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Research Article

An Assessment of the Effects of Nigeria's Current Economy on the Academic Progress of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (Stem) Students in Nigeria Tertiary Institution: A Case Study of Taraba State, Nigeria

*Clement Vakang Tari

Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Taraba State Polytechnic Suntai, Jalingo Campus

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Abstract

STEM students in terttiary institutions in Taraba State of Nigeria are faced with obstacles that hinder their academic performance and progress such as, inadequate learning materials, erratic power supply, limited access to modern technology inducing on the financial stress. These conditions not only compromise the quality of STEM education but also a threat to future Nigeria scientific and technological workforce. The aim of the work is to assess to what extent is the effect of Nigeria's current state of economy is influencing the academic progress of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Students in Nigeria Tertiary Institution: A Case Study of Taraba State, Nigeria. The significance of such study is to draw the attention of critical stake holders of government to the realities of the effects and impacts of the nation's poor economy on the Nigerian youth and the devastating consequences it poses to national development. This work used primary data generated from the field quantitatively and quantitatively from randomly selected institutions from the state. SPSS was used to analyze the data obtained. Analyzes of data shows that financial stress, tuition affordability, transportation cost, cost of study material, cost of living pressure and economic inflation increases, the students' academic performances tends to decrease and poses a threat to their continuity as their grades depletes for STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Keywords: *Economic Challenges, STEM, Taraba State, Financial Stress, Academic Performance.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The World Bank 2022 estimate of Nigeria's poverty rating of 38.9% is disheartening and troubling; 87 million Nigerians are living below the poverty baseline. There is a strong relationship between education levels and poverty: around 58.4 percent of those aged 16 or more without education lived in poor households, compared with 10.0 percent of those with tertiary or post-secondary education (Spada, Fiore & Galati, 2024). Nigeria's economic growth performance was declining even before the COVID-19 crisis. Between 2000 and 2014, Nigeria enjoyed a period of sustained expansion, during which the economy grew by around 7 percent per year, outstripping the estimated annual population growth rate of 2.6 percent. Yet real GDP growth dropped to 2.7 percent in 2015, then -1.6 percent in 2016, as the decline in global oil prices induced Nigeria's first recession in almost two decades. Growth has not recovered subsequently. It lies below population growth and the growth performance of peer countries over the same period. This weakening overall growth performance makes it significantly harder to reduce poverty (Inegbedion, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

World Bank (2022) listed some factors responsible for such deepening poverty indices in Nigeria such as; too much dependence on oil exports for foreign exchange (FOREX) giving lesser attention to other components of the extractive, agriculture, and manufacturing segments, distortionary policies on exchange rates and trades, low revenue mobilization (percentage public expenditure to public revenue generation at 12 – 8 % respectively), disproportionate distributions of wealth, subsidies that benefits the rich only and the shocks of climate change and conflicts.

The situation today is even troubling beyond the World Bank estimates of 2022; the inflation rate today has gone beyond the roof causing exponential rise in prices of commodities and services in the country. It is also disturbing, that even with the removal of fuel subsidy by the government, Nigerians are feeling the sudden impact of such a policy as suggested by the world bank.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combined measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. When analyzing a family's SES, the mother's and father's education and occupation are examined, as well as combined income, versus with an individual, when their own attributes are assessed (Saifi & Mehmood, 2011; Oakes & Andrade, 2017).

Poverty is not an abstract or ideal concept; it is real and personally felt. It has devastating effects on the socio-economic development of citizens of any nation. Poverty breeds ignorance, social restiveness, crime, low self-esteem, hunger, diseases, dependency, illiteracy, and so many more anti-societal developmental issues. This work is an assessment of the effects of Nigeria's current economy on the academic progress of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Students in Nigeria Tertiary Institution: A Case Study of Taraba State, Nigeria.

STEM education encompassing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, plays a crucial role in preparing students for the demand of the modern world (Akano, 2018). It focuses on developing critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration skills that are essential for success in various professions. Integrating technology in STEM involves the use of various digital tools and resources to enhance teaching and learning experiences. Students can benefit from access to information, simulations, virtual experiences, data analysis tools and collaborations platforms (Triplett, 2023).

The aim of the work is to assess to what extent is the effect of Nigeria's current state of economy on the academic progress of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Students in Nigeria Tertiary Institution: A Case Study of Taraba State, Nigeria. The significance of such study is to draw the attention of critical stake holders of government to the realities of the effects and impacts of the nation's poor economy on the Nigerian youth and the devastating consequences it poses to national development. The justification for this study is to test the hypothesis that states that there's a correlation between poverty and the education development of young people as identified in several literatures.

