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Experiences of Student-Teachers: Implications for Refined Student-Support

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Abstract. Every institution has support services available for students, especially first-year students, that would help deal with issues they might need assistance with during their early years. Student support services offered at universities to assist students' academic, social, or psycho-emotional needs help to enhance their overall welfare and academic achievement. This study investigated university student-teachers experiences and their implications for refined student support. A case study qualitative research design was employed for this study with 12 student-teachers (five male and seven female) as the sample. A focus group interview method was employed to generate responses, and the information was evaluated with thematic content analysis. This study reported that first-year students encountered various challenges classified into academic (inconsistency in keeping the timetable of lectures and lecturers, misplacement, and missing academic results), social (inadequacies in the transportation system and accommodation issues), and psycho-emotional (low self-esteem, external academic pressure, and suicidal ideation). It was also revealed that the respondents benefitted from extra classes by lecturers, tutorials from student associations and peers, assistance from the student affairs unit and students' associations, and aid from the counselling unit, staff advisers, and clerics support services in the institution. Also, there is a need for improvements in the various support services available in the institution. Therefore, it was recommended that institutions only offer admission to students applying for education-related courses.

Keywords: Experiences; Student-teachers; Academic; Social; Psycho-emotional; Support Services

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1. Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) aspire to provide students with positive academic and social campus-based experiences (Conley, 2017; Njageand & Athiemoolam, 2021). However, many challenges hinder student success at university. Homesickness, the pressure of studies (Maymon et al., 2019), making friends, accommodation, budgeting/finance, and transitioning to university life (Nelson-Royes, 2013) impacted dropout rates of first-year students negatively, both internationally and in Nigeria (Ogbeide & Ugwu, 2016). Students who do not have an academic, emotional, or social connection to the university are more likely to drop out of the university without effective student support services (Chandra, 2020). Developing and implementing comprehensive student support is crucial, especially in the first year at university (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). These services, which include academic, social, and psycho-emotional needs, are aimed at improving student well-being and student retention (Edwards et al., 2015). Every institution has its respective support services available for students, especially first-year students, that would help deal with issues they might need assistance with during their early years (Sosu & Pheunpha, 2019). However, students do not optimally utilize these support services (Scanlon et al., 2020). Over the last few years, support from the Nigerian government to HEIs has declined, compromising the quality of services provided by these institutions, especially regarding support services (Borishade et al., 2021).

There are two categories of student support services, academic and non-academic, which include peer support sessions, tutoring, academic mentoring, and counselling sessions (Conley, 2017). Non-academic support services refer to centralised services offered by universities, such as social, psychological (Green, 2021), and emotional support (Chou & Chang, 2019) that are not directly related to academic issues (Amirkhan & Kofman, 2018). However, they are crucial for providing students with suitable study conditions to excel outside of the classroom system. On the other hand, academic support is provided by academic staff. Academic support services are programs and strategies employed to improve the learning outcome of students, particularly for those who are showing signs of weak academic performance (Ugwu, 2021). Tertiary institutions are responsible for assisting students to enhance their intellectual capacity (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning), which would help them to proffer solutions to societal challenges (Ene, 2016). To attain their aims, these institutions engage in teaching, research, knowledge creation, and dissemination through a range of programs, including certificate, diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate courses (National Universities Commission (NUC), 2014).

Teacher education is one of the programmes offered at universities in Nigeria, aimed at the professional development of teachers to help them develop the attitudes, abilities, and knowledge deemed necessary to function effectively and efficiently in the teaching profession (Oyekan, 2016). Teacher education is categorised into pre-service and in-service programmes (Ogunyinka et al., 2015). A student-teacher is an individual pursuing a career in education at teacher training institutions and placed in a classroom under the guidance of an experienced teacher. In specific instances, these individuals are posted to schools

to observe and participate in classroom activities, assist with lesson planning, and gradually take on teaching responsibilities, gaining hands-on experience while learning from their mentor (Odutayo, 2021). This research focuses specifically on students studying early childhood education, also referred to as pre-primary education. Graduating quality teachers for the early years cannot be underestimated, as they play a crucial role in supporting young children's learning and development and laying the foundations for learning in later years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014; Alabi, 2018).

