

Behavioural, Cognitive, Emotional Engagement and Time Commitment as Predictors of Undergraduate Students' Utilisation of Academic Support Services in South-South Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated corporate governance practices, (transparency, accountability, integrity, and responsibility) as predictors of academic staff morale in private universities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational research design, with a sample of 360 academic staff drawn from selected private universities using the multistage sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure corporate governance practices and academic staff morale. The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's reliability coefficients. Data collected were analysed using simple and multiple regression analysis to determine the extent to which each governance variable predicts academic staff morale, both individually and jointly. The findings revealed that transparency, accountability, integrity, and responsibility significantly influence academic staff morale when considered independently. However, responsibility emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by accountability and integrity, while transparency had the least influence. In the combined model, responsibility, accountability, and integrity remained significant predictors, whereas transparency did not make a significant unique contribution. It was recommended that university management should strengthen responsible leadership, enforce accountability mechanisms, and uphold ethical standards to improve staff motivation and institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: corporate governance practices, transparency, accountability, integrity, responsibility, academic staff morale

Introduction

Student engagement has become a central focus in higher education due to its significant role in promoting academic success, student retention, and overall well-being. It refers to the extent to which students invest time, effort, and psychological resources in educationally purposeful activities (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Bond et al., 2020; Bond et al., 2021; Kahu et al., 2023). Contemporary perspectives conceptualise student engagement as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioural, cognitive, and emotional components that collectively influence students' academic experiences and outcomes (Bond et al., 2020; Redmond et al., 2018; Krause & Coates, 2022).

Student engagement is widely recognised as a key determinant of students' academic success and institutional experience. It reflects students' active involvement in learning activities and their interactions with the academic environment (Bond et al., 2020; Ansong et al., 2017). The multidimensional nature of engagement, behavioural, cognitive, and emotional, has been widely supported in recent literature (Redmond et al., 2018; Krause & Coates, 2022). Behavioural engagement involves students' active participation in academic and institutional activities such as attending lectures, completing assignments, and engaging in classroom discussions. Behavioural engagement involves participation in academic and extracurricular activities, which increases students' exposure to institutional opportunities. Cognitive engagement reflects students' investment in learning processes, including critical thinking and self-regulation. Emotional engagement captures students' feelings toward their learning environment, including interest, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging (Bond et al., 2020; Henrie et al., 2015; Ansong et al., 2017).

In addition to these engagement dimensions, time commitment is an essential aspect of student engagement that influences academic performance and help-seeking behaviour. It refers to the amount of time students allocate to studying, attending classes, and participating in institutional activities. Studies indicate that students who dedicate more time to academic activities are more likely to succeed and utilise institutional resources effectively (Quin, 2017; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Lim & Richardson, 2021). Time commitment has also been identified as a strong predictor of student success and participation in academic activities, suggesting that it plays a crucial role in shaping students' engagement and help-seeking behaviour (Quin, 2017; Lim & Richardson, 2021).

Students' utilisation of academic support services is a critical components of higher education institutions that facilitate students' academic and personal development. These services include academic advising, counselling, mentoring, and health services. Access to these services depends on students' awareness, motivation, and level of engagement. Research suggests that more engaged students are more likely to seek help and utilise available support systems (Kahu et al., 2023; Ansong et al., 2017). Universities provide various utilizations of academic support services to enhance students' academic success and personal development;

however, many students underutilise these services despite their availability due to factors such as low awareness, poor engagement, and time constraints (Brewster & Fager, 2020; Kahu et al., 2023).

This study is grounded in the integration of Student Engagement Theory and the Theory of Student Involvement. Student Engagement Theory conceptualises engagement as a multidimensional construct that explains the extent to which students actively participate in academic and institutional activities. Initially articulated by Fredricks et al. (2004), the framework has been substantially refined in recent scholarship to reflect contemporary higher education contexts. Current perspectives identify three interrelated dimensions of engagement: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional. Behavioural engagement encompasses observable actions such as participation in academic tasks and institutional activities; cognitive engagement refers to students' psychological investment in learning, including self-regulation and deep learning strategies; while emotional engagement captures affective responses such as interest, sense of belonging, and motivation (Bond et al., 2020; Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Complementing this perspective, the Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1984) emphasises the role of students' investment of time and effort in shaping educational outcomes. The theory posits that learning and development are directly proportional to the quality and quantity of students' involvement in academic activities. Central to this theory is the concept of time commitment, defined as the extent to which students devote time and energy to studying, participating in institutional activities, and interacting with academic resources. Contemporary studies reaffirm the relevance of this theory in modern higher education by highlighting the importance of time investment in influencing engagement and academic success (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Quin, 2017). Empirical evidence further suggests that students who allocate more time to academic and institutional activities are more likely to participate in support systems and engage in help-seeking behaviours (Bond et al., 2020). Thus, time commitment serves as a critical determinant of students' interaction with institutional resources.