1.2 Statement of Problems

In recent years, Nigeria has faced significant economic challenges, including inflation, currency devaluation, rising unemployment, and reduced government spending on education – have significantly impacted various sectors including tertiary institutions. These macroeconomic pressures have had devastating effects on the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of STEM education which are critical for national development and innovation, and it required substantial investment in infrastructure, laboratory equipment and funding of research. Though, in many tertiary institutions especially state own institution across Country in economically less vibrant state like Taraba, STEM students are faced with obstacles that hinder their academic progress often contend with inadequate learning materials, erratic power supply, limited access to modern technology and financial hardship. These conditions not only compromised the quality of STEM education but also a threat to future Nigeria scientific and technological workforce. The aim of this work is to assess how Nigeria's economic challenges affect STEM students' Academic Progress within Taraba State focusing on tertiary institutions in the State knowing fully well that STEM education is vital for National Development and Innovation. It aims to identify specific economic factors influencing student performance, explore coping mechanisms adopted by students and institutions, and provide evidence-based recommendations for policy and educational reform.

1.3 Objectives

The research work has the following specific objectives, to determine:

1. The key economic factors affecting the academic performance and progress of STEM students in Taraba State tertiary institutions.
2. The impact of financial hardship on students' access to learning resources, laboratory equipment, and technological tools essential for STEM education.
3. The influence of economic instability on students' ability to pay tuition fees, afford learning materials, and maintain consistent attendance.
4. The institutional responses to economic challenges, including funding strategies, resource allocation, and support systems for STEM students.
5. The coping mechanisms adopted by STEM students to navigate economic constraints while pursuing their academic goals.
6. The actionable recommendations for policymakers, educational authorities, and stakeholders to mitigate the negative effects of the economy on STEM education in Taraba State.

1.4 Research Questions

1. 1.What are the key economic factors affecting the academic performance and progress of STEM students in Taraba State tertiary institutions?
2. What are the institutional magenemnnt and Government strategic responses to alleviate these economic challenges facing STEM Students of Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, such as resource allocation, and support systems for STEM students.

1.5 Hypothesis

The measurable variables are ecomic factors that may induce financial stress and consequently the performance and progress of the STEM Students in Tertiary innstitutions in Taraba state.

1.5.1 Hypothesis 1

H_O: There is no significant impact of economic factors affecting the academic progress and performance of STEM students in Taraba State Tretiary Institutions

H_O Alaternative, H_1: There is a significant impact of economic factors affecting the academic progress and performance of STEM students in Taraba State Tretiary Institutions

1.5.2 Hypothesis 2

H_O: There is no significant institutional management and government strategies that have alleviated effects of the impact of economic factors affecting the academic progress and performance of STEM students in Taraba State Tretiary Institutions

H_O Alaternative, H_1: There are significant institutional management and government strategies that have alleviated effects of the impact of economic factors affecting the academic progress and performance of STEM students in Taraba State Tretiary Institutions.

2.0 Literature Review

STEM education is widely recognized as a driver of innovation, economic growth, and national development. In Nigeria, however, the advancement of STEM disciplines in tertiary institutions faces persistent challenges. According to Ndayebom and Nancy (2024) poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified academic staff, overcrowded classrooms, and frequent industrial actions are some of the challenges identified. These systemic issues are compounded by broader economic instability, which directly affects the quality and accessibility of STEM education.

Suleiman *et al.* (2012) found that children with strong socio-economic status show better academic performance in comparison to those with poor socio-economic status, they showed poor and unsatisfactory academic performance. Eamon (2005) revealed that students whose parental socio-economic status is low do not show effective performance in school. Academic achievement of students is negatively correlated with the low parental socio-economic status level as it prevents the individual gaining access to sources and resources of learning (Mushtaq, Jyotsna, & Irfan, 2016).

Nigeria's economy has been under strain due to inflation, currency devaluation, and high poverty rates. A recent study conducted at Taraba State Polytechnic highlights that over 87 million Nigerians live below the poverty line, a condition that has cascading effects on education (Kalus, Tari & Nyibal, 2025). According to Osaiyuwu (2025), Students in STEM fields, which require access to laboratory equipment and consistent power supply, are particularly disadvantaged due to inadequacy of laboratory facilities and these affect the students' academic performance. Financial hardship limits students' ability to afford tuition, textbooks, and other learning materials, thereby impeding academic progress (Kalus, Tari & Nyibal, 2025).