In Nigeria, most pre-service teachers are unwilling or reluctant to enter the teaching profession (Yusuf, 2010) but do so because they do not meet the minimum requirements to study their preferred career pathway (Odutayo, 2021). Most students are admitted into faculties of education with lower scores than their counterparts in other faculties. This implies that more scaffolding and support are required for academic and psychological well-being (Ogunojemite, 2020). As a result, most of these students don't take teacher education seriously, some dropout, do poorly in the university, and in other circumstances, they graduate but aren't passionate about being teachers (Yusuf, 2014). From the first author's personal experiences as an undergraduate in the university, the benefits and limitations of adequate support services were observed and experienced.

In one instance, the first author was conflicted about rejecting the teacher education admission offered to him. The assistance provided by the academic adviser facilitated the researcher to accept the admission and subsequently pursue a career in the teaching profession. The research can provide a comprehensive understanding of student teachers' experiences, challenges, and opportunities. It can shed light on their perspectives, emotions, and perceptions throughout the teacher preparation process, offering valuable insights into their professional development journey. In this research, we set out to examine student-teachers' first-year experiences and their implications for refined student support. The following research questions would guide this study.

- a. What are the challenges encountered by first-year students at the university?
- b. What are student-teachers' experiences on the support services (academic, social and psycho-emotional) provided at the university?
- c. How adequate are these support services (academic, social and psycho-emotional) at the university as articulated by student-teachers?

2. Literature Review

Student success at higher education institutions depends on several factors, including infrastructure supporting teaching and learning and the available academic, social, and psycho-emotional support. The following empirical studies relating to infrastructure support are identified and discussed. Subair et al. (2012) investigated the place of infrastructure in maintaining quality in Nigerian universities. It was gathered that the availability and adequacy of physical infrastructure, well-equipped libraries, ICT, and science laboratories with modern equipment are necessary, provided it meets the minimum standard and are an essential part of a conducive learning environment. Omogbadegun et al. (2014) researched Covenant University in Nigeria as a case

study of the infrastructure needed to improve tertiary institutions' academic performance. According to their research, the uninterrupted academic programme, faculty support programme, cutting-edge teaching and learning tools, internet services, students' assessment system, and 24-hour electricity and water supply have all contributed to Covenant University students' academic improvement. In another study, Nugroho and Wibowo (2019) studied the influence of school infrastructure on student learning activeness. Their study explained that having adequate and appropriate rooms and learning spaces in good conditions is decisive for students to achieve the expected academic outcome and encourages learning activeness.

Researchers such as Murillo et al. (2011); Amsterdam (2013); Alkadri et al. (2017); and Marmoah et al. (2019) have all carried out their separate studies and found that infrastructure such as structures, classroom space, libraries, computer and science laboratories, with renewed public spaces can contribute to improved students' academic learning outcome and quality of education. However, students' academic improvement might be threatened due to inadequate structures and facilities, housing, and overcrowded classrooms (Zhirnova & Absalyamova, 2013; Conolly & Lampe, 2016; Hyun et al., 2017). It is also necessary to measure the success of student support services. Here, Busaba et al. (2019) evaluated the use of a remedial management system in student support services in Thailand. The Student Support Service Workflow Information System (SSS WIS) comprises a student information system to evaluate the issues that may arise in finance, health, social, and psychological issues. They submitted that SSS WIS assists students in graduating from the university on time.

Regarding academic support services, Paideya and Bengesai (2017) investigated the University of KwaZulu-Natal's academic support. Their findings show that academic support services, such as curriculum-based interventions, alternate access interventions, peer support program evaluations, and innovative teaching programmes, can help achieve institutional and student objectives. Ramsaroop and Petersen (2020) carried out a study on portraits of primary school pre-service teachers at a South African university: Implications for nuanced student support. The profiles aided with understanding the intricacy of the themes and how identifying changeable and non-malleable variables impacting students' lives may influence and shape behaviors for a smooth transition to university. A multifaceted academic support approach was proposed for student assistance in the form of individualised and small group tutorials for students who are not coping, along with strategies for building conceptual knowledge, student tracking and follow-up, and improved pedagogical approaches. Similarly, research conducted by Cage et al. (2021) opined that effective tutoring programmes provide personalized attention, direct teaching, and address errors and misconceptions, keeping students motivated and improving academic success. The goal is to increase achievement, regardless of the additional assistance's shape (Venezia et al., 2017). Peterson et al. (2014); Omogbadegun et al. (2014); Higgins-Opitz and Tufts (2014); and Mngomezulu and Ramrathan (2015) in separate studies submitted that tutoring programs (individualised or class-wide), study skills coaching, adoption of remote learning, supplemental

instruction, academic mentoring, and academic counselling could promote positive learning outcomes.

