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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF SIDE HUSTLES ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of side hustles on the academic performance of undergraduate students in Nigerian universities, with a focus on Benin City, Edo State. Using a descriptive research design, the study explores the prevalence, types, and effects of side hustles on students' academic outcomes. A sample of 800 undergraduate students from public and private universities in Benin City was selected, comprising 350 male and 450 female students, using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that assessed students' demographic details, the nature and frequency of side hustles, time management strategies, and the perceived impact on academic performance. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.83 to 0.89. The findings reveal that a significant number of students engage in side hustles, predominantly driven by financial needs. While side hustles provide students with transferable skills, such as time management and problem-solving, they also present challenges in balancing academic responsibilities. Many students reported that side hustles interfere with study time, leading to reduced academic performance. Based on these findings, the study recommends the implementation of time management workshops, flexible class schedules, support networks for students with side hustles, and monitoring of their academic performance to ensure adequate support.

Keywords: side hustles, academic performance, undergraduate students, time management,

Introduction

In recent times, the phenomenon of side hustling among university students has garnered considerable attention, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. Side hustling, broadly defined as engaging in supplementary income-generating activities outside of formal academic commitments, has become a prevalent response to financial pressures, economic volatility, and entrepreneurial aspirations. While these activities can provide financial stability and practical work experience, they raise concerns about their potential impact on academic achievement. Balancing the dual demands of work and academics often leads to challenges such as poor time management, reduced focus, and burnout, which may negatively influence educational outcomes.

Side hustling involves engaging in additional work or entrepreneurial activities alongside

primary commitments, such as full-time education. It includes a variety of activities like freelance jobs, digital marketing, small-scale trading, and part-time employment. In Nigeria, this trend has become increasingly common among university students as a strategy to address rising tuition fees and living costs. Ajayi and Omotosho (2022) highlighted that side hustling provides financial autonomy but may interfere with academic priorities. In Nigeria, rising tuition fees and living costs have compelled many undergraduates to engage in side hustling, including part-time jobs, small-scale trading, online freelancing, and digital entrepreneurship. These endeavours offer financial relief and valuable life skills but also present difficulties in balancing academic responsibilities and work demands. Some research highlights the potential benefits of side hustling, such as improved time management and practical experience that can enhance academic outcomes (Gbadamosi et al., 2015). However, other studies underscore its downsides, such as increased stress and diminished academic focus, which can lead to lower academic performance (Ojonta & Anthony-Orji, 2021).

Globally, the trend of students engaging in side hustles reflects evolving perceptions of higher education, no longer seen as exclusively academic. In developed nations, side hustles often involve part-time jobs aligned with students' academic fields, providing opportunities for professional growth while earning an income. Conversely, in many developing countries, including those in Africa, side hustling is frequently driven by economic necessity, inadequate governmental support, and high unemployment rates (Alam et al., 2021). For students in these regions, side hustling is often less about choice and more about survival. In Africa, side hustling among university students is a common phenomenon, with prevalence rates exceeding 80% in some countries due to economic challenges and limited financial aid (Mwangi & Wambugu, 2022). In Nigeria, nearly 65% of undergraduates engage in various side hustles to cope with financial burdens and rising living costs (Ajayi & Omotosho, 2022). These activities, while beneficial in fostering resilience and financial independence, often raise concerns about their impact on students' academic performance.

Academic achievement refers to a student's performance in their educational endeavours, typically assessed through grades, tests, or cumulative grade point averages (CGPA). While moderate side hustling can foster time management skills and improve academic performance, excessive involvement often reduces study time and increases stress levels. For instance, Eze and Chukwu (2021) found that students heavily engaged in side hustling tend to experience academic decline, whereas Olatunji et al. (2023) observed that moderate side hustling might enhance time management and, subsequently, academic outcomes. The impact of side hustling on academic performance depends on several factors, including the type of side hustle, hours invested, and individual time management abilities. Bello and Adeniyi (2023) argue that flexible, online-based side hustles are less disruptive to academics than physically demanding jobs.

Globally, side hustling has been studied extensively, with findings often emphasizing its benefits for employability and skill development. For example, Chen et al. (2020) reported that U.S. students working in jobs related to their field of study exhibit greater academic engagement and career readiness. However, McDonald et al. (2019) cautioned that working over 20 hours per week often leads to reduced academic performance due to stress and limited study time.

