

STUDENT SUCCESS FACTORS IN ASHESI UNIVERSITY



ASHESI UNIVERSITY

Investigating Student Success Factors in a Top-Quality Ghanaian University: A Focus
on Ashesi University

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original study and that none of its parts
have been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

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I hereby declare that the submitted dissertation and presentation of it were supervised
in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by Ashesi
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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to collate and analyze the views of students and graduates of Ashesi University, a top African university, on the relevant factors which significantly influence their academic performance. The research was motivated by the desire of some university officials to identify the specific aspects of Ashesi's "modified liberal arts model" which most significantly impact students' academic performance and enable them to do so well in the job market. The questions this study sought to answer were: Which factors significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students and how do students rate the factors affecting their academic performance?

The research employed a sequential, transformative mixed methods strategy where both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative data collection techniques (questionnaires) were used. The sample comprised of 132 current Ashesi University students and alumni.

The results show that significant factors affecting student performance include the ability to think critically, adequate sleep, having a scholarship, proper time management, sitting at or near the front of the lecture hall and student ownership of a laptop. Respondents also identified lecturer support, Ashesi learning resources such as access to an internet connection, student-peer support learning as well as the spirituality of the individual student as significant to their performance.

This study recommends improvement in the provision of learning resources such as a stable, all day, all week, round the clock internet connection. This study also suggests that lecturers should continue being actively engaged in students' performance beyond the classroom by providing needed advice and support.

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Accredited Tertiary Educational Institution - An institution which can operate under the mentorship of a recognized and self-awarding tertiary institution in the case where such an institution was not established through an act of parliament. Graduates of the mentoring institution are awarded the certificates of mentor institution (National Accreditation Board, 2014).

Chartered Higher Educational Institution - A mentored higher educational institution in Ghana which has received state authority to award degrees and certificates through the issuance of a presidential charter (National Accreditation Board, 2015).

Colonial Model of Higher Education – Frameworks and curricula used by European colonists in administration and control of higher education within Africa.

Higher Education (Higher Ed)- A type of formal education beyond secondary school levels such as university education or vocational training.

Higher Educational Institution- An organization or legal body which provides higher education service to the public. It usually confers certification on an individual upon successful completion of a higher education program.

Information Technology (IT) Skills – The ability to use computer devices to process raw data into information.

Key Stakeholders: Relevant figures within the Ghanaian labor industry such as the Ghana Employers Association, human resource managers, recruiters, and employers.

Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations (MELR) – A legal body charged with labor, employment, and workplace safety-related issues in Ghana.

National Accreditation Board (NAB) - A government agency which regulates, supervises and accredits tertiary institutions in Ghana.

Scholastic Assessment Test or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT): An examination in the United States of America used by colleges and universities in admitting students who wish to pursue higher education and obtain bachelor's degrees.

The Gold Coast – This is a former British colony in West Africa which is currently an independent state known as the Republic of Ghana.

Traditional University – A higher educational institution which is organized after European higher education in terms of curricula, academic major choice and teacher instruction among other things in West Africa

West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) – National examinations taken by students in their final year of senior high school within English speaking countries of West Africa. It is the primary selection tool into a higher education institution within this region.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview and Background

According to a study by the British Council (2014, p. 5), Ghana, among other major economies in Sub-Saharan Africa, faces a graduate unemployment problem. The reason is that most graduates from Ghanaian higher educational institutions such as universities, training colleges, and polytechnics are unable to obtain a job within a year or more after graduation.

In fact, Ghana's Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations ([MELR] 2017), reports that about 300,000 graduates from several Ghanaian educational and training institutions join Ghana's labor market each year "without any hope of being employed" (p.18). It further describes a "chronic and high unemployment level among the youth, particularly among university and polytechnic graduates" (p. 18).

Similarly, Biney (2015, p. 2), in his study, "Exploring the Graduate Unemployment Problem in Ghana: Challenges and Strategies," describes the phenomenon of graduate unemployment as critical to the extent that an Unemployed University Graduates Association had been formed to find solutions to the problem. From the evidence presented above, there is clearly a graduate unemployment challenge facing Ghana.

It is important to inform readers not very familiar with Ghana that the Ghanaian economy has a huge informal sector super-imposed on a small formal sector (Haug, 2014; Koto, 2015; Osei-Boateng, 2011). Official unemployment estimates typically either ignore the informal sector or assumes full employment of the informal sector; thus record extremely low official unemployment rates for the economy. However, in the formal sector, the majority of the unemployed are recent university

graduates who find it very difficult to penetrate the formal sector to secure office jobs (Ameyaw & Obeng-Odoom, 2014).

In recognition of the challenge of graduate unemployment, the Nation Builders' Corps (NABCO) scheme was introduced on May 1, 2018, by Ghana's current President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. The NABCO aims at creating employment opportunities and avenues for graduates from accredited tertiary institutions in Ghana who cannot find jobs by providing 100,000 graduates, who have completed mandatory, post-university national service, with jobs (GhanaWeb, 2018; Yeboah, 2018).

The president described the NABCO as a "vehicle that would deliver a hundred thousand jobs" in seven primary sectors identified as "Educate Ghana; Feed Ghana; Heal Ghana; Revenue Ghana; Digitize Ghana; Enterprise Ghana and Civic Ghana" (GhanaWeb, 2018, para. 2). It is important to realize, that the implementation of the NABCO by the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) government not only acknowledges the graduate unemployment problem but assumes that the grim unemployment situation stems from limited employment opportunities, and so took steps to improve the situation.

However, the cause of the problem is not only a lack of employment opportunities within the country. The British Council (2014, p. 5) revealed that employers within Ghana, as well as in other Sub-Saharan countries were dissatisfied with the quality of graduate labor force in the country. In a subsequent study, the British Council (2016), explained that the high rate of graduate unemployment in Ghana is not due to a lack of employment opportunities but rather a result of "the unemployability of graduates." Unemployability means that graduates lack the skill

set, knowledge, values, behaviors, and personality to obtain and keep a job even though they possess university degrees.

Using anecdotal evidence, a recent study focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa by Baah-Boateng (2016), “Developing Youth Skill for Employment,” noted an employer lamenting, during the Ghana Transformation Forum in 2015, that “tertiary graduates (in Sub-Saharan Africa including Ghana), lack basic skills to complete simple routine assignments, indicating that certification has become a mere formality rather than an indication of achievement” (p. 5).

Moreover, discussions with various industry stakeholders (employers and recruiters in Ghana) reveal that there have been situations where graduates could hardly form coherent grammatical sentences (Business Desk, 2018, para. 5). Most troubling, although in some cases, graduates have acquired the needed disciplinary knowledge, employers perceived gaps in transferable skills such as information technology (IT) skills, reliability (integrity), critical thinking, communication, and team working skills.

Transferable skills are described as soft skills, key skills, employable skills or life skills. These skills are not specific to a field of study or work. These skills include but are not limited to: (a) professionalism (b) reliability (c) technological competence (d) numerical capacity (e) strong communication skills (f) ability to participate in teamwork (g) collecting or organizing information (h) problem-solving skills (i) creative abilities (j) enterprising and innovation and skills related to civic sense (Singh, 2015, p. 824; Andrews & Higson, 2008 p. 413).

What this means is that the unemployment crisis in Ghana is not always a case of a limited number of jobs in the country or the lack of employment opportunities.

From the evidence provided above, one comes to understand that lack of employable skills in applicants especially tertiary graduates may be another cause of the high unemployment facing the Ghanaian economy. As a result, the dissatisfaction of employers with the level of skills of graduates from tertiary institutions questions the quality and effectiveness of higher education in Ghana. It signals that there is a problem with the current Ghanaian higher educational system that needs to be addressed for the country to progress economically.

This grim situation has led to increasing awareness of the “important role that higher education in Ghana plays in developing and enhancing employable skills” (Boahin, 2018, p. 21). According to William Cronon (1998) in “Only Connect” a liberal arts education emphasizes these same transferable and “employable” skills. However, to date, the liberal arts education described by Cronon is unfortunately foreign to the Ghanaian higher educational sector, which was modeled after the colonial British University system and continues in the same tradition.

Most of the skills mentioned above closely resemble the learning goals that Ashesi University (Ashesi), a top private Ghanaian liberal arts university, seeks to develop in its students. Ashesi is unique as it is the first and only liberal arts university in Ghana and has won many international awards for the quality of its programs.

Ashesi’s learning goals and outcomes seem to include all the qualities for which key stakeholders (employers and recruiters) are seeking. These learning goals include ethics and civic engagement, the ability to think critically and reason analytically, as well as effective written and oral communication (Ashesi University, 2018). The Ashesi learning goals also comprise leadership and ability to collaborate

with others in diverse group settings known as teamwork, innovation and action, professionalism, curiosity and ability to analyze and solve complex problems, the ability to locate, organize and evaluate information from multiple sources, the ability to understand numbers and statistics as well as technological competence (Ashesi University, 2018).

The explanation of generic skills, provided by Singh (2015) and Andrews and Higson (2008), is similar to the core skills of the liberally educated person described by Cronon. It includes some of the same qualities for which critical stakeholders in the Ghanaian labor market value in graduates. It is reasonable to surmise that these stakeholders are not merely looking for employable skills. Instead, they are indirectly appealing to the higher education system to move away from the traditional Ghanaian higher education system to adopting a liberal art education; which develops the whole individual such that he or she becomes a productive member of society. This has not happened because of the entrenched colonial heritage of the university system in Ghana and may take a very long time to happen if it ever will.

Harrington and Saloner (2008) provide compelling evidence of the demand for liberal arts education in Ghana. According to the authors, a feasibility study was conducted in Ghana to determine the demand for the kind of education which Ashesi would offer (the liberal arts education.)

The research measured among other things, the preferences of students and parents and the needs of the “Ghanaian business community” for higher education (p. 17). The study shows that participants preferred a four-year higher education which comprised of a mixture of technical know-how, theory, general professional and critical thinking skills.

The results also indicated that Ghanaians wanted the school (Ashesi University) to have affiliations with the business community such that Ashesi graduates would be employable. Harrington and Saloner (2008) also reveal that, not only is there demand and preference for the liberal arts education in Ghana over the existing higher education in the country, respondents showed a willingness to pay higher tuition for Ashesi's education than what is normally paid in other Ghanaian universities. This finding also indicates that attracting employment (success in the industry) after graduation is indicative of effective higher education to the respondents. The above example is evidence of the increasing relevance of a broader tertiary education in Ghana in a style similar to Ashesi's version of liberal arts education.

What then is a liberal arts education? Who is a liberally educated person?

Conon (1998) provides one perspective:

By liberal education, we certainly do not mean an education that indoctrinates students in the values of political liberalism, at least not in the most obvious sense of the latter phrase. Rather, we use these words to describe an educational tradition that celebrates and nurtures human freedom. (Cronon, 1998, p.73)

Cronon (1998) explains that the phrase 'liberal arts' originates from the Greek phrase 'artis liberalis' which means 'freedom and growth.' This education consisted of seven courses namely the trivium (made up of grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and the quadrivium (consisting of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) (p.74). He maintains that a liberal art education "aspires to nurture the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom" (p.74).

The qualities of the liberally educated, according to Cronon (1998) include listening and hearing, the ability to read and understand and the ability to carry a conversation with everyone regardless of their professional or educational background. They also encompass the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively, the ability to solve a variety of puzzles and problems and the ability to practice humility, tolerance, and self-criticism among other traits (p.76-78).

Ashesi University in Ghana has applied the “liberal arts” concept typically employed by the category of undergraduate universities designated “liberal arts” universities in the United States of America (USA) to the Ghanaian context. Examples of such USA-based liberal arts universities include Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, Williams College in Massachusetts, Amherst College in Massachusetts, Denison University in Granville, as well as Kenyon College and the College of Wooster both in Ohio.

Ashesi superimposed practical majors such as Business Administration, Computer Science, Management Information Systems and Engineering on the standard liberal arts curriculum and included leadership courses and an Honor Code system to encourage the transformation of its students into ethical graduates. Ashesi University’s graduates have a high post-national service employment rate of 95% although the university has been in existence for just 16 years (Grant, 2016, p.46).

1.2 Description of the Research Problem

From the evidence presented above, employers in Ghana value job candidates with generic skills. These skills are often attributes of the liberally educated graduate but are typically not characteristics of the graduates of the traditional universities in Ghana, whose curriculum are typically inherited from Britain, the colonial master.

Unlike the unemployment challenges faced by most graduates in Ghana, Ashesi students and graduates do well in the job market and, understandably those who do well in school do best in the job market. However, there is limited information on significant factors influencing student academic performance, from the student perspective and the college's perspective.

Little is known about the major determinants of student performance as measured by cumulative grade point average at Ashesi University which could explain why Ashesi graduates are so sought after in the job market. In support of this claim, the British Council (2014, p. 7), reveals that “there is a lack of basic statistical information relating to higher education enrolment, quality, and outcomes,” in Ghana as well as other Sub-Saharan Countries.

Although it is reasonable to argue that having good grades does not necessarily translate into having soft skills or being employed, employers sometimes regard grade point average of a recent graduate as the best predictor of his or her job performance. To some extent, one's academic performance (as indicated by their cumulative grade point average) demonstrates the level of his or her work ethics during the first few years of employment (Koeppel 2006, as cited by Nelson, 2008). Another key point is the finding of Nelson (2008). The author set out to find the relationship between workplace skills and grade point average as predictors of employment, using Pearson's Product Moment correlation. He found a moderate relationship between grade point average and workplace skills (where workplace skills are defined by Nelson (2008) as crucial employment skills which enable a job applicant to participate in the labor force effectively).