Concerning social support services, Tamulien (2014) carried out a study on designing college students' social and psychological services to address student needs in Lithuania. The research was carried out to determine the connection between the academic, collegiate, vocational, and non-conformist students enrolled in Lithuanian institutions and the need for student emotional and psychological support services. It was revealed that first-year students' orientation courses, language training, and community feeling development activities are collegiate and non-conformist students' most critical SS services. It was noticed that the collegiate type of students also needs psychological counselling and accommodation services. Meanwhile, academic and vocational students require career counselling services. Awang et al. (2014) looked at first-year college students' perceptions of academic, SS, and well-being in their study. It has been noted that incoming students' capacity to receive academic assistance from friends (supporting friendship) and families affects their ability to transition academically, socially, and emotionally. They argued that the idea of social support should be expanded to encompass environments other than universities. The results of this study point to the value of older students, family networks, and the student body in helping first-year students adjust to university environments.

Ogbeide and Ugwu (2016) investigated the link between academic achievement and social support among undergraduate students at Madonna University in Nigeria. These results corroborate the linear beneficial association between SS and academic achievement. In other words, the higher the social support available and accessed, the better the students' academic performance (Ratelle et al., 2013; Poots & Cassidy, 2020). Adequate social support like excursions, a curriculum that emphasises social learning, informal interactions between students and staff, members of clubs and societies, sporting activities from educational institutions to students irrespective of age, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic status can contribute to improved learning outcome as reported in studies such as Ermer and Proulx (2020); Ramsaroop and Petersen (2020); Aloba et al. (2021); and Eze et al. (2021). McLean et al. (2021) evaluated perceived SS and stress in a survey of first-year students in Ireland. According to their research, both male and female students reported moderate levels of perceived stress, but those with more social support also reported less stress. The universities attempting to improve SS and deal with stress may need a gender-specific focus because female students require greater social support and stress than male students (Ugwu, 2021). Social support statistically substantially influenced the undergraduates' social well-being. SS is critical in determining an undergraduate's social well-being (Wu et al., 2020).

Lastly, Arifin (2018) investigated how psychological support services might improve students' persistence in the setting of open universities: a lesson from Indonesia. They submitted that psychological support was a significant factor in students' perseverance with open university systems. Students who experience academic stress but have solid emotional support can attain greater academic

heights. In related studies, Chinelo (2017) and Peretomode and Ugbomeh (2018) submitted that psychological support services are paramount in helping undergraduates navigate their early years in the university. Mental health professionals, counsellors, and academic advisers should be available and adequate to provide psychological services to students. The relevance of the quality and source of the assistance received for a student's well-being was examined by Maymon et al. (2019) in their study on helping first-year students throughout their transition to higher education. Overall, the results reveal the value of assessing first-year students' psychological support level throughout the transition to higher education and demonstrate that faculty/staff support is a significant factor in student well-being.

Perspectives on emotional and psychological learning in tertiary education were examined by Millett (2020). It was reported that emotional and psychological abilities, reading, and numeracy are increasingly acknowledged as crucial for success in school and beyond. Higher education institutions compete with one another for students, but they also work together by sharing information about what makes students successful there. Njageand and Athiemoolam (2021) investigated the efficiency of secondary school counseling programs in assisting students in making a smooth transition at Moi University, Kenya. Their study's conclusions showed that high school counseling programs do not sufficiently assist students in preparing to transition to higher education. For a smooth transition, the report advised the introduction of increased collaboration between universities and schools. In a sample of Afghan university students exposed to COVID-19, Green et al. (2021) investigated how psychological support reduces academic stress and promotes mental health. They concluded that receiving moderate to high levels of emotional support may mitigate the damaging effects of greater academic focus on mental health. Ogunode (2020) submitted that peer emotional support and regular counselling sessions with first-year students are psychological services essential for students to attain their educational objectives.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand the respondent's experiences. This approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to gather in-depth insights into the students' experiences within the university at the point of entry. The research design appropriate for this study was a case study design. A case study research design generates a multifaceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context (McCombes, 2023). The population for this study was all second-year student-teachers in the Department of Adult & Primary Education, University of Ilorin. In contrast, the target population comprised 175 second-year Early Childhood student-teachers in the department. The respondents in this study are second-year students who have spent one academic session (2020/2021), which should allow them to appraise and access the available support services within the university. The respondents were randomly selected, after which they were assigned randomly to groups. A focus group interview method was employed to generate responses from the participants. The respondents were classified into four groups, with