In African contexts, side hustling is primarily driven by socioeconomic challenges. Mwangi and Wambugu (2022) noted that in Kenya, students often juggle casual labour with academics, leading to fatigue and academic struggles. Similarly, Naicker et al. (2023) found that South African students in physically demanding jobs reported higher levels of academic burnout. However, flexible entrepreneurial activities, such as online tutoring or trading, were associated with financial independence and improved problem-solving skills (Muthoni & Njoroge, 2020).

In Nigeria, the prevalence of side hustling is particularly high due to widespread poverty, high unemployment, and inadequate financial aid systems. Ajayi and Omotosho (2022) revealed that nearly 45% of undergraduates engage in side hustling to support themselves financially. While flexible side hustles like online freelancing have a less detrimental impact on academics, physically demanding jobs such as street vending or transportation are more disruptive (Bello & Adeniyi, 2023).

Empirical research on the academic impact of side hustling has produced varied findings. Gbadamosi et al. (2015) found that while part-time work is infrequent among Nigerian students, those who engage in it appreciate the skills gained from employment. On the other hand, Ojonta and Anthony-Orji (2021) found a negative relationship between employment status and academic performance among university employees in Southeast Nigeria, suggesting that work commitments may detract from academic success. In contrast, Abasilim and Atta (2024) concluded that self-employment did not significantly affect students' academic performance, highlighting that the effects of side hustling depend on individual circumstances and the nature of the work.

Globally, Mortimer et al. (2021) emphasized that time management plays a crucial role in reducing the negative effects of side hustling. In Africa, Mwangi and Wambugu (2022) identified gender disparities in the academic outcomes of working students. In Nigeria, Bello and Adeniyi (2023) emphasized that the nature of side hustling activities is critical in determining their academic impact.
While global research generally focuses on voluntary side hustling, studies in Africa and Nigeria emphasize economic necessity as the primary motivator (Mwangi & Wambugu, 2022; Ajayi & Omotosho, 2022). The impact of side hustling on academic achievement is both positive and negative, with factors like time management and gender playing significant roles (Mortimer et al., 2021; Bello & Adeniyi, 2023). Entrepreneurial and flexible side hustles tend to have less detrimental

effects compared to labour-intensive jobs, especially for students who possess strong time management skills (Naicker et al., 2023). Time management and institutional support are key to helping students balance work and studies successfully (Chen et al., 2020). The interaction of these factors plays a critical role in shaping students' experiences, with institutional support serving as a buffer against the negative impacts of side hustling (Eze & Chukwu, 2021).

Mortimer et al. (2021) highlighted that effective time management helps mitigate the negative impacts of side hustling. Students who prioritize their academic responsibilities and set clear boundaries for work typically report better academic performance. Bello and Adeniyi (2023) noted that gender influences the types of side hustles students engage in and their academic outcomes. Female students often face additional challenges due to societal expectations and caregiving responsibilities. Naicker et al. (2023) found that universities offering flexible schedules, counselling services, and on-campus job opportunities tend to see better outcomes for working students. However, the lack of such support in Nigerian universities leaves many students vulnerable to the negative effects of side hustling.

Studies show that 40%–70% of students in developed countries engage in side hustles, while in parts of Africa, this figure exceeds 80% (Chen et al., 2020; Mwangi & Wambugu, 2022). In Nigeria, 65% of students participate in side hustling, a figure comparable to global averages but influenced by distinct socio-economic factors (Ajayi & Omotosho, 2022).

Although existing literature provides valuable insights into the dynamics of side hustling and academic achievement, significant gaps remain, particularly within the context of Nigerian universities. This study aims to address these gaps by comprehensively exploring the relationship between side hustling and academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

The growing prevalence of side hustling among undergraduates in Nigerian universities has raised significant concerns regarding its potential impact on academic achievement. While these activities offer financial relief and practical experience, they may also impede students' ability to meet academic demands effectively. The dual responsibility of balancing work and study often leads to fatigue, reduced concentration, and lower academic engagement. Globally, research has shown that side hustling can have both positive and negative effects on academic outcomes, with the nature and extent of these effects often influenced by various socioeconomic and cultural factors. In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, side hustling is frequently driven by economic necessity, which adds complexity to the challenge of balancing work and academic responsibilities. Despite its increasing relevance, there is limited empirical research exploring the relationship between side hustling and academic success within the Nigerian context. This gap highlights the need for data-driven insights into how side hustling affects undergraduates' academic performance. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the prevalence, and impact of

