

**DETERMINANTS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG MATURE ENTRY
STUDENTS: A CASE OF NAKURU AND NAIROBI CAMPUSES OF KENYA
METHODIST UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

Globally, universities are recording a greater mix of students currently more than in the past. The purpose of the study was to investigate the social factors and how it impacts on academic performance among mature age entry students. The study was guided by the Needs theory by Abraham Maslow and adopted descriptive survey research design. The total target population was all the 289 mature age entry students enrolled at Nakuru and Nairobi campuses of Kenya Methodist University, administrators, Chairmen of Departments and lecturers of the two campuses. Convenient sampling was applied to obtain a sample size of 100 mature age entry students who participated in the study. University administrators were purposefully sampled based on the information required for the study. Questionnaire and interview schedules were used for collecting data for the study. In the study, the researcher carried out a pilot study and then carefully analyzed the results for clarity, correctness and also ensured that the items were comprehensive as far as the coverage of objectives was concerned. In order to ensure smooth research procedures, various ethical issues such as anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were observed. The data from the questionnaires were edited, coded and entered into the computer for analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in analyzing the data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23 using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results are presented in tables and charts to enhance clarity. Finally, the study found out that current engagement, inability to fit in university programmes and inability to balance demands of mature age entry students affect their academic performance. The universities should develop academic programmes that help reduce conflict that mature age students' encounter with their jobs and family commitments. This would involve revising the calendar for this category of students and also introduce weekend and evening classes where possible.

Key Terms: Academic performance, Determinants, Mature Age Entry Students, Mature age admission Criteria, Motivation, Social factors, Socio-economic Status

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, universities are recording a greater mix of students currently more than in the past. There are also a greater proportion of mature-entry students, more students studying part-time and more students studying via distance education programmes (Nelson 2002). Mature-entry students (21 years and above) constitute a notable group within higher the education sector. In 2012, for instance, mature entry students comprised 38 percent of the undergraduate intake worldwide (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science & Training, 2012).

With the broader expansion of the sector, more mature students have participated in higher education in the US. The number of mature students enrolling for higher education more than doubled between 1982 and 1992 in the UK (Saunders, 1994). This declined in late 90's after tuition fees was introduced in 1998 (Davies et al, 2002). However, from 2000/2001 there was an increase by 64% for students taking first degrees. Policies have been obtained over this period to aid participation by older learners. The 2006 Leitch Review (Pedrosa et. al. 2006), recommended better engagement between universities and employers and extensive learning opportunities so that adults could acquire work-related skills. Since the late '90s, the government has offered additional funds to the universities for covering the additional cost for mature students re-entering education with a target of 40% gaining university qualification by 2020.

Conservative-led Coalition Government in its advice to the Director of Fair Access (2011) would support mature students as well as those learning part-time and understand their needs. These

policies existed beside the framework of the planned increase in the tuition fee cap, whose effect on mature student involvement was undetermined.

In terms of academic performance, university life, priorities for study and motivation for study, mature students are a diverse group financially, their prior education, nationality, family obligations and age (Davies et al., 2002). Their diverse nature situations make the mature age students have unique needs that need to be identified in order for them to have similar trajectories as those of direct entry students in terms of academic performance and social development.

In realization of the unique nature and the requirements of mature age entry students, different universities have developed policies and strategies for addressing their needs. For instance; University of Surrey in the UK runs the Mature Student Society which offer sessions for them, produces an occasional newsletter and organize social events within the year. The society facilitates personal and learning support tutors, study, pre-entry and personal skills sessions. Other universities (Bristol, Leeds, Newcastle and Sheffield) offered special support contacts such as advisory, committee or an officer for mature students' issues while other universities have a mentoring scheme for peer support.

In Africa, specifically in Kenya, universities recognize the different categories of students enrolled. For instance, according to Moi University Student Guide Book (6th edition), categories of students are categorized as direct entry from school recruitment, mature-age students, international students, parallel entry/evening studies/self-sponsored students and open and distance learning. It further notes that the mature age students constitute about 10% of all the students mainly from post-experience.