Recent empirical studies have continued to highlight the importance of student engagement in higher education. Bond et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review and found that behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement significantly predicts students' academic outcomes, including achievement and retention. Similarly, Redmond et al. (2018) reported that student engagement is positively associated with learning outcomes and student satisfaction in higher education. Quin (2017) found that time investment is a strong predictor of student success and participation in academic activities, while Henrie et al. (2015) reported that time investment significantly predicts students' learning outcomes and engagement levels. Kahu et al. (2023) examined students' utilisation of academic support services and found that engagement and awareness significantly influence students' likelihood of accessing institutional support systems. In the African context, Mokoena (2021) reported that

student engagement significantly influences academic performance and participation in institutional activities, highlighting the importance of engagement in developing contexts.

Despite these findings, there remains a lack of empirical evidence examining how behavioural, cognitive, emotional engagement and time commitment jointly predict students' utilisation of academic support services, particularly in South-South universities in Nigeria. Students at these universities face challenges such as limited institutional resources, high academic workload, and socio-economic pressures, which may affect their engagement levels and ability to access support services.

Statement of the Problem

Universities are expected to provide not only academic instruction but also support systems that enhance students' academic success and well-being. These support services, including academic advising, counselling, and health services, are essential for helping students cope with academic and personal challenges. Despite their importance, many undergraduate students do not adequately access or utilise these services. Recent studies have shown that student engagement plays a significant role in shaping students' academic behaviours and outcomes (Bond et al., 2020; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement have been found to influence students' participation, persistence, and success in higher education. However, there is limited research examining how these engagement dimensions influence students' access to institutional support services, especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

Furthermore, time commitment has been identified as an important factor in students' academic involvement, yet its role in predicting access to students' utilisation of academic support services remains underexplored (Quin, 2017). Students who are less engaged or who poorly manage their time may be less likely to seek help, even when such services are available. In South-South Nigeria, universities face challenges such as inadequate facilities, overcrowding, and limited student support systems. These conditions may further limit students' ability to access available services. The lack of sufficient empirical studies in this area creates a gap in knowledge that may hinder effective policy and intervention strategies. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by investigating how behavioural, cognitive, emotional engagement, and time commitment predict undergraduates' access to students' utilisation of academic support services in South-South universities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent does behavioural engagement predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in South-South universities in Nigeria?
2. To what extent does cognitive engagement predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in South-South universities in Nigeria?

3. To what extent does emotional engagement predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in South-South universities in Nigeria?
4. To what extent does time commitment predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in South-South universities in Nigeria?
5. To what extent do behavioural, cognitive, emotional engagement, and time commitment jointly predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in South-South universities in Nigeria?

Methodology

This study is descriptive, which adopted a correlational design. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data on the current status of variables and the examination of relationships among them without manipulating any conditions. The population comprised undergraduate students in all public universities within Edo and Delta states. A sample of 549 students was drawn using a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure proportional representation across universities, faculties, and departments. This sample size is considered sufficient to achieve representativeness and provide adequate statistical power for regression analysis (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Cohen, 1992).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to obtain information on students' behavioural, cognitive, emotional engagement, time commitment, and utilisation of support services. Items were measured using a 4-point Likert scale (Always, Sometimes, Rarely, Never). The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Educational Management, and its Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Reliability for students' utilisation of academic support services, the behavioural, cognitive, emotional engagements, as well as time commitment, were 0.89, 0.86, 0.86, 0.83 and 0.80, indicating acceptable internal consistency across all subscales. Permissions were obtained from the selected universities, and participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. The questionnaires were then administered and collected upon completion. The data collected were analysed using linear and multiple regression techniques to determine the extent to which behavioural, cognitive, emotional engagement, and time commitment individually and jointly predicted students' access to support services. A level of significant of 0.05 was chosen for the study.