Of course, employable skills are not solely determined by grade point average, but it is also true that students with GPA's below the minimum GPA standard, often drop out of school or are asked to leave without graduating.

Employers do not base their recruitment solely on grade point average. Sometimes, the grade point average is not even considered, but a lot of employers do consider GPA's. Nelson (2008) identified a positive relationship between student grade point average and the level of workplace readiness skills of a recent college graduate. As such, students with higher grade point averages have higher work readiness skills scores. It is therefore valuable to investigate what factors enable Ashesi students to attain a high grade point average as a high GPA is among the determinants of success in the job market.

This research will provide answers to these questions:

1.3 Research Questions

1. Which factors significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students?
2. How do students rate factors which significantly impact their academic performance and is this consistent with predictions from the literature?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify factors which significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students
2. To find whether the factors Ashesi students identify and rank as significantly impacting their academic performance is consistent with rating from the literature.

1.5 Research Relevance

The current research will contribute to the literature on student academic performance in private higher education institutions in Ghana. The findings of the current research could help faculty better understand students beyond their numerical grade point averages. The findings of the current research may also provide insights for student academic advisors at Ashesi University as well as inform the Ashesi Success program which aims at helping first-year students succeed in Ashesi University. The current research could also inform individuals, higher educational institutions and African countries who are looking to establish liberal art educational institutions or adopt the liberal art education program or improve the employability of their graduates.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview Of Chapter

In this chapter, I explain the meaning of education as it pertains to this current research. I also provide an overview of higher education and its challenges in Ghana. I then summarize the history of liberal arts in Greece and the USA as well as its practice in Ghana. I provide a critical review of grade point average as a measure of student academic performance and factors which affect grade point average of students.

2.2 Defining Education And Higher Education

‘Education’ is tough to define. For instance, Strand (2005) maintains that ‘education’ has two different meanings. The first meaning refers to passing down of knowledge from parents to children, while the other describes education as a process of preparing the next generation for the future by enabling them to craft solutions to problems they will encounter. The meanings offered by Strand (2005) suggest that there are different purposes for education.

The first meaning seems to have the purpose of merely informing and equipping one with knowledge while the second goes beyond directly obtaining knowledge to preparing individuals to be problem solvers in society. For the purposes of this paper, I define education as a kind of training which equips individuals not only with general and theoretical knowledge but also with transferable skills (such as problem-solving and critical thinking skills) which enable them to attract employment and serve society.

Apart from its definition and purpose, education embodies a fundamental human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proclaims that education is a human right (Claude, 2005, p.37; Johnson & Symonides, 1998, p.16). The Article clearly states that every person has a right to be educated to the extent that the first stages of education are made free and compulsory in all countries.

It further obligates governments and states to make higher education accessible to citizens based on merit. In my view, for education to be true to its meaning and achieve its various purposes, as a human right, implies each person should be informed through the acquisition of knowledge and equipped with needed transferable skills. Individuals who have the knowledge and vital skills will not only be able to attract employment for themselves but can contribute to the growth and development of society.

In light of the above framework, it is established that education is the right of every individual. For that reason, higher education is crucial in all countries to the extent that the World Bank (2017) builds its definition of higher education off the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' framework:

A highly-skilled workforce, with solid post-secondary education, is a prerequisite for innovation and growth: well-educated people are more employable, earn higher wages, and cope with economic shocks better. (World Bank, 2017, para. 1)

From the World Bank's definition above, it is worth noting that higher education is not simply about the impartation of knowledge. It is revealed that any institution

which undertakes to provide higher education (post-secondary education) is duty bound to produce ‘a highly-skilled workforce’ that is ‘employable’ (meaning having transferable skills). It implies that higher education programs should be organized in a way that provides students with general skills, thus enabling them to be employable in industry. The situation of Ghana, where recent graduates are found unemployable, suggests that the higher education sector may be failing in its function to produce employable graduates. Ghanaian higher education may not be delivering quality.

2.3 An Overview Of Higher Education In Africa

Higher education in Africa pre-dates the colonial era. According to Altbach and Teferra (2004), higher education in Africa is as “old as the pyramids of Egypt, the Kingdom of Timbuktu and the obelisk of Ethiopia” (p. 23). Pre-colonial universities in Africa included Al- Azhar University (established in 970 AD) in Egypt, Al-Quarawiyyin University (established in 859 AD) in Fes, Morocco, Sankore University of Timbuktu, Mali, and Al-Qayrawan in Tunisia (Diagne & Jeppie 2008).

Besides Diagne and Jeppie (2008), Woldegiogis and Doevenspeck (2013), who examine the various roles higher education has played in Africa, claim that all levels of education were practiced in Africa before European colonization. The findings of the above authors help contradict the belief that higher education was introduced in Africa exclusively by Europeans. Thus, higher education existed in Africa long before Europeans arrived in Africa.

However, the arrival of Europeans in Africa eventually led to the colonization of Africans. Among the strategies of colonization included the imposition of European education and by extension higher educational models.

Altbach and Teferra (2004) explain that the features of colonial higher education in Africa included limited access, the restriction of the language of instruction to that of the colonizer and a narrow university curriculum which focused on specialized disciplines such as the study of law.

In agreement with Altbach and Teffera (2004), Grant (2016) wrote accessibility of Africans to university education under the British university system “cater[ed] to an elite and relatively small student body with the sole intention of raising a class of bureaucrats for civil service” (p.34). Higher education was meant for the chosen few to promote colonial interests.

In the process of adopting and practicing European higher education, Africa’s traditional education was eroded. Woldegiogis and Doevenspeck (2013) explain that “colonial powers and their colonial ideology disconnected the continuity of African indigenous institutions including education and replaced them with Eurocentric institutions through time.” The authors further elaborate that “the introduction of European models of higher education [in Africa] ... is a product of European colonial imposition (p.38). The above claim is supported by Altbach and Teferra (2004, p.23). Thus, the adoption of European post-secondary educational organization led to a discontinuation of that of Africa’s. However, this does not mean the use of European higher educational models in Africa is necessarily bad because the Japanese, Chinese and Asian tigers all adopted and adapted western education to fuel their modern development.

2.4 Introduction Of Higher Education In Ghana

Focusing on Ghana, Osman, Yusif and Yussof (2013) claim that tertiary education (as exists today) began in 1948 following the passage of the 1943 Asquith Commission on Higher Education. The rationale of the Asquith Commission was to investigate the feasibility of higher education within African colonies of the United Kingdom and to recommend the establishment of university colleges to serve as affiliates of the University of London (University of Ghana, 2018, para.1-2).

Consistent with the account of Osman *et al.* (2013), Woldegiogis and Doevenspeck (2013), using a reflective method of writing, also say post-secondary education began in Ghana with the establishment of the University College of the Gold Coast (now known as the University of Ghana).

However, there seem to be some slight inconsistencies regarding the origin of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). Wiseman and Wolhuter (2013) claim that the university, initially a college, was upgraded to a university by an act of parliament in 1961. In contrast, Woldegiogis and Doevenspeck (2013) maintain that it was established as part of an Africanization process (led by the Association of African Universities) which sought to create an African identity and overcome intellectual dependency.

Despite the different reasons put forward by the various authors for the establishment of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science of Technology, it becomes clear that the number of tertiary institutions in Ghana gradually increased over time. Between 1990 and 2009, the number of public universities rose to eight (8) including the University of Development Studies (UDS) and the University of Education Winneba (Osman et al., 2013). Ghana also liberalized the university system

in the 1990s following the adaptation of the Structural Adjustment Programs SAPs) leading to the birthing of private universities

Following this trend, the number of accredited tertiary institutions in Ghana as of April 2018 was two hundred and twelve (212) (NAB, 2019). Ten of these tertiary institutions are public universities including: University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), University of Education Winneba, University of Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, and the University of Energy and Natural Resources (National Accreditation Board, 2018). There are also, thirty-nine public colleges of education, thirty-eight public and private nurses training colleges, and five registered foreign tertiary institutions as reported by the Ghana National Accreditation Board (2018).

Such numbers demonstrate the rapid expansion of higher education in Ghana once colonization ended. This increase in the number of universities confirms the conviction of many African governments, including Ghana, that higher education is pivotal to the economic growth of individual countries and the continent.

2.5 Private Higher Educational Institutions in Ghana

The first private university in Ghana was the Adventist Missionary College, now known as Valley View University (Osman, Yusif & Yussof, 2013). However, it took several years for private universities to participate in the provision of higher in Ghana legally. Once accredited, private universities rapidly increased in number due to a surge in demand and willingness of Ghanaians to patronize these new universities (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2014).

The escalation shows that there was an increasing demand by Ghanaians for higher education (Armah 2016, as cited by Abraham, 2018). Armah 2016 argued that some of the factors influencing the increased demand for private higher education instruction include population growth in Africa, increased need for higher degrees to meet job requirements, globalization and the knowledge economy. Armah (2016) further indicates that increased pressure on the few public universities to improve access to higher education, coupled with advice from the World Bank to liberalize the higher education sector, led to a proliferation of private tertiary institutions in Ghana. Thus, the entry of private universities into the tertiary sector broke the state monopoly of higher education in Ghana (Varghese, 2004).

In contention, Tsevi (2014, p. 1, 2) argues that the sudden proliferation of private universities is not an indication that “government initially established a formidable public design for it.” Tsevi contends that the government’s ability to meet the increased demand for higher education in Ghana was hampered by an economic downturn in 1980s along with demands from the World Bank to invest in lower level education rather than higher education.

Today, there are eighty-one (81) private universities offering degree programs and Higher National Diploma programs (National Accreditation Board [NAB], 2018). These include Accra College of Medicine, Accra Business School and Accra Institute of Technology. Among the eighty-one private tertiary institutions, five of them are fully chartered institutions or universities instead of university colleges. These are: Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Technology, Ashesi University, Central University, Trinity Theological Seminary and Valley View University (NAB, 2018)

According to Sawyerr (2004), enrollment in public universities in Ghana was below 10,000 in 1994. Admissions were at 40,673 in state universities and 2,500 in private universities by the year 2001. Between 1999 and 2006, the demand for university education was more than 118,000; however, public universities could not grant admission to many applicants. The University of Ghana received 22,865 student application in 2008, but could only admit a third of these students, equivalent to 8,774 students (Boateng, 2014. P. 2). This information clearly depicts the incapacity of public universities to meet the demonstrated demand for higher education in Ghana. There was a dire need for the establishment of private universities to reduce the stress on limited public educational facilities.

Enrollment into tertiary institutions in Ghana has increased significantly by more than tenfold within the last twenty years (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2014). Public universities still admit more students in Ghana than private universities (Osman et al., 2013; Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2004 p. 5). The increase in tertiary education enrollment is indicative of increasing access to higher education. Although the rapid expansion of private universities provides Ghanaians with greater access to college education, Boateng (2014, p. 4), keenly asserts that the quality of instruction within these institutions may be compromised. This assertion requires public and private university officials to critically assess their curriculums now that Ghana has the freedom to establish tertiary institutions to meet Africa's needs.

2.6 Challenges Facing University Education in Ghana: The Traditional University

Although the tertiary sector in Ghana has undergone a lot of positive changes and development, it is far from perfect as it faces several challenges. A recent study by Baah- Boateng (2016, p.1) noted that the relevance of education and skills training

in Sub-Saharan Africa (including Ghana), is problematic owing to poor quality tertiary level education. He describes the method of instruction at the tertiary level as examination and certificate focused. There is little emphasis on practicality and problem- solving skills. The result is that graduates lack creativity and problem-solving attitudes in their places of employment.

If the mode of instruction in tertiary is indeed examination focused as Baah-Boateng describes it, to some extent, it explains why students engage in rote memorization. Not to support the practice of rote memorization, but examination focused instruction indirectly tells students that the most important thing in any class is to pass the exam for the course regardless of whether they understand and can apply the content or not. Indeed, examinations are inclusive of the methods used to determine the students understanding of course content, but the way questions are set will determine how students learn (memorizing or understanding what is taught).

Along with other African countries, Ghana faces problems of access, equity, quality and relevance of higher education to social needs (Arthur & Arthur, 2016; Braimah, 2004; Sawyerr, 2004). Likewise, Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013) reveal that there is inequality of access to higher education for all social groups. In particular, there is low participation of women in higher education.

Not only are Ghanaian tertiary institutions failing to make their curriculums accessible, but the curriculums themselves also are not preparing students for success post-graduation. Awunyo-Vitor and Osei-Owusu (2012) identify little or no economic prospects of attending public universities in Ghana. He asserts that this finding partly explains the high graduate and youth unemployment rate which currently plagues

Ghana. Unemployment is on the rise because colleges have failed to instill in students the necessary skills which would enable them to participate in Ghana's workforce.

The discussion of syllabi effectiveness extends beyond education practitioners. Boahin (2018) reveals that in the last decade discussions by industry personnel, higher education practitioners and various civil society groups have called for more focus of higher educational institutions on "transferable and employability skills in the teaching, training and learning experiences of students" (p.21). Employable skills refer to effective communication, technological competency, professionalism, and numeracy.

Goode (2017), also identifies limited academic facilities as a significant challenge facing the tertiary sector in Ghana. Along the same train of thought, Arthur and Arthur (2016) report on the problem of large class sizes in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. The issue of large class size is a contributing factor to poor quality higher education. Since the student-teacher ratio is so high, there is less interaction with individual students and little opportunity for the lecturer to address the different learning challenges of students in the class.

Considering the above challenges, the recent implementation of the Free Senior High School (SHS) program could potentially worsen the situation. According to Kale-Dery (2018, para.1-3), the Ministry of Education estimates that 145,000 senior high school graduates will be pursuing higher education in the year 2020. This number represents an increase of 55,000 above the current tertiary sector admission capacity of 90,000 students. In the case where tertiary facilities are not expanded to meet the increased demand, not only will accessibility to such education be a huge challenge but also the quality of education offered will fall.

