Factors Shaping Academic Study Skills of University of Rwanda Undergraduate Students

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Abstract: This study examined factors that shape study skills of University of Rwanda undergraduate students, specifically at the National Police College. Using a qualitative cross-sectional design, the study involved 60 homogeneously sampled students from a total of 398 across three programs. Data was collected through focus group discussions and analyzed thematically. The findings identified both positive and negative influences on students' study skills under three key categories. Institutional factors include the living environment, rules and regulations, teaching methods and examination timetables. Student-related factors encompass individual personality traits, social media usage, demographic characteristics and challenges related to English language proficiency. Teacher-related factors involve practices, such as prohibiting note-taking in class, providing only soft copies of notes before sessions and not incorporating additional reading materials into assessments. There is a clear need for a holistic approach to enhance students' study skills, considering the diverse influences at play. A close collaboration between UR and NPC should be established to tackle challenges related to quality learning. Additionally, University of Rwanda should initiate a comprehensive campaign across all its colleges to raise awareness about the importance of study skills in higher education.

Keywords: Study Skills; Factors; University of Rwanda; undergraduates; National Police College.

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Introduction

Skills in learning are essential to ensure success in higher education (Drew & Bingham, 2012). Students with effective study skills attain better performance (Tennen & Hagar, 2015). Effective study skills enhance comprehension and retention of course materials, resulting in better grades and deeper understanding. They allow students to manage time

efficiently, balancing academics, extracurricular activities, work and personal life. Additionally, effective study skills reduce stress by avoiding last-minute cramming before examinations. They promote critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, essential for both academic and professional success.

Moreover, strong study skills foster a lifelong love for learning and the ability to independently acquire new knowledge, which is crucial in an ever-changing world. These skills also build self-discipline and responsibility. Furthermore, study skills like notetaking, reading comprehension, and test preparation are transferable to the workplace, aiding in professional development and career progression. Mastering effective study strategies boosts students' confidence in their academic abilities, motivating them to tackle challenging subjects and pursue educational goals (Joseph, et al., 2020; Menz, 2020; Nägele & Stadler, 2017; Rozvadská, & Novotný, 2019). On the other hand, students with poor study skills suffer at various stages of their studies (Naqvi, et al., 2018). Therefore, cultivating these skills is a critical component of higher education experience, laying a strong foundation for both academic achievement and lifelong success.

Studies on the quality of undergraduate students' study skills conducted at various institutions, including the University of Zambia- School of Medicine, University of Rwanda National Police College, a private college in Oman, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences and Government Arts and Science Colleges in Tiruchirappalli District, Tamil Nadu, South India (Ezeala & Siyanga, 2015; Mukingambeho et al., 2019; Naqvi et al., 2018; Shackebaei et al., 2015), revealed that students exhibit moderate to poor study skills (Ezeala & Siyanga, 2015; Mukingambeho et al., 2019; Sekar & Rajendran, 2015; Shackebaei et al., 2015). These studies primarily aimed to assess the level of study skills among university students. However, they did not investigate factors influencing students' study skills, nor did such research specifically address the Rwandan context. Therefore, this study sought to fill this gap within the Rwandan context by examining factors shaping academic study skills of undergraduate students at the National Police College (NPC), University of Rwanda.

This study was conducted among UR undergraduate students studying at NPC in Musanze district of Northern Province of Rwanda. UR has a partnership with Rwanda National Police (RNP) to train its officers at undergraduate and masters' levels. UR provides the teaching staff while RNP gives all required facilities. The study concerned three programs of study viz Professional Police Studies (PPS) as well as Law and Computer Science with the option of Information Security (CSIS). The choice of that college as a case to study was led by previous research, which found that its undergraduate students had moderate levels of study skills in time management, note taking, reading, writing, test preparation and test taking skills (Mukingambeho et al., (2019). Another study carried out by the same authors in 2022 indicated that the same students present difficulties in time-planning, notes wording and polishing, content-reading strategies, referencing skills, psychological abilities in preparing tests and attitudes before submitting examination papers (Mukingambeho et al., 2022). Therefore, researchers in this study felt the need to study factors behind that moderate level of study skills and associated difficulties. Six study skills were the main focus, including time management, reading, note taking, writing, test preparation and test taking skills.

