



## **Class of Degree and Postgraduate Students' Performance in a Nigerian University**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All the authors conceptualized the study. Author JOO designed the study, collected and analyzed the data and prepared the first draft and manuscript. Author OTO contributed in performing literature review and discussing the results. Author TEA extensively reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** University education remains the engine tower of development in any country. In the realization of this, goals of university education and strategies to achieve them were clearly spelt out in the Nigeria National Policy on Education. Some employers of labour have been lamenting on the poor quality of Nigerian graduates despite that some of them came out with good grades. Class of degree speaks volume in the employment and admission criteria of this country. The thrust of this paper therefore is to examine the influence of class of degree on postgraduate students' performance.

**Study Design:** The study adopted descriptive research design of the survey type.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The population comprised all the entire masters' students that graduated from Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria between 2015/2016 and 2018/2019 sessions.

**Methodology:** Proportional stratified random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and eighty nine (189) masters' graduates from the six faculties of the university. Simple percentage, bar chart and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used for data analysis.

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**Results:** Finding showed that: (i) There is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in course work based on class of degrees ( $F_{2,186}0.05 = 0.527$ ,  $p = 0.492 > 0.05$ ). (ii) There is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in dissertation based on class of degrees ( $F_{2,186}0.05 = 2.697$ ,  $p = 0.070 > 0.05$ ).  
**Conclusion:** Class of degree at undergraduate level has nothing to do with postgraduate students' performance at postgraduate level. It was recommended that class of degree at undergraduate level should not be solely used to select candidates for admission into postgraduate programmes. Multiple measures should be adopted.

*Keywords: Class of degree; postgraduate students; performance.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education occupies prime place in the development of any nation all over the world. It could be described as the only industry that touches every fabric of human endeavour. Many nations of the world including Nigeria have been making concerted effort to harness this industry for optimal sustainable development because it is seen as the light of the world, without which the whole world would have been in total darkness. University world over and Nigeria in particular is the ivory tower of knowledge. It is the highest tower where people of intellect domicile, where opinion is formulated and mould for the benefit of mankind. It is a place principally made and prepared to make pragmatic steps in building a better country and world at large [1].

Schultz in [2] opined that University education therefore is quite pertinent to human capital development, because its contribution is quite significant to economic growth of any society. Corroborating this further, Castells in [2] referred to university education as the engine of development in the new world economy. While realizing the importance of university education to national development, the goals of university education and strategies to accomplish them were clearly stated in the Nigeria National Policy on Education [3]. Part of this policy that focuses on university education is section 8.

According to this policy, the aim of university education in Nigeria is: to contribute to national development through high level relevant, manpower training; for the survival of the individual and society; to develop intellectual capacity of individual to understand and appreciate their level and external environment; to acquire both physical and intellectual skills, this enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; to promote and

encourage scholarship and community service [3].

Furthermore, the policy further states that university shall acquire these aforementioned goals by intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of national needs and requirements of the country. These goals were pursued by universities in Nigeria through:

- Quality students intake;
- Quality teaching and learning;
- Research and development;
- Quality facilities, services and resources;
- The generation and dissemination of knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to national goals and enable students to succeed in a knowledge-based economy;
- Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund);
- The maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate regulatory agencies and by all-inclusive, credible admission policy for national unity [3].

Products of Nigeria universities after graduation were now graduated into the main stream of the society after founding worthy in character and learning with the intent of applying their learning and training to the various needs of the nation thereby promoting self development and growth of the society. High level incompetence exhibited by the Nigerian graduates in various sectors of economy in recent time has generated serious concern to the entire citizenry. According to Nigerian Institute of Personnel Management, NIPM as cited in [4] lamented that the quality of graduates from Nigerian universities is declining rapidly and do not meet the demands of

**Table 1. Distribution of first class degrees in some Nigerian Universities in 2019**

Institution	Number of graduates	Number of first class	Percentage (%) ownership	School
1. Covenant University. Ota	1580	215	13.6	Private
2. Afe Babalola University Ado	979	99	10.1	Private
3. Babcock University	1926	62	3.2	Private
4. University of Lagos	6992	271	3.9	Public
5. University of Ibadan	7330	241	3.3	Public
6. Uthman Dan Fodio University	10,994	113	1.0	Public
7. University of Port Harcourt	4771	106	2.2	Public

Source: Daily Times 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2020

industry. Employers of labour often complain about poor skills displayed by graduates of Nigerian universities, which speak volume about the quality of the degree certificates issues by these universities [5]. Okebukola cited in [6] opined that graduates of Nigerian faculties of education, for instance, were inadequately prepared in both content and pedagogy, hence, they could not teach well or at worst impart wrong knowledge which contribute negatively to the quality of students they produce. Many Nigerian graduates are incompetent because majority of them were by-products of these incompetent lecturers. Class of degrees awarded by these universities is supposed to reflect graduands' level of competencies in the world of work and further studies.

