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Academic Calendar Enforcement and Student Performance in Theological Education: A Qualitative Study of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University

Emmanuel Khamis Louis[1] & Edward Isingoma[2]
1 Theology Student, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bugema University, emmanuelkhamis199@gmail.com/

2 Lecturer, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bugema University
edwardisingoma2016@gmail.com

Abstract

Delayed reporting and inconsistent adherence to the academic calendar among regular/full-time students in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University have raised concerns regarding academic discipline, learning continuity, and student performance. Although regular students have greater access to campus resources and more instructional time, anecdotal evidence and institutional observations suggest that in-service/part-time students often demonstrate stronger academic focus and better performance outcomes. This article evaluates the perceived effectiveness of academic calendar enforcement and explores how reporting patterns, time management, motivation, maturity, and institutional accountability influence student performance. The study employed a phenomenological qualitative design and drew on semi-structured interviews with nine students and three faculty members. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurrent meanings in participants' lived experiences. The findings indicate that academic calendar enforcement provides a necessary structure for learning, but its effectiveness depends greatly on student self-regulation, purpose-driven engagement, and institutional consistency. In-service students appeared to benefit more from calendar enforcement because they demonstrated clearer academic goals, stronger time management, and higher levels of maturity. The article concludes that academic calendar enforcement should be strengthened alongside mentoring, time-management training, and student accountability systems, especially for regular students in theological education.

Keywords: Academic Calendar Enforcement; Student Performance; Theological Education; Self-regulation; Time Management; Bugema University

INTRODUCTION

The academic calendar is a central instrument of institutional organization. It structures teaching, coursework, assessment, academic breaks, and graduation processes, thereby providing the temporal framework within which students and faculty pursue learning goals. In theological education, the calendar serves not only administrative purposes but also formative ones, since theological learning requires sustained intellectual discipline, spiritual reflection, classroom participation, and practical application. When institutional schedules are consistently observed, students are more likely to receive adequate instructional contact, complete assignments on time, and prepare meaningfully for examinations.[1]

Despite the importance of academic scheduling, many higher education institutions continue to struggle with late reporting, irregular attendance, delayed commencement of lectures, and uneven adherence to academic timelines. These challenges can weaken student engagement and contribute to learning loss. Within the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University, concern has emerged over a performance paradox: regular/full-time students, who enjoy more time on campus and greater access to institutional resources, are perceived to underperform in comparison with in-service/part-time students who have limited campus time and multiple professional or ministerial responsibilities. This paradox raises important questions about the relationship between academic calendar enforcement and student performance.

The concern is not merely that students arrive late or miss lectures; it is that weak adherence to institutional time structures may shape habits of procrastination, reduce academic seriousness, and normalize fragmented participation. Educational research consistently associates discipline, persistence, attendance, and self-regulation with academic achievement.[2] Therefore, where students fail to internalize academic schedules, the formal existence of a calendar may not translate into meaningful learning outcomes. This article examines the perceived effectiveness of academic calendar

[1]Faisa Chebet, "The Influence of Discipline Management on Academic Performance in Selected Private Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Kween District" Kampala International University (2018); 18

[2]Barry J. Zimmerman, "Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner: An Overview," *Theory into Practice* 41, no. 2 (2002): 64–70.

enforcement in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University and analyzes the behavioral and institutional factors that mediate its influence on student performance.

Statement of the Problem

The academic calendar of the School of Theology and Religious Studies is intended to guarantee adequate instructional time, predictable assessment schedules, and orderly academic progression. However, the observable decline in discipline and performance among some regular/full-time students suggests that the calendar is not always effectively internalized or consistently enforced. Regular students have more time on campus than in-service students, yet they are often reported to exhibit weaker time management, inconsistent attendance, and lower urgency toward academic tasks.

