is a challenge to my studies."

Also, respondents pointed out that their academic success is marred as a result of students who are not academically sound and are unserious. A female respondent captured this idea: "I keep friends that are not intelligent, friends that are extroverts, friends that consider their studies secondary and most of them don't come to school. So this affects me one way or the other." Another put it this way: "My friends lack devotion. They see school as a mere arena for passing time, and this influences me" while another said, "The kind of friends I keep are not really serious academically and they weigh me down and I cannot do anything about it." As a final example, one respondent noted, "The friends I keep mar me and their attitudes to reading is very poor so definitely I am affected with such attitude."

Students' associations with those who are not doing well and are not serious may be a cause or an effect of underachievement since Worley (2007) has stated that results from studies show that at-risk students tend to become associated with students who drop out. It is likely that associating themselves with those who are not doing well affects their own success and discovering that they are not doing well in school may push them away from those peers who are doing well.

Another important peer influence pointed out in this study is the fact that students get distracted by their peers even as classes go on. Study participants said they begin to discuss irrelevant issues that could put them off the points being made by their lecturers. One female respondent stated:

My friends contribute most times because when the lecture is going on in class and I am sitting with my friends, I get distracted and we begin to discuss, play music, talk fashion. Most times I don't get to listen to the lecturer and I miss out on the points stated.

Another said, "My friends are noisemakers and party goers and they affect me personally. When I sit with them

in class, I laugh a lot and with this I am distracted from the on-going lecture.” In another instance, a respondent reported being pressured by friends to leave school. She reported that “if you are not careful, they will take you out. My friends will always tell me, ‘Let’s go out.’ They will help me spend my day uselessly and at the end of the day it backfires on me.”

Also, the issue of discouragement from peers emerged from the transcript. Feedback from peers and their reactions to attempts made by underachievers sent a very strong message to the underachievers participating in the study. Some processed the reactions to such an extent that they interfered with their self-esteem and self-concept. One of the female participants stated:

My friends make fun of me when I fail in class, and they take me as a stupid person when I want to ask questions in class, so most times I just keep to myself and this hinders me from doing well in my studies.

The report of feeling discouraged agrees with Johnsons’ (2000) findings that students’ grade points could drop significantly if they are made fun of by their peers. This tends to dampen their self-efficacy and self-concept. They begin to restrain themselves from making creative efforts that will help them do better in their studies.

### Personal Factors Contributing to Undergraduates’ Underachievement

Analysis of the transcripts reveals a number of personal factors or challenges that cause the participants to underachieve in their studies, including lack of motivation and interest, procrastination, poor reading habit, laziness, distractions from social media and movies, and excessive sleep.

#### *Lack of motivation and interest*

Some respondents were not motivated to put in effort in their studies and did not consider effort as a major factor in their academic pursuit. Some attributed their lack of intrinsic motivation toward their studies to their inability to find meaning in what they were doing, which dampened their interest. Also, some respondents who are likely to be extrinsically motivated to learn attributed their lack of interest and motivation in their studies to how they are handled by their lecturers. One respondent noted, “The major personal factor is that sometimes, I don’t have the motivation and encouragement to read,” while another, in a tone that showed resignation to fate, said, “I don’t know what else to say; everything boils down to lack of motivation and interest.” Some participants stated the cause of their not being motivated. This was captured as “Sometimes I lack interest in my studies. Some lecturers make me lose interest in my studies” and “The course I am studying is not what I want to study, so I have the reluctance and discouragement in studying hard.”

These statements agree with Balduf’s (2009) and Garkaz, Banimahd, and Esmaeili’s (2011) findings that

interest and motivation, both internal and external, are related to academic achievement. When a child is not motivated to learn, all efforts made by teachers and other stakeholders may not make any meaningful impact on the child unless the issue of motivation is addressed.

Our findings also agree with the findings of Baslanti (2008) in which undergraduate students who are underachieving reported that not spending the necessary effort, desire, and persistence in their study contributed to their academic woes and that they would do better in their studies if they enjoy the course. Respondents in the present study, in a bid to point at the causality of the low motivation, noted that their being in a course they are not interested in and incompetent lecturers led to their not being motivated to study.

#### *The issue of procrastination*

Most students face the issue of procrastination as they tend to delay and postpone their time of personal study and allocate that time to attending to their electrical gadgets, going on social media, and so on. This is what one participant said concerning the issue of procrastination: “I sometimes postpone my reading and this affects me personally.” Another participant added:

When the semester starts, I don’t like to resume immediately. I wait until two weeks or one month later and when I resume, there will be accumulated work load for me and laziness sets it.

Students who underachieve are found to procrastinate in their studies (Rosário et al., 2009), and procrastination is negatively related to academic achievement (Bezci & Vural, 2013).

#### *Poor reading habits*

Students reported that poor reading habits contributed to their not doing well in their studies. One of the participants said, “I don’t read well and don’t get the necessary materials for studies.” This was further demonstrated by quotes from other participants: “I don’t read well. I only read during exams and this is a problem,” and “I don’t like copying notes in the class.”

Salleh, Yahaya, Yusof, and Hussin (2015) and Balduf (2009) identified that the main factors that were detrimental in affecting the underachievers’ academic competence were poor study skills, such as a lack of proper study schedules, poor note-taking skills, no study groups, and lack of revisions.