2.7 Description of Liberal Art Education: Origin in Greece

According to Zakaria (2015), the purpose of education was narrowly to train individuals for specific jobs and roles in society. The Greek aristocracy educated their children in the arts of war, governance, politics, history, and subjects necessary to assume positions of leadership. The working class, in contrast, instructed their children to take up professional roles. Children of working class could grow up to become farmers, blacksmiths, weavers, and hunters (p. 40). Education was solely intended for economic purposes. The focus was on vocational training known as *artes artes mechanicae* (Roche, 2010, p. 5).

However, education evolved as the purpose of education changed in ancient Greece (Zakaria, 2015, p.41). There was a need for citizens to be educated to govern their own societies beyond performing specific, routine functions in society. The need for broader education and concerns of human freedom led to the birth of a liberal education known as *artes liberals* (Zakaria, 2015, p.42). This serves as the foundation for contemporary liberal arts education.

2.7.1 Defining Liberal Arts Education

Robinson (1979, p.625) describes a liberal arts education as one which does not prepare a student for a specific role. In effect, the liberally educated individual can perform multiple functions. Additionally, Cronon (1998) later stated that a liberal education is not an education which teaches the values of political liberalism in students, but it is an “educational tradition that celebrates and nurtures human freedom” (p. 73). By this definition, the focus is on nurturing and developing human abilities to be employed for the good of society.

Also, liberal arts education is one which provides students with a general knowledge grounded in diverse disciplines (Roche, 2010, p. 5-6). Roche (2010)

further improves this definition by specifying that the goal of liberal arts education is to educate the whole person. This is achieved through vibrant conversations among students and faculty on diverse topics including moral values. Active learning is crucial in this type of education where students are engaged in the learning process. Grant (2016) concludes that liberal arts education is one that “prepares students for lifelong learning” (p.36). This feature is especially valuable in recent times where change is constant, and new research provides new information.

2.7.2 The Core of The Liberal Arts in Ancient Greece

The core of the liberal arts education consisted of the trivium— grammar, logic, and rhetoric— and the quadrivium— arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (Cronon, 1998, p. 74; Roche, 2010, p. 5). The trivium and quadrivium formed the foundations of general education in various academic disciplines. To this end, modern liberal arts colleges have expanded upon the trivium and quadrivium to include the humanities, social science and other science courses including among them biology, chemistry, psychology, philosophy, economics, and physics.

2.7.3 The Liberal Arts College

The current model of the liberal arts college originates from the United States of America (Grant, 2016, p.35). This model entails small, residential undergraduate universities which offer a four-year curriculum. Students typically have their first two years to decide on their major. The liberal arts education in the USA usually takes the form of a required core curriculum where students must offer certain specific courses or a structure which distributes graduation requirements across the different years. Students major in one field of study during their third and final years of university.

The liberal arts education features extra-curricular activities, such that students can engage in non-academic activities such as sports, student clubs and community

service activities (Grant, 2016, p. 36). This is not to say that non-liberal arts universities neither foster extracurricular activities nor encourage students to undertake community service projects. By describing the liberal education as promoting non-academic activities the author seeks to convey the message that liberal arts colleges in the USA, typically, do not promote specialized professional, vocational or technical training but provides a general education in various fields.

To what extent is Grant's claim that liberal art education is non-vocational true? Mehrens (2006) contends that some liberal arts colleges today offer vocational programs. For example, St. Olaf College (a private liberal arts college in Minnesota USA) has a nursing training program which can be considered a vocational program. From the conflicting views of these authors, it is important to establish that a liberal arts education, as distinguished from a strictly vocational program emphasizes a wide breadth of knowledge. For this reason, a liberal arts education can offer a vocational program and not contradict itself. Also, it is worth noting that liberal arts education is not opposed to professional training as some may believe. Rather, it aims to enhance and enrich professionalism (Mehrens, 2006).

2.7.4 The Purpose of Liberal Arts Education

As previously, discussed, education has a purpose. Although liberal arts education has always emphasized moral character, various prominent philosophers have disputed the purpose and practice of liberal arts education over the years. Aristotle argued that its purpose was to enable the discovery of hidden truths while Socrates maintained that it was a quest of virtue and good living (Agresto, 1999, p.40; Zakaria, 2015, p. 42).

Now, scholars such as Cronon (1998) reasoned that such an instruction aims to produce good citizens who serve the needs of humankind. For instance, Cronon

(1998, p.4) asserts that the recipients of liberal education are keenly aware that the prosperity and wellbeing of the communities to which they belong, depends on them and as a result contribute in making these communities flourish. Cronon's perspective of the purpose of the liberal arts education resonates and agrees with the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu rejects individualism for social prosperity. Ubuntu values "helpfulness, sharing, caring, selflessness and a sense of community" (Khoza, 2012, para.13). Like Cronon's (1998) view that the purpose of the liberal arts is that society should benefit positively from the contributions of the liberally educated, Ubuntu holds that the individuals within a community strive toward the wellbeing and development of the community as a whole, not just the individual.

2.7.5 Strengths of Liberal Arts Education

Cronon (1998) lists the advantages of liberal arts education as the characteristics of the liberally educated individual. These include the ability to listen and hear. The liberally educated can follow the logical reasoning of any argument, identify illogic and listen to the emotions conveyed by every logic presented as well as empathize with the speaker (p. 76-78). Moreover, the liberally educated can read and understand any text including news article or works of art. By so doing they should be able to carry on a conversation with people from diverse educational and professional backgrounds from a corporate president to a child.

Other key strengths include the ability to write and speak persuasively, solve a variety of problems and puzzles, understand how to get things done and practice humility and self-criticism— being able to view situations from different perspectives apart from one's perspective. The distinguishing features of a liberal education are "transferable skills namely: written and oral communication, analysis and synthesis, problem-solving, information and quantitative literacy, reasoning and logic, critical

thinking, citizenship, ethics, social responsibility and global competence” (Godwin, 2015, p.2; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD], 2018).

The liberal arts education promotes critical thinking capabilities- the ability to see things from multiple perspectives, analyze situations carefully and form sound judgments. Pant (2007), maintains that it equips the student with the ability to explain ideas, different opinions, construct logical arguments and defend any conclusions made with facts and logical reasoning (p.174).

The liberal arts also enable an individual to be curious, innovative and solve problems. According to Pant (2007, p. 174), a liberal education permits individuals to ask probing questions and think intelligently through social challenges. Problem-solving requires the contribution of other people, and so teamwork is a crucial skill that the liberal art education nurtures. Through in-class group assignments and group projects, the liberal art education trains the student to develop collaborative team working skills.

As convincing as the strengths mentioned above are, I would agree with Mehrens (2006) that a liberal arts education does not ensure these qualities. “It is simply oriented towards fostering these qualities (Mehrens, 2006, p. 33). Moreover, Entwistle (1997) acknowledges that liberal education has been criticized as elitist, irrelevant to the life of the ordinary person, culturally myopic and authoritarian among other things.

2.7.6 History of Liberal Arts in Africa

Lilford (2012) argues that the practice of specialization in tertiary institutions is alien to Africa. He maintains that specialized higher education was necessary, suitable and specific to imperialists in achieving their objectives which never favored African colonies. Specialized higher education has become irrelevant in Africa. He argues that the current higher educational structure is so narrow that it disregards the humanities, ethics, and social sciences and treats education as “a rare commodity” available to a few. Unfortunately, this has resulted in overspecialization and joblessness in Africa today (p. 2 -3). Lilford (2012) proposed that Africa adopt the liberal arts model in higher education as a viable response to current social needs.

Lilford (2012) reveals that liberal arts education was part of the African traditional culture before colonization. He explains that most pre-colonial communities emphasized a broad, general knowledge in technical, cultural and medical skills while still allowing for specialization (in medicine, music, poetry and art). It was similar to the modern liberal arts college model used in the USA which provides students with a broad education in different fields while still permitting students to specialize in fields of their interest in the junior and senior years of college. Traditionally, education in Africa did not distinguish between fields of study but educated and trained members of the society on a wide range of subjects.

For example, cultural, medical practices combined botany, physiology, theology, psychology, music, dance, and poetry. Having received instruction in all seven subjects above mentioned, the medicine man could perform multiple functions within a society such as a dancer, a musician or a psychologist as and when the need arose. The kind of education that pre-colonial African societies provided for its members which enabled community members to perform several functions is

consistent with Robinson (1979) description of liberal arts. Clearly, the concept of the liberal arts is not new on the continent. Using European teaching models ensured that traditional African liberal arts suffered erosion during decades of colonization to the extent that it was discarded and become non-existent.

Godwin (2015) found about four liberal educational programs in Africa specifically in Kenya, Ghana, Morocco, and Nigeria (this accounts for 2% of all liberal arts programs outside the USA) (p. 3). In Kenya, the University of Nairobi offers liberal arts degrees, but it is not a liberal arts institution. The author also reveals that liberal education in Africa has provided Africans with an exceptional postsecondary education which has fueled economic and social development.

While this may be true, Grant (2016) identifies ten, small liberal arts universities in Africa, most of which are private and non-profit institutions. Of these institutions, only four are members of the Global Liberal Arts Alliance. These four institutions are Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, American University in Cairo, Egypt, American University of Nigeria and Ashesi University in Berekuso, Ghana (Global Liberal Arts Alliance).

Besides membership of this alliance, Grant (2016) emphasizes that despite their small sizes, these liberal arts institutions have impacted the continent through a positive transformation of student lives (p.32). Although her claim may be true, the author does not provide clear evidence as to the aspects of student lives on which the liberal arts seems to have had such an impact. I am of the view that her claims would be stronger if she compared the impact of the liberal arts universities in Africa with rival traditional African universities, which have existed much longer, are usually much larger and well-staffed to support the relevance of the liberal arts in Africa.

2.7.7 Liberal Arts Education in Ghana: A Focus on Ashesi

As established above, the modern liberal arts college is strictly American in curriculum and system. Ashesi University, a small private university in Ghana claims to be a liberal arts university. To what extent is this claim true?

Comparing Ashesi University to the typical liberal arts model used in the United States of America (USA) reveals several similarities and some differences. The USA model is a four-year curriculum which provides students with broad knowledge in different academic divisions (such as social sciences, natural sciences, arts, and the humanities) during the first two years of college. The third and fourth years are then devoted to pursuing a specific major in any field of knowledge. This is usually achieved through a core curriculum or distribution of graduation requirements approach (Grant 2016; Roche, 2010). Like the USA model, Ashesi University offers a four-year curriculum in which students must take certain required courses as part of its core curriculum.

Grant (2016) and Roche (2010) agree that liberal arts colleges tend to be small-sized institutions with small class sizes. Likewise, Ashesi University is a small institution but as to whether its classes are small is debatable. Compared with most universities in Ghana, Ashesi's class sizes would be considered very small. However, Ashesi's class sizes may be larger than those of liberal arts colleges in the USA.

Aside from the curriculum, liberal arts colleges in the USA are known to encourage vibrant extracurricular student activities (Roche, 2010; Grant 2016). Similarly, Ashesi students are engaged in diverse extracurricular activities including student clubs, sports, and community service activities (Grant, 2016). Moreover, as is

consistent with the typical liberal arts model, the dean of students, career services and the office for international exchange play active roles in students' lives.

Unlike the American model, Ashesi students do not receive the same scope of the breadth of exposure to different fields of learning. This is not only because of the limited courses offered in the school but also because these courses are pre-determined for them. All Ashesi students are required to offer such core courses such as calculus, precalculus, statistics, microeconomics, foundations of design and entrepreneurship, written and oral communication, text, and meaning and four leadership courses. Although students have the right to take four free electives (which can be any course offered at Ashesi or elsewhere), they do not have much flexibility in exploring different fields. Moreover, each student must declare their major at the beginning of their second year, but the options for majors are limited to Business Administration; Management Information Systems, Computer Science, Electrical, Mechanical, and Computer Engineering.

Grant (2016) also points out that in the USA model, students are admitted in college even if they are not sure of their major. In contrast, Ashesi students must choose a field of study during the application process regardless of whether they know which field to major in or not. Also, different from most liberal arts colleges in the USA, Ashesi incorporates a leadership seminar series and an honor system. Students take examinations without supervision (Grant, 2016). The honor system is Ashesi's way of incorporating ethics into its educational program.

Ashesi's liberal arts model gives special focus to entrepreneurship and leadership courses. These two elements have been incorporated in response to the demands of the business and leadership environments in Africa as reveal by

Harrington and Saloner (2008). Grant (2016) claims that part of the reason why Ashesi's educational program may differ from that of the typical liberal arts model is because of Africa's specific needs (context) and also having to comply with the requirements of Ghana's National Accreditation Board for authorization. Often, these requirements favor the features of traditional universities in Ghana. For this reason, one might find that Ashesi's educational program does not completely conform to what is considered a liberal arts education in the USA.

Ashesi also incorporates need-based scholarships into its liberal arts model. The need-based financial aid allows brilliant but economically disadvantaged students across Africa to access the excellent education offered by Ashesi University. About 47% of students are on some form of scholarship (Ashesi University, 2017). This is very different from what is found in most private universities in Ghana which are established exclusively for profit and depend entirely on school fees.

From above, Ashesi University features elements of the liberal arts model used in the USA. However, it differs in certain areas such as the emphasis on entrepreneurial and leadership courses adapted to meet the needs of Ghana, and Africa at large. Moreover, the number of majors offered are few compared with typical USA liberal arts universities. Within the Ghanaian context, one can describe Ashesi University as a liberal arts university. However, with regards to the USA, I would classify Ashesi University as a hybrid liberal arts university which gives the liberal arts model an African perspective.