Available statistics shows that 36 Nigerian universities produced 2,288 graduates with first class honours degree in 2019. The first class graduates emerged from 127,023 students that completed their studies in various schools. Private universities took the upper hand in awarding first class degrees to their students. Detail is as shown in Table 1.

From Table 1, it can be observed that the number of first class graduates are more in private universities in Nigeria than their public counterparts. Ibe as cited in [7] said it was embarrassing that some universities continued to produce large number of first class graduates in spite of the generally poor quality of academic staff in many of the country's universities. However, class of degrees plays a prominent role in the employment and admission policies in Nigeria. For instance, to be employed into any sector of the economy, preference is always given to first class products more than people with lesser class grades. In the same vein, to be admitted into master's and Ph.D programmes in Nigeria, preference is always given to first class degree holders than applicants with lesser

degrees. For instance, to be admitted into a master's degree programme of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, which is being used as a case study in this study, the admission requirements goes thus: in addition to possessing the basic requirements for matriculation in the university (namely, credit in five relevant subjects including English language passes at not more than two consecutive sittings at WAEC/NECO, SSCE, GCE "O" level or equivalent), applicant must each hold either a postgraduate diploma with an overall minimum average score of 60%, or a first degree in the first or second class division obtained from either this university or any other university or educational institution recognized by the senate (The postgraduate prospectus 2015-2019, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo state, Nigeria).

Detail analysis of the class of degree is shown thus:

First class	-	4.50 – 5.00
Second class upper	-	3.50 – 4.49
Second class lower	-	2.40 – 3.49
Third class	-	1.50 – 2.39

(Source: Undergraduate prospectus 2018-2020, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria).

The Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) as indicated above will determine whether a student will be awarded first class degree or lesser.

Research is inconclusive on the relationship between class of degree at undergraduate level and performance at postgraduate level. According to [8], there was a significant relationship between cognitive ability tests for

selecting students into postgraduate programmes and postgraduate students' performance. But there was no significant relationship noticed between class of degree at undergraduate, self efficacy and postgraduate students' performance. In a similar study conducted by [9], combination of class of degree at undergraduate level, self efficacy and cognitive test scores was a better predictor of postgraduate students' actual performance. Some factors may bring about variations in the performance of students in undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Some of these factors according to [10-13] are: students' personal, financial, institutional, supervisor-related and non-academic factors. For instance, if a student graduated with first class in a well equipped university and enrolled for postgraduate programme in a university that was not well equipped, this institutional factor could affect his actual performance at postgraduate work.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

University education remains the ultimate vehicle and veritable tool for the delivery of critical development goals of the country as enshrined in NPE (2004). Various strategies have also been put in place for the attainment of these goals. Despite mass production of graduates in Nigeria Universities, most especially with the first class grades, majority of these graduates seem not competent in the various sectors of the economy they were employed. Some employers of labour even claimed that no remarkable difference in the skills displayed by the so called first class graduates and graduates with lesser classes in the world of work. Majority of Nigerian graduates after first degree or masters are equally employed to be lecturers in the Universities. Corroborating the views of employers of labour in Nigeria, one could also wonder what these calibers of lecturers would have to offer. If this trend of incompetent graduates should continue, it would spell doom for the country as it will pose danger for the social, economic and political development of Nigeria. The researchers observed that some employers of labour always give preference to first class graduates more than graduates with lesser classes. In the same vein, virtually all universities in the country give admission for higher degrees with special considerations for first class degree at bachelor level. Since some employers of labour do not see any exemplary performance of graduates based on their class of degree, the question that naturally arises is that will there be any difference

in the performance of graduate students at postgraduate level based on their class of degrees?

