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Perceived Influence of Short Semester Break on Commitment to Studies among Self-Sponsoring Science Education Undergraduates in Regular Public Universities in Makurdi

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Abstract

The study investigated the perceived influence of short semester break on commitment to studies among self-sponsoring science education undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria using a descriptive survey design. The study had two research objectives and corresponding questions. The population for the study included all the 2003 science education undergraduates in the Department of Science and Mathematics Education, Benue State University (now Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University), Makurdi, Nigeria (411) and those from Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University (formerly Federal University of Agriculture), Makurdi (1592). A multistage sample of 91 self-sponsoring undergraduates (47 federal + 44 state) was used for the study. Data were collected using Short Semester Break and Self-sponsoring Undergraduate Questionnaire (SSBSUQ). The researchers'-made 5-point SSBSUQ was validated by experts and trial-tested on 15 undergraduates other than those involved in the actual study. The SSBSUQ's reliability value of 0.73 was determined using Cronbach's Alpha statistic. The research questions were answered by mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that short semester break has negative influence on school attendance (mean = 4.11) and time management (mean = 4.19) of self-sponsoring undergraduates. The study recommended among others that university administrations should increase the length of semester break to enable self-sponsoring undergraduates prepare better for upcoming semesters or the government should grant them study loan with bonds to work for the Nigerian government for a given period after graduating.

Keywords: Short Semester Break, Commitment to Studies, Self-sponsoring Undergraduates, School Attendance, Time management.

Introduction

Education is universally defined as the systematic process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and habits through teaching, training, research, and practical experience. It is both a formal and informal process that facilitates personal development, social integration, and cultural continuity; which goes beyond rote learning, encompassing the holistic development of a person's intellectual, moral, emotional, and physical capacities (Ayua, 2003; Ayua, 2015a). In Nigeria, education is structured into a 9-3-4 system. This system entails 9 years of basic education, 3 years of post-basic education and at least 4 years of tertiary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013). Universities in Nigeria generally organize their academic programme into academic semesters with scheduled breaks between these periods. These

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breaks provide both faculty and students with the opportunity to rest, attend to personal and family responsibilities, engage in employment or other activities and prepare for subsequent academic period. However, the duration and timing of semester breaks vary across universities and could be long or short. Short semester breaks refer to the limited periods between academic semesters, often lasting less than a month. These breaks, designed for rest and recovery, provide undergraduates with opportunities to rejuvenate mentally and physically after intensive study periods (Steiner & Gertel, 2020). However, the short duration can also present challenges, as undergraduates may struggle to transition smoothly between academic demands and personal obligations. While some research suggests that breaks improve focus and productivity upon returning to school (Schaufeli et al., 2019), others argue that insufficient time off, may leave undergraduates feeling unprepared for the new semester. The effectiveness of these breaks often depends on how undergraduates utilize the time, whether for relaxation, employment, or academic preparation. However, this form of break could be very challenging to self-sponsoring undergraduates, who need adequate time to source financial requirement of the institution before returning to settle in for the semester. Ayua (2022a) and Ayua (2022b) reported that when learners are faced with unresolved dilemmas, they get themselves caught in the web of thought cycles, which distort their attentiveness in class besides developing negativity to learning due to emotional traumas. Self-sponsoring undergraduates are students who independently finance their education without reliance on institutional scholarships, government funding, or parental support. These undergraduates typically balance academic responsibilities with part-time jobs, entrepreneurship or other income-generating activities. Self-sponsoring undergraduates often face financial obligations during breaks, such as working additional hours to accumulate savings for tuition or living expenses (Broadbridge & Swanson, 2005). This financial focus may hinder their ability to fully relax or engage in academic preparation, affecting their readiness for the subsequent semester. This financial focus may leave them fatigued or stressed at the start of the semester, reducing their ability to attend classes consistently. Additionally, inadequate rest during the break can disrupt physical and mental recovery, making it harder for undergraduates to transition back to academic routines (Schaufeli et al., 2019). Understanding the experiences of self-sponsoring undergraduates is essential to designing supportive policies and interventions that enhance their academic success and improve their commitment to studies.

