

## Carrying Scars and Stigma: Repeating Failed Modules at Midlands State University

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### Abstract

*This paper investigates the extent of module carrying at Midlands State University (MSU) level in Zimbabwe. It explores the impact it has in university students' success and examines the implications of student failures in university learning. This paper reveals that carrying modules is common in Zimbabwean universities due to reasons such as failing as a result of lack of module interest, stigmatization from other students, difficult learning environment, too much socialization, poor relations with the lecturers among others. Furthermore, repeating a module by university students may have side effects that are costly to students, parents, lecturers and university administration. The paper also found an inverse relationship between student absenteeism and course performance. This paper adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (mixed methodology) as the operational framework for data gathering. The study is useful to those who may want to expand their horizons on the issue of university students' academic achievements and development. It gives an insight into how student failure can be accounted for at institutions of higher learning.*

### Key words:

### Introduction

This paper focuses on the university core business of teaching, learning and research and will specifically focus on why many failing students continue repeating modules. The researcher has encountered students who fail dismally both coursework and examinations, students who experience anxieties about aspects of study and presentations; hence, this study seeks to minimize the occurrence of module failure in Universities. Approximately, more than forty-five percent of students at Midlands State University carry modules. It is a general assumption by all sectors of society that the university community will produce quality education and quality graduates. However, it is not always the case as some people

struggle academically throughout the course of their university education. This study will take it that the issue of failing modules is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders, that is, the learner, the teacher and the university society.

In the investigation on why students continually fail and carry modules, the interaction between university students and the lecturers, the university and home environments and any other factors that may come into play shall form the basis of this research. Thus failure of students at University is a complex issue influenced by many interdependent variables; therefore a holistic approach to these problems should be adopted, with a high level professional commitment and involvement. From a broader perspective, the learner should play his/her part by availing one's self and opening up to allow the inflow of knowledge. While some students may receive support from their lecturers, others may not receive the quality and quantity of academic support they need. The lack of support will prevent the achievement of academic and psychological stability. These students may require additional support and intervention in order to support their optimal social, academic and career development. It therefore becomes mandatory that institutions create conducive learning environments for their students. A good learning environment has a bearing on the provision of an improved learning experience and hence student success. Thus quality education is achieved through maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that should be complied with and in the sense of excellence that should be aimed at (Strydom, 1996). And as such, resources such as books, internet, journal etc. should be made available to the students. On the other hand the lecturer has to play his/her part by providing students with the necessary guidance and expert knowledge needed. University, government and parents should play their part by providing the necessary financial and material support for the provision of quality education by the institution.

### **Area of Investigation**

This paper investigates university student failure and the concept of carrying a module within or to a next level in student learning. Repeating a module in university is a traditional practice the world over. It is against this background that the Midlands State University allows its students to repeat failed modules to replace poor or failing grades. Research shows that over forty percent of Midlands State University (MSU) students repeat modules every semester. Repeating a module has been accepted as a corrective measure to failing students. It is regarded as an

answer to a student's academic difficulties in his/her academic work. Module repetition is also regarded as a common means to help lecturers deal with a variety of learning abilities and personalities within their classes (Ysseldyke & Christenson 2002). However, module repetition can be seen as an inadequate and wrong strategy for fixing individual learning or social deficiencies. Students who fail modules are often labelled as failing students and this may lead them to end up having behavioural and personality problems. This educational stigma normally has a dramatic negative input of students' self-esteem and thereby their motivation and effort to learn. The negative effects are persuasive over all academic and personal educational outcomes. The findings of this research show that there are neither academic nor social advantages for the majority of students who repeat failed modules. Modules are recognised as relatively free-standing units of teaching which have a level of independence in their delivery and this caters for a wide intake of students with a variety of backgrounds and expectations (Hawley and Rosenholtz, 1984). The advantages of adhering to modular schemes are seen to provide students with greater control and flexibility with respect to their study patterns, students can make use of the portability of their credits, can voluntarily suspend or defer studies and can exit programmes with levels of awards. Highly successful lecturers and researchers believe that failure is a critical part of the learning process. But, the question is what should be done to deal with the issue of failing students and the issue of carrying a module at university? Can the concept of carrying modules be completely done away with, as carrying a module is regarded as a narrow strategy that does not clearly address the complex needs of most of the students who are achieving poorly or have social behavioural difficulties?