This situation creates a performance paradox in which the student group with more time and access to resources may not necessarily achieve better academic outcomes. In-service students, despite professional, family, and ministry responsibilities, often appear to demonstrate higher levels of self-regulation and stronger academic commitment. The problem, therefore, lies in understanding how academic calendar enforcement interacts with motivation, maturity, accountability, and institutional practices to influence student performance in theological education.[3]

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of academic calendar enforcement in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University and to determine how it influences student performance, particularly among regular/full-time students. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do regular/full-time and in-service/part-time students perceive the relationship between academic calendar enforcement and academic performance?

[3]Tinto, *Leaving College*; Zimmerman, "Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner," 64–70.

2. How consistently does the School of Theology and Religious Studies adhere to official academic schedules regarding lecture commencement, instructional contact, assignment deadlines, and examination periods?
3. What institutional and student-related strategies can strengthen academic calendar discipline and improve student performance?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for theological educators, university administrators, academic planners, and students. It contributes to discussions on academic discipline by showing that the calendar is not simply a timetable but a pedagogical structure that shapes habits of learning. For institutional leaders, the findings offer a basis for strengthening accountability systems, improving adherence to scheduled academic activities, and protecting instructional quality. For students, the study highlights the importance of self-regulation, time management, and purpose-driven learning. For theological education, the study underscores the need to integrate academic structure with spiritual and professional formation.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Academic Performance in Higher Education

Academic performance is a multidimensional concept that includes grades, persistence, completion, skill acquisition, and the ability to apply knowledge in practical settings. In many empirical studies, however, performance is commonly measured through grade point average, examination scores, and completion rates because these indicators are accessible and institutionally recognized.[4] Higher education research shows that academic performance is shaped by prior preparation, attendance, institutional support, teaching quality, student motivation, learning environment, and study habits.[5]

Student success therefore cannot be reduced to time spent in school. Time must be organized, purposeful, and aligned with academic goals. Students who attend classes regularly, submit assignments on time, and maintain

[4]Shahad Al-Shehri et al., "Predicting Academic Success in Higher Education," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* (2020): 5–6.

[5]George D. Kuh et al., *Student Success in College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 23–25; Yi Cao et al., "Orderness Predicts Academic Performance: Behavioral Analysis on Campus Lifestyle" A name of the journal is required (2017), 3–4.

disciplined routines are more likely to perform well than students who merely possess access to institutional resources without using them effectively. This distinction is central to understanding why calendar enforcement may benefit some students more than others.

Academic Calendar Structure and Student Learning

The academic calendar determines the distribution of instructional time, coursework, assessment, and academic breaks. Studies on school calendars and instructional time suggest that learning outcomes are influenced not only by the amount of time allocated but also by how that time is structured and protected.[6] In higher education, the academic calendar establishes the pace of learning by setting expectations for lectures, assignments, examinations, and academic progression.

Calendar predictability can improve student planning, reduce uncertainty, and support continuous engagement. Conversely, inconsistent implementation of academic schedules can lead to fragmented instruction, rushed assessment, poor preparation, and uneven learning experiences. For theological students, whose education involves both cognitive and formative dimensions, disruptions in instructional rhythm can weaken both academic mastery and ministerial preparation.

Academic Calendar Enforcement and Institutional Discipline

Academic calendar enforcement refers to the consistent implementation of scheduled academic activities, including lecture commencement, contact hours, assignment deadlines, examination windows, and semester completion. Effective enforcement communicates institutional seriousness and helps students understand that time is a shared academic resource. Research on discipline management suggests that orderly educational environments support improved academic outcomes by reducing absenteeism, procrastination, and laxity.[7]

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[6]Esperanza DeLeon, Daniella G. Varela, and Don Jones, "Impact of School Calendar on Academic Performance: A Comparative Study," *Research in Educational Policy and Management* 4, no. 1 (2022); 45–48.