Commitment to studies can be seen as students' dedication to academic goals, measured through time, effort, and consistent focus on learning activities (Ayua & Pila, 2018; Tinto, 1994). It involves self-discipline, time management, and the ability to prioritize academic pursuits over competing interests. High commitment is essential for academic success, as it fosters: efficient time management, consistency in school attendance and improvement in overall performance (Ayua & Akaabo, 2016; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Kuh et al., 2016). In the context of undergraduates, commitment to studies is particularly critical because it directly impacts their ability to balance academic requirements with social, financial, and personal responsibilities. However, many factors influence students' commitment to studies such as personal, financial and psychological factors. Among self-sponsoring students, short semester breaks could limit the time for rest, financial or work activities and personal/family responsibilities. Theoretically, Tinto (1975) Student Integration Theory constitutes the framework for the study. The basic assumption of the theory is that student retention and academic commitment are significantly influenced by the degree of integration into both the academic and social environments of an institution. According to Tinto (1975) students who feel connected to their academic community through interactions with faculty, engagement in coursework, and participation in extracurricular activities are more likely to persist and succeed. This integration fosters a sense of belonging, which strengthens students' motivation and commitment to their studies. Conversely, students who experience isolation or disengagement, particularly due to financial burdens or external work obligations, are more likely to struggle with commitment and eventually drop out. Another key assumption of the theory is that external factors, such as financial pressures and personal responsibilities, influence students' ability to integrate into the academic environment. The theory holds that while personal motivation is important, institutional policies and support systems also play a crucial role in student success. The theory is relevant as it explains how self-sponsoring students' financial constraints and work commitments may reduce their integration into the academic environment. The short semester break exacerbates this challenge by limiting their ability to recover physically and mentally, leading to irregular attendance, poor time management, and reduced academic participation. Understanding these factors can help institutions

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develop interventions to enhance student engagement and retention. Based on the two objectives of the study, the following empirical studies were reviewed. As regards school attendance and financial constraints of self-sponsoring/working undergraduates, Mhlongo et al. (2024) explored the impact of financial exclusion on student performance and retention at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), South Africa using a cross-sectional survey of 220 undergraduates; and discovered that among financially excluded students (self-funded or partially supported), 68% reported frequent class absenteeism due to unmet basic needs such as textbooks, accommodation and food, while 43% were uncertain about completing the academic year. There was a significant negative correlation between financial pressure and academic performance ($r = -0.51$, $p < 0.01$), displaying that financial destitution directly lessens engagement and attendance. Oyekola et al. (2024) studied challenges associated with working and studying as expressed by undergraduates in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria and found that those who combined work with studies ranked incessant fatigue, poor academic performance, poor time management and poor attendance as major problems. The undergraduates reported that the need to work to sustain themselves affected their ability to resume on time and attend classes steadily, especially at the commencement of a semester. Paul (2025) investigated the impact of self-sponsorship on female academic performance in higher institutions in Nigeria. The study exposed that self-sponsoring students face delicate financial burdens and are forced to take up employment obligations during and after short semester breaks. These responsibilities lead to late resumption, irregular attendance, reduced concentration in class, and hinder optimal academic performance. On short semester break, time management and work-study conflict, Ede et al. (2025) explored work-study-life balance among students in four higher institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. With 930 valid responses, they reported a high prevalence of self-employment (44.3%) among students. Ordinal regression showed that full-time employment negatively affected GPA ($\beta = -0.534$, $p = 0.016$). The major issues recognized were physical/emotional strain (68.8%) and time conflicts (57.0%). Focus group discussions established that financial restraints during short breaks compel students to work intensively, leaving little time to plan for the approaching semester. Mukwevho (2018) studied time management challenges on students' academic performance at a rural university in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The findings were that work overload, stress and lack of institutional support for time management contributed to poor academic planning, missed deadlines and disorganized study habits at resumption. Ayua (2011) and Ayua (2015b) reported that undergraduates who lacked operative time management tactics, effective study habits; struggle to balance academic and work tasks. These researches offer empirical basis that financial exclusion, self-sponsorship and work during short semester breaks constitute structural barricades to attendance and effective time management among undergraduates.