Despite acknowledging the presence of mature age students and their unique motivations and circumstances, studies and efforts to address the determinants of the academic performance among the mature age students and how to mainstream them in the university community in Kenya are generally lacking. The proposed study sought to investigate the determinants of academic performance among the mature age entry students enrolled in Kenyan Universities with special focus on Nakuru and Nairobi Campuses of Kenya Methodist University (KeMU).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is evident that the mature age entry students operate under a very different scenario compared to their counterparts who join the institutions at the usual age. The number of such students enrolled in the universities is on the rise. Due to their unique needs, their academic performance is usually affected in certain unique ways compared to that of the usual students. In addition, however, university guidebooks do not specify how unique needs and circumstances surrounding the category of students may be identified, examined and addressed. A lot of research has gone into the factors that influence academic performance in general; however, research on the factors affecting academic outcomes among mature age entry students into the universities is scanty. The study sought to examine the determinants of academic performance of mature age entry students with a view of seeking ways of creating an enabling environment for them to achieve their academic goals, as well as, contributing to the country's development.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study's purpose was to investigate the factors that determine academic performance among mature age entry students, a case of Nakuru and Nairobi Campuses of Kenya Methodist University.

2.1 Literature Review

The term ‘mature-age’ is a term that is used to refer to students who join the university after acquiring other educational qualifications and possibly having settled in their careers. Academic performance, priorities for support, motivation for study and accounts of university life categorize mature students in studies.

In terms of nationality, financial circumstances, family commitments, previous education and age, mature students are a diverse group and could be post or under graduate, full or part-time, live in campus or not (Davies et al. 2002). Enrolled potential mature students are motivated by prospects of desire for improved qualifications, personal development, interest in career choice and advancement (Davies & Williams, 2001). They are motivated to enhance their work experience or prove themselves to others (McCune et al. 2010).

According to Davies & Williams (2001) however, considering higher education had uncertain outcomes and competing demands like insufficient finance and fear of debts. Time not devoted to family by parents in order to study would have immediate cost against other benefits like being a role model to children and investing in education also has the fear of failure and risk. Reay’s (2002) found that mature students were strongly inspired by education, but difficult to weigh amid “investing in a new improved identity and holding on to a cohesive self” (pg 403). Challenge and welfare was an important matter to consider and due to distress in previous experience in education, many err for safety in the choice of institution.

2.1.1 Social Factors Encountered by Mature Age Entry Students

Mature age entry students are faced with a myriad of unique factors in their social environment that may influence their participation in higher education. This study conceptualizes the social

factors as family obligations and expectations, challenges that come with the interaction with members of the university as well as their immediate families. West (1986) report that the majority of mature-age students have very little expectation for social support as they enter university education. Their focus is on attending university, getting work done and not being distracted by social contact. In most cases, mature-age students fear that they would not be completely accepted by younger students either during tutorials or outside class times. Therefore, they worry about communicating with young students from a generation different from theirs.

They feel socially disoriented when surrounded by younger students with very different interests and life experiences. This may negatively affect their academic performance if not properly handled. West (1986) notes that student-to-student interactions with peers have shown to be an extremely effective form of learning. Therefore, specific programmes directed at the needs of mature-age students within the sciences should be considered.

Kantanis (1999) notes that social support is a factor that can affect academic performance of students both negatively and positively. The social support networks have great value to enhance academic performance as students form friendship groups to exchange information on assignments and find out about tutorials and lecture schedules. Peer support and relationships have been found to enhance persistence of students both directly and indirectly.

West et al. (1986) report that family support influenced students' commitment to the institution and course satisfaction. It was an important factor in persistence for a small sample of respondents under study at Monash University in Australia. However, West found that a few students withdrew from studies, failed or repeated courses because of the difficulty of combining study with family commitments and needs. Terenzini (1992) noted that families can be either a supportive asset or a source of stress especially as relationships change. West et al. (1986) report

that financial matters generally appear to have a small but significant effect on academic performance either directly or indirectly through goal commitment. More financial responsibilities such as mortgages and children's school expenses which have to be maintained whilst studying can have far reaching consequences on the student. The proposed study will seek to establish the nature of the effect of current personal engagements on academic outcomes among mature age entry students in the universities.

In their study of non-traditional learners, Leathwood & O'Connell (2003) observed that the experience for majority in higher education is strenuous, has financial, ability and institutional difficulties like insufficient teaching staff support. In her study on healthcare programmes of mature female students, Shanahan (2000) observed that participants regarded their courses as a catalyst for transformation in their lives, but were not confident about their own academic abilities and were enthusiastic about assessment.

The importance the women attached to their studies made the pressure to succeed acute, while the pressure of juggling the demands of home and university, left them feeling "extreme guilt" that they were doing nothing properly (p 156). Thomas (2002) noted the importance of social networks and friendship.