Literature Review
Factors Influencing Time Management Skills
In higher education, effective time management is a requirement for independent study (Shahabudin et al., 2010). However, students do not always make the best use of their time (Aduke, 2015). Lack of a clear purpose in their study, distractions and interruptions (Miqdadi, et al., 2014), transition from directed to self-directed study time, poor notetaking, reading, research and writing skills (Shahabudin et. al., 2010) all hinder proper time managing. Other studies (Adeel, 2018; Alani, et al., 2020; Mohamed et al., 2018) indicate that living in hostels with quiet, calm environments and facilities allows students to get enough time for their studies. However, lack of monitoring in hostels makes students waste half of their time in unwanted activities on social media and chats (Mohamed et al., 2018). Moreover, family affairs or responsibilities especially for married students disturb students' time (Nasrullah & Khan, 2015). Furthermore, academic stress, interpersonal relationships (Lin, et al., 2015) and provision of lecture notes and handouts before the class sessions influence students' ability to organize their time (Erdemir & Tomar, 2019).

Factors Influencing Note Taking Skills

Note-taking is a crucial study skill for students (Sharifi et al., 2013). However, students' notes are often inaccurate or incomplete due to various factors, such as overestimation of their note-taking abilities, where they believe that they take effective notes, thus overrating their skills in this area (Bonner & Holliday, 2006). Other factors include insufficient time or laziness, slow writing pace, poor spelling, teacher dictation and hesitations in teachers' speech (Baffoe et al., 2015). Siegel (2022) identified that personal, speaker and contextual factors impact notetaking, with speaker and personal factors being more influential than contextual ones. The speaker's rate of speech was the most impactful factor while personal factors such as interest in the lecture topic and note-taking skill were also significant. Interest in the topic was the most agreed upon factor across five countries, highlighting its importance regardless of national context.

Factors Shaping Reading Skills

Reading is one of the most crucial academic activities (Scott & Saaiman, 2016). It is critical for completing university courses (Salehi et al., 2014) and achieving academic success at the postsecondary level (Akabuike and Asika 2012). Tien (2015) posits that students' quest for academic achievement is impeded by their lack of mastery of reading skills. Shen (2013) identified deficiency in language ability, a large number of reading assignments and a lack of background knowledge and technical terms in the subject as contributing factors to poor academic reading. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), word recognition speed, text complexity, environmental factors, anxiety during reading comprehension, interest and motivation affect students' reading abilities. Shanmugathasan (2017) adds that students' attitudes, peer influence, school environment and the cost of reading materials impact good reading habits. Furthermore, Wema (2018) lists excessive academic work, limited internet connection, family and job responsibilities, inability to afford books, irregular electricity and too many physical, mental and emotional disturbances as factors that inhibit students' reading habits. Finally, Pitan (2015) and Bharuthram (2017) mentioned a lack of a reading culture, limited encouragement for extensive reading, and insufficient time as hindrances to students' reading abilities.

Factors Shaping Writing Skills

Effective academic writing is essential for university students because university assessments focus on how students present information in writing (Gonye et al., 2012). However, students face numerous academic writing challenges (Komba et al., 2012; Rafikova, 2022). Language deficiency significantly hinders students' writing proficiency as they struggle to use language appropriately and effectively in their writing tasks (Chokwe, 2013; Javid & Umer, 2014). This issue is also prevalent in Rwandan higher learning institutions (Higher Education Council, 2015; Nizeyimana, 2013; Sibomana, 2014). Additionally, large class sizes prevent lecturers from providing effective feedback on students' written assignments, and there is often a lack of attention from lecturers towards students' academic writing. Other challenges include the absence of academic writing units to help students practice their writing skills, the influence of social media writing genres (Pineteh, 2014), contradictory feedback from teachers of different departments within an institution and lack of feedback on students' essays (Archer, 2007).

Factors Shaping Test Preparation and Test Taking Skills

The reviewed literature has commonly combined test preparation and test taking skills under one study (Duraku, 2017; Simran et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015). This study deviates from that approach and examines separately factors shaping test preparation and test taking skills. Tests are commonly used to evaluate students' academic performance (Mutimani, 2016). Yet, it was noticed by Vaz et al., (2018) that the examination period is extremely stressful to students. While low stress levels can help motivate students, excessive stress leaves them exhausted, overwhelmed and confused. A study by Simran et al. (2015) revealed that too much course load, lack of revision time, systematic studies, expectations from parents and time for other activities like exercise and extracurricular activities contribute to examination anxiety. A study by Li N. et al. (2015) reported that examination reforms, others' opinion about students' performance, worry about the future, physical and psychological discomfort, lack of confidence and previous academic record lead to anxiety. In the same vein, Sharma and Kaur (2011) reported that motivation, commitment and interpersonal variables can influence stress. In the same way, the difficulty level of the test, the

environment of the examination hall, invigilation, personal and emotional factors play an important role in examination performance (Neemati et al., 2014). Furthermore, lack of preparation, fear of failing, family responsibilities, limited time management skills and lack of study skills increase test anxiety (Duraku, 2017). Therefore, literature outlines the multifaceted nature of examination related stress and anxiety, identifying numerous factors that contribute to students' struggles.