### **Objective of the study**

This paper explores the concept of module carrying at institutions of higher learning using the Midlands State University as a case study. The major objectives of this paper can therefore be summarized as follows:

- To develop an action plan to resolve the situation of university module carrying students.
- To critically reflect on the processes involved in supporting and managing a learner who is carrying a module and continuously failing to meet university academic standards.
- To identify and critically reflect on the common behaviour patterns of the underachieving students.

- To help students who are experiencing academic difficulties with a confidential space in which they can talk to a counselor about their academic concerns.

### Related Literature

Holmes (1989), Jimmerson (2001), Shepard and Smith (1990) have provided the most important information about the effects of repeating a module. They conclude that repeating a module creates low esteem and a negative attitude to school and places students at risk of further failure, deferring studies and also dropping out of school. Jimmerson (2001) argues that repeating modules does not always improve academic outcomes; it can contribute to poor mental health outcomes. It demonstrates a high level of behavioural problems and also leads to poor social outcomes. Furthermore, it can contribute to a negative attitude to school and learning. He argues that at times universities underestimate student reaction to repeating as this practice of carrying a module is not supported by university. Jimmerson, et al (1998) warn that such a practice may lead to institute educational malpractices. They argue that some lecturers may use it as a tool to exert control and punish difficult students or other circumstances, but reiterated that it is not always the case. However, module repetition may be justified as a solution to help students to succeed in specific situations, for example, in case of serious illness, (Brophy 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that, to some extent, module repetition is helpful to academically struggling students.

Although there is no single empirically supported intervention strategy or approaches that can be shown to be effective for all students who are achieving poorly, the use of a combination of specific evidence based interventions and approaches can enhance and support the achievement and adjustment of individual students. Thus, Murdisch and Wilson (2004) suggest that using a cooperative learning strategy may reduce the issue of individual failing of a module by a student. On the other hand, Bloombers (2000), Lambros (2002), McGrath and Noble (2005) suggest that adopting problem based learning approach may solve the problem of carrying students. They urge lecturers to identify student academic problems and intervene earlier to save the student from failing a module. Intervention should focus on structured engaging programs that teach basic literacy and communicating skills. Each lecturer may have a different style and the format of teaching may also be different. This means that lecturers should allow flexibility in the way students

learn in their lectures. In addition, examining students does represent a distinct and potentially separate role for the lecturer. Thus it is possible for someone to be an 'expert teacher' but not an expert examiner. In other words, students may be short charged during examination period and thereby being awarded undeserving marks. And this can cause students to be failed unnecessarily by the lecturer, thereby disadvantaging students who will be made to carry a module to next level of learning (Murdisch and Wilson 2004). The reality of being a lecturer is that it is a complex and demanding role. Adding the issue of carrying students and it can be overwhelming. Lecturers need effective preparation and support to deal with carrying students. They need extra time and guidance to fulfil their professional responsibilities, help from other lecturers and strong moral support for students from university administrators to succeed academically. This will reduce student module failures in higher institutions of learning.

Furthermore, Hawley and Rosenholtz (1984) argue that issue of carrying modules by university students is caused in part by ineffective teaching. They go on to say that effective teachers function where learning time signifies that portion of allocated time in which students are successful at working on tasks that are associated with desired outcomes. Effective teachers maintain and communicate high expectations for student performance. In addition they analyse both the tasks of their students to determine whether a task is best handled by large groups, small groups or individually. The resulting decision helps determine appropriate instructional strategies. A reflective lecturer knows the art and craft of teaching and considers it carefully both during and after interaction with students. Murdisch and Wilson (2004) add that, to mitigate the issue of module failing at university, there should be self-evaluation efforts by both the student and the lecturer. As a formative process, self-evaluation enables individuals and groups of individuals (lecturers and students) to be accountable for their work and demonstrate how they might improve by reflecting on their own practice and performance.