2.7.8 Student Academic Success

Kuh *et al.* (2006), adopting various qualitative frameworks, define academic success broadly in terms of academic achievement, acquisition of certain skill and post-university performance among others. Gibson, Rankin, and York (2015), who sought to define ‘academic success,’ by assessing how this term has been used in academic research using an analytical review of literature, criticize the above definition as too broad.

Interestingly, Gibson *et al.* (2015) revised definition of academic success includes academic achievement, acquisition of certain desired skills, satisfaction with educational experience and post-undergraduate studies performance. In my opinion, these authors agree as to what comprises student academic success although they may have used different conceptual frameworks to arrive at their various definitions. Still, these definitions do not address the issue of broadness. Gibson *et al.* (2015) acknowledge that though academic success can be measured by career success, persistence, satisfaction, and attainment of certain learning goals, they found that grades and GPA were more frequently used to measure academic success.

From the above, there is no specific definition of academic success. The ambiguity of the term academic success permits researchers to measure define and measure it as suits their research objectives. This current research will define academic success in terms of the achievement of a grade point average from 3.5 to 4.0 on a four-point scale because such information is available for analysis compared with any other measure stated above.

2.7.9 Correlation Between Undergraduate Student Performance, Employment and Work Performance

Howard (1986, p. 537), through a study influenced by psychology, claims that higher grades (thus higher academic performance of undergraduates) are related to higher standards of quality job performance by employees. In contrast, Afarian and Kleiner (2003, p. 42), by reviewing and analyzing literature, say most studies have shown that higher grades earned for an undergraduate degree resulted in higher future earnings once employed. Combing the findings of the above authors, it seems logical that since higher grades earned while in university is a strong motivation for employees to perform higher equality work beyond what is expected that they would earn more income.

Nelson (2008), using Pearson's Product Moment correlation, found a moderate relationship between grade point average and workplace readiness skills. As such, the study claims that undergraduate students with higher GPA's tend to have more workplace skills than those who have lower GPA's.

2.8 Factors That Determine Students Academic Success in Universities in General

Literature provides extensive quantitative research with regards to student academic success. Regarding the use of grade point average as an instrument for measuring academic success, Stupnisky *et al.* (2008), using a cross-lag structural equation model, found perceived academic control among first-year college students to have a more positive impact on academic performance than their critical thinking disposition (the willingness to apply essential thinking abilities). The higher students perceived their control over academics, the better they performed. In contrast, Higbee (2003, 1,5) claims that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are vital to academic achievement in college. This implies that rote memorization, which is a

replication of established information, impedes high academic performance in a rigorous educational setting.

Moreover, using an Ordinary Least Squares model, Dayioğlu, and TÜRÜT-AŞIK, (2007) found that females in public universities had higher cumulative grade point averages (GPA) than males (p. 268). Similar to Dayioğlu, and TÜRÜT-AŞIK, (2007) findings, Barrow, Reilly, and Woodfield (2009, p. 684), using a pooled regression model, found that females outperformed males academically with higher grade point averages. However, Clifton et al. (2008) found little differences between males and females regarding academic achievements.

Not just gender, but age seems to play a role in student academic performance. Using multivariate regressions models, age was found to have a significant impact on the GPA of female students than male students (Clifton, Perry, Peter & Roberts, 2008, p. 696).

In contrast, Issahaku (2017), who researched factors influencing undergraduate student performance (measured by GPA) in Ghanaian public universities, using correlational analysis, found no significant relationship between age and student grade point average for students at the University of Ghana.

Additionally, Monks and Schmidt (2010) found that class size has a negative impact on student course grade, using a multivariate econometric model. Along a similar line of thought, Majid et al (2014), in their study to discover students' perspectives on factors affecting their academic performance (at the University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and University of Developmental Studies) found a significant relationship between the provision of infrastructure and student academic performance.

Furthermore, when a similar research was conducted only at the University of Ghana, Issahaku (2017, p. 263) found that class attendance and participation, not drinking alcohol, living off campus and time spent studying strongly predict student GPA. Even so, Bono (2011, p.24) using a hierarchical multiple regression model where the outcome variables of interest were academic performance (as measured by GPA), and overall university satisfaction discovered that individual conscientiousness, level of academic engagement and SAT scores significantly affect academic performance, holding constant all other variables.

However, the literature on the impact of classroom seating location on academic performance is inconsistent. Benedict and Hoag (2004), who researched the relationship between students' seating preferences and their academic performance found that students who sat at the front of an economics class had a higher chance of making good grades than those who did not. In like manner, Armstrong and Cheng (2007) researched the correlation between student performance and seating location in different parts of a large biology class using exam score as the outcome variable. The researchers found a weak relationship between student performance and seat location. Also, in the same areas of interest, Kalinowski and Taper (2007) researched second-year students in a biology class. They set out to discover the impact of seating location on the exam grades and student perceptions using experimentation and multiple regression (where exam score was the outcome variable). They reported that students who sat in front seats had higher GPA's than students who sat in back seats.

In their research to determine the effect of social media usage on academic performance, Dzandza and Kolan (2018) found that about 38% of students at the University of Ghana were addicted to social media which negatively affected their academic performance.

The literature also shows that undergraduate academic performance can be predicted for just one course. Fang and Huang (2013), used a set of multivariate linear regressions to predict the academic performance of students in an Engineering Dynamics course. Final exam score was the outcome variable, and predictor variables included cumulative GPA and the grades earned in four prerequisite courses such as physics and Calculus 1. Also, Bagheri, Kara, and Tolin (2011, p. 27) use an Ordered Logit regression model to determine factors that affect the success of students in the principles of economics classes. The study concluded that gender, SAT score, number of classes missed and interest in the course were among the variables which were statistically significant in determining learning and success in the course.

Research has also shown that the amount of time spent studying, study habits and personal characteristics such as effort, motivation, and determination also influences academic performances (Borg et al., 1989; Cooper & Geiger, 1995; Nonis & Hudson, 2010). Narrowing in on the factor of time, Alsalem, Alamodi, & Hazazi (2017, p. 3042), using a cross-sectional study on time management, found that undergraduate students, who practiced proper time management, generally performed better academically. However, information on effort, motivation, and determination are not often available as they are intangible and therefore difficult to measure.

Based on the above literature, researchers typically employ quantitative regression models in measuring academic achievement using grade point average as the outcome variable. Literature from qualitative research on factors which influence student academic performance is limited. Also, existing literature on undergraduate student success factors in Ghana have typically focused more on public universities such as the University of Developmental Studies than private owned universities.

2.8.1 Factors Underlying Success in The Liberal Arts University

According to Blaich et al. (2008), very little research has been conducted to assess the impact of liberal arts education on student learning outcomes. Thus, they set out to discover how institutional ethos, student interactions with fellow students and faculty in a supportive environment predict outcomes of liberal education. In their research, the authors used age, parent's education, household income, high school GPA and dichotomous variables such as race and gender among others. The primary variable of interest for the analysis was 'liberal arts experience.' The authors measured liberal arts outcomes using several quantitative instruments such as the Defining Issues Test to measure moral reasoning and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. As a result, Blaich et al. (2008) found that students' liberal arts experience positively affected intercultural effectiveness, curiosity, student well-being, and student leadership. The results show that liberal arts experience had no significant impact on moral reasoning, effective reasoning and problem solving, well-being and leadership.

Moreover, in determining factors associated with the academic success of college students in a liberal university in Canada, Dixon et al. (2008) sampled 231 students. The researchers employ three success measures: cumulative grade point average, personal success (having each participant rate themselves with regards the goals of the school and the progress they had made in achieving those goals) and total success (a combination of grade point average and personal success). The results show that the best predictors of GPA were the ability to manage time, ownership of a personal computer, healthy diet, waking up early, individual spirituality and less time spent sleeping.

2.8.2 Literature Gap

From the review of literature, it became obvious that little research has been done on factors affecting the academic achievement of students in liberal arts universities in Ghana. Studies which have been conducted on factors which significantly impact the academic success of students in Ghana tended to focus on public universities including the University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

Also, the literature is skewed towards the use of quantitative methods in identifying and analyzing significant factors influencing student academic performance. The qualitative method is less used in this respect.

Per my research, I discovered that literature on the relationship between academic performance and having employable skills is scarce. Further studies on this topic is necessary to enable educators to understand the role they could play towards improving employee's performance in terms of curriculum design.

2.8.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

The higher education sector in Africa, and Ghana specifically, face challenges of access, quality, lack of economic prospects and inability to access university impact on student achievement. One such impact of university education is employability in the job market. Ashesi University provides a unique post-secondary education to students across the African continent which is more liberal arts oriented.

A major impact of Ashesi University education is the high employment rate of its graduates in the Ghanaian job market. It is important, therefore, to understand what factors significantly impact its students' academic performance and how relevant its curriculum is to the workplace.

Since the majority of the literature used quantitative rather than qualitative means to identify factors which strongly influence student academic performance, the current research will employ a mixed method approach. The purpose of the mixed method is to provide a balanced assessment of student success factors in private, liberal arts-oriented university (Ashesi University). The mixed method is used to mitigate the weakness of using the quantitative and qualitative methods independently. Also, it allows the views of participants to be reflected in the research, by its design, which was lacking in most of the studies above.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This study sought to identify factors which significantly affect student academic performance at Ashesi University, a leading Liberal Arts university in Berekuso, Ghana. It also sought to rank these factors in order of relevance and to recommend strategies which will raise the general success level of students in Ashesi.

Since Ashesi University graduates do well in the job market and since its officials do not sufficiently know which aspects of its liberal arts model promote employment success, this research is important for student performance improvement as well as serves as a reference for other universities by way of improving their graduate employability rates. In essence, the study identified the factors which significantly influence variations in student GPA in a significant way.

The meaning of academic success is ambiguous. Academic success is defined and measured differently by researchers. Among the definitions include job attainment rates, career success, acquisition of skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and academic achievement. Academic achievement has typically been measured by grades or GPA (Gibson, Rankin & York, 2015). Gibson et al. (2015, p.8) emphasize that GPA is the “top measurement of academic success accounting for 54.8%” while the degree of critical thinking and completion rate come second with 19.4% of overall usage.

This study employed a mixed method research approach. This approach is a way of “collecting, analyzing and interpreting both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies” which examine the same event (Leech, 2009, p. 265). The mixed method can serve as a method or a methodology which allows the

researcher to confirm findings and gain a full understanding of results from the qualitative aspect of mixed methods.

Johnston and Vanderstoep (2009) state that qualitative research emphasizes the meaning of people's experience (p. 165). Similarly, Parahoo (2014, p. 61) describes it as an "umbrella term" for the various ways by which researchers try to understand people's experiences, beliefs, motivations, intentions, and behavior. This definition provides a complete description of qualitative research. The qualitative research focuses on people and the importance of their experiences in society. In contrast, quantitative research is a "numerical assignment to phenomena" and statistical analysis (Hughes & Murray, 2008; Johnson & Vanderstoep, 2009, p.7).

The mixed method research, therefore, involves gathering and analyzing closed-ended and open-ended data. The mixed method was chosen for this research to enable the researcher to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data to achieve research objectives. This approach also provided detailed information on research findings and confirmed quantitative findings with qualitative results by focusing on students' lived experiences in Ashesi. This approach also enabled the researcher to incorporate students' perspectives on how the liberal arts model affects their level of achievement aside intellectual ability and motivation.

3.2 Research Design

Petre and Rugg (2007, p. 60) reveal that a good research design helps the researcher to get more and better results with the same effort input used on a bad design. A research design is described as a blueprint which allows the researcher to have maximum control over anything which could interfere with the validity of the results (Burns, Gray & Grove, 2012, p. 214). Similarly, Dulock (1993, p. 154),

describes a research design as a blueprint or a plan designed to provide answers to research questions. Along the same train of thought, Wisker (2009) explains that research design is “the overall plan of action which will enable you to ask your research questions or test hypotheses” (p.89). Therefore, a research design is a roadmap that shows who, where, when and how raw data is gathered and processed to provide information.

The current research took a sequential transformative design which has two phases of data collection. It allowed the researcher to decide the order of data collection. The results of both aspects of research were integrated during the interpretation stage. The current research administered a questionnaire to participants and followed up with interviews based on the findings of the questionnaire to explore certain responses in detail. The results of the two phases were combined in the analysis of outcomes. It is also a descriptive in design. According to FluidSurveys Team (2014), descriptive research is one which employs the bulk of online surveying. It is designed and structured such that results may be statistically inferred on a population. This was an appropriate research design for the current study because it allowed the researcher to achieve research objectives by answering the research questions related to significant factors affecting student academic performance at Ashesi University.

3.3 Research Scope

The study population is “the universe of people to which the study could be generalized” or the “group from which the sample is drawn” (Johnson & VanderStoep, 2009, p.26; Studenmund, 2017, p. 139). The population for this study was all liberal arts universities in Ghana. Since Ashesi is the only liberal arts university in Ghana, it was automatically the population for this study.

3.3.1 Study Area

The location for this study was Ashesi University established in Berekuso, in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

3.4.1 Sampling Method

The sampling techniques used were purposive and random sampling. According to Johnson and VanderStoep (2009, p. 187), purposeful samples consist of participants with specific qualities and are often used to include equal representation of groups. This method allowed the researcher to obtain the views of the stakeholders in academics (students). Also, by using the random technique, each student currently on campus or alum had an equal chance of participation.