Overall, from the above-reviewed literature, it is evident that several factors influence university students' study skills. However, a notable gap is the lack of clear classification of the identified factors into major categories. This gap highlights the need for further research that systematically categorizes and examines these factors within the context of students' study skills. Therefore, this study sought to address this gap by investigating whether similar factors identified in previous studies are present in Rwanda.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1989), which posits that learning is influenced by cognitive, behavioral and environmental factors (Bandura, 1991). According to Bandura (1986), learning occurs within a social context, where there is a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between the learner, the environment in which learning takes place and the learner's behavior. In the context of this study, Bandura's theory is particularly relevant as it elucidates the factors that shape students' study skills within the broader framework of quality learning. Students' behaviors, cognitive processes and the learning environment interact in complex ways to influence the study skills. For instance, students' approaches to studying (behavior), their strategies for organizing and processing information (cognition) and the support and resources available to them in their learning environment (environment) all play crucial roles in determining their study outcomes.

Methodology

Design

This study followed a qualitative cross-sectional design. It is a research design used to collect data from participants at a single point in time. It allows researchers to explore and understand complexities and nuances of a particular issue or phenomenon as perceived by participants at a specific point in time (Creswell, 2012).

Population and Sampling

Respondents in this study comprised sixty (60) undergraduate students from three programs: Professional Police Studies), Law and Computer Science with a specialization in Information Security, with 5 students selected from each class. Each program consisted of 4 levels, totaling 20 students per program and 60 students across all three programs. Each program registered 125, 138 and 135 students, respectively, making the total of 398 students for the three programs; meaning that in each program 20 students were taken as respondents. These were purposively and conveniently selected based on their overall moderate level of academic study skills as identified in previous studies (Mukingambeho et al., 2019) and their reported difficulties in various aspects of study skills (Mukingambeho et al., 2022). The five students include the two class representatives who are knowledgeable about their classmates, and other three students who were available at the time of collecting data.

Instrumentation

Data was collected using a structured group interview guide of 5 students per class, making a total of 60 students for 12 classes. Homogeneous sampling was used to select group members because all students were thought to be knowledgeable about the research topic. Homogeneous sampling is a purposive sampling technique involving deliberately selecting participants who share similar characteristics to facilitate a more focused and targeted examination of research questions or hypotheses (Mussarat et al., 2019). The interview guide was set referring to the research questions and was piloted to 5 undergraduate students of Forensic Science programme of the same institution. The interview guide was refined based on the answers from the piloting phase. The choice of 5 group members was motivated by the fact that through group discussion, multiple viewpoints about factors shaping students' study skills are captured. In addition, the group of 5 members was mentioned by previous studies as the ideal group (Cortini et al., 2019; Nyumba et al., 2018). Furthermore, the study found the group of 5 members manageable in data collection as confirmed by Cortini et al., (2019).

Procedure

The research permit was granted by UR- College of Education directorate of research. Besides, permission was sought and obtained from the

Inspector General of RNP through the Commandant of NPC. Likewise, informed consent was obtained from the students involved in the study after being informed about the purpose, requirements, risks and benefits of participating in the study. Face to face data collection took place and each focus group interview lasted about 2 hours.

Findings and Discussion

Findings revealed three categories of factors that interplay to shape students' study skills namely institutional, teacher and student- related factors.

Research Question 1: What are institutional factors that shape the development and effectiveness of students' study skills?

The feedback from students highlights several key factors impacting their study skills, including the study environment, institutional regulations and facilities, the teaching and examination timetables, duplicated curricula, nature of programs and the examination revision periods as explained below.

NPC Living Environment, Rules and Regulations

Students reported that NPC's good living conditions, along with its rules and regulations, help them manage their time effectively. They clarified that being hosted by the institution means they are not involved in activities that can take up their time, unlike other students at UR colleges who are sometimes occupied with food shopping and cooking. They further explained that their movements outside the college are limited due to the college's rules and regulations. Consequently, they spend most of their time studying, which is their primary duty. On the other hand, students mentioned that they have little control over planning their academic and personal activities because of the institution's rules and regulations. One student declared: "Our plans are mostly disrupted by the plans of our institution that we are called to obey. We follow the plans of the institution, not ours."