As MacKeachie et al (1986) points out, the threat of low grades may prompt some students to work hard, but other students may resort to academic dishonesty, excuses for late work, and other counterproductive behaviour in order to evade failing the module. Thus most students who repeat modules never catch up academically. Hence the impact of carrying a module for some students is rarely stimulating. Worse still, some lecturers do not plan for or specify the areas that the failed student needs improvement, let alone methods of achieving most effectively levels of knowledge and skills. Students need academic motivation because the

perceptions students have about their skills influence the types of activities they select, how much they challenge themselves at those activities, and the persistence they exhibit once they are involved (Ames, 1990; Bandura, 1977, 1986; Schunk, 1981) will greatly affect their academic performance.

Conversely, Coach and Siegle (2001) made an observation on student performance on four factors: attitudes toward lecturers, attitudes toward learning, goal valuation, and motivation/self-regulation. Gifted students have high academic self-perceptions and they believe that they have the ability to perform well (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1984). Secondly, they trust their academic environment and expect that they can succeed in it. They expect that this environment is conducive to their performance of academic tasks and they have positive attitudes toward their lecturers and academic tasks. Thirdly, they find school meaningful (Atkinson, 1964). They enjoy school or believe that what they are doing in school will produce beneficial outcomes for them. Finally, they implement self-regulating strategies where they set realistic expectations and implement appropriate strategies to complete their goals successfully. Thus this ground the fact that the cause of module carrying is entirely the concerned students' making. However this research reveals that module carrying at MSU is a mixture of various variables as is detailed further in this paper.

## **Methodology**

The paper employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (mixed methodology). The qualitative methodology was appropriate to this study because it allowed the researcher to get the data, ideas, views, voices, perceptions and expectations from research participants in detail. A quantitative approach was adopted in order to allow the researcher to gather more precise and quantifiable information on the causes and effects of module carrying.

## **Variables that Contribute to Student Failure: Findings of the Problems and Possible Explanations**

This paper seeks to isolate major factors that give rise to the problem of module carrying. Hence the research findings in this paper revolved around the following categories:

### **University Environment**

The university environment is markedly different from the Secondary School environment in terms of the degrees of freedom for both the learners and the lecturers. This is good, but conversely freedom may bring with it some factors that may be detractors to academic success. One may assume that too much freedom hampers the acquisition of knowledge in one way or another such that there is a higher failure rate of modules. Furthermore, according to Astin (1993) first-time university students have lower levels of academic motivation and higher academic boredom from high school which they carry to universities. In this view if students are not aware of the objective of learning, they will not take learning seriously. It therefore becomes mandatory that universities in general and MSU in particular create conducive learning environments which guards against laxity for their students, and student counselling unit which should allow for productive learning to take place. A good learning environment has a bearing on the provision of an improved learning experience and hence good grades. As such students' academic success can be achieved through a more purposeful system of education, which should encourage a conducive atmosphere for the teaching, and learning at University institutions.

### **Home Environment**

Research in this paper; show that another factor that may contribute to students' poor or good academic performance is the home environment. Seventy-five percent of the research participants for this paper concurred that a student's home environment has significant effects on learning and school performance. The home environment provides the foundation for learning and is an element of the student's life that can affect grades. Thus parents are responsible for ensuring that their children are well-fed, happy and calm, by providing social, emotional and economic needs of their children at university. What parents expect and communicate to their child about the value of learning and their child's skills has a powerful effect on the child's motivation to learn. Hence creating a positive physical and mental atmosphere for the children helps them to be able to learn at school up to university level. On the other hand, it can be argued that, the poor home environment can contribute to good academic performance as students from a struggling single parent and unstable or fragmented families prefers to work hard than one from a rich home environment.

Consequently, MSU authorities have put in place student guidance and counselling services at the institution. This is very important given the fact that the majority of

its students are adolescents of which the first year students are staying away from home for the first time in their lives. Students need regular guidance and counselling services as well as career support so that they may be able to cope with university life and all that goes with it. Understandably, some of them experience a great deal of crises e.g. financial challenges, module failures, decision-making as pertaining to their academic affairs, etc. Such students with academic challenges need a special focus; hence this paper highlights the need for university student counsellors and lecturers to be professional in dealing with each impending situation. Each decision made is important and valid for the student, but it is of utter importance that this decision is made thoughtfully and carefully. This, in some way, points towards the level of maturity that most university students have. It is therefore crucial that when students enrol with university, their level of maturity should not be taken for granted. The implementation of effective and functional first year student orientation and student support programmes such as religious, social, sports clubs, (increasing sport infrastructure) could be part of the intervention strategies that MSU might need to reconsider among others.