#### *Social media and movie distractions*

Students also reported their experiences with social network and movies in which they noted that addiction to them has imperiled their performance in school. It was a theme that emerged from across the transcripts of many of the respondents. One stated: “I am addicted to pressing my phone. Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media distractions are my major personal problems.” Others

identified distractions from “electrical gadgets, social media” and “movies. I watch movies a lot. I prefer to watch movies to read my handouts” Once participant noted: “I watch movies a lot to the extent that the time I allocate to reading my books is not enough.” Another said: “I give too much time to my phone instead of my books.”

Venkatashiva, Arti, and Amit (2017) found in their study that students’ excessive use of technology was seen as one of the factors that affect students’ success in school. This corroborates the reports of the respondents. When social media is abused, there is the likelihood that students’ academics are jeopardized, given that the time that should be dedicated to their study would be used for activities unrelated to their study.

Similar studies have found that use/multitasking on laptops distracts students’ attention (users and nonusers) and those who do score low on tests (Awwad, Ayes, & Awwad, 2013; Sana, Weston, & Cepeda, 2013). It is also possible that their engaging excessively in social media could result in academic underachievement.

### *Excessive sleep, laziness, and lack of discipline*

Although both adequate sleep and rest are required and needed by students to help relax their nerves, they become problems when they become excessive. Excessive time spent sleeping may prevent students from devoting enough time to their studies. Some participants noted that excessive sleep becomes a personal factor that causes them to underachieve in their studies:

I find it difficult to read for a long time. I also see excessive sleep as a challenge to my studies, when I want to study I find myself sleeping most times and also [I experience an] inability to recall some of the things I have read. This is a challenge to me.

Another participant said: “I sleep a lot, so instead of coming to school I sometimes stay at home and sleep” while another noted “laziness and indiscipline.” One respondent said, “I find it difficult to read. I love ‘gisting’ and forget to read and sometimes when I read I don’t understand” while another pointed to “my carefree life. I don’t take things too seriously and it has contributed to my not doing well.”

Salleh et al. (2015) reported that personal factors such as excessive sleep contribute to underachievement. The volume of work to be covered by an undergraduate student demands that restraint is needed before indulging in excessive sleep.

### *Home Factors Contributing to Undergraduates’ Underachievement*

Analysis of transcripts reveals a number of issues from the students’ home environment that cause the participants not to do well in their studies, namely socioeconomic background and parental pressure.

#### *Socioeconomic background*

Financial problem was a recurrent theme that emerged

from the interviews. Students noted that it affected them negatively in their studies by hindering them from paying full attention. One of the participants stated: “The financial challenge is one of the major issues that has affected me academically. Presently there are some books I need to buy which I have not because the money is not there so it is a challenge.” Another said, “The inconsistency in terms of financial assistance. Money doesn’t come ...so it impedes my performance in my academics.” Another participant expressed the theme this way:

But I will say the money aspect. There are situations whereby I will need to get some handouts and I call my parents to ask for money and they don’t give me. It discourages me and makes me feel reluctant and not willing to read that particular text.

Research has shown that income level of parents significantly predicts the academic achievement of students because it determines the type of parental attention and involvement students will receive (Dzever, 2015). This could affect their achievement because the university education in Nigeria is expensive and there is hardly any provision by the government to offset the financial burden of students in financial difficulty. Students are likely to engage themselves in economic activities to help themselves out, preventing them from devoting their time in their studies.

Also, other participants pointed out that parental educational attainment is another challenge in their study because it leads to minimal parental involvement in the schooling of their children. For instance, a respondent stated: “Also from my personal home background, my parents are not so educated and it tends to affect me in my educational background because they do not call to ask me about my educational challenges and this affects me.” Another reported:

My family background has a lot to do in my education, and it affects me because of the poor parental background I come from. Assuming I came from an educated family they would have started on time to teach me the ethics and values that will help me in a being a better person.

Chaudhry, Shafiq, and Berhanu (2011) found that parental educational attainment impacts students’ academic achievement. Better educated parents are more likely to be involved in the education of their children because they themselves have gone through the process and understand what it takes to become successful in an educational endeavor.

#### *Parental pressure*

Pressure from home is another cause of underachievement among undergraduate students. A student noted: “Yes, I only come to school just on the basis of going to school because others are doing so. My parents forced me here so my interest and motivation have not been developed yet.” Another stated:

I come to school from home and I stay with my mother and she can give trouble, because I have to settle her problems before I can concentrate on my studies. Sometimes I even run away from home to stay with friends so that I will be able to concentrate.

These pressures from the home can impede the academic success of undergraduate students. Other researchers have found that students who report high levels of parental pressure develop test anxiety and are negatively affected in their test outcomes (Nagpal & Sinha, 2016).

## Conclusion

The study explored the factors affecting the academic success of undergraduate student teachers in Nigeria. Several factors were reported by respondents. These factors bordered on students' experiences with the school, peer, their own motivation, and the home. The array of themes that emerged from the interviews deepens the understanding that several factors impede the achievement of these students. These factors are, however, unconnected with their individual mental abilities, which is in line with the current view that noncognitive factors are as important as cognitive factors in determining the academic success of students. This suggests that a holistic approach be adopted to address the issue of underachievement among undergraduate student teachers in Nigeria.

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#### Authors

**Kingsley Chinaza Nwosu**, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. His specialty area is Educational Psychology. His research interests include intervention programs for special needs children, self-belief systems of students, metacognition, teacher education, and technology and learning.

**Cynthia Chisom Okoye** is a graduate of the Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. She has passionate interest in intervention programs for underachievers, reading problems of students, and instructional strategies.

**Uchechukwu Hope Onah**, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She specializes in Educational Psychology. Her research interests include instructional strategies, teacher education, and education of at-risk children.

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