These findings suggest a complex relationship between institutional support and personal autonomy among the students. While students at NPC benefit from a supportive and structured environment that aids their academic focus, they also experience a significant lack of personal freedom and control over their own schedules due to the institution's rigid rules and regulations. The findings highlight the importance of balancing institutional support with students' need for autonomy and self-direction in their academic and personal lives.

UR Teaching Timetable

Feedback from students regarding the UR teaching timetable highlights a significant disparity in how it impacts their time management in the three programs. Specifically, students from the PPS program benefited from a schedule that concludes at 12:00 pm, allowing them ample time in the afternoon to rest, revise lessons or complete assignments if they are assigned other institutional duties during this time. This flexibility is seen as advantageous for their overall academic performance and well-being. One student declared it in the following terms:

> Students with a timetable ending at 12:00 pm, like those in PPS, benefit from having the afternoon to rest, revise lessons or do assignments—provided they are not given other duties by the institution. In contrast, students of Law and CSIS finish their classes at 4:00 pm.

On the other hand, students from the Law and CSIS programs face a more demanding timetable, with their classes extending until 4:00 pm. One Law student pointed out the difficulty of balancing the rigorous schedule, explaining that CSIS and Law students often have to study one module intensively for one or two weeks, both in the morning and afternoon. This intensive schedule leaves them with limited time to rest or review the material they have covered, as their entire day is consumed by academic commitments. A student explained the above in the following terms,

> We, CSIS and Law students, spend one or two weeks studying one module, attending classes both morning and afternoon. Consequently, we do not get sufficient time to rest or revise the studied material, as our entire day is consumed with classes.

This situation underscores the challenges these students face in maintaining a balanced approach to their studies. The disparity in timetabling highlights the need for a more equitable distribution of schedules across different programs. A more balanced timetable could provide all students with sufficient time for both academic pursuits and personal well-being, enhancing their ability to manage their workload effectively and promoting

better learning outcomes. By addressing these concerns, the institution can support a more conducive learning environment that accommodates the diverse needs of its student body. By aligning the schedules more equitably across different programs, the institution can help ensure that all students have sufficient time for rest and independent study, which are crucial for effective learning and retention.

UR Duplicated Curricula

While some students find the duplicated content in the curriculum unhelpful and demotivating for notetaking, others appreciate the repeated and structured learning opportunities as a way to improve their skills. Students indicated that the duplicated curricula at UR contribute to poor note-taking skills. One PPS student pointed out,

> The curriculum of English offers duplicated content learned in other modules, such as how to study and reference academic work, which are covered in Life Skills Education for Policing module. As a result, we find ourselves not interested in taking notes on such similar content.

Conversely, another PPS student highlighted,

> The study of some modules' components in year one and year three helps committed students improve their writing skills." Additionally, a Law student noted, "The study of academic study skills in year one, followed by library skills and research skills in year three, helps committed students improve their study skills.

These findings highlight a mixed response to the duplicated curricula at UR. On one hand, the redundancy in the curriculum can be demotivating for students, leading to poor note-taking habits because they feel they are relearning the same material. This perspective suggests a need for curriculum review to eliminate unnecessary repetition and keep students engaged. On the other hand, some students appreciate the repetition, seeing it as a structured approach to reinforcing and improving their skills over time. This viewpoint indicates that for certain students, especially those who are committed, the repeated content helps them build a stronger foundation in their writing and study skills.

Nature of the Program and NPC Facilities

Students revealed that the nature of their program, with practical lessons and good internet connection, influences their reading and writing skills, especially for CSIS students. One CSIS student explained,

> Our reading is mainly internet-based. We follow someone who did a given practice on YouTube. When something goes wrong with our codes in ICT, we go on YouTube to see how the code runs, imitate it, and achieve our goal instead of reading books about it.

CSIS students also mentioned that they rarely go to the library for reading purposes and that they do have internet connection at NPC. They insisted that the practical nature of their program also impacts their writing skills. One student elaborated,

> We mainly use codes; instead of typing codes on paper, we write them on the computer, run them to see the output, like making a webpage or website. We do it directly on the machine to see the output, not on paper.