[7]Chebet, "Influence of Discipline Management"23

Nevertheless, enforcement must be accompanied by fairness and academic support. Overly rigid systems may increase student stress, especially among learners with work, family, or ministry obligations. The issue, therefore, is not whether the calendar should be enforced, but how enforcement can be firm, consistent, and pedagogically supportive. A well-enforced calendar protects academic time while also enabling reasonable accommodation where necessary.

Self-Regulation, Time Management, and Motivation

Self-regulated learning is a major predictor of academic success. Zimmerman describes self-regulated learners as students who plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning behaviors.[8] Such learners manage time effectively, set academic goals, seek help when needed, and persist despite challenges. In the context of academic calendar enforcement, self-regulation determines whether students respond to institutional schedules with discipline or indifference.

Time management is especially important in university education. Students who possess abundant time may become complacent if they lack internal discipline, while students with limited time may become more focused because every hour carries value. This dynamic is particularly relevant when comparing regular students with in-service students. Adult learning theory also suggests that mature learners tend to be goal-oriented, self-directed, and motivated by the practical relevance of what they study.[9]

Theological Education and Purpose-Driven Learning

Theological education is distinct because it seeks to form knowledge, character, and vocation. Students are expected not only to understand theological content but also to apply it in ministry, community life, and ethical decision-making. In-service students may therefore benefit from a direct connection between classroom learning and ministry practice. Experiential learning theory supports the integration of classroom instruction and ministry

[8]Zimmerman, "Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner," 64–70.

[9]Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 9th ed. (London: Routledge, 2025)

practice because Kolb defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.[10]

In this context, calendar enforcement becomes more effective when students understand the purpose of their studies. Where learning is connected to ministry identity and professional responsibility, students may be more willing to honor academic schedules. Where students lack clarity of purpose, even a well-designed calendar may fail to produce deep engagement.

Empirical Gap

Although there is considerable literature on student performance, discipline, time management, and academic calendars, fewer studies focus specifically on academic calendar enforcement within African faith-based universities and theological institutions. Existing research often examines general academic performance without considering how institutional schedules, religious formation, and student categories interact. This study addresses that gap by exploring academic calendar enforcement in the specific context of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design. This design was appropriate because the study sought to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of students and faculty concerning academic calendar enforcement and student performance. Rather than measuring performance statistically, the study interpreted how participants understood reporting patterns, attendance, motivation, time management, and institutional accountability.[11]

Study Locale

The study was conducted in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University in Luweero District, Uganda. The school was selected because of its structured academic programs and its relevance to

[10]David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2015), 49.

[11]John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 152, 163.

theological formation. Institutional records from 2023 to 2025 provided contextual background regarding academic planning, enrollment patterns, attendance concerns, and quality assurance processes.[12]

Participants and Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select twelve participants: nine students and three faculty members. The student participants were drawn from both regular/full-time and in-service/part-time programs in order to compare experiences across student categories. Faculty members were selected because of their involvement in teaching, academic planning, and observation of student performance. Purposive sampling was suitable because the study required participants who had direct knowledge of academic schedules, attendance patterns, and performance trends.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews explored participants' experiences with academic calendar adherence, lecture attendance, assignment deadlines, motivation, reporting behavior, and perceived academic performance. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient to participants and conducted in a respectful environment that allowed open expression. The interviews were not audio-recorded; instead, responses were carefully documented in detailed field notes, including selected verbatim statements.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was enhanced through careful documentation of field notes, and comparison of participant responses with institutional context. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, in which selected participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of summarized responses. Dependability was supported through a clear description of the research process, while confirmability was pursued by grounding interpretations in participant statements rather than researcher assumptions.[13]

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[12]Bugema University, *Academic Records, 2023–2025*, Office of the Academic Registrar.

[13]Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985). 300-301.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw without penalty. Data were stored securely, with physical documents kept in sealed folders and digital materials protected from unauthorized access.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically. Interview notes were read repeatedly to identify recurrent patterns, which were then coded and organized into themes. The analysis focused on how participants described academic calendar enforcement, student discipline, time management, motivation, maturity, and institutional accountability. Thematic analysis was appropriate because it allowed the study to interpret shared meanings across participant experiences.