Challis (1976) found that mature students doubted their own abilities though they perform well academically or better than younger students (Cantwell et al., 2001), showing a deeper approach to study and a richer understanding of what they are learning (McCune et al., 2010). Doubts shown by mature students replicate the risks purported in investing money and time to study and high hopes they have in ensuring these risks reimburse.

Likening home mature students to international mature students in an Australian study, Leder & Fogasz (2004) found that home students had challenges in balancing study against paid work, social activities and family life. Financial constraints and lack of acquaintance financially about support systems was an obstacle. Language proficiency was a significant problem for international students, with frequent references to having few friends, being lonely, and difficulties in working with others.

In research at Queensland with mature students, Tones et al. (2009) found that lower socio-economic upbringings main barriers were uncertainty about university hopes; financial and family duties; not knowing where to seek help and feeling dissimilar from school leavers and also had limited personal resources. Childcare and care responsibilities were the main barriers for students aged 35 to 44 while students over the age of 45 lacked computer skills and uncertainty about where to seek help at university. In contrast, external, part-time, fourth year and postgraduate mature students all appeared to experience fewer barriers and support needs.

The studies reviewed indicate that mature age entry students encounter obstacles which at times could be beyond those faced by their counterparts. The present study seeks to establish the extent to which the obstacles posed affect their academic performance.

Geiser and Santelices (2007) found that the ideal predictor of college grades is high school grade point average. Geiser and Studley (2003) established that grades attained in high school were ideal in predicting academic results.

A study in Kuwait by Mohammad and Almaheed (1988) showed that grades from secondary school were helpful in predicting performance in the university. Their research together with

Waller and Foy (1988) is now obsolete though the method used in research is relevant and the use of Statistical Package of Social Science is applicable at present.

On the contrary Reddy, Huw, and Talcott (2006) are not of the opinion that prior academic outcomes determine the current outcomes. In their study, they found that university academic outcomes were not predicted by grades obtained at A' level. They cite Pearson and Johnson (1994) who showed a 0.28 overall mark association between degree performance and A' level grades. Academic Admission Council of Oregon State University (2003) agrees with the view and established that potential tradition evaluation of academic like high school Grade Point Average (GPA) marks defined only one-third of the difference in initial year at college GPA.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Abraham Maslow Needs theory. The theory postulates that behaviour is influenced by a person's needs. If one need is not met, a person may do anything to have his or her need fulfilled. As noted by Child (1993), the needs follow a specific order or hierarchy. They begin with physiological needs that include food, air, clothing and shelter. After the physiologic needs comes the safety needs that include desire for predictable safe environment. Thereafter, the need for love and belonging follows. This includes acceptance, having supportive classmates and having a communicating class system. The fourth level is the esteem needs which consist of need to be appreciated, valued, respected, recognized, prestige, status, attention, competence, mastery and freedom. The last need on the hierarchy is the need for self-actualization. It includes desire to achieve one's dreams. The physiological needs have to be fulfilled before the safety and other needs.

Concerning this study, the needs theory elaborate on the factors affecting academic performance of mature-age students. For instance, at physiological level of needs, students concentrate on their academic endeavors only if most the physiological needs are met. These include having a favorable learning environment, having adequate food for their families and being able to pay for water bills so that the home has water supply among others.

Safety needs entail that students need to be protected from threats from fellow students and lecturers if they are to perform well academically. Students need to feel loved in whatever situations they may find themselves in. This creates a sense of belonging which in turn gives them the motivation and confidence to work hard regardless of how difficult the courses may be. Even in situations where students face challenges in a course, they get encouraged by friends, tutors and lecturers. But when they fail in a test or examination, the students do not feel that they belong to the class and become discouraged. In fact, failure culminates in a lower self-esteem and a negative self-concept.

The Maslow's theory will also help to explain how social needs of mature-age students are met. To achieve the social needs, students work in groups. The need to belong and be appreciated holds the groups together. Through academic study-groups, students tend to socialize, make friends among the groups and help one another academically. As a result, their need to belong and for appreciation gets fulfilled. Positive comments from lecturers and tutors also boost their self-image and confidence in their academic work and feelings of success building their positive self-esteem. In addition, positive comments on students' work are a source of motivation to better performance in the courses they take. Passing tests and examinations builds confidence in students to the point that they develop hope to attain higher levels of education and self-actualization. But failure in tests and examinations builds low self-esteem and rejection.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. As pointed out by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), descriptive design can be used to collect information about people's attitudes, opinions or habits. They further note that descriptive survey designs are used to allow researchers gather, interpret and present information for the purposes of clarification. This design was chosen because the researcher seeks to find out the effects of the selected factors on academic outcomes and completion rates among mature age entry students. As pointed out by Chitavi (2002), descriptive studies are not only restricted to fact finding, but may often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. The design was therefore, deemed most efficient in enabling the analysis of the selected factors on academic outcomes and completion rates among mature age entry students.

