

First Examination Experience in the University System: A Case Study of the University for Development Studies

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Abstract

The research explores the first examination experiences of 225 first-year students from the Faculty of Physical Sciences and the School of Engineering at the University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale, Ghana. Using the mixed method approach, the study underscores the significance of gender disparities in enrolment, with females representing only seventeen (17.3%) of respondents, reflecting the wider challenges in STEM representation. Also, a total of ninety-four (94%) participants found examination questions aligned with course content, suggesting an effective curriculum delivery. However, sixty-six (66.7%) described their performance as successful, fourteen (14.2%) indicated failure, and nineteen (19.1%) were uncertain, emphasising varied preparedness levels. Environmental factors also played a vital role: sixty-eight (68%) considered examination venues conducive, and issues such as inadequate lighting and poor ventilation continued. In addition, fifty-two (52.9%) of respondents indicated that sanitation deficiencies in washrooms undesirably affected them. Invigilators' conduct during the exams was another mixed factor, with fifty-two (52%) perceived as friendly and forty-eight (48%) as unfriendly, influencing stress and focus. Students recommended improving infrastructural aspects, including lighting and ventilation, while diversifying examination formats and establishing feedback mechanisms to enhance the assessment experience. These findings underscore the need for systemic interventions to create an equitable and supportive examination environment that fosters academic excellence and reduces stress.

Keywords

Examination, STEM, First-Year Students, Environment, Performance

1. Introduction

University education is widely recognised as a transformative phase in an individual's academic and personal development (Leal Filho et al., 2018). It imparts specialised knowledge and skills and fosters critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity for lifelong learning. Beyond equipping students for career advancement, university education aims to nurture individuals who can contribute meaningfully to societal development (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020; Rocks & Lavender, 2018). The structure of university programs, typically divided into undergraduate and graduate levels, ensures a comprehensive engagement with both theoretical and practical dimensions of various academic disciplines.

Examinations are a pivotal component of the university system, designed to measure students' understanding and application of course content (Ray et al., 2018). Examinations serve as a structured assessment tool, allowing educators to evaluate students' intellectual aptitude, problem-solving skills, and readiness for academic progression (Ghaleb, 2024; Mohammed & Ahmed, 2023; Schildkamp et al., 2020). These assessments also offer critical feedback to students and instructors, ensuring alignment between learning objectives and instructional practices (Schildkamp et al., 2020). However, for many first-year students, university examinations represent a significant departure from their prior academic experiences. Students transitioning from senior high school (SHS) to tertiary education often face new academic challenges from increased academic workload and unfamiliar teaching and assessment methods, all of which can contribute to heightened anxiety and stress levels in examinations (Javaid et al., 2024).

Fresh students' first examination experience at the university can be particularly an experience as it influences the student's subsequent academic performance. Although starting tertiary education marks a milestone in a student's academic life, it is often characterised by excitement and apprehension (Hodgson et al., 2010). Examinations, as a means of evaluating study progress, allow students to demonstrate their academic potential. Its execution mode can also pose unique challenges that may impact evaluation outcomes. Earlier research has identified several factors influencing students' examination experiences and hence performance, including the conduciveness of the examination environment, the conduct of invigilators, the quality of examination facilities, and the level of preparedness of students (Adamu et al., 2021; Kyei & Nduro, 2014; Udim et al., 2018). Test anxiety, inadequate time management, and limited familiarity with examination guidelines can also exacerbate first-year students' difficulties in taking first examines (Javaid et al., 2024).

Education in Ghana has seen significant evolution over the years, with an impressive literacy rate averaging 80%, although there is room for improvement in the Savannah region (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Despite the acknowledged importance of education in the country, there is a notable gap in research focusing on the specific experiences of students during examinations and, for that matter, first-time examinations in the university. Transitioning students from the con-

trolled environment of Senior High School (SHS) to a university, where students are expected to think independently, can be a challenge for slow adapters. New examination protocols have the potential to undermine students' experiences and outcomes. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a supportive academic environment that promotes equity, inclusivity, and educational excellence.