FINDINGS

Academic Calendar Enforcement Promotes Academic Discipline

Participants consistently described the academic calendar as an important framework for academic discipline. When lectures, assignments, and examinations followed the published schedule, students were better able to plan their reading, prepare for assessments, and manage competing responsibilities. One regular student stated, "*When the semester follows the calendar strictly, it helps me prepare early and avoid rushing at the last minute*." A faculty member similarly observed, *"The fixed schedule keeps both students and lecturers accountable. It creates seriousness in learning."*

These findings suggest that calendar enforcement reduces uncertainty and creates conditions for consistent academic engagement. Structured academic environments also lower the likelihood of procrastination because students know what is expected and when it must be completed.[14]

In-Service Students Demonstrate Stronger Focus and Goal Clarity

A major finding was the perceived academic advantage of in-service students. Participants reported that in-service students tended to submit assignments on time, attend scheduled sessions more consistently, and approach

[14]john Biggs, Catherine Tang, and Gregor Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, 4th edition. (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2023), 45 .

coursework with seriousness. One in-service student explained, "*Even though we come for a shorter time, we are more focused because we know why we are here.*" A faculty member added, "*Regular students have more time, but sometimes they do not use it effectively."*

The data suggest that limited time can function as a motivating constraint. In-service students often balance study with ministry, work, and family responsibilities; therefore, they approach academic sessions with urgency. Their academic engagement appears to be shaped not by the amount of available time but by the value attached to that time.

Time Management and Self-Regulation Shape Performance

Participants identified time management as a key difference between in-service and regular students. In-service students reported planning their academic work carefully because they could not afford to waste time. One participant noted, *"I have to balance work, family, and school, so every hour counts for me."* By contrast, regular students sometimes postponed reading and assignments because they assumed they still had enough time.

This finding supports self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes planning, monitoring, and disciplined action as predictors of academic success.[15] Calendar enforcement can provide external structure, but students must internalize that structure through personal discipline. Without self-regulation, even a clearly published calendar may fail to improve performance.

Motivation and Purpose Strengthen Learning Engagement

Participants also linked academic success to motivation and clarity of purpose. In-service students often connected their studies directly to ministry practice. One participant stated, *"What I study directly helps me in my ministry, so I take it very seriously."* A faculty member observed that some regular students were "still trying to figure out why they are in the course."

This finding indicates that purpose-driven learning strengthens persistence and seriousness. Self-determination theory emphasizes that intrinsic

[15]Zimmerman, "Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner," 64–70.

motivation improves engagement, resilience, and academic performance.[16] In theological education, students who see the relationship between classroom learning and ministerial calling may be more likely to respect academic schedules and complete academic tasks responsibly.

Maturity and Life Experience Support Deeper Learning

Participants frequently associated the stronger performance of in-service students with maturity and life experience. In-service students reported that pastoral, professional, and family experiences helped them understand theological concepts more deeply. One student stated, "*Life experience helps us understand concepts faster because we have seen them in real situations.*" A faculty member similarly noted, *"Older students tend to be more serious and focused in class."*

Adult learning theory affirms that mature learners often draw on life experience to interpret new knowledge and apply it to real-world problems.[17] In theological education, such experience may enhance the integration of theory and practice. This does not mean that regular students cannot perform well; rather, it suggests that they may require stronger mentoring and structured formation to develop similar seriousness.

Regular Students Face Behavioral and Environmental Challenges

The study identified several challenges affecting regular students, including unstructured daily routines, campus distractions, delayed reporting, and a low sense of urgency. One regular student admitted, *"There are many distractions on campus that affect our study time."* Another stated, *"Because we are always here, we sometimes take things for granted."*

These responses indicate that the availability of time can become a disadvantage when it is not governed by discipline. Regular students may need institutional support that helps them convert campus residence and instructional access into productive academic habits.