The total target population was the accessible mature age entry students enrolled at Nakuru and Nairobi campuses of KeMU. In addition, two senior administrators, Chairmen of Departments and five lectures from each of the two campuses that participated in the study. Therefore, the target population of the study was all the mature age entry students, university administrators and the lecturers of Nakuru and Nairobi Campuses of KeMU.

The sample size for each category of the respondents ranged from 10.6% to 34.6% with an overall percentage representation of 29.0% of the total target population. This is considered adequate according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) who opines that a sample size of between 10%- 30% provides an adequate representation. Different percentage representation of the various strata was adopted due to the difference in the numbers of the subjects in each stratum.

Questionnaires for students and interview guides for lecturers and other university staff were the methods used in data collection. Questionnaires were used for the students due to their large

number while interview schedules were used for the lecturers and other university staff due to their small number.

It is important that the research instruments are piloted as a way of fine tuning them (Wiersman, 1995). Piloting involves administering the research instruments to a sample with similar characteristics to the intended sample with a view of determining the reliability of the research instruments. The sample used in the pilot study is not involved in the final data collection. A pilot study was carried out using a sample of 10 mature age entry students, 2 senior administrators and 2 lecturers at the Nyeri Campus of KeMU.

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from Kenya Methodist University which was used to apply for a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovations. On receipt of the permit, the researcher used it to solicit for local authority from the university administration. The researcher then proceeded to administer the questionnaires. The researchers administered the questionnaire personally and collected the filled questionnaires at an agreed time with the university administration and the students. The interviews were also conducted during the same period at the time agreed upon with the interviewees.

The data from the questionnaires were edited, coded and entered in the computer for analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v23) computer software in order to enhance faster and accurate analysis. The methods used were quantitative and qualitative in analyzing the data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data from the questionnaires through use of frequencies and percentages and presented using charts, tables and graphs. The data was also analyzed using Pearson Product Moment to determine the relationship between the variables. Qualitative data was organized in themes for further analysis.

4.1 FINDINGS

4.1.1 Social Factors Affecting Mature Age Students

The objective of the study was to establish the social factors affecting mature age entry students on their academic performance. The students identified a number of social factors that could influence their academic performance. Table 1 summarizes the responses obtained.

Table 1: *Social Factors Affecting Mature Age Entry Students*

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Current engagements such as family and domestic obligations	39	46.4
Inability to fit in the university programmes	23	27.4
Inability to balance demands of studies and career/ personal commitments	13	15.5
Others	9	10.7
TOTAL	84	100

A number of social factors may affect the academic performance of the mature age entry students were identified. They included current engagements such as family and domestic obligations (46.4%), inability to fit in the university programmes (27.4%) and inability to balance the demands of studies and those of career or personal commitments (15.5%) and other commitments (10.7%). The findings indicate that there are three social factors that may influence the academic performance of the mature age entry students.

Further, the study sought to establish the extent to which social factors affecting mature age students affect their academic outcomes. Figure 1 summarises the responses obtained.