This paper has shown that repeating a module to some students is not a positive event; it contributes to poor mental health outcome leads to poor long term social outcome and also contributes to a negative attitude to school and learning and hence failing students need constant counselling. Learning to deal with challenges empowers students to overcome many academic obstacles. From the research findings, it became clear that student support services at MSU need to be visible and intensified so that students are assisted in making sound decisions that relate to their studies and life in general. Module failing can be overwhelming to students; they need support and counselling system to guide them through their failures, for which the teaching staff have little time. This will minimise module failing and re-failing thus avoiding the carrying stigma and scars to the next level of their academic life.

### **The lecturer**

The lecturer is a facilitator for student learning (Bligh, 1972). The quality of any teaching programme cannot rise above the quality of its teachers (Lowman, 1984). In other words it means that the quality of lecturers may affect the quality of student academic achievements. Therefore, the lecturer education can have a large bearing on the issue of failing students because they (lecturers) do not have the necessary skills to cater for low achieving students e.g. remedial work teaching skills. Interpersonal skills are learnt or taught at colleges to equip the lecturer with

skills to provide quality education to students. Encouragingly, MSU has made it compulsory and put in place staff development programmes such as teacher education that equip lecturers with the necessary skills needed in the execution of their work. Hopefully this will reduce cases of module carrying at MSU.

### **Lecturers Attitudes**

Attitudes determine what each individual will see, hear, think and do. Attitude means the individual's prevailing tendency to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person or group of people, institutions or events, (Zimmerman, etal 1996). Attitudes can either be positive or negative. This paper concurs that negative attitudes towards students can cause them to fail and retake modules countless times. Negative attitudes discourage learning, positive change and growth. A lecturer's positive attitude does cause a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. The positive attitude is a catalyst and it sparks extraordinary good classroom results. Many students who participated in this paper alluded the fact that lecturer negative attitude contributes much to student failure. Lecturers are encouraged not to be distracted by the challenges of their own life such that they adopt a negative attitude towards a student. They are also human and not perfect but they should try by all means to develop positive attitudes towards students.

### **Students**

Students are the epicentre of the learning continuum and as such form the principal clientele for educational success. Hence, proper perception of the significance of learning by university students is therefore vital to enhance the quality of education, as well as to raise their academic performance levels.

### **Students Attitudes**

Students' attitudes may be a contributing factor towards their failure or success. This paper established that a considerable number of students' attitudes towards learning at MSU are negative. Lecturers who participated in this study raised concern over student absenteeism, late submission of assignments, and students being on social media during lectures, e.g. Facebook, Whatsup, YouTube, Twitter etc. It is against this background that this paper calls for MSU authorities to earnestly disallow the use of laptops and carrying of cell phones into the lecture room by students. In this regard therefore, there is need for academic counselling against such behaviours in order for students to perform better at university.

## Student Motivation

Motivation has a powerful affect and it is certainly a state of mind that is worth developing and strengthening. Many factors affect a given student's motivation to work and to learn (Bligh, 1971; Sass, 1989): interest in the subject matter, perception of its usefulness, general desire to achieve, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as patience and persistence are major motivational factors at university. As a result, if students do not have any of these, then there is a higher probability of them failing modules. And, of course, not all students are motivated by the same values, needs, desires, or wants. Some of the students will be motivated by the approval of others, some by overcoming challenges. Students' beliefs about their ability to learn are shaped by messages and experiences at home, at school, and in the larger society. Low expectations can be subtly communicated by parents and teachers, conversely, high but achievable expectations convey the message that all students are capable of achieving.

Lecturers, then, should motivate failing students to review past learning materials, past examination questions, past in class tests and other reading material to look over. Lecturers should have skills to motivate failing students. Unfortunately, there is no single magical formula for motivating students. This paper urges lecturers to act in loco-parentis, because according to Wood (1996) lack of contact between students and lecturers may lead to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and a lack of confidence in their own abilities. If lecturers act as though they expect their students to be hardworking and interested in the course, they are more likely to be so. Student motivation helps them to cope more easily with the daily affairs of life. This brings optimism into their lives and makes it easier for them to avoid worrying and negative thinking. This will bring constructive changes in their lives and make them happier, brighter and more successful in their academic work at university.