This shows that the nature of the CSIS program at UR, characterized by its practical, hands-on approach and dependency on internet resources, impacts the students' academic skills. CSIS students develop their reading skills through internet-based resources, particularly YouTube tutorials, which provide practical demonstrations and immediate solutions. This method is preferred over traditional book-based learning because it is more aligned with their need to solve practical problems quickly. The lack of frequent library visits suggests that traditional academic resources are not as integral to their learning process. This could be due to the immediate applicability and accessibility of online resources, which are more suited to their practical needs. The emphasis on practical exercises, such as coding directly on computers, reduces the necessity for traditional writing. CSIS students are more accustomed to writing code and running it on machines to see the results, which diminishes their engagement with pen-and-paper writing practices. This highlights a shift in how CSIS students develop their academic skills, driven by the practical demands of their program and the availability of internet resources. This shift reflects the evolving nature of education in technology-focused fields, where hands-on practice and digital learning tools take precedence over traditional methods.

Examination Revision Periods and Timetable

Students reported that dedicated examination revision periods aid in their preparation for final examinations. However, the examination timetable impacts their ability to prepare effectively. One student explained, "We are given one week of examination revision, which helps us in preparing for final examinations. However, for Continuous Assessment Tests (CAT), it is a personal arrangement because no specific time is allocated for their preparation." Additionally, students indicated that managing their time effectively becomes challenging at times due to the unfriendly examination timetable. For instance, a CSIS student mentioned, "one time in year two, we had 3 examinations in 3 successive days. Consequently, we were not adequately prepared for the examination on the third day due to lack of revision time.'

Students further mentioned that the UR exam timetable can be unfriendly, affecting their examination-taking skills, especially when examinations are scheduled at unfavorable hours or with abrupt changes in examination dates. Describing their experience, one CSIS student stated, "At times, we used to enter the examination room at 9:00 am while PPS and Law students had started theirs at 8:00 am in the same room. This inconsistency made us uncomfortable and disrupted our focus." Fortunately, they noted improvements where all students now start examinations at the same hour. However, students still find examinations scheduled during less optimal times, such as from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm or 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm, particularly challenging.

Changes to the examination timetable shortly before examination days were also highlighted as detrimental to their test-taking skills. One student explained,

> CSIS and Law students study the same modules with students at CST Nyarugenge and CASS Huye campuses. This sometimes results in overlapping examinations, where we might have our own examination in the morning and then a common examination with other CST or CASS students in the afternoon. In such conditions, examination preparation and revision become very challenging, often resulting in a packed schedule of examinations over a few days,

leaving us with idle time in the remaining days of the exam period.

Overall, students valued having a dedicated one-week revision period before final examinations. However, they expressed concerns about the examination timetable and how it affects their preparation and performance. These concerns indicate that the structure and management of the examination timetable impacts students' ability to prepare adequately and perform well in their examinations.

Overall, it is evident that various institutional factors can either positively or negatively influence students' study skills across all six areas examined: time management, note-taking, reading, writing, test preparation and test-taking skills.

Research Question 2: How do teacher-related factors shape the development and effectiveness of students' study skills?

The behaviors and practices of teachers significantly impact various student study skills, particularly note-taking, reading, writing and test-taking as clarified below.

Teachers' Behaviors

Students reported that teachers' behaviors influence their note-taking skills, such as stopping them from taking notes in class, explaining too quickly or projecting PowerPoint presentations too fast. Additionally, providing soft notes before the lesson and underlining or italicizing key words have an impact. One PPS student argued,

> When the teacher is teaching, many students take notes. But sometimes, the teacher stops us from taking notes to follow explanations and tells us that they will give the notes after class. When the teacher does not stop us, we are encouraged to take notes on key points of the lesson.

Another PPS student added,

> Taking notes in class depends on the speed of the lecturer. Some lecturers are too fast while lecturing and students take notes according to the lecturer's speed in providing explanations. Besides, when using slides, they go fast and students do not get time to take notes and prefer to

follow explanations and wait to read notes after class.

Furthermore, when reading the notes given by the lecturer, students stated that they rarely underline or italicize them because the lecturer has frequently already done so.

This suggests that teachers' practices in delivering lectures and managing notetaking can significantly influence students' ability to take effective notes, which is crucial for their learning and exam preparation. The students' reliance on provided notes and the pace of teaching are critical factors that affect their note-taking skills.

Nature of Assessments

Students reported that the nature of assessments given by lecturers, the lack of assessment on additional reading materials and the requirement for students to reproduce notes in formative and summative assessments hinder their note-taking skills. One student indicated,

> Completing assignments as soon as they are given by the lecturer depends on the nature of the assignment. When it is an individual assignment, every student is encouraged to do it on time because we fear failing in individual work, but for group work, the motivation often rests with a few courageous students who work on behalf of others.