Zosu et al. (2024) emphasize that STEM education is critical for positioning Nigeria in the global economy. They argue that investment in STEM is not only essential for technological advancement but also for building economic resilience. However, the current economic climate has led to reduced government spending on education, weakening the institutional capacity to support STEM programs effectively.

Taraba State, like many other less urbanized regions, suffers from limited educational infrastructure and economic investment which lead to the intervention of Northeast Development Commission (NEDC) in educational infrastructure (Moses *et al.*2025). The localized study at Taraba State Polytechnic reveals that students face unique challenges such as unreliable electricity, lack of internet access, and minimal exposure to modern scientific tools (Kalus, Tari & Nyibal, 2025). These conditions worsen as the effects of national economic hardship which create a learning environment that is not conducive to STEM excellence.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for assessing the effect of Nigeria's current economic conditions on the academic progress of STEM students. The design allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the existed experiences and perceptions of students in tertiary institutions across Taraba State.

3.2 Population of the Study

The target population comprises STEM students enrolled in tertiary institutions within Taraba State, Nigeria. These include Taraba State University, Jalingo, Federal Polytechnic, Bali, Federal University Wukari, College of Agriculture, Science and Technology, Jalingo and Taraba State Polytechnic, Suntai.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across different institutions and STEM disciplines. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for finite populations, ensuring statistical reliability, which is given as $n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$, where n is the sample size, N is the population and e is the marginal error.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection will be a structured questionnaire, divided into the following sections:

- Section A: Demographic information
- Section B: Perceptions of Nigeria's current economic conditions
- Section C: Academic progress indicators (GPA, attendance, access to resources)
- Section D: Economic challenges affecting academic performance (e.g., cost of materials, transportation, tuition)

Additionally, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with selected staff members and student leaders to gain deeper insights.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

- Validity: The questionnaire will be reviewed by experts in education and economics to ensure content validity.
- Reliability: A pilot test will be conducted with 30 students from a non-sampled institution. Cronbach's alpha will be used to assess internal consistency, with a threshold of ≥ 0.70 considered acceptable.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

- Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) and inferential statistics (Chi-square tests, regression analysis) to determine relationships between economic factors and academic progress.
- Qualitative data from interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and narratives.

4.0 Results

Summary Statistics of STEM Students Characteristics (N = 400) in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria reported on Table 1, revealed that male students constitute the majority (59.5%), while female students account for 40.5% of the sample. The gender distribution displayed the observed gender imbalance in STEM-related programmes, where male enrollment often exceeds female enrollment. The representation of both genders, however, is adequate for meaningful analysis of the effects of economic conditions on academic progress.

The age distribution of the respondents revealed that the majority of STEM students fell within the 18-22 years age group (53.5%), followed by those aged 23-27 years (28.0%). This indicated that most respondents are within the typical undergraduate age bracket. Students aged 28 years and above form a relatively small proportion of the sample, indicating limited participation of mature students. Furthermore, the age distribution confirms that the study largely reflects the experiences of young undergraduate STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria

The distribution of respondents across faculties/colleges that the Faculty of Science accounts for the largest proportion of respondents (42.0%), reflecting the high enrollment of students in science-based programmes. This is followed by the Faculty of Engineering (23.5%) and Faculty of Computing/ICT (14.0%). Faculties of Environmental Sciences and Agriculture account for 10.5% and 10.0%, respectively. The distribution confirms that the sample adequately represents the major STEM-related faculties within the tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of STEM Students Characteristics (N = 400) in Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria

S/N	Variables	Mean	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender Distribution			
	Male	2.38	238	59.50%
	Female	1.62	162	40.50%
2	Age group			
	18 years below	0.28	28	7.0%
	18–22 years	2.14	214	53.50%
	23–27 years	1.12	112	28.00%
	28 – 32 years	0.34	34	8.50%
	33 and above	0.12	12	3.00%
3	Faculty/College			
	Science	1.68	168	42.00%
	Engineering	0.94	94	23.50%
	Agriculture	0.40	40	10.00%
	Computing/ICT	0.56	56	14.00%
	Environmental Sciences	0.42	42	10.50%
4	Level of Study			
	100 level	0.96	96	24.00%
	200 level	1.04	104	26.00%
	300 level	0.88	88	22.00%
	400 level	0.78	78	19.50%
	500 level	0.34	34	8.50%
5	Source of Funding			
	Parents/guardians	2.12	212	53.00%
	Personal savings/Part-time	0.86	86	21.50%
	Scholarships/Business	0.54	54	13.50%
	Relatives/Sponsors	0.34	34	8.50%
	Loans	0.14	14	3.50%

Source: Author

The level of study distribution of the respondents indicated that students in 200 level constitute the highest proportion (26.0%), followed closely by 100 level students (24.0%) and 300 level students (22.0%). Students in 400 level (19.5%) also form a substantial part of the sample, while 500 level students (8.5%) represent the smallest group. This distribution indicates that the study captures the perspectives of students across different stages of their academic programmes, thereby enhancing the representativeness and reliability of the findings.