MSU authorities should assist educational and training institutions to have well motivated students and lectures who take responsibility for their own learning and teaching and they should state their own goals for achievement. Research done in this paper has shown that a lecturer's expectations have a powerful effect on a student's performance. Whenever lecturers identify a student's weakness, they should make it that their comments relate to a particular task or performance e.g. "improve on the analysis of the question", not to the student as a person e.g. "you are very dull". In this regard, it means therefore, that anxiety and frustration often result if behaviour thought to be positive does not lead to proper recognition, reinforcement and reward.

### Stigmatisation of Failing Students

According to findings in this paper, module failure is not a positive experience for most students at MSU because some see failing a module as a confirmation of lack of ability and as a result they develop negative attitudes and stigma for module carrying. This perception is also held by their peers, and for some students it creates a sense of shame, stigma and loss of self-esteem (Alexander, etal 1994). Research also shows that repeating a failed module is a major source of stress; difficult and stressful experience for university students as is evidenced by student research participants' responses for this paper below:

**Table 1: Percentage of Student Perceptions to Module Carrying**

<b>Stress</b>	<b>Shame</b>	<b>Stigma</b>	<b>Boredom</b>	<b>Low Self Esteem</b>
75%	90%	65%	80%	75%

Thus the impact of repeating a module is often demoralizing and rarely makes the expected academic improvements among students (Jimmerson, 2001). This view is also echoed by Smith and Shepard (1988:56) who argue that there is boredom from repeating similar tasks and assignments. It can also result in the negative self-fulfilling prophecy and low self- esteem from the students such that they will never be successful in their academic life. Furthermore repeating a module is a visible demonstration of "failure" and may negatively influence most lecturers' perceptions about the students. Thus this paper, argues that having to repeat a module results in loss of social status. It can create more problems than it aims to solve, for example, cheating, for fear of repeating a module. This paper suggests that selected courses can be completed at a different pace depending on students' abilities and life situations, to avoid module carrying.

### Student Absenteeism

Student absenteeism is a major concern for lecturers at MSU and it can be regarded as a major contributor to student module failures. When students are absent from class, they miss valuable information resulting from peer-lecturer interaction and the benefits of the specific examples lecturers use to clarify difficult concepts. This

valuable part of the learning experience cannot be replicated when lecturers re-teach the material to absentee students (Weller 1996; Williams 2000). As such students' absenteeism disturbs the dynamic teaching-learning environment and adversely affects the overall well-being of classes (Segal 2008). MSU regulations stipulate that if a student fails to attend lectures, then he/she should be denied entry into the examination room for the module in question (MSU Year Book 2011-2014: 162; 5.4.4). This is not strictly adhered to by most university lecturers. Thus students who absent themselves from lectures, at most universities and MSU in particular always get away with it as the penalties for this behaviour are mostly never executed. Thus student absenteeism is rampant at MSU. This paper established that these are the major causes of student absenteeism at MSU as shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2 Major Reason Given for Student Absenteeism at MSU**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>MAJOR REASONS FOR ABSENTEEISM</b>
Foreign Students difficult to grasp	Home sickness, peer influence, lecture content
Male Students	Beer drinking, peer influence, interest in subject matter
Female Students	Attending parties, social problems, peer influence
Poor Family Background	Rent problems, fees problems, stress
Rich family background	Social influences e.g. partying into the late nights

Accordingly, research findings above show that several students experience absenteeism that has a socio-economic character. It is, therefore, undisputable that a robust relationship exists between student attendance for lectures and their socio-economic status (Wadesango and Machingambi 2011). This paper established that most students who experience absenteeism of this character include the following: foreign students; students from poor and rich family backgrounds; students from single parent families; and self- sponsoring students. Such students with social and financial challenges need special assistance from both the university and

government; hence this paper once again highlights the need for university student counsellors and lecturers to interact with them. These findings do not only enhance the understanding of student attendance patterns but they also enhance an insight into why so many students carry modules at MSU.