To ensure a coherent flow of ideas, the paper is properly structured. The introduction will provide background information on the examinations, research problems, objectives, and significance of the study. It then proceeds to a literature review that discusses examinations and the factors affecting the examination experiences of first-year students. The methodology section describes the approach adopted for analyzing the data collected. The findings and discussion section presents the study's key insights, emphasizing their implications for university management. The paper concludes with a summary of the study's recommendations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

University examinations are a critical mechanism for evaluating students' academic progress through measuring their understanding of the materials and courses delivered to them in preparing them for future academic and professional challenges. Although examinations are critical for institutional assessment, experiences of students during this assessment are influenced by several factors, including environmental, psychological, and institutional. This section of the study assesses the key findings from the literature on the factors influencing the examination experiences of first-year university students.

2.1. Environmental Issues

Students' experiences and academic performance are influenced by the physical and logistical conditions of the examination environment. The cleanliness of the examination venue, air circulation, lighting provision, and arrangements of furniture are fundamental to creating a conducive atmosphere for a positive examination experience (Barri, 2020). Research has proven that dirty and poorly maintained facilities negatively affect students' experience in examinations (Swargiary, 2023). Similarly, the adequacy of lighting and ventilation has been highlighted as critical; poorly lit and poorly ventilated spaces can cause physical discomfort, eye strain, and heightened stress levels (Asadi et al., 2024; Felgueiras et al., 2023; Kapoor et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it has emerged that the quality of sanitary facilities is a significant determinant of student satisfaction during examinations. Inaccessible and sub-standard lavatories engender needless anxiety among students, hindering their ability to concentrate during assessments. Students frequently report that such conditions affect their well-being, which results in heightened distraction and discomfort (Qadeer et al., 2024; Swargiary, 2023). Another perilous factor is the arrangement and ergonomics of furniture in examination rooms. In lengthy exam-

inations and assessments, inadequate furniture and uncomfortable seating arrangements disrupt physical posture, negatively impacting concentration and stamina. Equally, well-spaced and ergonomically designed furniture enhances students' physical comfort, fostering a more conducive environment for academic performance (Boampong et al., 2015; Dobрева, 2012).

2.2. Psychological Issues

Documented research has shown the psychological pressures associated with examinations, predominantly for first-year students (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Test anxiety shows a widespread influence, manifesting through emotional, physiological, and cognitive disturbances. Notably, first-year university students are particularly vulnerable to these negative impacts since they are frequently unfamiliar with the requirements and rigour of tertiary-level assessments (Hamzah, Mat, Bhagat, Amaran et al., 2018).

Students' time allocation and preparatory techniques have a great impact on how well they perform academically. Learners who exhibit expert skills in managing their time tend to approach examinations with a high level of confidence and a reduced level of apprehension (Wilson et al., 2021). These potentials empower students to allocate sufficient time for preparation, thereby reducing the probability of last-minute cramming, which has been shown to increase stress, panic and anxiety, leading to suboptimal performance.

Moreover, early inculcation of time management practices into students' academic trajectories equips them with essential planning and prioritization skills, which enable them to effectively meet their academic requirements (Calonia et al., 2023; Valente et al., 2024). Preparation methodologies significantly influence outcomes. Students who underestimate the rigour of university examinations or employ ineffective study strategies tend to underperform. Conversely, adopting active learning techniques such as participating in study groups, seeking academic support, and utilising evidence-based study methods has been associated with improved academic performance (Munna & Kalam, 2021; Nurbavliyev et al., 2022; Zerdani & Lotfi, 2021).

Furthermore, invigilators conduct, and practices during examinations have been identified to impact students' experiences greatly. Invigilators who provide impartial oversight, clear instructions, and supportive conduct contribute meaningfully to a positive examination environment. Studies have proven that when invigilators maintain a composed and professional demeanour during exams, students' performance and confidence increase while anxiety reduces (Awoniyi et al., 2024; Cameron et al., 2022). Conversely, instances of unprofessional conduct, such as favouritism, ambiguous communication, or excessively stringent monitoring, have been demonstrated to exacerbate students' stress levels and impede their performance. Consequently, a supportive and respectful relationship between students and invigilators can play a crucial role in mitigating examination-related anxiety and fostering an environment conducive to assessment (Butakor & Min-

gah, 2024; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002; Starovoytova & Arimi, 2021).