side hustling on students' academic performance in Nigerian universities

Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence of side hustling among undergraduates in Nigerian universities?
2. What types of side hustling activities are most common among undergraduates in Nigerian universities?
3. How does side hustling affect the academic achievement of undergraduates in Nigerian universities?
4. What strategies do undergraduates employ to balance side hustling with academic commitments?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the prevalence, types, and impact of side hustling among undergraduate students in Benin City. The target population for the study consisted of undergraduate students from various universities in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. These students were enrolled in both public and private universities within the city. A sample size of 800 undergraduate students was selected for the study. Among these, 350 were male students, representing 43.8% of the sample, while the remaining 450 students (56.2%) were female. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that male and female students were proportionally represented in the sample. The stratification was based on gender to mirror the gender distribution of the student population in Benin City. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, divided into five sections. Section A gathered demographic information such as age, gender, and level of study. Section B focused on the prevalence and types of side hustles, including the types of activities the students were involved in and the number of hours they dedicated to these activities each week. Section C explored the impact of side hustling on academic performance, looking into aspects such as the interference of side hustles with study time and perceived effects on academic outcomes. Section D examined the time management strategies employed by the students to balance their academic responsibilities with their side hustles. Finally, Section E assessed students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with side hustling, including skill development and the financial benefits gained from engaging in side hustles.

The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Measure and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability indices for the sections of the questionnaire were as follows: Section B had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, Section C had 0.84, Section D had 0.88, and Section E had 0.83. To analyze the data, descriptive statistical methods were employed. Percentages were used to determine the prevalence of side hustling and to identify the distribution of various types of side hustles among the students. Ranking was applied to identify the most common side hustles and the frequently used time management strategies.

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Results

Table 1: The Prevalence of Side Hustling Among Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities

Statement			Yes	No
Do you engage in side hustling?			537 (67.1)	263(32.9)
How long have you been engaged in side hustling?	Less than 6 months	6 months to 1 year	1 to 2 years	Over 2 years
	136(25.4)	202(25.3)	194(24.3)	201(25.0)
How many hours per week do you spend on your side hustle?	Less than 5 hours	5–10 hours	10–20 hours	Over 20 hours
	194(25.7)	135(25.1)	130(24.2)	134(25.0)
What motivated you to engage in side hustling?	Financial Necessity	Gaining work experience	Developing entrepreneurial skills	
	270(33.7)	264 (33.0)	266(33.3)	

Table 1 reveals that 67.1% of respondents reported engaging in side hustling. Among them, 27.5% dedicate less than five hours per week, while 25.0% spend more than 20 hours weekly on side hustling. Financial necessity emerged as the primary motivation for side hustling, as indicated by 33.7% of respondents.

Table 2: Types of Side Hustling Activities Most Common Among Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities

Types of Side Hustling Activities	Frequency	Rank
Freelancing (e.g., graphic design, writing, programming)	140	1
Tutoring or academic-related services	132	4
Selling goods or services (e.g., fashion, food, crafts)	135	2
Internships or part-time jobs	129	6
Digital marketing or content creation	133	3
Others	131	5

Table 2 indicates that freelancing is the most common type of side-hustling activity among undergraduates in Nigerian universities. This is followed by selling goods or services, digital marketing or content creation, and tutoring or academic-related services. At the same time, internships, part-time jobs, and other activities were ranked the least common.

Table 3: How Side Hustling Affect the Academic Achievement of Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities

Statement	Not Demanding at All	Slightly Demanding	Moderately Demanding	Very Demanding.
How demanding is your side hustle regarding time commitment?	18(2.3)	129(16.1)	173(21.6)	475(60.0)
How often do your side hustles interfere with your academic commitments?	Never 42(5.2)	Rarely 190(23.8)	Occasionally 172(21.5)	Always 396(49.5)

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How would you rate your academic performance compared to your peers who do not engage in side hustling?	Much lower 495(61.8)	Slightly lower 126(15.8)	Slightly higher 136(18.3)	Much higher 33(4.1)
Do you think side hustling has affected your academic performance?	Yes 566(70.7)		No 234(29.3)	
In what ways has side hustling impacted your academic performance?	Reduced concentration during lectures 223(27.9)	Less time for study and assignments 197(24.7)	Increased stress or fatigue 194(24.3)	Improved skills that complement academic work 185(23.1)

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents (60.0%) agreed that the time commitment required for side hustling was very demanding, with 49.5% stating that it frequently interfered with their academic commitments. When comparing their academic performance to peers who do not engage in side hustling, 61.8% believed their performance was much lower, while only 4.1% considered theirs to be much higher. Furthermore, 70.7% of respondents acknowledged that side hustling had impacted their academic performance. Specifically, 27.9% reported reduced concentration during lectures, while 23.1% noted that side hustling had enhanced skills that complemented their academic work.