Statement of the Problem

It is observed that the academic commitment of self-sponsoring undergraduates in universities is increasingly being challenged by the structure of academic calendars, particularly the short semester breaks (Ede et al., 2025; Mhlongo et al., 2024; Mukwevho, 2018; Oyekola et al., 2024; Paul, 2025). While these breaks are intended to provide undergraduates with rest and rejuvenation, their limited duration often creates a mismatch between the academic outcomes and financial responsibilities of self-sponsoring undergraduates. This issue is especially critical because many self-sponsoring undergraduates depend on semester breaks to work additional hours, accumulate savings, or address financial obligations, leaving them physically and mentally fatigued at the start of a new semester. Accordingly, the short semester break is observed to be the determinant of their inability to attend classes regularly, disrupting their academic continuity and diminishing their overall commitment to effective studies. It is against this backdrop, that the perceived influence of short semester break on commitment to studies among self-sponsoring science education undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria was studied.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the influence of short semester break on school attendance of self-sponsoring undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi.
2. Ascertain the influence of short semester break on time management of self-sponsoring undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi

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Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the influence of short semester breaks on school attendance of self-sponsoring undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi?
2. What is the influence of short semester breaks on time management of self-sponsoring undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi?

Research Methodology

This study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design. Out of the population of 2003 (411 State + 1592 Federal) science education undergraduates in the two regular public universities in Makurdi (MOAUM Directorate of Academic Planning, 2025; JoSTUM Academic Directorate, 2025), a multistage sample of 91 self-sponsoring science education undergraduates (47 Federal + 44 State) was drawn for the study. The multistage sampling had three stages involving stratified, purposive and simple random sampling. In the first stage, the population was stratified into state and federal regular public universities. Secondly, the undergraduates in the federal and state universities were purposively split into self-sponsoring, partially self-sponsoring and non-self-sponsoring. Lastly, only the fully self-sponsoring science education undergraduates were drawn at random and used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled Short Semester Break and Self-sponsoring Undergraduates Questionnaire (SSBSUQ) developed by the researchers. The SSBSUQ was structured on a 5-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with a cut-off mean of 3.00. The SSBSUQ was divided into three sections. Section "A" was on demography of respondents; Section "B" contained items on short semester break and school attendance and Section "C" contained items on Semester break and time management. The SSBSUQ was validated by three university academic experts: Two in Science education and one in measurement and evaluation. To determine the reliability index, SSBSUQ's trial testing was carried out using 15 respondents outside the study area, representing 16.48% of the main sample (91 undergraduates). This is in line with the recommendation of Hertzog (2008) that pilot sample should be 10% of the main study sample, and that trial-test sample of 15 to 30 participants is adequate for establishing the reliability of a research instrument. Respondents for the trial test did not participate in the main study. Thereafter, the trial test data were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha statistic which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.73. Thus, SSBSUQ was deemed reliable for the study. The main data collected for the study were analysed using mean and standard deviation statistics to answer the research questions.

Presentation of Results

The results of the study are presented in order of the research questions as follows:

Research Question One: What is the influence of short semester breaks on school attendance of self-sponsoring undergraduates in Makurdi?

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Short Semester Break's Influence on School Attendance of Self-Sponsoring Undergraduates*

S/n	Item description	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1	I often miss early semester classes in order to arrange my school fees.	58	29	0	2	2	4.53	0.81	Accepted
2	Making efforts to cope with responsibilities usually delay my resumption.	50	38	1	0	2	4.47	0.74	Accepted
3	In a bid to meet financial demands, I hardly attend classes from the beginning to the end	47	28	3	7	6	4.13	1.20	Accepted
4	I sometimes miss classes because I have to go out to look for money for my upkeep.	47	32	2	2	8	4.19	1.18	Accepted
5	I feel mentally unprepared to resume school after a short semester break	34	34	9	10	4	3.92	1.15	Accepted
6	Short semester break affects my readiness to participate actively in school activities.	25	44	0	16	6	3.73	1.23	Accepted