2.3. Institutional Issues

Other scholars have also identified institutional policies and infrastructure. Other scholars have also identified institutional policies and infrastructure to shape students' examination experiences. Higher education institutions that allocate resources to support systems, including accessible feedback mechanisms, well-maintained facilities, and effective examination policies, tend to achieve higher student satisfaction and retention levels. In transparent and student-centered assessment practices, it is ensured that students perceive the examination process as equitable and impartial (Altinay et al., 2024; Amoako et al., 2023).

In addition, gender disparities in enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes, affect students' examination experiences (Makarova et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) identified several obstacles hindering women's engagement in STEM disciplines. Some of these obstacles include social prejudices, unequal resource allocation, and a scarcity of prominent female examples in these fields (UNESCO, 2017). These factors influence female enrolment and affect their self-efficacy and examination performance. Educational institutions must address these disparities by implementing targeted support mechanisms for underrepresented groups and fostering inclusive environments (Wube et al., 2024).

Further studies have also been carried out on the design and conduct of examinations as crucial factors in ensuring that assessments accurately reflect students' skills and knowledge. Despite the extensive use of traditional approaches to writing examinations, it may not fully capture the diversity of students' abilities and learning styles. Alternative approaches such as oral examinations, practical assessments, and online tests offer enhanced flexibility and inclusivity, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of competencies (Asamoah, 2019; Huxham et al., 2012; Quansah, 2018). When examinations are aligned with course objectives, it enhances effective learning and lessens the need for rote memorization. Alternatively, a poorly aligned assessment may negatively influence students' motivation and may fail to yield meaningful insights into their academic development.

While the literature provides valuable insights into the factors affecting students' examination experiences, significant research gaps remain, particularly in the context of first-year university students in developing countries (Adamu et al., 2021; Ghaleb, 2024; Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020; Javaid et al., 2024). The unique challenges students encounter at the University for Development Studies (UDS), where infrastructural challenges, resource constraints, and socio-demographic disparities may be more pronounced, warrant further investigation. This study, therefore, examines the factors that influence the initial examination experiences of students in the School of Engineering and the Faculty of Physical Sciences at UDS. By analyzing the conduct of the examination, this study seeks to identify key areas for improvement. The findings will provide recommendations

for the conduct of examinations, mitigating stress, and supporting student success. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the broader discourse on improving the examination environment in higher education institutions, emphasizing the need for equitable and student-centered approaches to assessment.

This investigation further emphasizes the significance of comprehending and addressing the challenges encountered by first-year university students, particularly during their initial examinations. By establishing a conducive and supportive examination environment, institutions can enhance student satisfaction, promote academic achievement, and facilitate the holistic development of future professionals.

3. Methods

This study combined different research methods. Both qualitative and quantitative designs were used. Previous research scholars have equally used this approach to explore the multifaceted factors that affect first-year students during exams (Adamu et al., 2021; Ghaleb, 2024; Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020; Javaid et al., 2024; Kyei & Nduro, 2014; Hodgson et al., 2010; Ray et al., 2018; Rocks & Lavender, 2018; Schildkamp et al., 2020).

3.1. Study Area

This study was conducted at the University for Development Studies (UDS), Ghana. It focused on first-year students at the School of Engineering and the Faculty of Physical Sciences, Nyankpala campus. The University is the first public university in northern Ghana, located in the Tolon District, and was established in May 1992 under PNDC law 279 to address developmental inequalities and promote access to quality education in Northern Ghana. The University promotes academic excellence and community engagement as an academic institution, seamlessly combining teaching with research to address societal issues. Its Third Trimester Field Practical Programme (TTFPP) signifies its commitment to experiential and socio-economic transformation (UDS, 2025). Based on the region's socio-economic and infrastructure challenges, this setting is the best choice for examining first-year students' examination experience. **Figure 1** depicts the GPS coordinates for the University location in the map of the District, Tolon.