Results

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Behavioural Engagement on Undergraduate Support Services

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	52.462	—	24.602	0.000
Behavioural Engagement	0.269	0.099	2.314	0.021

R = 0.099; R² = 0.010; Adjusted R² = 0.008; F = 5.355; p = 0.021

Table 1 shows that behavioural engagement predicts undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.099$) indicates a weak positive relationship between behavioural engagement and student support services. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.010$) indicates that behavioural engagement accounts for only 1.0% of the variation in undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services, indicating low explanatory power. The F-statistic ($F = 5.355$, $p < 0.05$) shows that the regression model is statistically significant, meaning that behavioural engagement is a meaningful predictor of student support services. The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.099$, $p < 0.05$) further indicates that behavioural engagement has a positive and statistically significant influence on student support services. This implies that an increase in students' behavioural engagement is associated with a corresponding increase in the availability or utilisation of student support services.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Emotional Engagement on Undergraduate Support Services

Variables	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	55.738	—	29.990	0.000
Emotional Engagement	0.110	0.037	0.857	0.392

$R = 0.037$; $R^2 = 0.001$; *Adjusted R*² = 0.000; $F = 0.735$; $p = 0.392$

Table 2 shows that emotional engagement does not predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.037$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between emotional engagement and student support services. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.001$) shows that emotional engagement explains only 0.1% of the variation in student support services, which is negligible. The F-value ($F = 0.735$, $p > 0.05$) indicates that the regression model is not statistically significant. This means that emotional engagement does not meaningfully contribute to predicting student support services. Furthermore, the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.037$, $p > 0.05$) shows that emotional engagement has a positive but non-significant influence on student support services. This implies that changes in emotional engagement do not result in any meaningful change in undergraduate support services.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Cognitive Engagement on Undergraduate Support Services

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	52.538	—	24.634	0.000
Cognitive Engagement	0.265	0.097	2.277	0.023

$R = 0.097$; $R^2 = 0.009$; *Adjusted R*² = 0.008; $F = 5.187$; $p = 0.023$

Table 3 shows that cognitive engagement predicts undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.097$) indicates a weak positive relationship between cognitive engagement and student

support services. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.009$) shows that cognitive engagement accounts for 0.9% of the variation in student support services. The F-value ($F = 5.187$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. This means that cognitive engagement significantly contributes to predicting student support services. The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.097$, $p < 0.05$) shows that cognitive engagement has a positive and statistically significant influence on student support services. This implies that higher levels of cognitive engagement are associated with increased student support services.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Time Commitment on Undergraduate Support Services

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	59.076	—	33.904	0.000
Time Commitment	-0.099	-0.045	-1.056	0.292

$R = 0.045$; $R^2 = 0.002$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = 0.000$; $F = 1.114$; $p = 0.292$

Table 4 shows that time commitment does not predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.045$) indicates a weak relationship between time commitment and student support services. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.002$) reveals that time commitment accounts for only 0.2% of the variation in student support services. The F-statistic ($F = 1.114$, $p > 0.05$) indicates that the regression model is not statistically significant. This suggests that time commitment is not a meaningful predictor of student support services. Additionally, the standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.045$, $p > 0.05$) indicates a negative but non-significant influence of time commitment on student support services. This implies that an increase in time commitment does not significantly influence the level of undergraduate support services.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis of Behavioural, Cognitive, Emotional Engagement and Time Commitment on Undergraduate Support Services

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	54.368	—	19.741	0.000
Behavioural Engagement	0.456	0.161	3.113	0.002
Cognitive Engagement	0.307	0.127	2.467	0.014
Emotional Engagement	0.124	0.041	0.809	0.419
Time Commitment	-0.102	-0.047	-1.016	0.310

$R = 0.161$; $R^2 = 0.026$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = 0.019$; $F = 3.599$; $p = 0.007$

Table 5 shows that behavioural engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and time commitment jointly predict undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.161$) indicates a weak positive relationship between the combined independent variables and student support services. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.026$) reveals that the

combined variables account for 2.6% of the variation in undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services, indicating a relatively low explanatory power. The F-statistic ($F = 3.599$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant. This means that the combination of the predictors significantly explains variations in students' utilisation of academic support services.

In terms of individual contributions, behavioural engagement ($\beta = 0.161$, $p < 0.05$) and cognitive engagement ($\beta = 0.127$, $p < 0.05$) have positive and statistically significant influences on student support services. This implies that increases in these variables lead to increases in students' utilisation of academic support services. However, emotional engagement ($\beta = 0.041$, $p > 0.05$) and time commitment ($\beta = -0.047$, $p > 0.05$) do not significantly contribute to the prediction of student utilization of students' utilisation of academic support services. This indicates that these variables do not have meaningful independent effects when considered alongside other

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that behavioural engagement significantly predicts undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. This implies that students who actively participate in academic and institutional activities, such as attending lectures, contributing to class discussions, and engaging in campus programmes, are more likely to access and utilise available support services. This finding aligns strongly with Astin's Student Involvement Theory, which posits that students derive greater benefits from institutional resources when they are actively involved in the academic and social life of the university (Astin, 1984). The theory emphasises that learning and development are functions of the quality and quantity of student involvement. Empirically, this result is supported by studies such as Bond et al. (2020) and Henrie et al. (2015), which found that behavioural engagement enhances students' interaction with institutional structures, including academic support systems. This suggests that active participation serves as a pathway through which students become aware of and utilise support services.