Table 4: The Strategies Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities Employ to Balance Side Hustling with Academic Commitments

Statement				Yes	No
Do you have a set schedule to balance your side hustle with academic work				350 (43.8)	450(56.2)
How do you balance your academic commitments with your side hustle	Time management techniques (e.g., prioritizing tasks) 145(18.1)	Setting clear boundaries between work and study time 166(20.8)	Seeking academic support (e.g., tutoring or extra classes) 164(20.5)	Flexible work arrangements (e.g., part-time or remote work) 161(20.0)	Reducing side hustle hours during examinations or critical academic periods 165(20.6)
How effective are these strategies in helping you balance your academic and side hustle responsibilities	Not effective at all 353(44.1)	Slightly effective 111(13.9)	Moderately effective 145(18.1)	Highly effective 191(23.9)	

Table 4 indicates that most respondents agreed they do not have a structured schedule to balance their side hustle with academic work. Among the 43.8% who agreed, 20.8% identified setting clear boundaries between work and study time as their primary strategy for balancing commitments. This was followed by reducing side hustle hours during

examinations or critical academic periods, seeking academic support (e.g., tutoring or extra classes), and adopting flexible work arrangements (e.g., part-time or remote work), with time management techniques (e.g., task prioritization) being the least utilized. Regarding the effectiveness of these strategies, 44.1% believed they were not effective at all, while 23.9% found them highly effective.

Discussion of Findings

The study offers valuable insights into the prevalence, types, and impacts of side hustling among undergraduates in Nigerian universities, alongside the strategies students use to balance their work and academic commitments. It was found that 67.1% of respondents were involved in side hustles, highlighting their widespread nature among students. This aligns with findings by Adisa et al. (2022), who noted that financial pressures often push students to seek alternative sources of income while studying. The study also uncovered a notable variation in the number of hours students spend on their side hustles, with 27.5% dedicating less than five hours a week, while 25.0% commit more than 20 hours weekly. This supports the assertion by Huston and Bergerson (2020), who warned that excessive working hours could negatively affect students' academic engagement, leading to poorer academic outcomes.

Freelancing was identified as the most common type of side hustle, reflecting students' preference for flexible, skill-based work that can be easily adapted to their academic schedules. Other popular side hustles included selling goods, digital marketing, and tutoring. These findings are consistent with Gbadamosi et al. (2021), who found that students typically choose side hustles offering greater autonomy. However, as noted by Reeves and Alcott (2018), such jobs may lack consistency in income, prompting students to juggle multiple hustles to meet financial needs.

The study also found that 60.0% of respondents felt their side hustles were highly demanding, with 49.5% acknowledging that their work often interfered with academic commitments. These results are supported by Butler et al. (2021), who highlighted that students managing multiple roles tend to experience stress and reduced productivity. Additionally, 61.8% of participants felt their academic performance suffered compared to peers not involved in side hustling, further supporting research by Bello and Agbaje (2023), which indicated that side hustling can undermine academic focus.

Interestingly, 23.1% of students reported that their side hustles had enhanced skills complementary to their academic work, such as time management and problem-solving, aligning with Schneider and Ingram (2020), who observed that structured employment can foster transferable skills. Despite these benefits, the study found that many students lacked effective time management strategies, with 43.8% admitting to not having a structured schedule. Those who attempted to balance their commitments used strategies like setting clear boundaries and reducing work hours during examinations, but only 23.9% found these strategies highly effective. This

mirrors Zhou and Broadhurst's (2022) findings on the low adoption of effective time management practices among working students.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that a significant proportion of Nigerian university students engage in side hustles, primarily driven by financial needs. However, the study highlights several challenges these students face in balancing work and academic commitments. Many respondents reported that side hustling consumes a substantial amount of time, which often interferes with their academic responsibilities and leads to reduced academic performance. Despite these negative impacts, side hustling also provides students with valuable transferable skills such as time management, problem-solving, and adaptability.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it was recommended that:

1. Universities should implement mandatory workshops on time management to help students, particularly those with side hustles, develop the skills needed to balance work and academics effectively.
2. Institutions should offer more flexible class schedules, including evening or weekend classes, to accommodate students' work commitments and reduce time-related conflicts.
3. Support networks should be established where students engaging in side hustles can access mentorship and guidance on managing both academic and work responsibilities.
4. Universities should monitor the academic performance of students with side hustles to identify those who might need additional academic support or intervention.

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