3.2. Research Design

A mixed-method design approach was used to investigate the predictors of students' experiences with their first examination at the University. In this method, both the qualitative and quantitative methods are integrated to comprehend the research problem. The qualitative design focused on capturing in-depth and descriptive insights into students' subjective experiences. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions facilitated a flexible and nuanced exploration of the challenges encountered during examinations. The quantitative design utilized a structured questionnaire to collect numerical data on key variables such as

students' perceptions of the examination environment, invigilator conduct, and infrastructural challenges. The quantitative approach facilitated statistical analysis, identifying trends and correlations (Oranga & Matere, 2023). This dual design ensures data triangulation, enhancing the findings' reliability and validity.

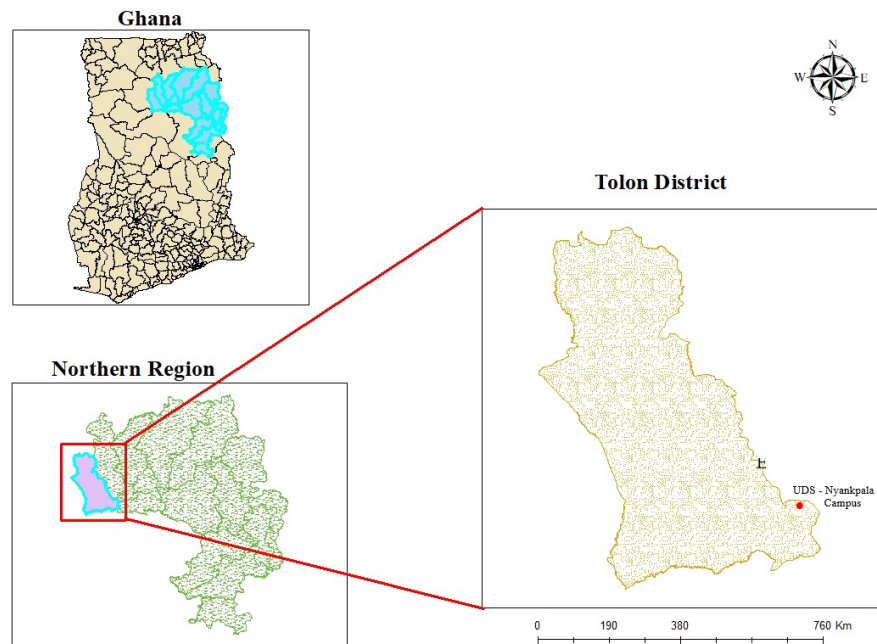


Figure 1. The University for Development Studies on the map of Tolon District. (Source: Authors, 2025)

3.3. Sampling Techniques

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, targeting 225 first-year students who had recently participated in their initial university examinations of the 2022/23 academic year first-trimester examination. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate as it enabled the researchers to focus specifically on the School of Engineering and Faculty of Physical Sciences, which possessed direct and relevant experiences of the factors under investigation. This sample size was adequate for qualitative and quantitative analyses, ensuring rich and diverse data collection.

3.4. Target Population

The target population was the entire University for Development Studies student body. The sample size then comprised first-year students at the School of Engineering and the Faculty of Physical Sciences at UDS—Nyankpala campus. These students were selected as they represent the cohort experiencing their initial university-level examinations, thus constituting an ideal population for assessing the challenges and perceptions associated with this critical transition.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed utilizing the Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize the data, whilst inferential statistical techniques were applied to identify trends and relationships among variables. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were subjected to thematic analysis. Transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing a clear understanding of students' experiences. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings facilitated a comprehensive interpretation of the results.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were rigorously adhered to throughout the study. Before consenting, subjects were provided comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, methodologies, and potential risks. Their participation was entirely voluntary. All data were anonymised to safeguard participants' identities, and responses were treated with strict confidentiality. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board at UDS, ensuring compliance with academic and ethical standards.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's findings, organised around key themes derived from the data, and provides a detailed discussion contextualised within the existing literature. The findings highlight the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, factors contributing to students' first examination experiences, and challenges identified during the process.