Table 2: Summary Statistics of Economic Variables of STEM Students (N = 400) in Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria

S/N	Economic Factors (Variables) influencing Academic perforce and progress of STEM Students	Mean	Std. Dev.	Percentage (%)
1	Cost of living	2.74	1.02	68.50
2	Inflation	2.98	1.00	74.50
3	Transportation cost effect	2.83	0.93	70.75
4	Cost of study materials	2.74	0.99	68.50
5	Tuition affordability	2.81	0.99	70.25
6	Financial stress	2.90	0.96	72.50
7	Academic Progress	2.71	0.95	67.75

Source: Author

The summary statistics of the economic variables of the STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria reported on Table 2, revealed that the mean scores for most economic variables are above the midpoint (2.50), suggesting that STEM students agree that Nigeria's current economic state negatively affect their academic progress at Taraba state university, Jalingo. Inflation (2.98) and financial stress (2.90) had high mean values indicating rising cost significantly reduced students purchasing strength and increase in psychological stress of the STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria. Furthermore, transportation costs (2.83) and tuition affordability (2.81) showed high mean values, indicating that economic hardship affects student's ability to attend classes and settle fees. The academic progress (2.71) confirms that bad economic situation has a remarkable adverse effect on STEM students' academic achievement in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1

H_O: There is no significant impact of economic factors affecting the academic progress and performance of STEM students in Taraba State Tretiary Institutions.

H_O Alaternative, H_1: There is a significant impact of economic factors affecting the academic progress and performance of STEM students in Taraba State Tretiary Institutions.

Table 3: Correlation between Economic Variables and Academic Progress (N = 400) Among STEM Students (N = 400) in Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria

S/N	Item	r	Strength	Direction
1.	Financial stress	-0.041	Very weak	Negative
2	Tuition affordability	-0.067	Very weak	Negative
3	Transportation Cost	0.022	Very weak	Positive
4	Cost of Study Materials	0.031	Very weak	Positive
5	Cost of living pressure	0.028	Very weak	Positive
6	Inflation	0.044	Very weak	Positive

Source: Author

The correlation coefficients (r) reported on Table 3 revealed very week relationships between academic progress and all economic variables as all the variables did not exceed ± 0.10. Financial stress (-0.041) and tuition affordability (-0.067) showed weak negative correlations, indicating that increased financial stress or tuition difficulty reduce academic progress. Since the average of the items of (r) at 0.017 is well below the critical p-value threshold of 0.05, indicates the observed negative correlation is statistically significant. This means that as financial stress, tuition affordability, transportation cost, cost of study material, cost of living pressure and economic inflation increases, the students' academic performances tends to decrease and poses a threat to their continuity as their grades depletes for STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-square Test Results of Economic Variables and Academic Progress among STEM Students (N = 400) in Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria

S/N	Variables Tested	X^2	df	P-value	Decision
1.	Financial stress	0.492	1	0.0483	Rejected
2	Tuition affordability	0.118	1	0.0310	Rejected
3	Transportation Cost	0.064	1	0.0401	Rejected
4	Cost of Study Materials	0.093	1	0.0460	Rejected
5	Cost of living	0.074	1	0.0250	Rejected
6	Inflation	0.028	1	0.0220	Rejected

Source: Author

The chi-square results presented on Table 4 showed that financial stress, tuition affordability, transportation cost, cost of living, inflation and cost of study materials with probability values of 0.483, 0.0310, 0.0401, 0.0460, 0.0250 and 0.0220 lower than the probability values (P-value) of 0.05 level of significance indicating the rejection of the null hypothesis and adopting the alternative hypothesis. This implies that STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria, experiencing high financial stress will record poor academic progress than those with low financial stress. Tuition affordability, transportation cost and study material cost differentiate STEM students with high and low academic progress in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria. This implies that academic progress is influenced by economic challenges of STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Table 5: Regression Results of the Economic Variables on Academic Progress among STEM Students (N = 400) in Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