three participants in each group. The sample for this study was 12 randomly selected student-teachers. Interviews using open-ended questions were used for data collection from the respondents. The researcher made an audio recording of the interview sessions with explicit verbal approval from each of the participants. Reliability and validity in data analysis were observed as the first author worked with the data, which the second author then verified. Secondly, triangulation took place by comparing the responses from different participants using the comparative method. All ethical considerations/parameters were adhered to. Data generated were analysed using thematic content analysis. The researchers opted to adopt Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method, a circular procedure involving the following steps. Becoming familiar with the information, creating cyphers, creating, assessing, describing themes, and locating patterns.

4. Findings

In this section, the researchers present the interview results with the respondents. The respondents were five male and seven female students in the department who provided insight into the three themes that guide this study.

Theme one: Negative Academic and Social Experiences Influences Students' Well-being

This theme provides a searchlight into the academic, social, and psycho-emotional challenges experienced by the respondents in their first years in the institution.

In discussing the academic challenges, inconsistency in keeping the timetable of lectures and lecturers was identified. As stipulated by a female respondent from group 1 *"part of the challenges that I faced academically was the constant sudden change of lecture period after so many struggles to get to lecture areas and front seats due to overcrowded lecturer room...and after all that 'wahala' (struggles), the lecturer would end up not showing up"*. Strike actions by lecturers was another academic difficulty as stated by a female respondent from group 3 *"the strike action embarked upon by lecturers created a serious issue for her academically. As a result of the strike action proposed by federal lecturers, the university shut lectures. Immediately school opened like this, examination timetable released. I didn't know what hit me, like play like play, examination starts, and my performance was not encouraging"*. The respondents also identified misplacement and missing academic results. A male respondent from group 4 said *"the most trying academically difficulty encountered as a first-year student was missing examination result, which subsequently meant that I failed the course. It was a stressful time for me, and I even thought I was cursed after four years of being at home. And now, battling with missing scores (sighs). Finally, after stressing the lecturer in charge for months, the script was found, and my grade was released. However, the experience had already taken a toll on my academic activities"*. Other issues that affected the respondents in their first year were delays in the release of results, clash of timetables, poor teaching methodologies, and compulsory imposition of textbook handouts by lecturers.

Regarding social challenges, the respondents encountered unfriendly lecturer-student interaction, peer pressure, financial challenges, sexual harassment,

cultural diversities, insecurity, and homesickness. Other issues were inadequacies in the transportation system. A female respondent from group 2 said, *“transportation was my social achilles heel... the excitement of being an undergraduate quickly disappeared on the first day I attended classes. Two hundred buses could not take the number of people I saw at the bus stop to school. After so much shunting, struggling, and begging, I was able to get to campus around 11am since 7:45am that I got there. This was a regular occurrence for the better part of the first semester. I was already exhausted most times on my arrival in class... and this has even discouraged me so many times from going to school, and as a result, I used to miss numerous classes”*. Also identified by A male respondent from group 3 was accommodation issues *“securing appropriate accommodation was not an easy task. The hostel operated by the university could not cater to a large chunk of the student population, while the privately controlled hostels were too expensive. Before getting to my apartment, I had to squat with a coursemate for a few weeks. The room was inadequate for two people to live in, not to talk of four male students. I secured a room off-campus, but there was no power supply, water and difficulty getting to school due to insufficient transportation were matters arising”*. In the same vein, difficulty in making friends, as stated by a female respondent from group 4 *“growing up, it was difficult to interact with people who she was not related to, and it takes a lot of time to make friends... So, being a first-year student at the university was difficult, and I had to make friends to avoid being isolated. I was found at club, bars, and any other event that had music and drinks.... It became so bad that I got mixed up with the wrong crowd. It almost got me thrown out of school... However, that’s all behind me now”*.