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender distribution among the 225 respondents was 82.7% male and 17.3% female (**Figure 2**). These results are consistent with UNESCO (2017) and Wube et al. (2024), highlighting the global underrepresentation of females in STEM fields. This observation could be attributed to societal stereotypes, gender biases, and limited access to role models, identified as significant barriers to female participation in STEM disciplines. The gender disparity observed in this study emphasizes the need for targeted initiatives to promote gender equity in the School of Engineering and Faculty of Physical Sciences at UDS.

Many respondents were within the 15 - 20 (50.7%) and 21 - 25 (44.4%) age ranges, with only 3.1% and 1.8% falling within the 26 - 30 and 31 - 35 age groups, respectively (**Figure 3**). These findings align with the typical undergraduate age demographic (Education Policy and Data Center, 2018), particularly in STEM disciplines, where students often pursue higher education immediately after secondary school. Furthermore, the Faculty of Physical Sciences recorded the highest enrollment, with 63.6% of respondents, compared to 36.4% from the School of Engineering (**Figure 4**). Despite the long-standing presence of the School of Engineering, the higher enrollment in the Faculty of Physical Sciences suggests a pref-

erence for exploring theoretical and natural sciences over the applied problem-solving focus of engineering disciplines.

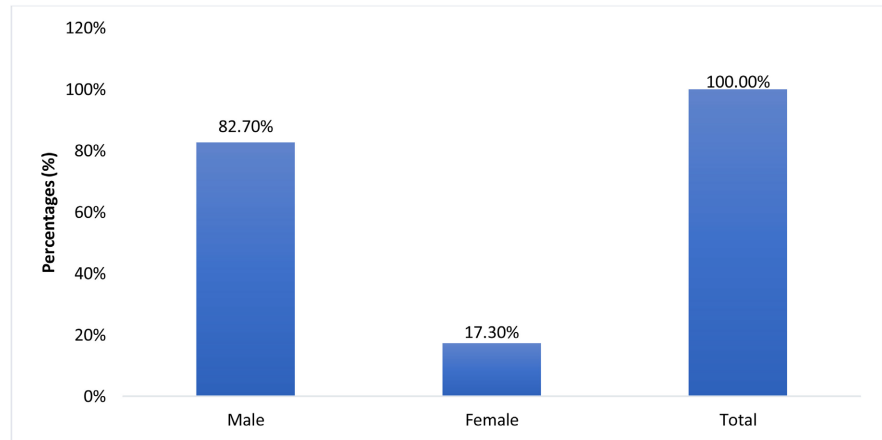


Figure 2. Distribution of gender in the study population.

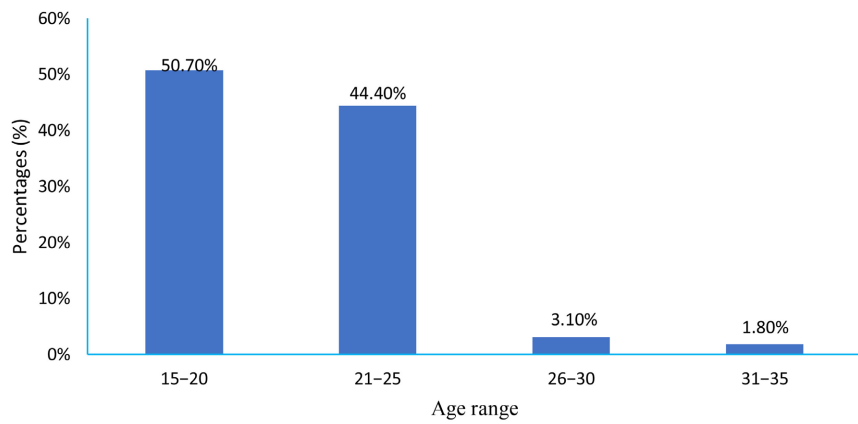


Figure 3. Age distribution of the study population.