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7	Struggling to balance my job during short semester reduces my regular class attendance.	43	33	9	4	2	4.22	0.95	Accepted
8	The short semester break does not provide enough time for me to reflect on my academic goals which affect my class attendance.	43	34	4	8	2	4.19	1.02	Accepted
9	The stress of managing financial responsibilities during the semester often makes me late to class.	34	35	3	15	4	3.88	1.21	Accepted
10	The difficulties of managing financial demands sometimes force me to consider deferring a semester.	33	32	9	11	6	3.82	1.24	Accepted
	Cluster Mean						**4.11**	**1.07**	Accepted

Table 1 presents responses from self-sponsoring undergraduates regarding the influence of short semester breaks on their school attendance. The items focus on financial preparedness, mental readiness, and time constraints linked to short semester breaks. The cluster mean of 4.11 suggests a high overall agreement among respondents that short semester breaks influence their school attendance. The cluster standard deviation of 1.07 indicates a moderate spread of responses around the mean.

Research Question Two: What is the influence of short semester break on time management of self-sponsoring undergraduates in Makurdi?

Table 2: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Short Semester Break's Influence on Time Management of Self-Sponsoring Undergraduates*

S/N	Item description	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The short semester break does not give me enough time to plan my academic schedule for a new semester.	31	48	4	6	2	4.10	0.92	Accepted
2	I struggle to balance work with responsibilities immediately after a short semester break.	41	34	5	11	0	4.18	0.96	Accepted
3	I begin semesters without a clear time management plan due to the short duration of the break.	39	34	10	6	2	4.12	1.00	Accepted
4	Because of work during the short break, I often resume school feeling mentally disorganised to manage my time effectively.	47	32	6	6	0	4.32	0.87	Accepted
5	I have little time left for academics due to work demands	44	40	5	2	0	4.38	0.70	Accepted
6	I find it hard to meet assignment deadlines because of limited time.	38	37	14	0	2	4.20	0.86	Accepted
7	I struggle to allocate enough time for studying after work.	42	30	6	8	5	4.05	1.18	Accepted
8	I often postpone my academic work because of the time spent on income-generating activities.	42	35	3	9	2	4.16	1.04	Accepted
9	I find it difficult to be in school all the time because the break is usually too short to handle my struggles well.	37	38	5	8	3	4.08	1.06	Accepted
10	It is difficult to combine work with study time.	42	40	4	4	1	4.30	0.84	Accepted
	Cluster Mean						**4.19**	**0.94**	Accepted

Table 2 presents students' responses on the influence of short semester breaks on their ability to manage time effectively for academic activities. The items reflect challenges in planning, balancing work and academics, and maintaining regular

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attendance due to financial demands. The cluster mean of 4.19 indicates that the respondents generally agree that short semester breaks disrupt their time management. These disruptions are primarily due to the necessity of working during or immediately after the break, lack of sufficient time to plan academically, and mental exhaustion. The findings suggest that short semester breaks negatively affect students' ability to start the semester with organized schedules, leading to lack of proper commitment to studies and inefficient academic planning