3.4.2 Sampling Size

A sample is “the subset of people from the population, who will take part in the current study” (Johnson & VanderStoep, 2009, p. 26). The sample for this research included current Ashesi students and alumni. The total number of current Ashesi students was 1005 students. The main sub-populations within the student body were the various graduating classes (2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022) and majors (business administration, computer science, management information systems, computer engineering, electrical engineering, and mechanical engineering). There were 1,200 Ashesi alumni. In total, the population size was 2,205.

In determining the appropriate sample size for this research, a confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 8% and a population of 2,205 was used. The recommended sample size for the current research from SurveyMonkey was 141. About 250 questionnaires were sent out to ensure that 141 respondents from the various clusters within the population, mentioned above, completed it. However, 132

completed questionnaires were submitted. The 132 respondents included current students and alumni in various majors and varying grade point averages on the four-point scale. The questionnaire was randomly sent out to more about 250 students and alumni in groups and individuals through online means such as email and WhatsApp. The completion of the questionnaire by respondents was entirely optional.

Also, eight additional students and alumni were further interviewed to gain a better understanding of the results of the questionnaire. The interview was unstructured to enable the researcher to probe further into a comment made by the interviewee. Among the eight interviewees were three current students of the class of 2019 and five Ashesi alumni who graduated with first class honors.

3. 5 Data Collection

Data collection instruments were a questionnaire and an audio recording. The questionnaire was administered via the internet. An online questionnaire was used because it is an advanced and robust self-reporting technique which is user-friendly in terms of construction and analysis of information. It was an efficient method which saved time and resources.

3.6 Data Preparation, Collation and Processing

With regards to a pilot test, the instrument of data collection is tested on a different sample before the actual research project begins to prevent instrumentation problems (Johnson & VanderStoep, 2009, p. 149). For the current study, an initial pilot test for the questionnaire was conducted with three participants to determine the appropriate length, structural issues and issues related to double-barreled or leading questions. Based on the feedback of the initial pilot test, modifications were made to the questionnaire.

A second pilot test was conducted with two other participants to determine whether participants understood the questions in the questionnaire the way the researcher intended to communicate them. Feedback from these participants was also taken into consideration for the final draft of the questionnaire. Actual data collected by questionnaire was cleaned and processed using an excel spreadsheet.

With regards to the interviews conducted, data was collected through audio recording. This data was then transcribed into a Microsoft word document for analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through theme and pattern identification and coding of responses. Content analysis was employed in analyzing all data gathered. According to Haggarty (1996), content analysis enables a researcher to synthesis qualitative data systematically and reliably such that generalizations can be made. Descriptive statistics were presented in graphs and charts to support research findings. The results were interpreted through deduction.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Although validity and reliability have become part of quantitative research, Noble and Smith (2015) state that there are ongoing debates about the validity and reliability of qualitative research since it is so subjective. This research ensured reliability by administering the same questionnaire to each participant to avoid inconsistencies in measurement. Also, reliability was ensured using explicit instructions and explanations of how participants were expected to answer the questionnaire. The use of a pilot test was to ensure validity in terms of the relevance of research before the actual administration of the questionnaire to participants. The

pilot test was to ensure among other things that participants clearly understood the objective of the research as well as what information the research sought from them.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The researcher submitted the questionnaire and interview questions to the Ashesi University Human Subject Review Committee for approval before it was administered. The researcher obtained informed consent from participants before conducting interviews. For participants to whom the questionnaire was applied, the questionnaire clearly assured them that their identities were kept strictly confidential. It was also communicated that participating in the research was optional and as such, participants were at liberty to withdraw from this research at any point in time. Research findings were made accessible to participants and the entire Ashesi community on the Ashesi University online repository and in the form of a printed and bound book in the Ashesi library.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses findings in line with the objectives of the current research. Data was gathered primarily using a questionnaire and unstructured interviews. Data was processed in relation to the problem of Ashesi University officials not fully understanding from students' viewpoint, which factors significantly impact student performance, and ultimately their performance in the job market.

The main research questions which influenced the data collected and the analysis of this data are: (i) Which factors significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students of Ashesi students? (ii) What are student views on why a student may not obtain a high CGPA? (iii) What is the ranking of significant factors impacting student academic performance?

4.2. 1 Demographics

What is your current academic level in Ashesi University?

132 responses

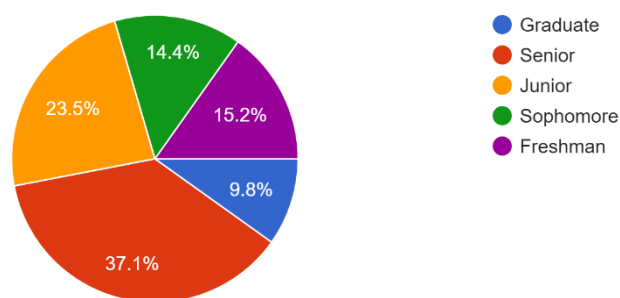


Figure 1. Distribution rate of respondents by academic level

From Figure 1 above, of the total number of respondents for this research, 9.8% were graduates (alumni), 37.1% seniors (4th year), 23.5% juniors (third year), 14.4% sophomores (second year), and 15.2% were freshmen (first-year) students of

Ashesi University. As such, it is established that current students and graduates were represented in this research.

What is/was your academic major?

132 responses

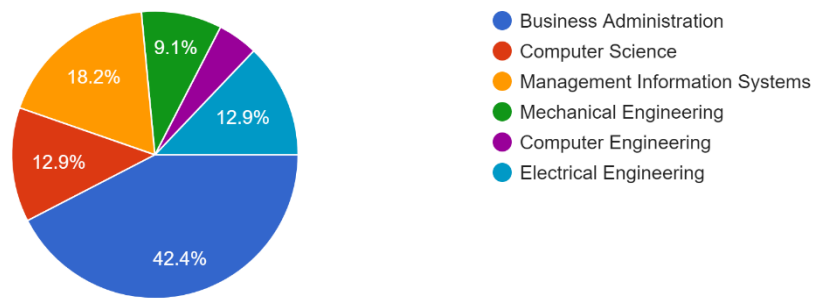


Figure 2. Distribution rate of research respondents by academic major

Figure 2 above depicts the distribution rate of research respondents by academic major. It shows that 42.4% of the respondents were business administration students, 12.9% computer science students, 18.2% management information systems students, 9.1% mechanical engineering students, 4.5% computer engineering students and 12.9% electrical engineering students. Thus, Figure 2 shows that students from all the various academic majors participated in the current research.

What is/was your scholarship status in Ashesi University ?

132 responses

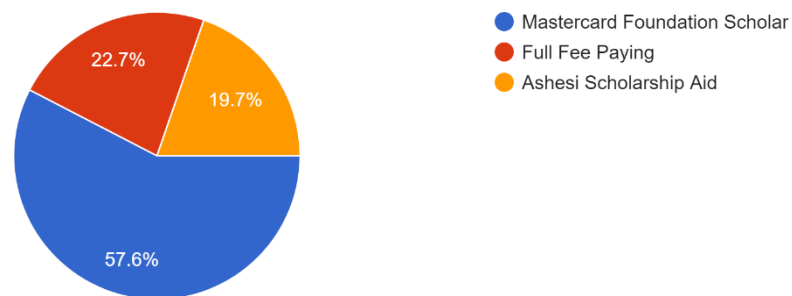


Figure 3. Distribution of research respondents by scholarship scheme

Figure 3 above illustrates that 57.6% of respondents were on MasterCard Foundation Scholarship, 22.7% were full fee-paying students and 19.7% were on the Ashesi Scholarship Aid. Figure 3 provides graphical evidence that students on various scholarship schemes on the Ashesi University campus participated in the current student.

What is your gender?

132 responses

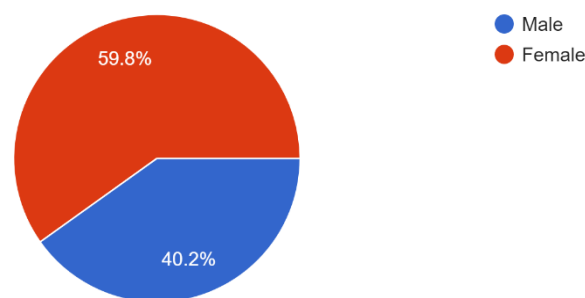


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by gender

According to Figure 4 above, 59.8% of the participants were female, and 40.2% were male. The distribution was decided by the respondents' choice to participate in this research. Figure 4 illustrates that more females than males

participated in this research. However, the findings of the current study are still representative of both genders of participants.

4.3 Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis took the form of theme identification of responses. The coding of themes was based on repeated or similar ideas and topics raised by various respondents in answering research questions. In presenting the research results in an organized and more meaningful way, data was analyzed by each research objective of the current study.

Research Objective One and Research Objective Two

1. *To identify factors which significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students*
2. *To find out the rating of factors significantly impacting student academic performance as well as the consistency of these rating with literature*

Table 1

Top Factors Impacting Student Academic Performance

Research Objective	Descriptive Codes
To identify factors which significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students.	Lecturers, Peer Support, Ashesi Learning Resources Team Work Spirituality Time Management

Note: Descriptive Codes refer to significant themes identified from responses regarding the top factors which had a substantial impact on their academic performance

Lecturers

From Table 1 above, it became evident that most respondents view lectures as playing a significant role in student academic performance in Ashesi. Respondents revealed that the teaching style of the lecturer, support from the lecturer and the general attitude of a lecturer had a strong impact on their academic performance. For instance, with regards to the attitude of lecturers, Respondent 18, 38 and 41 identified, *“the availability of the lecturer [beyond the classroom],” “greedy lectures who set very [hard] questions that did not reflect the whole aspect of the material covered,”* and *“Attitude of lecturers”* strongly impacted their academic performance. Moreover, during follow up interviews, Interviewee two admitted that *“Those [lecturers] who are rigid, even meeting time [with them] you are scared to meet them.”* The above responses suggested that the attitude and personality of lectures had a substantial impact on student academic performance. If a lecturer is available and approachable, it is easier for students to seek extra academic help beyond what is taught in the classroom.

Along the same vein, Respondent one, five and 38 identified *“teaching skills,” “lecturer performance and teachings”* and *“lecturers who don’t know how to explain courses”* as having a strong impact on their academic performance. Moreover, Interviewee two also stated that *“students have changed majors because of some lecturers’ style of teaching. Lecturers can build or break an institution.”*

Also, support from faculty beyond the classroom was relevant to student academic performance. Respondents one, eight, 13, 21, 35, 40 and 55 identified *“Inadequate assistance outside class,” “support from faculty and FI’s, Assistance from lecturers”* *“frequent visits to lecturers,” “support from lectures and FI’s [Faculty Interns],”*

“office hours with faculty members” and “support from teachers and friends” as having a strong influence on the student’s performance.

Therefore, the results show that a lecturer is a significant factor in an Ashesi student’s academic performance. The lecturer can have either a positive or negative impact on how a student performance by his or her general attitude and availability. A lecturer’s willingness to provide support for students beyond teaching in class through tutoring of a student during office hours can help boost a student’s performance.

Peer Support

Student support was also found to be very important to student academic performance. When asked to identify top factors which had a strong impact on their academic, respondents identified, *“friends,” “course mates,” “group studies,” “support from friends,” “feeling supported by lectures or students.”* As such students found peer support to be a vital factor in their academic performance. Apart from getting academic support from lecturers, students themselves provided academic help to each other. For this reason, support from other students plays a crucial role in improving student performance.

Ashesi Learning Resources

Ashesi’s learning resources was another theme that this study identified as a strong influencing factor on student performance. Such resources identified included the availability of internet services to enable online research, textbooks, and PowerPoint slides. Also, lectures were found to be very important for student learning and performance. Most respondents identified lecture periods and attending classes as crucial factors in their academic performance. For instance, Interviewee One said,

“One of the major things which works well for me is that if I understand the topic in class, I do not struggle to understand the topic outside of class. I find it hard to read.”

Similarly, Interviewee two also said, *“I make sure I go to class because that is where I learn. I value my class time.”* As shown above, some of the students learn best in the classroom which implies that without this learning resources, the performance of some students is low. Consistent with the findings of Issahaku (2017), this research found that attending lectures is a strong predictor of student academic performance.

Team Work

Equally important is the role of team or group work in the academic performance of students Ashesi students. Various respondents identified teamwork as having a strong impact on student academic performance. Follow up interviews revealed that teamwork could have a positive or negative impact on a student's academic performance depending on the attributes of the team such as dedication and punctuality to the academic task and excellent execution of this task. According to Interviewee one, *“Group work makes you lose grades. They make your grades go bad.”* The ability of students to engage in teamwork through collaboration with diverse groups of people is a core learning goal of Ashesi. Teamwork is strongly emphasized by the Ashesi liberal art model. Therefore, teamwork plays a significant role in each student achievement because excelling requires the student to acquire the soft skill of working with diverse groups of students to complete assigned tasks and projects.

Spirituality

Did/does your spirituality have any influence on your academic performance?

132 responses

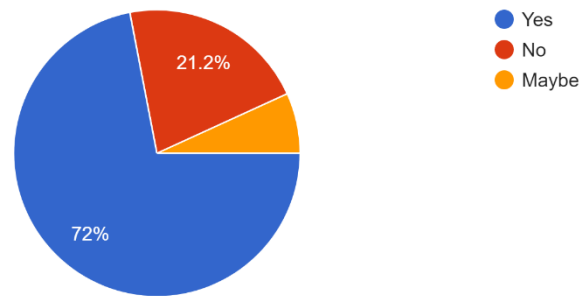


Figure 5. Impact of spirituality on academic performance

Furthermore, respondents identified spirituality as having a substantial impact on student academic performance. Spirituality played a significant role in student academic achievement because it impacted the amount of effort put into academic work. Figure 5 depicts that 72% of respondents identified their spirituality (the belief and worship of a Sovereign God) as having a significant impact on their academic performance. In contrast, 21.2% did not think their spirituality had any important influence on their academic performance. However, 6.8% of respondents were undecided about the impact of spirituality on their academic performance.