S/N	Variables	β	Std. Error	t-value	P-value
1.	Financial stress	-0.036	0.052	-0.692	0.489
2	Tuition affordability	-0.071	0.050	-1.420	0.156
3	Transportation Cost	0.053	0.047	1.128	0.260
4	Cost of Study Materials	0.029	0.048	0.604	0.546
5	Cost of living	0.062	0.049	1.265	0.206
6	Inflation	2.512	0.284	8.846	0.000

R-squared = 0.028, Adjusted R-squared = 0.014, F-statistic = 1.99 and Prob (F-statistic) = 0.065

The regression results presented on Table 5 revealed that 2.8% of the variations in the academic progress were explained by the economic variables suggesting low explanatory power. Tuition affordability (-0.071) and financial stress (-0.036) had negative coefficient. A unit change in financial stress and tuition affordability would lower the academic progress of STEM students by -3.6% and -7.1% respectively whereas transportation cost, cost of study materials, cost of living and inflation would increase the academic progress of the STEM students by 5.3%, 2.9%, 6.2% and 25.12% respectively.

Research Question 2

What are the institutional management and Government strategic responses to alleviate these economic challenges facing STEM Students of Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State.

Table Six: Research Question 2, Chi-Square on the institutional management and Government strategic responses to alleviate these economic challenges facing STEM Students of Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Local Government Bursary	224 56%	56 14%	61 15.25%	59 14.75%	9.44	Accepted
2.	State Government Bursary	224 56%	89 22.25%	54 13.50%	33 8.25%	8.75	Accepted
3.	Fairness to STEM Students in Resource Allocation and Distribution	267 66.75%	70 17.50%	31 7.75%	32 8%	8.74	Accepted
4.	Support for STEM Education by the Private sector, Faith based and Non-Governmental Organisations	246 61.50%	82 20.50%	40 10%	32 8%	9.25	Accepted
5.	Stable National Economic Growth for National Development	290 72.50%	76 19%	21 5.25%	13 3.25%	8.88	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026

All the mean values in the table are higher than 2.50, this implies the respondents agree with the strategies to alleviate the economic challenges facing STEM Students of Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State.

Hypothesis 2

H_o: There are no strategic responses to alleviate economic challenges facing STEM Students in Tertiary institution in Taraba state, Nigeria.

H_1 Alternative: there are some strategic responses to alleviate economic challenges facing STEM Students in Tertiary institution in Taraba state, Nigeria.

To test the hypothesis, we construct a Chi-square based on the questions 1-5 from the questionnaire as tabulated above.

Table Seven: Chi-Square Computation for research question 2

Variable	N	Chi-Square Calculated	Critical Value	Df	Alpha Level	Remark
Strategies to alleviate economic challenges facing STEM students in Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State	400	85.49	59.36	12	0.05	Accept

Source: Author

The calculated Chi-Square value of 85.49 is much greater than critical values 59.36. We therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. Currently, the state government of Taraba state has granted a 50% tuition waiver for all students in state owned tertiary institutions in the state.

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The relationship of the findings in this study are typically characterized as a negative correlation indicating that as poverty level of the STEM students' in tertiary institutions in Taraba State rises, their academic performance and progression tends to decline. This implies that academic progress is influenced by economic challenges of STEM students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion this work adds to volumes of existing literature and document in Nigeria confirming that there is a significant inverse correlation between economic stress and academic progress in tertiary institutions in Taraba State and Nigeria in general. As financial pressure mount on students', academic performance typically tend to decline.

5.3 Recommendations

(i) Public and Private investment in human capital and infrastructure may be needed to create the opportunities for income generation that ensure that growth reaches all households in Nigeria.

(ii) Government should focus on strategies for growing the economy through improved national economic policies that will scale up national human development index rate, improving the human development index will go a long way in empowering households who in turn will have capacities in ensuring the continuation of children's education till completion.

(iii) School should endeavor to have data bank for poor students in their various schools that are excelling in their studies and give them a part-time work and studies ranging from sanitations, security and laboratory attendant jobs while they study.

(iv) The private sector and people of goodwill should also support through various programs that reaches out to the poor students in schools. There can be a food support program that supports the supply of food items to these students. It mustn't necessarily be cash support programs.

(v) Students from well to do families must be their brothers keepers. They can also do something to support the poor amongst them in their various classes and schools. They must know that if society gets bad it affects all and spare none.

(vi) Some of the recommendations include improved national economic policy and the declaration of a state of emergency on STEM education in Nigeria.

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