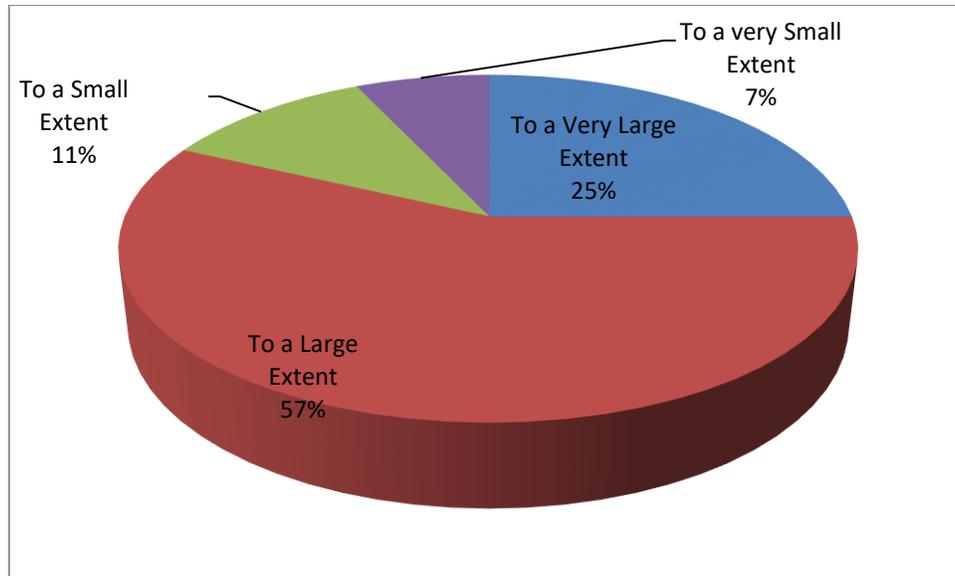


Figure 1
Impact of challenges faced on academic performance

The study found that majority of the students (57%) agreed to a large extent, 25% were to a very large extent, 11% to a small extent, and only 7% agreed to a very small extent to the statement that social factors facing mature age entry students influence their academic performance. The findings indicated that majority of the mature age entry students were of the opinion that social factors of mature age students affect academic performance in the universities.

On the nature of the influence of social factors on academic performances, the responses obtained were as summarized in Figure 2.

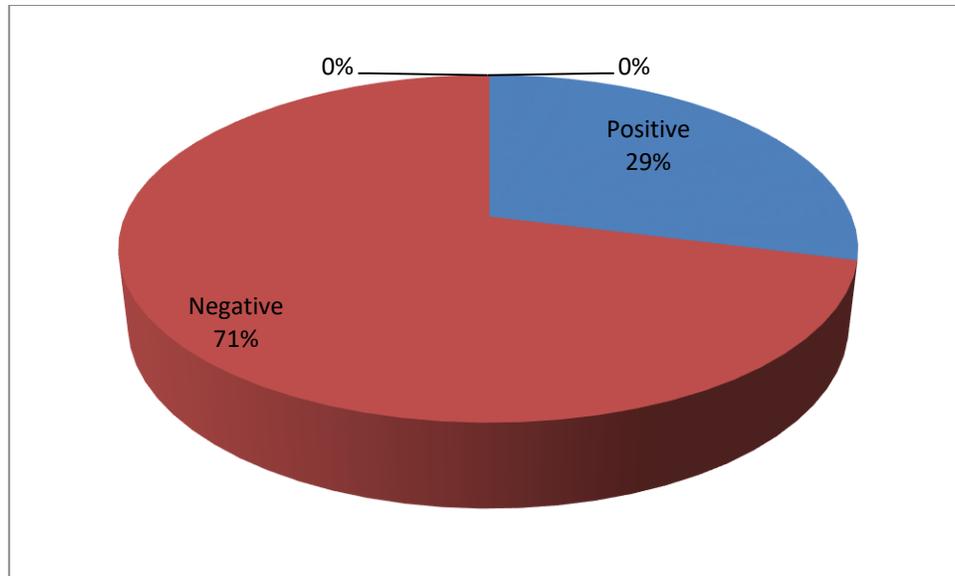


Figure 2

Relationship between social factors and academic performance

Majority (71%) of the respondents were of the opinion that social factors affected their academic performance negatively and only 29% were of the contrary opinion. The findings indicate that in most cases the challenges that mature age entry students had faced affected their academic performance negatively. The lecturers and the university administrators had a similar opinion and added that at times the current engagements of the students conflicted with their academic programmes and at such times, it was the academics that were sacrificed. For this reason, the respondents were of the opinion that the academic performance of the mature age entry students may be affected adversely.

Further, the researcher used a 5-point Likert scale to determine the extent to which the respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements indicating the impact of current engagements on academic performance among the mature age entry students. Table 2 summarizes the responses obtained.