Follow up interviewees revealed that the impact of spirituality on student success is ambiguous. Interviewee two explained, “*A believer puts in his best [effort into his academics] and believes that God will do the rest and it works for him. Also, another believer believes that God will help him in his academics [regardless of the amount of effort invested in his or her studies] Therefore, he or she does not put in much effort, which may result in poor performance sometimes.*” As such, spirituality affects

academic performance because it influences the amount of individual effort and the level engagement of a student with his or studies. Spirituality operates positively or negative on student academic performance.

High School Grade Point Average

In your view, how relevant is your high school GPA is as a determinant of academic performance as measured by cumulative GPA in Ashesi?

132 responses

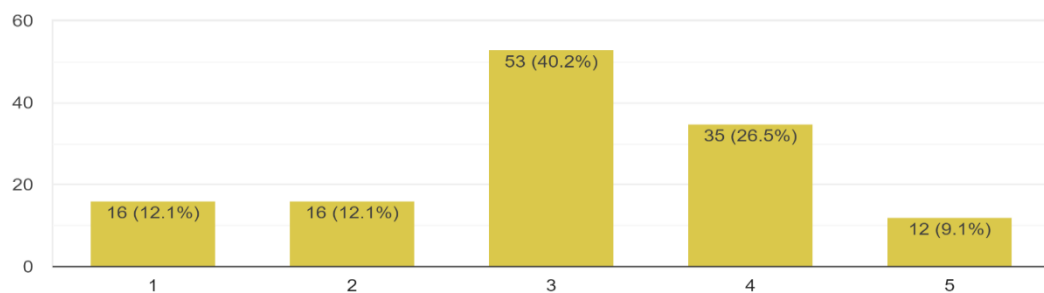


Figure 6. Relevance of high school GPA to academic performance in Ashesi

On a linear scale of one to five where one, two, three, four and five represented ‘not relevant’, ‘somewhat relevant’, ‘moderately relevant’, ‘relevant’ and ‘very relevant’ respectively, 12.1% ranked high school GPA as somewhat relevant, 40.2% said it was moderately relevant, 26.5% said it was relevant, and 9.1% ranked it as very relevant to academic performance at Ashesi University. Figure 6 reveals that respondents did not find high school performance very relevant to the academic performance at Ashesi University. As in the case of Blaich et al. (2008), there is little indication that high school performance has a significant impact on university performance. Also, through the explanations provided by respondents for this question, various themes were identified as seen below:

Table 2

The Relevance of High School GPA to Academic Performance at Ashesi University

High School GPA	Descriptive Codes
Themes identified under why high school GPA may be relevant to academic performance in Ashesi	Motivation Effort Different Context

Note: Descriptive codes refer to the various themes identified within the explanations of the relevance of high school performance to academic performance in Ashesi. Descriptive codes are in no specific order.

Motivation

Respondents who said high school GPA had an impact on their academic performance in Ashesi revealed that their high school performance influenced their academic performance in Ashesi because their high school grades served as a source of motivation to continue performing well in the university.

Moreover, respondents further explained that because they had demonstrated academic prowess in high school, they felt it was expected of them to perform no less in university. As such, they were motivated to get strong grades in Ashesi. For instance, when asked to elaborate on the impact of high school GPA on their academic performance in Ashesi, Respondent six said, *“Yes, it was a very good motive for me to stand out and perform excellently at [Ashesi] university. I had to carry on the zeal, hard work and positive vibe in performing well.”* Respondent 14 also said, *“Yes. This is because we mostly continue as we started. That is, if you performed well in high school, it means you are academically good and are likely to continue the same way; the opposite for poor performance is true.”*

Similarly, Respondent 19 said, *“Yes, knowing that I have always been known to do well in school pushed me to work hard and maintain a good GPA.”* In like manner, Respondent 22 explained, *“When we perform very well in high school, people have higher expectations from you to excel, and this pushes you to work harder. This ultimately leads to higher grades.”* Also, Respondent 54 also said, *“I think high school performance affects university performance. This is because people have some expectations for us, so we try to work towards those expectations.”* Therefore, secondary school performance was found to have a level of impact on students’ academic achievement since it served as a motivating factor for students to perform well and live up to the expectations of academic excellence.

According to Cooper and Geiger (1995), student motivation is known to have a significant impact on academic performance. The type and degree of this relationship derive from the expectancy theory and the needs theory. The expectancy theory refers to how a student’s actions will yield a specific desirable future result. It says that motivating students to invest more effort into their academic performance depends on the kind of future benefits they associate with their performance. Perceived future benefits tend to result in higher motivation and increased effort in studies resulting in higher academic success.

On the other hand, the needs theory explicated by McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell (1953), (as cited by Cooper and Geiger, 1995) says that students will invest more effort into their academics which results in higher performance because they are motivated by intrinsic needs such as achievement. The findings of this research with regards to motivation tend to support the needs theory. It is apparent from above that respondents felt the need to meet high academic

performance expectations which served at as an intrinsic motivation to attain high academic performance which translates to high GPA's.

Individual Effort

Equally significant was the impact of individual effort in determining academic performance. It is evident in the explanations offered by various respondents of the questionnaire. Respondent 33 said, *"Yes... a good high school GPA is a sign of intelligence. However, if the student does not work hard enough, he or she will flop because the university is a different playing field."* Along the same line of thought, Respondent 55 revealed, *".... High school GPA may [or may not] affect your university GPA. In my case [experience], I do not think I will associate my performance here [in Ashesi] with my performance in high school. I attribute my performance here with my own hard work."* From the above statements, it is clear that respondents view high school scores as having a certain level of impact on their academic success at Ashesi University. Respondents emphasized the importance of hard work which implies the application of student effort. It also means that past academic performance is not enough to guarantee academic excellence at Ashesi University. The finding is consistent with that of Borg et al. (1989), Cooper & Geiger (1995) and Nonis and Hudson (2010). The researchers mentioned above found that individual effort, although not measurable, impacts students' academic performance. Similarly, the above analysis indicates that individual student effort plays a significant role in determining student's academic performance and ultimately, their grade point averages.

Different Context

Not just high school scores, but respondents revealed that context played a significant role in student performance in Ashesi. They explained that the environment and educational system (the liberal arts educational system) in Ashesi is entirely different from what existed in their various high schools. Respondent 10 explained, “... *some international students have different educational systems in their own country which means when you come to Ashesi, you start from zero. Some [students] do science courses in high school, but when they come to Ashesi, they offer business courses, some [students] come from francophone countries. All these factors play a role in your performance in Ashesi.*” Respondent 39 also said, “*Partly true. Some of such students are now struggling here [in Ashesi]. I think the environment and the conditions of learning matter more than who you were in high school. Some of us worked on our own to make it through high school. Here at Ashesi, there’s so much distraction that you cannot learn on your own.*”

Given these points, respondents felt that different educational backgrounds and educational systems together with the difference in environment and curriculum in Ashesi has a more significant impact on how students perform. As discussed in the literature review, the liberal arts education system is new in Ghana and Africa at large. It requires students to exercise critical thinking and frowns on rote memorization (an unfortunate and common practice in some educational systems across the continent). The liberal art model used by Ashesi demands more of the student and engages the student beyond the expectations of high school. It calls upon the student to be more ethical socially and academically; to be an excellent communicator and to employ technology effectively among other things. As such, it means that adaptation to the environment and academic rigor is vital to academic

success. Those who do not adapt well to the new environment may struggle to maintain excellent academic performance.

Also, even though 12.1% of respondents found no significant impact of high school grades on their scores in Ashesi, they also indicated that the different academic system in Ashesi explains student academic performance. For instance, Respondent 16 said, *“I do not think high school GPA influences academic performance [in Ashesi University]. This is because there is quite a gap between the content taught in high school and that of the university. Brilliant students in high school have been known to falter in university. Here in Ashesi especially, the workload is quite strenuous for freshmen who are not used to a rigorous approach to teaching.”* Also, Respondent 17 said, *“No, Ashesi system is different because it teaches how to come up with solutions on your own.”* In a similar vein, Respondent 18 said, *“I do not think so because Ashesi is a totally different academic experience from the high school one.”*

Moreover, Respondent 57 explained, *“Not really. I have always been an ‘A’ student in high school. I was a super A student. I had a [GPA of] 3.87 and my lowest semester GPA was 3.75. In Ashesi, I’m struggling even to maintain a 3.0 GPA though I began with a 3.75. I think the university is way different from high school at least for my country The Gambia. University [education] requires you to put more efforts into studying and seeking help during office hours and from your peers. To me, university GPA is not about how smart you are but how strategic and hardworking you are.”*

All sides considered it is evident that the rigor of the educational system of Ashesi (which is liberally oriented) and the ability to adapt quickly to the system plays a vital role in the performance of her students. Respondents bring to light the occurrence of a reverse performance where good students, by high school standards,

struggle to replicate those same grades in Ashesi University primarily. This is because the academic system does not “spoon feed” students but pushes them to develop various soft skills necessary for success in the university and beyond. Thus, the liberal arts system in Ashesi plays a vital role in students’ academic performance in terms of how well students perform in school and by extension in the job market.

The Opportunity to Sleep

How relevant is the opportunity to sleep to your academic performance?

132 responses

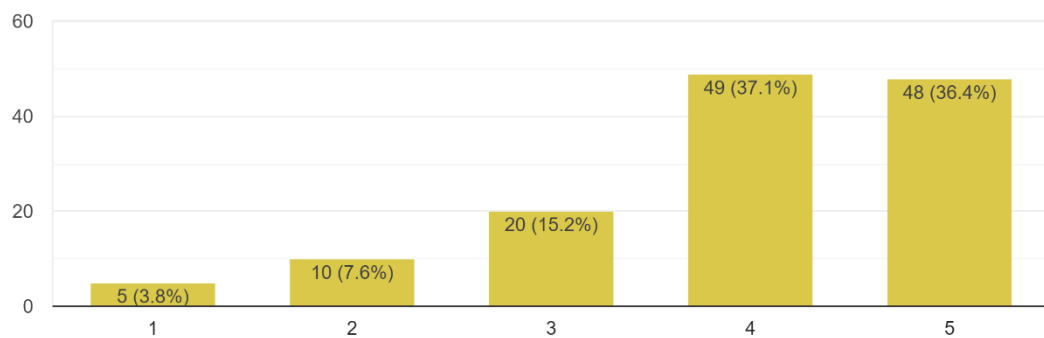


Figure 7. The relevance of sleep to academic performance in Ashesi

The study shows that the average amount of sleep that respondents had per week was 30.86 hours. Respondents identified the opportunity to sleep as very significant to their academic performance. From Figure 7 above, most respondents rated sleep as a 4 or 5, indicating relevance to their academic performance. Thus, as a factor of academic achievement in Ashesi, the opportunity to sleep is very significant with a high ranking of five indicating its relevance.

Gender

Some studies show that one's gender impacts how well they perform academically. How relevant is/was your...d) academically in Ashesi University?

132 responses

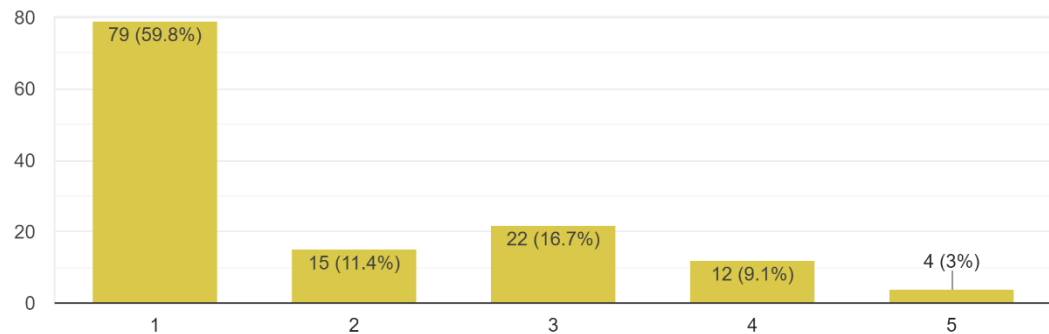


Figure 8. Relevance of gender to academic performance in Ashesi

Figure 8 shows that 59.8% of respondents rated gender ‘not relevant’ while 3% ranked it as very relevant (five) to academic performance on a linear scale of one to five. Figure 8 illustrates that gender was insignificant in terms of impact on students’ performance at Ashesi University.

According to the literature, Dayioğlu, and Türüt-Aşık, (2007) Barrow, Reilly, and Woodfield (2009) found that undergraduate female students had higher GPA's than males, suggesting that gender played a role in one’s academic achievement. In contrast, Clifton et al. (2008) found no significant differences between the academic performance of male and female undergraduate students. In like manner, the current research found the impact of gender to be irrelevant to student academic achievement and success.

Scholarship Status

How relevant is/ was your scholarship status (whether you are full fee paying, on Ashesi scholarship or Mas...mic performance as measured by GPA?