Lastly, the researchers gathered that psychological intimidation, procrastination, peer pressure, and students’ ambition were some of the psycho-emotional challenges encountered by the respondents. Other challenges include lack of family support and depression *“admitted to study primary education in the university was a waste of time according to relations and family members. When you have been denied admission for five years, securing an admission offer into any programme is a welcome development. The lack of support from people closest to me got me into a state of depression and used different substances as a relief... I was able to get assistance from one of my lecturers”* as submitted by a male respondent from group 2. Other challenges mentioned by the respondents were low self-esteem, external academic pressure, and suicidal ideation. A group 1 male respondent added, *“I come from a more competitive family than cooperative..., where every sibling achievement is designed to challenge the rest of us”*. The pressure is unbearable. After the first semester examinations and results were released, my performance was not too bad, but it was also not to the standard set for me. I had self-esteem issues and later suicidal ideation. I believed it was better for me to be ‘dead’ rather than face the disappointment from my family... Obviously, I didn’t go through (smiles) with it, but I was very close”. A female respondent from group 3 also reported that academic stress and examination sickness, *“the rate at which they bombard us with lectures and tests before exam commences usually increases the tension... I remember this pressure made me feel sick during the exam, to the extent that I missed two exams while on admission at the school clinic during second-semester examinations”* were psycho-emotional challenges encountered as a first-year student.

Theme Two: Hoping for the experience to be better than anticipated

Based on the challenges highlighted in theme 1, the respondents reported on the support services (academic, social, and psycho-emotional) available and utilised in the institution. These services made their early years issues less dreadful.

Relating to academic support services, some respondents opined those extra classes by lecturers and tutorials from student associations, and coursemates assisted them in surviving their first years academically. As stated by a female respondent from group 1 *"If not for the extra classes and tutorial organised by some teaching assistants and higher-level students, I wouldn't have understood many of my courses offered and even passed some of my first-semester examinations...Kudos to the student association"*. Access to library facility (both conventional and e-library facilities) *"the university has a massive building dedicated for library purposes. There is also the e-library, and construction on another building (library annex) has been completed. Library and e-library are accessible to all students with their university identity cards"* were also available, as reported by a female respondent from group 3. Likewise, the respondents also submitted that internet facilities and access to online learning materials were provided, and this made learning interesting. To state it clearly, a male respondent from group 2 shared that *"wireless internet facilities are available at the lecture area, around the hostels, and office buildings. it is accessible to all students at the university...I mostly make use of it to do my assignments"*.

On social support services provided by the institution, the respondents commented that the departmental student association helped with issues relating to course registration, timetable issues, and locating lecturers' offices and lecture halls *"upon my arrival on campus, I did not know what was expected of me or where to go, until I was directed to the department student association. I was able to meet my level adviser, my coursemates and other necessary information I required to get my footing"* as reported by a female respondent from group 2. Another support provided by the institution was the regulation of on and off campus accommodation by the student affairs unit. A male respondent from group 1 said *"in my first few weeks as an undergraduate in the university, there was an issue of theft in my off-campus hostel. The case was reported at the student affairs unit, and it got resolved...Onwards, I understood the role of the unit"*. Other social support services coordinated and regulated by the unit are school-owned and private transportation, extra-curricular activities, organizing of orientation programmes, registering of students' associations (university, faculty, and department), social, religious and political societies. While other respondents submitted that the school's security unit provided protection from harassment, theft and general safety on-campus. In the words of another female respondent from group 4 added *"during examinations the presence of the university's security details helps to secure my possessions... On a rare occasion, an individual tried taking someone else's possession, he was caught, and appropriate punishment was meted out"*.

With regard to the psycho-emotional support services provided by the institution, the researchers enquired more from the respondents. This was based on the emotional/psychological challenges (examination anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation) reported by the respondents in theme 1. On the issue of

examination anxiety, the female respondent from group 3 reported that *due to my concern, my level adviser directed me to the faculty counsellor... He recommended techniques in helping me manage my anxiety*". While the male respondent from group 2 submitted on the issue of depression, *"regular sessions were organised with my cleric to measure my progress"*. In conclusion, the male respondent from group 3 who spoke about suicidal ideation said, *"I did not go through with the suicidal ideation due to the help I am receiving from a lecturer in counselling education"*.