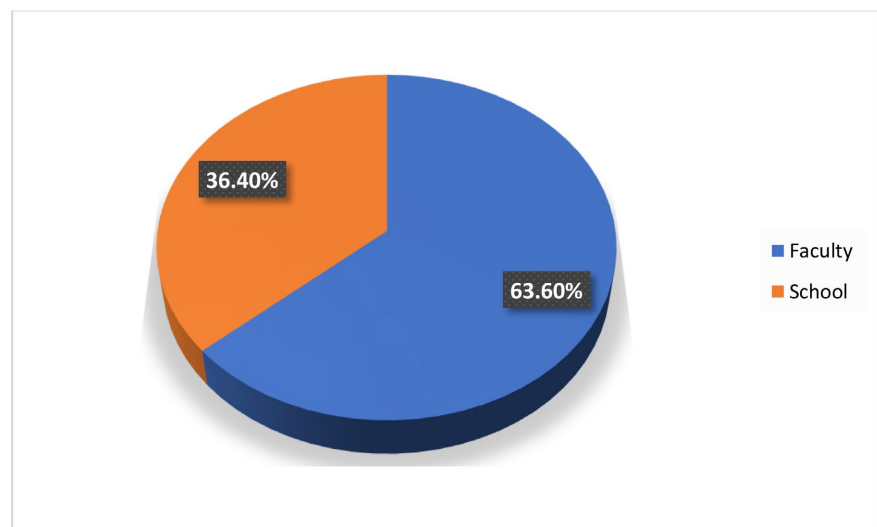


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents in the School of Engineering and Faculty of Physical Sciences.

4.2. First Examination Experience

4.2.1. Perception of First Paper

Approximately 66.7% of respondents described their first examination paper as successful, 14.2% reported it as unsuccessful, and 19.1% expressed uncertainty about their performance (Figure 5). The high percentage of successful perceptions reflects a generally positive initial experience, likely influenced by personal preparation and conducive environmental factors. A student responded, *“I felt confident during the exam because I had prepared thoroughly. The questions were fair, and I managed my time well”*. Another, in response to the questions posed, indicated, *“The exam went smoothly for me. The environment was quiet, and I didn’t feel stressed, which helped me perform well”*.

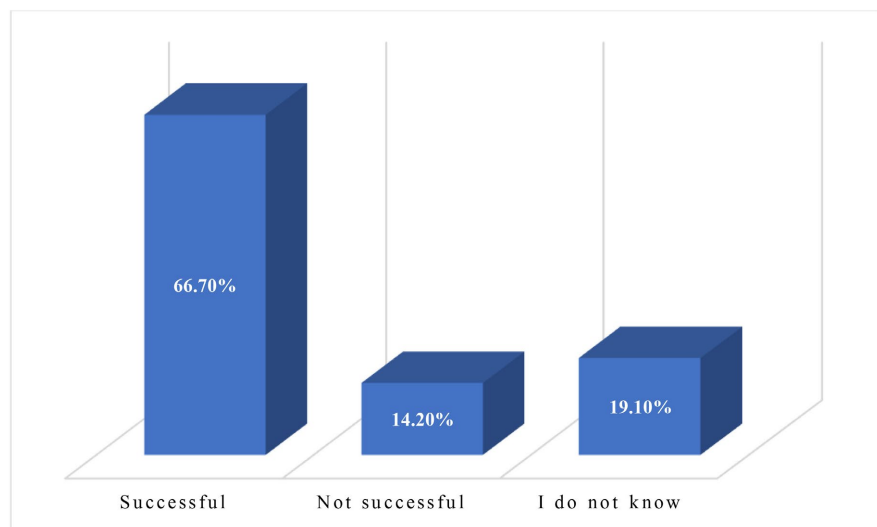


Figure 5. Respondents’ description of first examination paper experience.

However, the significant proportion of students reporting unsuccessful or uncertain outcomes highlights challenges that may have hindered optimal performance. One responded, *“I struggled with time management and couldn’t complete all the questions. It felt overwhelming”*. Another also indicated that *“Some of the questions were unexpected, and I panicked, which affected my performance”*. The student indicating uncertainty stated that, *“I answered all the questions, but I’m not sure if my responses were correct. I’ll have to wait for the results to be sure”*.

Most (94%) of the respondents affirmed that examination questions reflected the course outline, with only 6% disagreeing. Some of their quoted responses were, *“The exam questions were exactly what we covered in class. I wasn’t surprised by any of them.”* another stated, *“I found the exam fair because it followed the topics outlined in the syllabus. My preparation paid off.”* A few of the respondents who disagreed indicated that *“While most of the exam was familiar, a few questions seemed outside what was emphasized in class”*.