From the findings of this research, it became evident that the problem of absenteeism is quite a critical issue at MSU in which this research was conducted. Some students have blamed lecturers for the large number of absenteeism in lectures. Students were asked to indicate whether lecturers had anything to do with student absenteeism and sixty-five percent of the research participants reported that absenteeism was precipitated by some of their lecturers' conduct in executing their duty which predispose them towards absenteeism or non-attendance. Contributing to this issue, a second year student expressed his views as follows:

Some lecturers download lecture notes from the internet, and these are just read to the students urging students to do further research. It's not something that you would wish for, and as such there is no need to attend lectures as one can also download notes from the internet and therefore there is no importance going to college to attend lectures. I prefer studying at home than going for lectures.

In addition, the following sentiments from most students' participants were typical; Some lecturers have poor teaching method, and may contribute to the issue of absenteeism. There is no need to attend such lectures because we end up sleeping and it will be of no use to come and sleep every now and again.

A student studying accounting raised the following remarks, "Some lecturers are sometimes absent from lectures and for us then is no need to waste our time by attending lectures where the mentor is absent." Thus the problem of student absenteeism at Universities in general and MSU in particular is an interaction of a multiplicity of factors which are both internal and external to both the student and the university. Therefore, this paper calls for serious mitigation strategies against student absenteeism and to a considerable lesser extent, lecturers, in order to address this problem in any meaningful way. Guidance and counselling services should be enhanced to make students able to cope with university's academic life and all that goes with it

### **Financial Challenges for Students**

Most students successfully achieve their good learning outcomes from day one of registration up till the day they complete their university degrees. However some students do not perform at the expected level as other factors like funding come into play. Many students are facing financial challenges due to the ever rising cost of university education. This result in them losing lectures as they try to run around to get their fees. Relatedly, due to this problem most students will be stressed so much that they do not perform well in their academic work because their focus is divided due to the factors outlined above. In other words students face a challenge of balancing their studies with social, psychological and their university education (Grace 2001). For these students these challenges may outweigh any educational goals, and university institutions will continue to see students attaining very poor academic results. One student who participated in this research argued, "It is obvious that when something like fees problems comes into one's mind during a lecture, one gets detracted from total concentration and loses out on some facts." In addition the situation is made worse by university authorities who deny them access to lectures for non payment of fees. What usually puts off a busy student is when he/she is asked to get out of a lecture, (Macgilchrist and Buttress 2005). The student will have been detracted or prevented from accessing knowledge or information from the lecturer if he/she is asked to go out leaving other students in the lecture. Students express their anger against authorities who pull them out of lecture rooms for non-payment of fees in different ways. According to this paper the actions by MSU authorities of preventing students who have not paid, three quarters fees /or without payment plans from attending lectures and access to the library and internet laboratories are true detractors to the provision of quality education. The provision knowledge and information is greatly compromised by so doing because the lecturer would not teach the same lecture for the second time if affected students eventually pay up. This exacerbate student failure rate, and many MSU students find themselves carrying modules to other learning levels.

### ***Large Classes***

One of the factors that contribute to student failure and module carrying in Zimbabwean Universities is the large number of students with no increase in resources like classroom accommodation, library etc. Large student numbers may lead to the spreading of tutorial expertise less among student groups. This paper reveals that, large class size has been found to reduce the likelihood of classroom

participation. These large-class settings have historically been heavily lecture-centred, requiring minimal student engagement and expecting little more than memorization of terms and concepts as evidence of student learning. The sheer size and anonymity of large classes seem to militate against the very elements that promote students' involvement and intellectual development, learning, and success. This would adversely affect assignment marking, supervision, examination marking, and meeting deadlines against large examination scripts. This leads to tutors knowing students less well and giving the students less personal help and attention hence a high rate of student failure and consequently module carrying. This is rightly observed by Astin (1993) who notes that quality provision suffers when tutors have some administrative and teaching loads which inhibit their ability to engage properly in research and professional development. Essay assignments involve critical marking; which is less likely to be employed by lecturers who are teaching large classes opting instead for in-class tests, thus analysis of this paper suggests that, in general, large classes are simply not as effective as small classes for retention of knowledge, critical thinking, and attitude change. Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence (1992) remark;

One of the challenges of large classes is overcoming the anonymity and distance that can exist between teacher and students. If students are to be actively involved in and feel personal accountability for the learning process, they must be more than anonymous spectators and passive recipients of information.