The study further revealed that emotional engagement does not significantly predict students' utilisation of academic support services. This indicates that students' feelings of belonging, interest, or emotional attachment to the institution do not necessarily translate into actual help-seeking behaviour. While emotional engagement is an important dimension of student engagement, this finding suggests that affective connection alone may be insufficient to drive observable academic actions. This position is consistent with the argument that emotional engagement often exerts indirect rather than direct effects on academic outcomes (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Supporting this, Anderman and Midgley (2012) emphasised that affective components of engagement must be complemented by behavioural actions to influence educational outcomes. Therefore, although students may feel positively about their institution, such feelings must be channelled into active participation to influence their utilisation of

support services. This highlights the need for institutions to design mechanisms that translate students' emotional attachment into actionable academic behaviours.

The study also found that cognitive engagement significantly predicts undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services. This implies that students who are intellectually invested in learning through critical thinking, self-regulation, and deep processing strategies are more likely to seek academic assistance and utilise available support systems. This finding is consistent with the multidimensional framework of student engagement proposed by Fredricks et al. (2004), which identifies cognitive engagement as central to deep learning and self-regulated behaviour. Students who are cognitively engaged tend to adopt strategic learning approaches that often require interaction with academic resources and support services. Empirical support for this finding is provided by Dixson (2015), who reported that cognitively engaged students are more proactive in seeking academic support. This underscores the importance of promoting higher-order thinking and self-regulated learning as mechanisms for enhancing students' utilisation of institutional services.

In addition, the findings indicated that time commitment does not significantly predict students' utilisation of academic support services. This suggests that merely spending more time on academic activities does not necessarily lead to increased use of institutional support systems. This finding supports the assertion that engagement is not solely about the quantity of time invested but rather the quality and nature of that investment. Kuh (2009) argued that what students do during their time in school is more important than the time itself. In line with this, students may spend considerable time studying independently without interacting with formal academic support services, thereby limiting the influence of time commitment on help-seeking behaviour. Although previous studies (Quin, 2017; Lim & Richardson, 2021) have identified time investment as important for academic success, the present finding suggests that time alone does not guarantee engagement with institutional resources, particularly in contexts where awareness or accessibility may be limited.

Finally, the study revealed that behavioural engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and time commitment jointly predict students' utilisation of academic support services, although the overall explanatory power is relatively low. This indicates that while these variables collectively influence students' help-seeking behaviour, a substantial proportion of the variance is explained by other factors not included in the model. This finding aligns with contemporary perspectives that student engagement operates within a broader ecological system that includes institutional characteristics, service accessibility, communication strategies, and student awareness (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Thomas et al., 2017). Notably, within the joint model, behavioural and cognitive engagement emerged as the most significant predictors, reinforcing their central role in shaping students' interaction with support systems.

Overall, the findings of this study support the view that active participation (behavioural engagement) and deep learning orientation (cognitive engagement) are more influential in predicting students' utilisation of academic support services than emotional attachment or time investment alone. This underscores the need for higher education institutions to prioritise strategies that promote active and intellectually engaging learning environments, while also ensuring that students are effectively guided towards utilising available support services.

Conclusion

The study concludes that behavioural and cognitive engagement are the primary determinants of undergraduate students' utilisation of academic support services in universities in South-South Nigeria. Students who actively participate in academic and co-curricular activities and who invest in understanding and mastering their academic content are more likely to engage with institutional resources. Emotional engagement and time commitment, however, do not independently predict academic support service usage. While the combined effect of all predictors is statistically significant, the explanatory power is relatively low, suggesting that additional institutional and contextual factors also influence students' engagement with support systems. In essence, active participation and cognitive involvement emerge as the most critical drivers of student support service utilisation in the study context.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Universities should implement programs and initiatives that encourage students to participate in academic and co-curricular activities, thereby enhancing behavioural engagement.
2. Teaching strategies should focus on deep learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving to increase cognitive engagement among students.
3. Institutions should develop structured interventions that convert students' emotional attachment and interest into tangible behaviours.
4. Universities should provide guidance on effective time management and ensure that students' academic efforts are directed towards activities that promote interaction with support services.
5. Institutions should ensure that students are aware of available students' utilisation of academic support services and that these services are easily accessible and responsive to students' needs.
6. University management should train academic advisors and support staff to actively engage students and encourage the utilisation of support systems.

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