Table 2: Impact of Current Engagements on Academic Performance

Statement	Extent of Agreement or Disagreement (%)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
My current engagements reduce the amount of time I have for my studies and hence adversely affect my performance	32	46	12	6	4	
I can perform better at the university if there is less conflict between my current engagements and my studies	29	35	16	11	9	
My career offers me opportunity to practice what I am learning at the university	18	29	27	16	10	

Analysis of the findings in Table 2 shows that the level of agreement with the statement that their current engagements reduced the amount of time they had for their studies and hence, adversely affected their performance was very high (32%), high (46%), moderate (12%), low (6%) and only 4% of the students responded that the extent of their agreement with the statement was very low. Cumulatively, the findings indicate that majority of the students (78%) perceived that their current engagements reduced the amount of time they had for their studies and hence, adversely affected their performance. This implies that the current engagements of the mature age entry students reduced the amount of time they had for their studies and hence, adversely affected their academic performance. This concurs with the views of the university administrators and lecturers

who expressed the views that students who had many other commitments either in the family or at their work places recorded poorer academic performances than those who did not have.

On whether they can perform better if there were no conflicts between current engagements and studies, majority of the mature age entry students (35%) agreed to a high extent, 29% agreed very highly, 16% of the students moderately agreed, 11% recorded low agreement with the statement and 9% of the students recorded low agreement with the statement. Cumulatively, the findings indicate that majority of the students (64%) were of the opinion that they could perform better if there were no conflicts between their current engagements and studies at the university. This finding was in line with the sentiments of the university administrators and lecturers interviewed who unanimously indicated that students whose career or their family/domestic obligations of their children and spouses conflict the interests of their academic programmes usually record lower academic outcomes.

When asked whether their careers offers, them an opportunity to practice what they were learning at the university, 29% of the students sampled indicated very high, 18% indicated high, 27% indicated moderate with 16% and 10% of the students indicating low and very low, respectively. Cumulatively, the findings indicated that majority of the students (47%) were of the opinion that their careers offered them an opportunity to practice and advance what they were learning at the university. The findings of the study were corroborated by the university administrators who asserted that, majority of the mature age entry students enrolled in academic programmes closely related to their careers and therefore, were able to practice what they learnt at the university. This reduced conflict between their careers and the studies and the students were therefore, able to post better academic outcomes.

Further, the researcher carried out correlation analysis to establish the nature and the extent of the relationship between challenges faced by mature age entry students and their academic performance. Table 3 displays the output obtained.

Table 3: *Correlation between Challenges Faced and Academic Performance*

		Challenges Encountered
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.694
	N	84

The information displayed on Table 3 indicates that the correlation between the challenges encountered by the mature age entry students and their academic performance was negative and not significant ($r=-0.049$, $p>0.05$). The findings imply that the more the challenges faced by the mature age entry students, the lower their academic performance. However, the relationship was weak and statistically insignificant. The coefficient of determination ($r^2=0.0024$) indicates that challenges faced by the mature age entry students contributed to only 0.24% of their academic performance. This implies that challenges encountered by the mature age entry student are a weak determinant of their academic performance.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

5.1.1 Social Factors Affecting Performance of Mature Age Entry Students

The objective of the study was to establish the impact of challenges faced by mature age entry students on their academic performance. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that current engagements affected the performance of the students academically. The findings indicated that in most cases the engagements that mature age entry students had affected their academic performance negatively. Cumulatively, the findings indicate that majority of the students perceive that their current engagements reduce the amount of time

they have for their studies and, hence, adversely affect their performance. This implies that the current engagements of the mature age entry students reduced the amount of time they had for their studies, hence adversely affected their academic performance. Cumulatively, the findings indicated that majority of the students were of the opinion that they could perform better if there were no conflicts between their current engagements and studies at the university. Cumulatively, the findings indicated that majority of the students were of the opinion that their careers offer them an opportunity to practice and advance what they were learning at the university.

The study also found out that the correlation between the challenges encountered by the mature age entry students and their academic performance was negative and weak ($p > 0.05$). The findings implied that the social factors encountered by mature age entry students affect their academic performance. However, the relationship was weak and statistically insignificant. The coefficient of determination indicated that challenges faced by the mature age entry students contributed only 0.24% to their academic performance.

5.2 Recommendation for Research Finding

The universities should develop academic programmes that help reduce conflicts that mature age students encounter with their jobs and family commitments. This would involve revising the calendar for this category of students and also introduce weekend and evening classes where possible.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Study

The following are the suggestions for further research:

Even though this study has come up with precious information on the determinants of academic performance among the mature age entry students, the researcher took into consideration that the

small sample of only one 100 students and only one university presents a limitation in that the findings may not be widely generalized. Therefore further studies investigating a larger sample and covering more universities over a wider geographical area is recommended to explore further the factors influencing academic performance among the mature age entry students. Further studies could also be extended to other factors such as university management, location of the universities and availability of learning and teaching materials.

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