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main thrust of this paper is to examine the influence of class of degree on postgraduate students' performance in a Nigeria University. More specifically, the study sought to examine if there is going to be a difference in the performance of postgraduate students in course work and dissertation based on their class of degrees.

### 1.3 Research Question

The only research question raised for this study is:

What is the level of postgraduate students' performance based on their class of degrees?

### 1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated to find solutions to the problem of this study.

- There is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in course work based on their class of degrees.
- There is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in dissertation based on their class of degrees.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. The population comprised all the entire masters' students that graduated from the six faculties of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria between 2015/2016 and 2018/2019 academic sessions. Proportional stratified random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and eighty nine (189) masters' graduates between 2015/2016 and 2017/2018 academic sessions as sample (Faculty of Education, 97; Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, 40; Science, 36; Arts, 14 and Law, 2). A proforma was used to collect the masters' students' data such as faculty, class of undergraduate degrees, scores on course work and scores on dissertations. A letter was written to the Dean of postgraduate school of this university seeking for the data. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, simple percentage and bar chart were

used for data analysis and to answer the only research question while inferential statistics such as Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Research Question

What is the level of postgraduate students' performance based on their class of degrees?

To answer this research question, the scores of the masters' students in course work and dissertation were sorted based on their class of degrees (that is first class, second class upper and second class lower). The mean and standard deviation of the scores in course work and dissertation were later compared. The result is as shown in Table 2.

From Table 2, 42 (22.2%) of the masters' students have first class, 68 (36.0%) have second class upper, while 79 (88.8%) have second class lower. Majority of the students have second class lower followed by students having second class upper. Students with first class

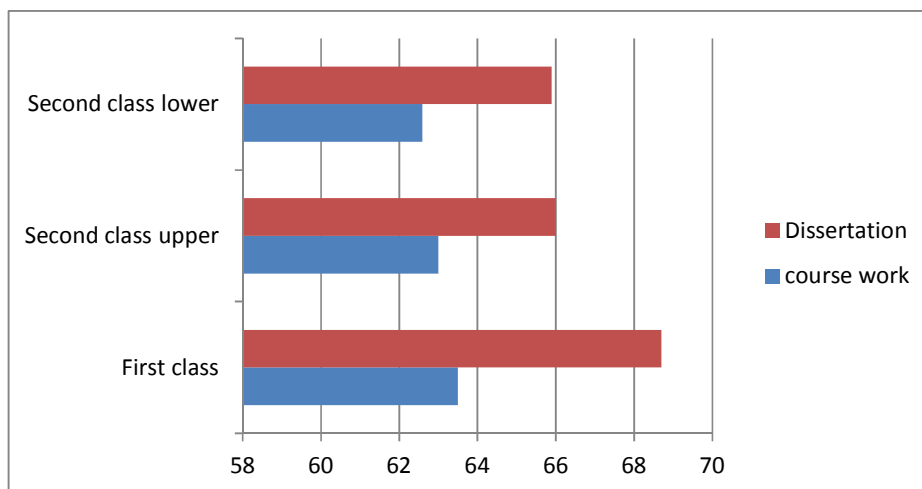
were the least. In course work, postgraduate students with first class have the highest mean score (63.5%), followed by the postgraduate students with second class upper (63.0%). Postgraduate students with second class lower have the least mean score (62.59%). In dissertation, postgraduate students with first class equally have the highest mean score (68.7%), strictly followed by the postgraduate students with second class upper (66.0%). Postgraduate students with second class lower have the least mean score (65.89%). In both course work and dissertation, postgraduate students with first class maintain a lead, followed by second class upper and second class lower was the least. The results are further presented in Fig. 1.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in course work based on their class of degrees.

To test this hypothesis, the mean scores of postgraduate students in Course work were obtained and compared based on their class of degrees. Data obtained were subjected to ANOVA statistics. The result is shown in Table 3.