Another student explained,

> Sometimes, assessments set by lecturers require students to reproduce the same notes during Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs) or final examinations or to memorize the content. Consequently, we end up taking notes exactly as they are presented without rephrasing them into our own words.

Furthermore, another student expressed,

> Taking notes from additional reading materials depends on whether teachers assess them. Teachers' assessments usually focus on the notes they have given us, and they rarely ask questions on other provided reading materials. Therefore, we often find no need to read and take notes from those materials.

Students studying the CSIS program reported that they sometimes do not finish final examinations or CATs on time because lecturers do not allocate enough time for completing these assessments. One student said, "Lecturers often ask open-ended questions in CATs or final examinations, such as making a website, which is time-consuming. This prevents us from completing all the questions." These findings suggest that the current assessment practices may not effectively promote thorough note-taking and deeper learning. The focus on reproducing notes and memorization, combined with insufficient assessment of additional reading materials and inadequate time for complex exam tasks hinders students' ability to develop robust academic skills.

In relation to the findings related to teachers' factors influencing students' study skills, it is evident that teachers' actions primarily influence a set of four student study skills, specifically note-taking, reading, writing, and test-taking skills, either positively or negatively. However, teachers do not significantly affect students' time management and test preparation skills. This is not surprising because students mentioned that their police force institution, NPC, plays a critical role in their time management while UR is more involved in their test preparation skills. This nuanced understanding can guide educators in optimizing their teaching methods to foster holistic skill development among students, ultimately enhancing academic outcomes and student satisfaction

Research Question 3: What student-related factors that shape the development and effectiveness of students' study skills?

The findings underscore the diverse array of individual factors that significantly impact students' study skills. The following are reported factors:

Individual Personality

Students reported that planning academic and personal activities depends heavily on the individual personality. One student explained,

> Every student has their own way of planning the day, but some fail to plan their activities well due to carelessness or lack of seriousness. Depending on personality, some students are dissatisfied with how they manage their activities, particularly because free movement out of the institution is restricted and obtaining

permission is not automatic. Students who prefer to spend free time outside the institution may find this arrangement problematic.

This finding suggests that students' ability to effectively plan their academic and personal activities is influenced by their individual personality traits. Each student has a unique approach to organizing their daily schedule. This diversity suggests different personality traits such as organizational skills, attention to detail and motivation levels. Some students struggle with planning their activities due to carelessness or a lack of seriousness. This indicates that personal attributes like discipline and conscientiousness play a crucial role in effective time management. The restriction on free movement and the requirement for permission to leave the institution pose challenges for students with specific personality preferences. For instance, students who prefer spending their free time outside the institution may feel constrained and dissatisfied with these policies. The level of satisfaction with activity management varies among students based on their personality traits. Those who value autonomy and unrestricted movement may find institutional regulations restrictive and may struggle more with managing their time effectively within these constraints.

Use of Social Media and Family Responsibilities
Students indicated that managing time can be more challenging for married students compared to single students, as married students have additional family responsibilities. One student noted, "Married students have other responsibilities at home and are often disturbed by family calls and problems, which hamper their time management." Additionally, students stated that social media consumes significant time, with activities such as being on WhatsApp, watching movies or playing games on laptops or smartphones and responding to calls during class. These findings highlight significant challenges that students, particularly married ones, face in managing their time effectively. Married students, compared to their single counterparts, experience additional burdens from family responsibilities, such as attending to household tasks and addressing family issues. These responsibilities often interrupt their study schedules and can lead to difficulties in prioritizing academic commitments.

Psychological Factors
Psychological factors, such as fear of difficult lessons, fear of failure and fear of plagiarism, along with lack of confidence, stress and panic, were found to affect test preparation and test-taking skills. Students explained that fear of difficult lessons, particularly in the first year of the CSIS program, leads them to dedicate extra time to mastering challenging material. They also mentioned that early test preparation is often driven by fear of failure or poor time management. Additionally, students highlighted that they struggle to differentiate between what they have learned and not learned during test preparation, which can result from a lack of understanding or fear of exams. This difficulty is more pronounced in the first year due to unfamiliarity with university exams. Lack of interest, insufficient knowledge about the importance of reading, laziness and a desire for an easy life negatively affect students' reading skills. Students reported that they decide when to start reading based on the size of the notes. They mentioned an instance where outdated notes led to confusion during an exam. They also pointed out issues with in-text citation and referencing due to a lack of mastery in these areas. Students confirmed that some do not review their notes against those of classmates due to confidence in their own notes, poor handwriting, or personal abbreviations.