132 responses

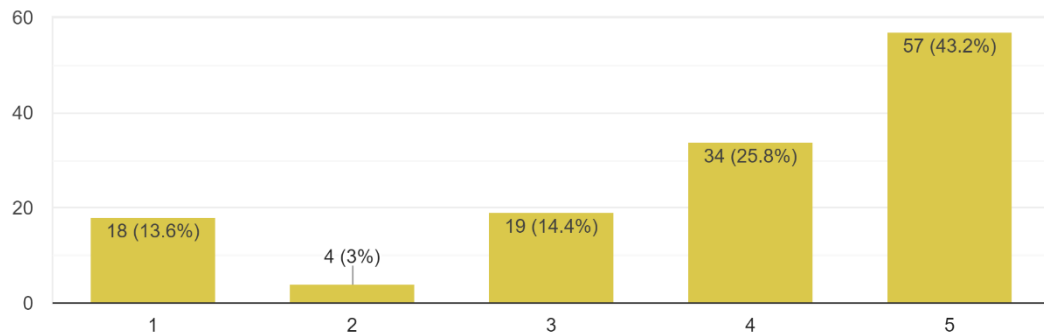


Figure 9. Relevance of scholarship status to academic performance

Figure 9 above depicts that most respondents (43.2%) rated scholarship status in Ashesi (Full Fee Paying, MasterCard Scholarship, Ashesi Financial Aid) as a five (the highest rating on the five-point Likert scale). This rating means that the scholarship status of an Ashesi student (especially those on full scholarship) has a substantial impact on their academic performance. Among the explanations provided for the above rating, three main reasons recurred. These were: psychological effect, maintaining scholarship and the value of tuition paid.

The review of the literature mentioned Ashesi's incorporation of need-based scholarships into its liberal arts model. The purpose of the need-based scholarship is to enable brilliant but financial disadvantaged students across the African continent to experience and benefit from its high-quality post-secondary education. With attention to the scholarship factor, the researcher realized that it was the psychological effect of the scholarship which had a significant impact on students' academic performance.

By way of illustration, Respondent five stated, *“I didn't have to think about fees and other college costs. I was well fed and had [all my] other needs being met so that I could focus on my studies.”* Likewise, Respondent eight said, *“It helped me concentrate on my education, and I worried not for my fees.”*

Similarly, Respondent 10 said, *“Having a full scholarship made me study at ease without thinking much outside academic work.”* Moreover, Respondent 19, 22 and 42 each respectively said, *“As a MasterCard student, I was able to concentrate on my studies. I was not worried about school fees, meal and books”, “The scholarship and the opportunities with which it comes, give me a peace of mind. Also, it encourages me to work harder”* and *“Being on scholarship relieved me of the pressure of thinking about how my parents will pay my fees every semester.”* *“I had the peace of mind to study as well as work on my business projects. Due to the scholarship, all I needed to do every semester is to pick my bag and go to school.”*

Given these points, one realizes that the significance of the scholarship factor lies in improving the mental stability of students. It served as an enabler which increased student ability to focus on their academics and excel. It neutralizes the effect of certain distractions such as worry over tuition and feeding, thus allowing the student to have the peace of mind necessary to devote their full attention to their academics. As such, the mental stability provided from being on a scholarship eases psychological burdens and allows the student to work toward a strong grade point average.

Apart from the psychological effect, being able to maintain the scholarship provided a strong incentive to produce a strong academic performance. Although Ashesi offers need-based scholarships, a demonstration of academic excellence also

determines whether a student receives the scholarship award. As such, strong academic performance evidenced by a strong GPA is necessary to maintain the scholarship. Therefore, respondents shared that their academic achievement is linked with the scholarship award. As such, they worked hard to continue to benefit from the scholarship by maintaining strong grades. For instance, Respondent six said, *“I had to maintain good academic results and perform excellently to keep the benefit as a scholar.”* For the very same reason, Respondent nine, 13 and 14 stated respectively, *“I didn't want to lose my scholarship, so I put in more effort”*, *“As a scholar you are supposed to push hard and be the best you can to not lose your scholarship”* and *“Other than the scholarship I have, I would not be in Ashesi now, so I work very hard to meet the cutoff and keep my scholarship.”* As noted above, maintaining a scholarship is significant to academic performance because it serves as the motivation for academic excellence, thus strong GPA's.

Besides the above reasons, the value of the tuition also motivates greater efforts towards achieving high GPA's. Respondent 12 captures this precisely by saying, *“Because it drives you to do better because so much money is spent on your education.”* Similarly, Respondents 16, 18 and 21 explained, *“The fact that my parents are paying so much money pushed me to study hard.”*, *“It lets me know how much effort my parents are putting into my education and as such it pushes me to study,”* and *“Because my parents pay my school fees, I must put in the effort to study...”* As shown above, the monetary value of tuition is also vital to students' performance in the sense that they equate the fees with a certain level of hard work and academic achievement. As such, high tuition is an incentive for high academic performance using hard work and dedication towards their academics.

In sum, scholarship as a factor is ranked as very significant for students' academic performance in Ashesi. It serves as a motivator for strong academic performance. It also eases psychological burdens which would normally distract and divide the focus of Ashesi students to their academic work.

Seating Location

Ashesi has various classroom settings from the cultural 'grandmother' seating arrangement to a traditional ... your academic performance in Ashesi?

132 responses

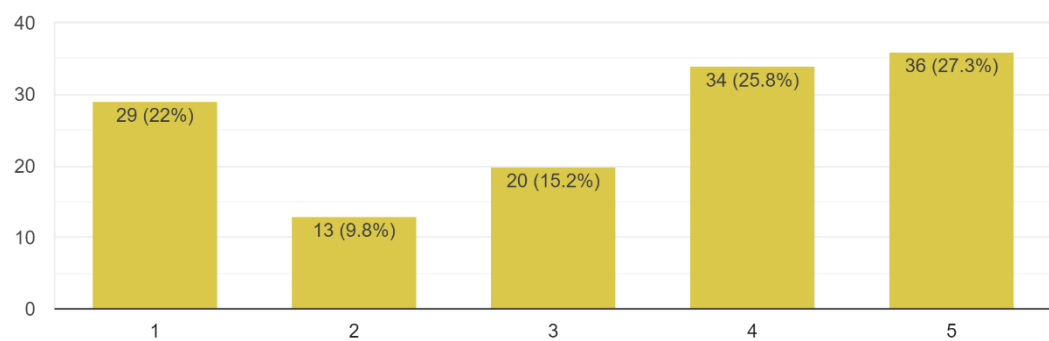


Figure 10. Relevance of seating location to academic performance

Figure 10 above shows 22% of the respondents found their seating location having no significant impact on their learning and academic performance.

Approximately twenty-six percent (25.8%) of respondents said their seating location was relevant to their academic achievement and 27.3% found their seating location in any given class to be very vital to their academic performance. It is important to note that in sum, about 53.1% of respondents found seating location in Ashesi classrooms to be very relevant to their academic performance. These respondents provided reasons for the above rating of the relevance of seating location.

For example, Respondent 12, 15, 16, 30, 39, 42 shared, *“When I sit at the back or far from the board, I get lost in most classes and do not understand [the lecture].”* *“Sitting in front gives me extra focus and makes me attentive.”* *“Sitting in front of the class allows me to focus more as compared to sitting at the back where I can use my phone and have conversations with friends.”* *“I wanted to get maximum concentration, so I always sat in front.”* *“Sitting at the back of the class means you cannot see the board and hear the lecturer.”* *“Usually when I sit in front, I can learn faster than when I am behind no matter the seating arrangement.”*

Given these statements above, it is obvious that respondents who found seating location to have a significant impact on their academic performance prefer sitting at or near the front of the class because they can see the board and projection as well as hear the lecturer better without distraction. As such they are better able to focus when they sit at the front of the class which increases their understanding of the content taught and ultimately their academic performance.

Moreover, respondents made mention of a class seating arrangement, which augmented their focus, and participation in class. Respondent five revealed, *“The grandmother seating helped with keeping the class interactive with fewer distractions.”* Respondent eight also said, *“Classes felt like a conversation, a forum free for contribution. An engaging set-up.”* Similarly, Respondent 26 said, *“It makes me feel so at home and comfortable to speak in class.”*

The above responses indicate that respondents prefer the 'grandmother' or 'theatre' classroom setting because it creates a conducive atmosphere for interaction. Not only the lecturer, but this class design allows classmates to be visible and audible

at the same time. Students not only learn from the lecturer but indirectly from other classmates whom they can see, hear and interact with in class.

Overall, seating location is ranked as essential to student learning and performance at Ashesi University. Sitting at or near the front of the class facilitates students learning and performance. Also, the ‘grandmother’ style lecture halls in Ashesi enhances student learning, unlike the typical rows and columns class design.

The literature on the significance of student seating location is ambiguous. Benedict and Hoag (2004) claim that students who sat at or near the front of the class tended to out-perform those who sat at the back of the lecture hall. Also, Kalinowski and Taper (2007) found that students who sat in seats located at the front of the class had higher GPA’s than those who sat at the back of the class.

However, Armstrong and Cheng (2007) found a weak relationship between students’ performance and seating location. The findings of Armstrong and Cheng (2007) suggests that seating location has no significant impact on student academic performance. Figure 10 above reflects this ambiguity as well. Respondents had differing views on the significance of their seating location in class to their academic performance. Most of the explanations they provided although support the findings of Kalinowski and Taper (2007) and Benedict and Hoag (2004).

Critical Thinking

How relevant is critical thinking to your academic work?

131 responses

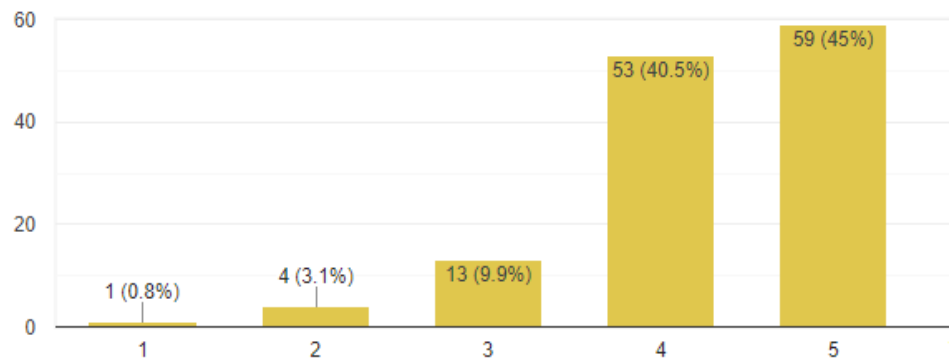


Figure 11. Relevance of Critical thinking to academic performance

According to Figure 11 above, 40.5% of respondents found critical thinking to be relevant to their academic performance while 45% of respondents found it to be highly relevant to academic achievement. Figure 11 illustrates that critical thinking is a significant factor impacting the academic performance of Ashesi students.

Moreover, almost all the respondents indicated that they often applied critical thinking to their academic work at Ashesi University.

In connection with literature, Stupnisky et al. (2008) found that first-year students who perceived they had firm control over their academic work tended to do better academically rather than their application of critical thinking to coursework. However, Higbee (2003) found that critical thinking and problem-solving skills were vital to strong performance among undergraduate students. The results of this research support the findings of Higbee (2003) that critical thinking has a significant impact on undergraduate students' academic success.

Time Management

How relevant is/was your ability to manage time to your academic performance in Ashesi?

132 responses

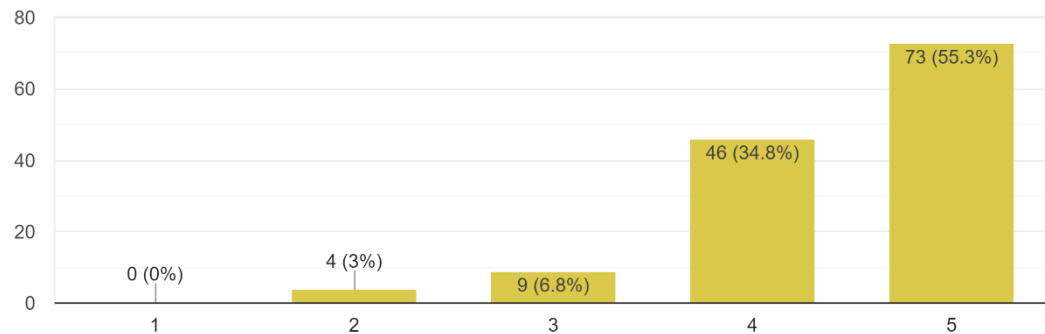


Figure 12. Relevance of time management to academic performance

Figure 12 above illustrates that the ability to manage time is crucial to student academic performance at Ashesi University. The graph shows that 34.8% of respondents rated time management as relevant while 55.3% of respondents rated it as very relevant to academic performance. As such, it is evident that the ability to prioritize activities and allocate the appropriate amount of time to each event significantly impacts student academic performance.

Alsalem, Alamodi, & Hazazi (2017, p. 3042), found that students who managed time well performed better academically. The authors indicate that students who had better time management skills had higher GPA's than those who did not. Similarly, Dixon et al. (2008) found time management to be among the best predictors of students' GPA in a liberal arts university. The results of the current research are in line with the finding of the researchers mentioned above. Approximately 90% of respondents found time management to be significant to their academic performance.

Personal Ownership of a Laptop

How relevant is/was your personal ownership of a laptop to your academic performance in Ashesi?

132 responses

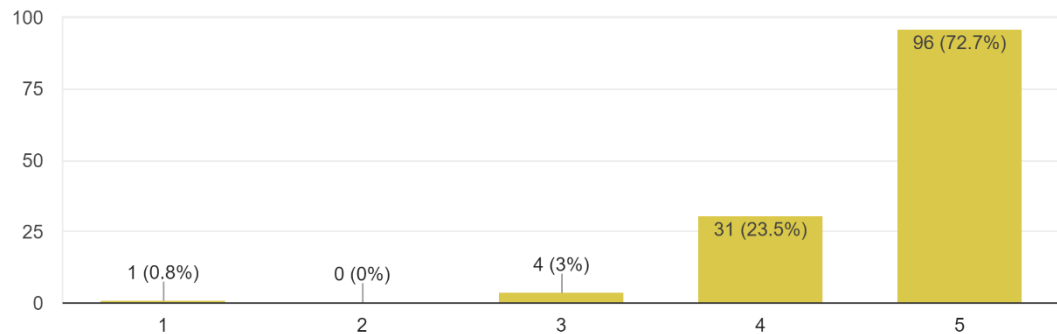


Figure 13. Relevance of personal ownership of a laptop to academic performance

Figure 13 shows that 72.7% of respondents rated a student's ownership of a laptop as very relevant to their academic performance while 23.5% rated it as relevant to academic achievement. Without a doubt, personal ownership of a laptop is vital to academic success in as Ashesi University. It is important to realize that it is not coincidental that owning a computer is significant to student academic performance.