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[16]Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2017), 3–5, 7

[17]Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 6th ed. (Burlington, MA: Elsevier, 2005), 66–67.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that academic calendar enforcement is necessary but not sufficient for improved student performance. The calendar creates structure, protects instructional time, and establishes academic expectations. However, its effectiveness depends on whether students and faculty consistently honor it. This supports the broader view that institutional policies influence performance only when they are internalized by the learning community.[18]

The stronger performance of in-service students may be explained by the interaction of motivation, maturity, and self-regulation. Their limited time does not weaken their performance; rather, it appears to sharpen their focus. Because many in-service students connect theological education to active ministry, they approach learning with clearer goals and greater seriousness. This finding resonates with experiential learning theory, which argues that experience strengthens learning when students reflect on and apply knowledge in practical contexts.[19]

For regular students, the study highlights the danger of temporal abundance without structure. More time does not automatically produce better learning. Without self-discipline, abundant time can lead to procrastination and weak academic urgency. Academic calendar enforcement must therefore be accompanied by student support systems such as mentoring, study-skills training, time-management workshops, and regular academic advising.

The theological context also matters. Theological education aims at holistic formation: intellectual, spiritual, moral, and ministerial. Calendar enforcement should therefore be framed not simply as administrative compliance but as part of formation in discipline, stewardship, and vocational responsibility. A student who learns to honor time in academic formation is also being trained for responsible ministry.

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[18]Quentin Wodon, ed., *Digitalization and the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education in Africa: An Exploratory Study* (Addis Ababa and Shenzhen: UNESCO IICBA and UNESCO-ICHEI, 2025), 6, 25.

[19]Kolb, *Experiential Learning*,51

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the School of Theology and Religious Studies should strengthen enforcement of the academic calendar by ensuring that lectures begin on schedule, contact hours are protected, assignment deadlines are clear, and examination periods are consistently observed. Enforcement should apply to both faculty and students in order to promote shared accountability.

Second, the school should introduce structured time-management and study-skills programs for regular students. Such programs should train students in weekly planning, disciplined reading, assignment scheduling, and examination preparation.

Third, academic mentoring should be strengthened. Faculty mentors, class advisers, and senior students can help regular students develop the seriousness often demonstrated by in-service learners. Mentoring should connect academic work with ministerial purpose so that students understand the relevance of theological study.

Fourth, the school should establish monitoring systems for attendance, late reporting, and assignment submission. These systems should not merely punish students but should identify those who need early support.

Fifth, the institution should consider blended and modular learning strategies where appropriate. Such approaches may help both regular and in-service students benefit from structured learning while maintaining flexibility for ministry and personal responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of academic calendar enforcement on student performance in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bugema University. The findings indicate that calendar enforcement is a critical institutional tool for promoting academic discipline, protecting instructional time, and improving learning outcomes. However, its effectiveness is mediated by student-related factors, especially self-regulation, motivation, maturity, and time management.

The performance advantage of in-service students demonstrates that effective use of time is more important than mere availability of time. Regular

students, despite having more campus time and institutional access, may underperform when they lack discipline and purpose. Therefore, the School of Theology and Religious Studies should combine firm academic calendar enforcement with mentoring, time-management support, and purpose-driven formation. Such a holistic approach can improve academic performance while strengthening the quality of theological education.

Areas for Further Research

This study was qualitative and phenomenological; therefore, it interpreted participant experiences rather than statistically measuring the relationship between calendar enforcement and performance. Future studies should employ quantitative or mixed-methods designs to compare grade trends, attendance records, reporting patterns, and course completion data across regular and in-service students. Comparative studies across other faculties and universities would also help determine whether the performance paradox identified in this study is unique to theological education or reflects a broader pattern in higher education.