The findings on psychological factors reveal a deep-seated influence on students' test preparation and test-taking skills, shedding light on the complex emotions and challenges they face in academic settings. Fear emerges as a significant psychological barrier, manifesting in various forms such as fear of difficult lessons, failure, and plagiarism. These fears drive students to allocate additional time to grasp challenging concepts and to prepare early for exams, often as a preemptive measure against potential failure or due to concerns over time management. Additionally, the difficulty students encounter in distinguishing between what they have fully understood and what remains unclear during test preparation underscores the impact of psychological stress and anxiety. This challenge is particularly pronounced in the first year of university, where students navigate unfamiliar exam formats and expectations. Factors like lack of interest, insufficient understanding of the importance of reading and tendencies towards laziness or seeking an easier path further complicate their reading skills and overall academic

performance. Moreover, issues with notetaking, such as relying on outdated materials or struggling with citation and referencing due to inadequate mastery, reflect broader challenges in academic engagement and preparation. The reluctance to compare notes with peers, driven by factors like confidence in personal notes or difficulties with handwriting, suggests a need for improved study habits and collaborative learning strategies.

Demographic Characteristics

Students mentioned that their age, marital status and year of study influenced their time management. One student observed, "*In general, adults manage their time better than younger students because they are more mature and committed due to family responsibilities*." Another student added, "We get more time as we progress in our studies because we become familiar with academic life and the number of modules decreases." Students also reported that English writing skills improve with each year of study, with significant progress observed in students who initially struggled due to a French background.

Besides, as students advance in their academic journey, they tend to become more familiar with university life and its demands. This familiarity leads to improved time management skills as they learn to navigate through their coursework and assignments more efficiently. Additionally, the reduction in the number of modules as they progress allows for more focused study and better time allocation. Students noted significant progress in their English writing skills with each passing year of study. This improvement is particularly noticeable among students who initially struggled due to a French-language background. Over time, exposure to English instruction and academic writing requirements enhances their proficiency, enabling them to communicate more effectively in written assignments and exams.

Overall, these findings emphasize the dynamic relationship between demographic characteristics and students' development of crucial academic skills. They highlight how maturity, familial responsibilities, academic familiarity and language proficiency contribute to shaping students' abilities to manage time effectively, write effectively and succeed academically throughout their university experience.

English Language Barrier

Students testified that language barrier hinders effective note-taking. One student remarked, "We are not able to summarize notes or use abbreviations while taking notes because of the language barrier. Many of us do not master English well, which affects our ability to take notes during lectures." Another student added, "Studying everything in English is challenging for students with a French background, especially older students who completed secondary school many years ago. Our level of English is low, particularly in speaking and writing."

The statements from students show the challenges posed by the English language barrier on their note-taking abilities. Due to the language barrier, students find it difficult to summarize lecture content or use abbreviations effectively while taking notes. This limitation stems from their struggle to grasp English proficiency necessary to condense information succinctly during lectures. Students with a French background, especially older individuals who completed secondary education many years ago, face significant hurdles when studying in English. They highlight that their English proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, remains comparatively low. These insights reveal how language proficiency directly affects students' academic performance and their ability to engage effectively with course material. The difficulties described illustrate the need for targeted language support and strategies to enhance comprehension and communication skills in an academic setting dominated by English-language instruction.

Educational Background and Financial Means

Students mentioned that inadequate note-taking skills stem from their educational background in high schools, where they were accustomed to copying teachers' notes. However, they acknowledged that having financial means to buy note-taking materials positively impacts their skills. In line with this finding, the students' perspectives shed light on the influence of educational background and financial resources on their note-taking abilities. Students attributed their inadequate note-taking skills to habits developed during high school, where they were accustomed to simply copying teachers' notes from the blackboard. This practice may have limited their ability to engage critically with course content and develop effective note-taking strategies necessary for higher education. Conversely, students recognized that

having sufficient financial means positively impacts their note-taking skills. They attribute this to the ability to afford necessary materials, such as notebooks, pens and other resources that facilitate comprehensive notetaking during lectures. These observations highlight the intersection of socio-economic factors and educational preparedness in shaping students' academic strategies and outcomes. They underscore the importance of supporting students from diverse educational backgrounds with resources and strategies to enhance their note-taking proficiency and overall academic success.

Size of Notes and Limited Referencing Mastery

Students reported that they decide when to start reading based on the size of the notes. They mentioned an instance where the use of outdated notes led to confusion during an examination. They also pointed out issues with in-text citation and referencing due to a lack of mastery in these areas.