Indeed, one of Ashesi's learning goals is technological competence which is often embodied in the use of technology such as the computer. It stands to reason that beyond owning a computer, being able to effectively use the computer for various academic purposes is equally important. Thus, technological competence is very important to student success at Ashesi University. This finding is the same as that of Dixon et al. (2008). The researchers found that ownership of a computer was a key predictor of undergraduate student academic performance as measured by GPA.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Research

This chapter provides a summary which captures the questions, objectives, the methodology and key findings of the current research. This section also contains a conclusion and recommendation to improve student academic performance and for future research. This chapter ends with the weaknesses and limitations of the current study.

In stark contrast to the unemployment challenges faced by numerous graduates from various tertiary institutions, Ashesi graduates do well on the job market. They are regarded as among the best educated and most career-ready in Ghana. However, Ashesi University teaching faculty do not fully know the significant determinants of students' academic performance (represented by cumulative grade point average), especially from the student perspective. For this reason, the current study posed the following questions: (a) Which factors significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students? (b) How are factors which significantly impact student academic performance rated and is this consistent with predictions from the literature?

Based on the above questions, the objectives of the current research were: (a) To identify factors which significantly impact the academic performance of Ashesi students (b) To find out the rating of factors significantly impacting student academic performance as well as the consistency of these rating with literature.

The current research used a sequential transformative mixed method design in which data were collected by questionnaire and follow up interviews with respondents. Data gathered from both phases were combined in the analysis and interpretation stage to produce meaningful information. The sample size for the

questionnaire was 132 current Ashesi students and graduates. Eight respondents interviewed with the researcher in pursuance of a more in-depth understanding of factors raised by respondents on the questionnaire.

5.2 Conclusion

5.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Participants in this research included approximately 10% of graduates and 90% of current students of Ashesi University. Current students included participants from the graduating classes of 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Among the participants were students from all current academic majors in Ashesi University namely, Business Administration, Computer Science, Management Information Systems, Computer Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering. Respondents comprised of approximately 60% females and 40% males.

5.2.2 Key Findings

The current study revealed that factors which significantly impacted student academic performance in Ashesi University were lecturers, Ashesi learning resources, peer support and teamwork, critical thinking, time management, being on scholarship, seating location, getting enough sleep, spirituality and individual student ownership of a computer. Ashesi lecturers were critical to how students performed in terms of their teaching style and support for students in the form of advice, encouragement and further explanations of course content during office hours. Thus, the willingness of lecturers to devote time to helping students succeed is highly important for Ashesi students' performance.

Also, the availability of resources such as the internet, textbooks and PowerPoint slides and frequent class attendance were relevant to student

performance. Respondents showed a great appreciation for lecture hours because it afforded them the chance to learn and better understand course content from the lecturers and their classmates.

Teamwork and peer support in the form of collaborative studies were shown to have a strong impact on students' academic success. By working on tasks and learning in teams, students trade off ideas on each other and improve their own understanding of concepts taught. They also develop a team spirit and leadership skills through leading group study discussions and spearheading the completion of group projects. Not only does teamwork help students do better academically, but it also equips them with soft skills such as effective communication and taking initiative which are highly desirable in the world of work.

Critical thinking was also very significant to Ashesi student academic performance. Respondents found that critical thinking was necessary for their academics. They applied it frequently in various ways in their academics. By so doing, they developed the ability to analyse data and view information from various perspectives; open-mindedness.

Moreover, time management and the ability to prioritize are valued skills in the work place which respondents identified as having a significant impact on Ashesi students' academic success. Since the aim of Ashesi's educational model is to develop the whole individual, students are encouraged to engage in extra-curricular activities apart from academics. For that reason, students are engaged in several activities and time management becomes very important in meeting all the various demands of the student on time.

Respondents admitted that being on a scholarship gave them maximum focus on their academic performance. The reason for this was that the scholarship frees them from psychological burdens which then allows them to be fully engaged in their education. Respondents also rated sitting at or near the front of the lecture hall and getting enough sleep as significant to their performance. Even so, God was a significant factor in student academic achievement by way of providing understanding and help in coursework.

Lastly, owning a computer was rated as very relevant for Ashesi students to excel in academics. Ashesi courses are designed such that the use of computers is highly important to study and completion of assignments. As such being technologically competent is a vital part of owning a laptop.

5.3 Recommendation

5.3.1 Recommendations to Improve Student Performance

1. Since learning resources such as the internet are vital to student performance, it is recommended that Ashesi try as much as possible to provide as strong and stable internet connection for student learning.
2. Lecturers are pivotal in the performance of students. It is commendable that lecturers are positively impacting student lives and academic performance. As such, it is recommended that lecturer would continue to be involved in student lives, assisting, encouraging and challenges students to exhibit the learning goals of Ashesi in academics and with life problems. The lecturers should be properly motivated so that they can continue to play this role effectively. Lecturer incomes, transportation and accommodation problems should all be addressed to help lecturers perform their roles.

3. It is suggested that students be taken through exhaustive time management sessions to help them develop the skill of balancing, prioritizing the various activities and events they are engaged in and still perform very well academically.

5.3 .2 Recommendations for Future Research

1. For future studies on factors which have a significant impact on the performance of Ashesi students, I would recommend that quantitative research be carried out to determine if the above findings hold.
2. It is also recommended that future research look at how the above factors which significantly impact Ashesi student academic performance affect their employability in the job market by incorporating the views of key stakeholders in the industry.

5.4 Limitations of the Research

A major limitation of this research was the lack of quantitative data to run a regression analysis. Regression analysis would have been useful for comparing and validating statistical findings with the qualitative finding.

The findings of this research would have been further strengthened with more insights from the Ashesi graduate community especially with regards to the relevance of the liberal arts education for the job market in Ghana.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Table of Themes**Table 1***Top Factors Impacting Student Academic Performance*

Research Objective	Descriptive Codes
To identify factors which significantly impact academic performance of Ashesi students.	Lecturers, Peer Support, Ashesi Learning Resources Team Work Spirituality Time Management

Note: Descriptive Codes refer to major themes identified from responses regarding the top factors which had a strong impact on their academic performance. Descriptive codes are in no specific order.

Table 2*The Relevance of High School GPA to Academic Performance at Ashesi University*

High School GPA	Descriptive Codes
Themes identified under why high school GPA may be relevant to academic performance in Ashesi	Motivation Effort Different Context

Note: Descriptive Codes refer to the various themes identified within the explanations of the relevance of high school performance to academic performance in Ashesi.

Appendix 2: Questionnaires Questions**Thesis Questionnaire on Student Academic Performance at Ashesi University**

The current research is carried out in fulfillment of the thesis undergraduate requirement of Ashesi University. The aim of this research is to obtain student and alumni views on factors which significantly impact student academic performance at Ashesi University. The information provided on this questionnaire is strictly for academic purposes. Please note that your identity will be kept strictly confidential and will not be revealed under any circumstances. Thank you for participating in this research.

* Required

Please respond to each question below by clicking on the option which best applies to you.

1. Which is/was your year of graduation from Ashesi? * *Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 2016
☐ 2017
☐ 2018
☐ 2019
☐ 2020
☐ 2021
☐ 2022

Other: _____

2. What is your gender? * *Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

3. What is/was your academic major? * *Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Computer Science
- ☐ Management Information Systems
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Computer Engineering
- ☐ Electrical Engineering

4. What is your nationality? *

5 What is your current academic level at Ashesi University? * *Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Graduate
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Freshman

6. What is/was your scholarship status in Ashesi University? * *Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Mastercard Foundation Scholar
- ☐ Full Fee Paying
- ☐ Ashesi Scholarship Aid

Significant Factors Impacting Academic Performance

7. Which top factors have/had a strong impact on your academic performance or cumulative GPA in Ashesi? List them below in descending order of impact. *

8. Studies show that high school performance is a good predictor of how well a student will perform in university. A student with a good GPA or strong academic performance in high school is found to also perform very well or get a good GPA in university. Do you think high school GPA influences your

academic performance (as measured by cumulative GPA) in Ashesi University?
Briefly explain. *

On a linear scale of 1 to 5, 1= not relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant, 3= moderately relevant, 4 = relevant, 5 = very relevant

9 In your view, how relevant is your high school GPA is as a determinant of academic performance as measured by cumulative GPA in Ashesi?

* *Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. How many hours do/did you sleep per week as a student in Ashesi? *

11. How important is the opportunity to sleep to your academic performance? * *Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. How relevant is/ was your scholarship status (whether you are full fee paying, on Ashesi scholarship or Mastercard Scholarship) to your academic performance as measured by GPA?

*

Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Explain your answer above *

14. Some studies show that one's gender impacts how well they perform academically. How relevant is/was your gender to how well you perform(ed) academically in Ashesi University? * *Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Ashesi has various classroom settings from the cultural 'grandmother' seating arrangement to a traditional classroom setting with tables in rows and columns. How relevant is/was your

seating location in class to your academic performance in Ashesi? * *Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Explain your answer above *

Significant Factors Impacting Academic Performance

On a linear scale, where 1= not relevant, 2= somewhat relevant, 3= moderately relevant, 4= relevant, 5=very relevant

17. How relevant is/was your ability to manage time to your academic performance in Ashesi? * *Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. How relevant is/was your personal ownership of a laptop to your academic performance in

Ashesi? *

Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. How often do you apply critical thinking in your academic work? *

20. How relevant is critical thinking to your academic work? * *Mark only one oval.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Yes/No Answers

21. Did/does your place of residence (on or off campus) have any impact on how well you perform (a strong CGPA of 3.5-4.0) in Ashesi? * *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

22. Did/does your spirituality have any influence on your academic performance? *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

Short Answer Questions

23. Do you think group assignments positively or negatively affect your cumulative GPA? *

24. Do you think changes in academic policies in Ashesi have had any significant impact on student performance? * *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

25. If yes, which policies?

26. Describe what you understand by the concept of a liberal arts education. *

27. In your view, how relevant is the liberal arts education to excellent employee performance in the Ghanaian job market? * *Mark only one oval.*

1 2 3 4 5

28 Explain your answer above *

29. How many hours do you spend on social media per week? *

30. From your experience, did/does your use of social media affect your academic performance? * *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

31. Any additional comment(s)?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of a liberal arts education?
2. Identify factors in Ashesi University which have a significant positive impact on student academic performance? Please explain
3. Identify factors which have a significant negative impact on student performance and explain how or why.
4. How significant was critical thinking to your academic performance as a student? Explain
5. In your view, did your high school GPA or performance have an impact on your academic performance which is measured by your cumulative grade point average? If so how?
6. Approximately how many hours of sleep did you have a week during your time as a student? Was it enough? How relevant is the opportunity to sleep to your academic performance?
7. What was the impact of teamwork on your academic performance?
8. How significant was time management to your academic performance?
9. Which of these scholarship schemes were you on while in Ashesi University:
Full Fee paying, Ashesi Financial Aid or MCF?
10. Did your scholarship status as Full Fee paying, Ashesi Financial Aid or MasterCard Scholarship have any significant impact on your academic performance as measured by cumulative Grade point average?
11. What are your views on the impact of spirituality on your academic performance in Ashesi?
12. Would you say your gender has any impact on how well you perform academically?
13. Ashesi has various classroom setting from the cultural 'grandmother' seating arrangement to a traditional classroom setting with tables in rows and columns. How does your seating location affect how well you perform in a class?

14. In your view, what are the main reasons why a student would fail to pass a course?
15. How much time did you devote to your studies per week?
16. In your opinion, what impedes students from achieving strong CGPA (3.5-4.0)?
17. How much time did you spend studying per week? It is enough?

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

RESEARCH TITLE: Investigating Student Success Factors: A Focus on Ashesi University

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a study carried out by Atarebono Amwelmoo, a thesis student at Ashesi University. The aim of this study is to identify factors which affect how well students perform academically at Ashesi University. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE STUDY

You will be asked to share your experience on the Ashesi liberal arts model and what impact it has had on your academic performance through an interview or online questionnaire. Each interview or questionnaire should take thirty (30) minutes to complete. You may skip any question(s) which you are uncomfortable answering.

RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY

There is no risk for participants in this research.

BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

- To identify factors which determine the academic performance of an Ashesi student
- To gain an in-depth understanding of factors that determine the success or failure of students
- To recommend strategies which will raise the general success level of students in Ashesi

CONFIDENTIALITY

This study does not require your name or student number. All information you provide is confidential and strictly for academic purposes. Information will be protected from unauthorized access using a password.

RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Your participation in this research is optional. Deciding not to take part in or leave the study any time has no penalties and does not harm your relationship with the researcher.

Contact the researcher at atarebono.amwelmoo@ashesi.edu.gh / +233263557497 or the supervisor at searmah@ashesi.edu.gh should you have questions, concerns or problems about the study.

This research protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Ashesi University Human Subjects Review Committee. If you have any reservations about the approval process, please contact the Chair, Ashesi HSCR at irb@ashesi.edu.gh

CONSENT OF SUBJECT

I, have read this informed consent and have agreed to participate in this study.

Participant's signature.....