Theme Three: More help required, but it's a start

This theme discusses the adequacy of the respondents' academic, social, and psycho-emotional support services as stipulated in theme 2.

Many respondents conclude that academic support services available and utilised in the institution require serious improvement. *"The university library is equipped with mostly outdated materials... while the e-library is also not always useful due to insufficient computers. Sometimes, students must wait for other students to finish with their tasks...And the library is closed by a certain time which hinders student's academic productivity"*. On the other hand, *"due to congestion and overcrowding, the internet facilities within the institution are inadequate and epileptic. I had to either subscribe personally with my mobile carrier to the internet, stay late in school or go to school on weekends depending on the urgency in submitting the assignments"*. It was also gathered that the tutorials were not an official activity by the university. It was not readily available and is primarily dependent on the tutors, which eliminates individualised instruction to assist struggling students.

Their assessment was unanimous on the adequacy of the social support services the respondents benefitted from in their first year. They rated the services as mildly adequate. The submission of some respondents as it relates to state of the campus hostel *"the experience in the school-run hostel was not encouraging... the rooms did not have reading area, functional fans, and proper lighting. The bathrooms and toilets did not have water supply and were not properly cleaned. Students were treated at the school clinic for different forms of infection. Some students moved out of the hostel"*. While others reported that *"staying off-campus is demanding due to incessant power outages and theft. The buses available for transportation were limited, and this created untold hardships. We had to leave home hours before classes to get public transport. Otherwise, we had to trek or ask for lift from private motorist (PS or Tanke Sir). It was the same situation after classes. We are fatigued before classes and too tired to do assignments in the evening...Things improved in the second semester"*.

Whereas the psycho-emotional support services provided for students is less than adequate. Factors such as insufficient manpower, inadequate space for sessions, inexperienced counsellors, and unawareness of the counselling unit due to inadequate information are some of the reasons for this submission by the respondents. As responded by the students, *"except one is directed to the counselling unit, it is difficult to be aware of its existence due to its location...On the other hand, the faculty counsellor's office does not assure a safe space"*.

5. Discussion

It is the opinion of the first researcher that some of the academic and social challenges these first-year students face could be attributed to the system of secondary education and the upbringing they experienced. These students are trained in a rigid and controlled system where such schools' authorities determine learning decisions. Due to the flexibility in the system of the university, they struggle. Parents and guardians also contribute to their wards' struggles as they do not allow them to make decisions independently while in a lower educational level. It is only logical that these students struggle in the university since they do not have the luxury of their secondary school teachers, and parents to make decisions on their behalf. Transiting from one educational level to another is bound to create challenges, the important thing is either to find solutions or adapt quickly. This study's findings correlate with the assertions of Wangeri et al. (2012), Millet (2015), and Brooker et al. (2017), who submitted in different studies that students face separate struggles during their early years in any institution. This shows that difficulties in adjusting are expected in the early years of university students, and institutions should put necessary mechanisms in place for solutions. For students to attain their educational objectives, they must quickly adapt to the environment of the institution in all ramifications. The challenges undergraduates face in their first year can substantively impact their academic productivity if adequate steps are not undertaken.

This study also found that students' learning might be threatened due to inadequate facilities and spaces, which are crucial components in attaining academic excellence. What then is the essence of attending a university where appropriate facilities to promote learning and ease students' academic stress are not readily available? It means that in addition to doing well academically, they must also be burdened with self-providing materials and resources for learning. State-of-the-art teaching and learning tools, internet services, an efficient system for monitoring students' progress, 24-hour power supply, and adequate internet services are facilities the university is expected to provide, creating an environment where learning is continuous, comprehensive, and robust. Researchers such as Murillo et al. (2011); Amsterdam (2013); Alkadri et al. (2017); and Marmoah et al. (2019) have all carried out their separate studies and found that provision of necessary academic services should increase educational productivity which the findings of this study support.