These findings suggest that students are influenced by the clarity and organization of their notes when deciding to begin their reading, indicating that effective note-taking is crucial for their study habits. The mention of outdated notes leading to confusion during an exam highlights the importance of keeping study materials current and relevant, as outdated information can hinder performance. Additionally, the students' struggles with in-text citation and referencing indicate a gap in their understanding of academic writing conventions. This lack of mastery could affect their ability to produce high-quality work and might contribute to anxiety or confusion during assessments. Overall, these insights point to the need for improved note-taking strategies and targeted support in citation skills to enhance students' academic success.

Duration of Assessments and Being Busy

Students stated that reviewing assignments before submission depends on the time available. One student noted, "If we have time, we review, but if not, we leave it. We rarely give our assignments to others for review because everyone is busy." The students' views on the duration of assessments and peer involvement in assignment review provide insights into their study practices. According to students, the extent to which they review assignments before submission depends heavily on the available time. If they have sufficient time, they engage in reviewing their work. However, when time is limited, they are less likely to undertake

thorough reviews. This practice suggests that time constraints can impact the depth of their preparation and revision efforts. Students mentioned that they rarely seek peer feedback on assignments before submission. The reason cited is that everyone is busy with their own academic responsibilities and tasks. This indicates a lack of opportunity or inclination among students to engage in collaborative learning practices such as peer review. These observations demonstrate the challenges students face in managing their time effectively and engaging in collaborative learning activities.

Other Factors

Test preparation skills are significantly influenced by factors, such as past examination papers, prior test experiences and levels of confidence among students. One student reported,

> When preparing for tests, we often refer to past examination papers and may consult classmates on how to approach specific questions. This practice helps us understand the types of questions typically posed by a lecturer, allowing us to tailor our preparation accordingly.

Additionally, some students reported that they recall examination content well when they engage in intensive study sessions the night before an examination. Furthermore, students mentioned that some prefer to study in quiet environments as early as 3:00am to finalize their preparation. The effectiveness of these strategies varies among individuals based on their personal preferences and approaches to studying.

The influence of past examination papers, prior test experiences and levels of confidence on students' test preparation skills reveals several key insights: Students commonly rely on past examination papers as a crucial study resource. By reviewing these papers, they gain insights into the types of questions typically asked by lecturers. This practice allows them to tailor their preparation strategies to align with the expected exam format and content. Collaborating with classmates to discuss approaches to specific exam questions is another effective strategy. This peer interaction helps students broaden their perspectives and refine their understanding of how to tackle challenging exam scenarios. Some students highlighted the effectiveness of intensive study sessions conducted the night before an exam. This concentrated effort

allows them to consolidate their knowledge and reinforce key concepts shortly before the assessment. The choice of study environment plays a significant role in students' preparation. Those who prefer quiet environments, sometimes starting as early as 3:00 am, find this conducive to finalizing their exam readiness. This underlines the importance of personalized study habits tailored to individual preferences and effectiveness. It is important to note that the effectiveness of these strategies varies among individuals. Factors such as personal preferences, learning styles and the nature of the subject matter can influence how students engage with these preparation methods.

Conclusions and Recommendations
Conclusions
This study identified multifaceted factors that shape the study skills of UR undergraduate students at the National Police College. While institutional frameworks can enhance students' study skills, inflexible policies and poorly managed schedules hinder effective study skills. Teachers affected students' study skills through teaching methods and assessment practices, which often emphasized rote memorization rather than deeper learning. Finally, individual characteristics, including personality traits and psychological factors, like fear of failure, affected students' ability to manage their study skills effectively.

Recommendations
Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that the learning institution under study should review and revise their policies to strike a balance between structure and flexibility, ensuring that students have the support they need to thrive academically. Professional development programs should be implemented for educators, focusing on diverse instructional strategies and assessment methods that foster critical thinking and engagement. Learning institutions should provide personalized support services, including counseling and workshops, to enable students develop resilience and effective time management strategies. There is a need for a holistic approach to enhance students' study skills, considering the diverse influences at play. UR should initiate a comprehensive campaign to promote study skills development across all colleges, integrating personal development workshops, peer mentoring and academic support services. Finally, future research should explore similar factors in other colleges within the UR and in private higher education institutions across Rwanda and beyond. This will provide deeper insights into the complexities of study skills development and aid in crafting targeted interventions to support students' success. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders in higher education can significantly enhance the quality of learning experiences for students, fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence.

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