This high level of alignment indicates a strong correlation between instructional content and assessment, which is crucial for ensuring fair evaluation. Misaligned

examinations can undermine students' trust in the academic process and adversely affect performance.

4.2.2. The Conduciveness of Examination Rooms and Washrooms

The study revealed that 68% of respondents found the examination rooms conducive, 25% reported them as “somehow conducive,” and 6.2% found them entirely unconducive (Figure 6). The first respondent reporting a conducive environment indicated that “*The room was spacious, well-ventilated, and quiet, which made it easy to concentrate*”, the second, “*The seating arrangement was good, and there were no distractions. I felt comfortable throughout the exam.*”, and the third was “*The lighting was adequate, and there was minimal noise, which helped me focus on my work*”. A conducive environment minimises stress and fosters concentration, while inadequacies such as poor lighting, ventilation, and seating arrangements detract from students' experiences, as reported in earlier studies (Boampong et al., 2015; Felgueiras et al., 2023; Kapoor et al., 2021; Swargiary, 2023). Additionally, the cleanliness of toilet facilities/washrooms emerged as a significant concern, with 52.9% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction and 47.1% indicating satisfaction. Clean and hygienic facilities are essential for maintaining students' comfort and well-being during examinations. Poor sanitary conditions not only create physical discomfort but also heighten stress and anxiety, detracting from the overall examination experience.

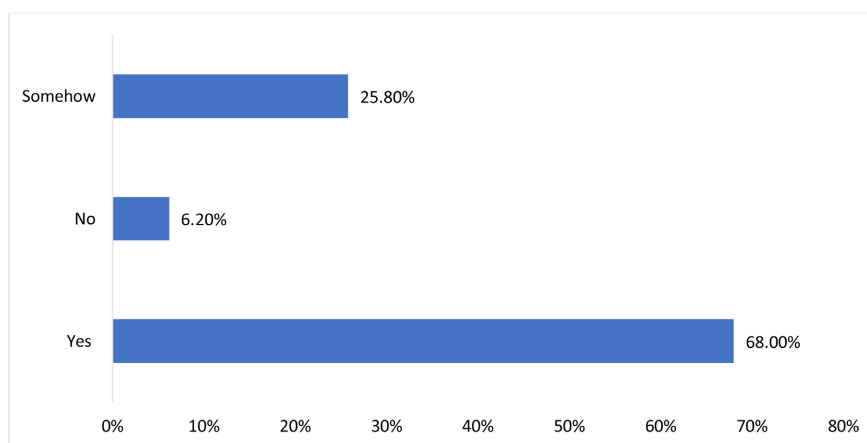


Figure 6. Conduciveness of examination rooms.

4.2.3. Conduct of Invigilators/Assistant Invigilators

The study highlighted the role of invigilators in conducting examinations and creating a conducive atmosphere. The study found that 52% of respondents perceived the invigilators' conduct as professional, while 48% described it as unprofessional (Figure 7). For those reporting that invigilators' conduct was professional, the first stated, “*The invigilators were professional and approachable. They gave clear instructions and helped reduce exam anxiety*”, the second, “*They maintained a calm environment and were respectful when addressing students,*” and the third “*One invigilator even reassured us to stay relaxed before the exam*”.

started, which helped”. For those reporting invigilators being unprofessional, the first stated, “Some invigilators were too strict and created unnecessary tension in the room”, the second, “They kept walking around and staring at us, which made me feel uncomfortable.” And the third “When I asked for clarification on a question, the response was dismissive and unhelpful”.