**Table 2. Descriptive analysis showing the level of postgraduate students' performance**

Class of Degree	No. of students	Mean score in course work	Standard deviation	Mean score in dissertation	Standard deviation
First class	42(22.2%)	63.50	5.32	68.7	5.40
Second class Upper	68(36.0%)	63.00	4.26	66.0	6.84
Second class Lower	79(88.8%)	62.59	5.08	65.89	7.60
Total	189 (100%)				



**Fig. 1. Bar chart showing level of postgraduate students' performance**

**Table 3. ANOVA showing significant difference in the mean performance of postgraduate students in course work according to class of degrees**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	24.869	2	12.435	.527	.592
Within Groups	4392.500	186	23.616		
Total	4417.369	188			

**Table 4. ANOVA showing significant difference in the mean performance of postgraduate students in dissertation according to class of degrees**

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	256.457	2	128.228	2.697	.070
Within Groups	8844.094	186	47.549		
Total	9100.550	188			

From Table 3, the value of F-calculated is 0.527 and p-value is 0.592. since p-value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in course work based on their class of degrees is hereby not rejected at 0.05 level of significance ( $F_{2,186}0.05 = 0.527$ ,  $p = 0.492 > 0.05$ ). This shows that class of degree has nothing to do in the scores of postgraduate students in course work.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in dissertation based on their class of degrees.

To test this hypothesis, the mean scores of postgraduate students in dissertation were obtained and compared based on their class of degrees. Data obtained were subjected to ANOVA statistics. The result is shown in Table 4.

From Table 4, the value of F-calculated is 2.697 and p-value is 0.070. since p-value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant difference in the performance of postgraduate students in dissertation based on their class of degrees is hereby not rejected at 0.05 level of significance ( $F_{2,186}0.05 = 2.697$ ,  $p = 0.070 > 0.05$ ). This shows that class of degree has nothing to do in the scores of postgraduate students in dissertation.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Finding from the only research question clearly showed that Postgraduate students with first class have the highest mean scores in course work and dissertation. This was closely followed by the postgraduate students with second class upper. Post graduate students with second class lower have the lowest mean scores in course

work and dissertation. The performances of the postgraduate students are higher in dissertation than course work. Perhaps the reason why the result is coming this way might be that many courses, seminars, assignments and tests accumulated together to form scores for the course work unlike dissertation which is just scores on research work and oral presentation. Many rigorous tasks were involved in course work than dissertation.

Findings from the two hypotheses clearly indicated that class of degree at undergraduate level has no influence on postgraduate students' performance in course work and dissertation. Performance at postgraduate level is independent of class of degree. This finding is at variance with the finding of [9] which showed that 32 per cent of the variance in postgraduate performance was explained significantly by variations in class of degree, cognitive ability and self efficacy scores. Although, in the earlier study of [8], there was no significant relationship between class of degree and postgraduate students' performance. Perhaps, the reason why class of degree at undergraduate level is not having influence on postgraduate students' performance in this study could be explained in various dimensions as earlier substantiated by [10-13]. At undergraduate level, some students might be brilliant but have lower grades because of the poor socio economic status of their parents which may result in their non-payment of school fees thereby preventing them from attending classes when others are learning and doing tests. It might also be that some are brilliant but performing poorly because of the poor gangs they joined in the school. Some students also perform poorly at underrate because they were not yet matured when they were admitted into undergraduate programme. Their level of

maturity could affect their performances. It could also be that some final CGPA obtained at undergraduate level might fall into marginal or border line. For example, in the grading system adopted by the university used as a case study in this study, First class ranged between 4.50 and 5.00 while Second class upper ranged between 3.50 and 4.49. There could be no much difference in the performances of students whose CGPA is 4.49 or 4.50. The difference in this study and earlier study by [9] was that a single measure (class of degree) was used in this study in relation to postgraduate students' performance, whereas, multiple measures (class of degree, self efficacy and cognitive test ability) were used in [9] in relation to postgraduate students' performance.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study examined the influence of class of degree at undergraduate level on postgraduate students' performance in course work and dissertation in a university in Nigeria. It was revealed that class of degree at undergraduate level (being it first class, second class upper and second class lower) has no significant influence in the performances of postgraduate students at masters' level. It implies that students with first class, second class upper and second class lower performed the same way in the course work and research work. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that a class of degree at undergraduate level should not be solely used to select candidates for admission into postgraduate programmes. In psychometrics, multiple measures yielded better predictive validity of the criterion variable than a single measure like in this study. Multiple measures such as cognitive ability test scores and motivational variables' scores (such as self efficacy, emotional intelligence, need achievement, and so on) should be used in conjunction with class of degree in selecting students for admission into postgraduate programmes. This study is limited to a single university in Nigeria. Future researchers could replicate this study by widening the scope to include more universities and courses for better comparative analysis.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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