Discussion of Findings

As regards the influence of short semester break on school attendance, the finding revealed a high negative influence of short semester break on school attendance of self-sponsoring undergraduates with a cluster mean of 4.11. This indicates that undergraduates strongly agreed that short breaks hinder stable school attendance. Items such as adding extra time before resumption to arrange fees, delay in resumption due to responsibilities, and inability to gather fees within the short break were highly rated. This implies that short breaks do not give self-sponsoring undergraduates reasonable time to engage in income-generating activities, leading to late resumption and irregular school attendance. This aligns with Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Theory that external financial burdens reduce academic integration. The result is in agreement with Mhlongo et al. (2024) at Mangosuthu University of Technology, South Africa, who found that 68% of self-funded students reported frequent class absenteeism due to unmet basic needs, with a strong negative correlation between financial pressure and academic outcomes ($r = -0.51$). The finding also supports Oyekola et al. (2024) in University of Ilorin, Nigeria, who ranked poor attendance, incessant fatigue and poor academic performance as top challenges expressed by self-sponsoring undergraduates, and Paul (2025), who found that self-sponsorship with financial pressures hinders optimal academic performance. The implication of the finding that short semester break highly hinders school attendance is that the academic calendar is not considerate of the socio-economic realities of self-sponsoring undergraduates. Because respondents strongly agreed that they need extra time to arrange fees, experience delay in resumption due to responsibilities and cannot gather fees within the short break, they miss foundational lectures and continuous assessments at the start of the semester. This results in learning loss, particularly in science courses that are sequential, and could force lecturers to repeat content, thereby distorting syllabus coverage. It may also widen inequality and increases dropout risk among self-sponsoring undergraduates, as supported by Mhlongo et al. (2024) who found 68% absenteeism among self-funded students, and by Oyekola et al. (2024) and Paul (2025). The implication for educational planning is the need for calendar reform and flexible fee policies. Concerning the influence of short semester break on time management, the study revealed a strong negative influence with a cluster mean of 4.19. This suggests that the shortness of the break leaves students mentally or psychologically disorganized and with no clear academic plan at the beginning of a new semester. Responses for self-sponsoring science undergraduates agreed that a longer break would help improve their academic time management, that they resume feeling mentally disorganized, find it difficult to combine work with study time (Mean = 4.30), and have to share school time with work. Because the break is consumed by intensive work to raise tuition, they resume stressed and unable to properly schedule their academic activities effectively. This finding is in line with Tinto's theoretical assumption that external pressures decline academic integration. The result is also consistent with Ede et al. (2025) in Imo State, Nigeria, who found that 57.0% of working students experienced time conflicts and 68.8% experienced physical/emotional strain, and that full-time employment negatively affected GPA (Grade Point Average), and with Mukwevho (2018) in Limpopo Province, South Africa, who found that time management challenges due to work overload and stress led to poor academic performance. The finding that short semester break strongly impairs time management implies that undergraduates resume psychologically unprepared for academic work. Since they resume feeling mentally disorganized, find it problematic to combine work with study time, and have to share school time with work, they are incapable to allocate time successfully for lectures, laboratory work and personal study. This work-study conflict breeds fatigue, stress and poor academic planning, resulting in missed deadlines and low grades, as substantiated by Ede et al. (2025) where 57.0% reported time conflicts and 68.8% reported emotional strain. The implication is that universities need to strengthen counselling and academic advising on time management, and lecturers should implement flexible pedagogical support in the first weeks of resumption to help self-sponsoring students re-integrate academically.

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Conclusion

The study concluded that short semester break has a high negative influence on the commitment to studies of self-sponsoring science education undergraduates in regular public universities in Makurdi. Specifically, the short break hinders school attendance, as undergraduates lack enough time to raise fees and upkeep money, resulting in late resumption and irregular school attendance. It also interrupts time management, as undergraduates resume mentally or psychologically disorganized, fatigued, and with no clear academic plan, forcing them to share study time with work.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were advanced:

1. **For University Management on Academic Calendar:** The University management should consider elongating the semester break period from the current short duration to at least 4+ weeks. This will provide self-sponsoring undergraduates adequate time to engage in income-generating activities, arrange school fees and upkeep money, and resume mentally prepared for academic work. This addresses items 1, 2 and 3 in Table 1 which were highly rated with means above 4.
2. **For University Management on Flexible Fee Policy:** The University should adopt a flexible school fees payment policy that allows self-sponsoring students to pay in installments and attend classes while completing payment. This will reduce late resumption, irregular attendance and the intention to defer semester as indicated in Table 1, item 10.
3. **For Department and Lecturers on Academic Support:** Lecturers should avoid fixing major continuous assessments and compulsory practicals in the first two weeks of resumption. Also, lecture materials and notes for the first weeks should be made available online to support late resuming self-sponsoring students to catch up and reduce learning loss in sequential science courses.
4. **For Guidance and Counselling Unit on Time Management:** The University Counselling Centre should organize time management and work-study balance workshops for self-sponsoring undergraduates at the beginning of every semester. This is necessary because findings in Table 2 showed students resume mentally disorganized (Mean = 4.32) and find it difficult to combine work with study time (Mean = 4.30).5.
5. **For Self-sponsoring undergraduates:** Self-sponsoring undergraduates in Makurdi should be sensitized to apply for NELFUND (Nigerian Education Loan Fund) loan for students as a sustainable alternative to hustling during short semester breaks, which disrupts their attendance and time management.

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