First-year undergraduates' transition from home and secondary education to tertiary education is vital to attaining their academic objectives. Institutions are encouraged to provide an environment that promotes empathy, trust, care, hope, and love among and between undergraduates to enhance social and academic life quality. By so doing, an atmosphere that promotes immersion in sporting activities, socio-cultural participation, religious tolerance, and other co-curricular activities to reduce academic pressure and stress. University education should not be totally about academic endeavours alone, but it is an environment that should promote the social experiences of students. When a student focuses solely on academics, they lose out on exploring the social culture within the institution. Social interactions help individuals to understand the

social psychology of people. The findings of Ermer and Proulx- (2020); Ramsaroop and Petersen (2020); Aloba et al. (2021), and Eze et al. (2021) have been supported by this present study. The provision of appropriate and adequate social support services can contribute to improved learning outcomes.

The emotional needs of undergraduates should be efficiently met, which results in the elimination of serious roadblocks to educational goals. Educational institutions should assist students in developing the emotional fortitude required to succeed inside and outside the classroom. Equipping students in the process of navigating sticky social challenges, either self-inflicted or due to external factors, should be areas of emotional support institutions should provide. There are incidences where undergraduates have committed suicide because they failed a course, did not meet up with expectations, or did not graduate with their coursemates. If the appropriate counselling services were provided from their first year, there is a possibility of reduced incidences of suicide cases. The responsibility does not lie solely with the university; parents and guardians have also left the training and upbringing of their children in the hands of teachers, house helpers, and caregivers.

The findings of this study show that the absence of parental support in providing appropriate guidance for their children is a serious emotional red flag. As a black person, we are trained to believe that asking for assistance or talking about one's challenges is a sign of weakness. This view is problematic, resulting in increasing rates of suicide among youths. Parents should also provide emotional support to complement the psychological support services available at the university. It is pertinent that administrators should have individuals who have the required expertise to guide students through challenging situations. Students who experience academic stress but have strong emotional support can accomplish better academic heights (Chinelo, 2017; Peretomode & Ugbomeh, 2018; Njageand & Athiemoolam, 2021).

6. Conclusion

From the interview, the researchers gathered that the first challenge some respondents had before stepping on campus was the conflict of accepting or rejecting the admission offer. In some ways, this conflict contributed to the difficulties (academic, social, and psycho-emotional) they encountered in their first year at the university. Many respondents opted for their present course of study due to the rejection of their preferred programme. This shows that from the onset, they were not open-minded about their programme, because they believed only students who were not good enough studied education-related courses. On the other hand, a few respondents submitted that they applied for admission into their desired courses at separate institutions and faculties while holding on to their present admission offer. This situation had varying impacts on their academic, social, and psychological well-being. They added that since they were not going to be completing the degree in education, there was no need to take the course seriously or create relationships with other students. Some added that they were not in the right state of mind to explore the opportunities and possibilities available within the institution. The researchers also gathered that due to the unwillingness of most students in education-related

programmes, some engaged in dangerous and reckless activities, and it impacted their learning outcomes. As a result of the disappointment of not performing as expected (either due to internal or external motivation), they failed to get the required assistance (reluctance to ask for help or unprofessionalism by the support services staff. The first author insisted that the institution is handicapped and doing its best with the limited resources provided by supervisory agencies. Furthermore, the institution is underfunded and understaffed, which overstretches the available staff.

7. Limitations and Recommendations

The study provides valuable insights into student-teachers' challenges in their first year and highlights the need for improved support systems. However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Firstly, the study focused on a specific cohort of student-teachers from a particular educational institution, which limits its ability to capture diverse experiences across different contexts and settings. Additionally, the study's sample size was relatively small, which may restrict the representativeness of the findings. Furthermore, the study relied heavily on self-reported data, introducing potential biases and subjectivity. Lastly, resource constraints and time limitations are also presented as limitations in this research.

Therefore, it was recommended that tertiary institutions should make adequate provision for mental health practitioners to guide undergraduates, especially first-year students, in navigating their academic journey. Supervisory agencies should provide necessary assistance to these institutions, which allows them to provide required support services to their students. The institution should formally provide adequate academic assistance to assist weak learners. The institution should strongly encourage and reward participation in sporting and social activities. Institutions should only offer admission to students who apply for education-related courses.

8. References

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