In addition, Mckeachie et al (1986:182) argues that in general large classes are simple not as effective as small classes for the retention of knowledge, critical thinking and attitude change. It means that lecturers who engage large classes should highly motivate their students to learn, especially first year students as research has shown that students who are entering college for the first time have substantially higher levels of academic disengagement carried over from high school, Astin (1993) and they have a tendency of missing classes and spending less time on their studies inside and outside the class. Thus large numbers have a negative impact on the quality of students' learning experience and this may exacerbate the issue of module carrying by university students.

### *Timetables*

The timetable is another factor that may contribute to continuously student module carrying. The timetable is a primary medium by which everything is linked and

organized within an institution of learning e.g. a university. A good timetable results in utilizing the highest productivity of lecturers and students' optimum use of facilities and lecture rooms, while maintaining the required number of time slots for the respective modules. At MSU the timetable is well formulated but it should be made having the consideration of carrying students. This research reveals that failing students in most universities and at MSU do not have a separate timetable which enables to attend the failed module, such that, in most cases they are needed to attend two lectures at the same time. Consequently, left with no option, students choose not to attend the lecture for the carried module, such that this module will continuously be failed by the students. However, it can be argued that at universities, there are often many different curricula, such that there is no conflict-free timetable for every student within the given time, but this paper suggests that whoever makes the timetable should consider the students who carry modules.

### *Registration Deadlines*

Registration deadlines at universities must be made public to all students and organisations must enforce their being adhered to (Flowers 2001). This paper has established that due to the laxity of registration deadlines at MSU, some students get access to their previous semester examination results two weeks before the examination. These students proceed to write an examination of the failed modules without fulfilling the university requirement of coursework assessment and thereby causing them to fail and hence module carrying. MSU general regulations stipulate that a student should not sit for the examinations if he/she does not have coursework for the module in question (MSU Year Book 2011-2014: 162; 5.4.4). Universities must clear all registration holds, register for classes and make payment of fees by published deadlines before attending classes. It is important to meet registration deadlines so as to ensure that university organisation meets their goals and objectives of producing quality education and quality graduates. Failure to meet registration deadlines leads to disruption of organisational activities such as teaching and student failure can be experienced. Registration deadlines also ensure that teaching efficiency is achieved within the organisation as everything is done according to time. Cases of students joining classes at the middle of the semester, having missed out on important information in the beginning will be minimised. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published university deadlines should not be attending classes and should not be allowed to sit for an examination and receive credit or a grade for the course. This measure may reduce the rate of student failure and module carrying at MSU.

## Conclusion

This paper has shown that the problem of module carrying is quite prevalent at universities. The problem is precipitated by interplay of a multiplicity of factors which are both internal and external to the student and/ or the university. Key among the factors that give rise to module carrying is absenteeism, attitudes of lecturers, financial problems, unfavourable learning or home environments, poor socio-economic background, peer influence as well as uncondusive interpersonal relations between students and lecturers. In summary these are the research findings on why failing students continual carry modules:

- Due to clashing of time tables' and students absenteeism, some students miss lectures thereby compromising their course work assessment leading to further module failure.
- Other reasons could be due to attitude towards the module and lecturers by students.
- Being chased away from lectures and examination rooms due to non-payment of fees.
- Lack of adequate student orientation student counselling
- Stigmatisation of students who carry modules

## Recommendations

- This paper suggests that lecturers should create strategies like individual learning plans and these should be developed for those struggling students, so that students may proceed with their education with no stigma attached.
- In order to facilitate discussion feedback, and active learning, this paper suggests that the lecturers of large classes can work to create the kind of group identity and individual rapport that make smaller classes so effective and enjoyable. This will reduce student failure.
- Lecturers should identify students with academic problems and intervene early to save student from failing their modules. Lecturers should plan for or specify the areas that the failed student needs improvement, let alone methods of achieving most effectively levels of knowledge and skills.
- The implementation of effective and functional first year student orientation and student support programmes should be enhanced such that student support services at MSU need to be visible and intensified so that students

are assisted in making sound decisions that relate to their studies and life in general.

- Therefore, this study advocates that in order to address the problem of module carrying in any meaningful way, efforts should be directed not only at the student or university but at the broader socio-economic and political environments in which universities are located.

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