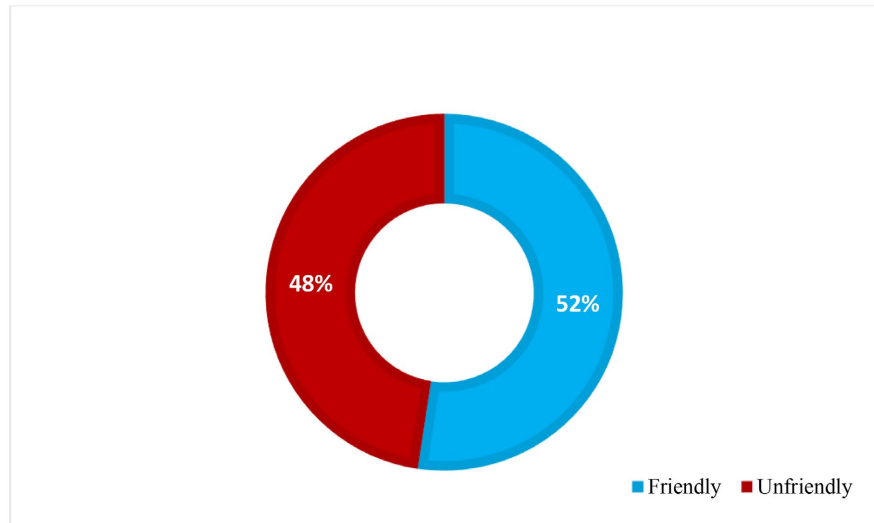


Figure 7. Conduct of invigilators/assistant invigilators.

Positive interactions with invigilators contribute to a supportive atmosphere, reducing anxiety and fostering better performance. Conversely, unfriendly or overly strict invigilators may increase stress levels, negatively impacting students’ focus and confidence (Awoniyi et al., 2024; Cameron et al., 2022).

4.3. Recommendations for Improving Examination Conditions

Respondents provided valuable recommendations for improving examination conditions (Table 1). Key suggestions from approximately 27% of respondents emphasised the need to improve lighting systems in examination rooms to reduce eye strain and ensure a fair assessment environment. “The administration should ensure all examination rooms have proper lighting to prevent eye strain and enhance readability.”

Table 1. Students’ recommendations for the School/Faculty to improve the examination conditions for the first-timer examinees.

Students Recommendations	Number of students (%)
Improvement in the lighting system of examination rooms	61 (27.00%)
Improvement in the ventilation system of examination rooms	59 (26.10%)
Establishment and utilisation of feedback channels where students can provide suggestions or report concerns regarding examination processes	55 (24.60%)
Practical exploration of diverse examination formats beyond the traditional to accommodate different learning styles and access a broader range of skills	50 (22.30%)
Total	225 (100%)

Additionally, 26.1% of students recommended enhancing ventilation, highlighting issues such as faulty fans and windows that hinder proper air circulation. Some responses were “*Proper ventilation should be prioritized by fixing broken fans and ensuring windows can be opened for fresh air*”, “*Installing more fans or air-conditioning units in crowded exam halls would significantly improve comfort levels.*” and “*To reduce heat and discomfort, the institution should regularly inspect and maintain ventilation systems*”.

About 24.6% of respondents stressed the importance of establishing feedback channels to enable students to provide suggestions or raise concerns about examination processes. Some responses were “*A formal feedback system should be introduced to allow students to share their concerns and suggestions about exams*”, “*Creating an online portal or suggestion box for exam-related feedback would help improve future assessments*” and “*The administration should consider periodic student surveys to gather insights on examination conditions*”.

Furthermore, 22.3% suggested diversifying examination formats to accommodate different learning styles and evaluate a broader range of skills. Some responses were “*The examination system should include multiple formats such as oral exams, practical assessments, and coursework to accommodate different learning styles*”, “*Alternative assessment methods should be considered to evaluate a broader range of skills beyond written tests*”, and “*A more inclusive approach to examinations, such as incorporating presentations and problem-solving exercises, would better reflect students’ abilities*”.

4.4. Militating Factors against Students’ Examination Experience

The study revealed several factors negatively impacting students’ examination experiences at the University for Development Studies. These militating factors include infrastructural, psychological, and procedural challenges that hindered the creation of an entirely conducive examination environment for first-year students.

The physical conditions of the examination venues emerged as a critical concern. While 68% of respondents found the examination rooms conducive, the remaining 32% described them as “somehow conducive” or “not conducive,” citing issues such as poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, and uncomfortable seating arrangements.

These inadequacies contributed to physical discomfort, diminished focus, and heightened anxiety levels, as supported by previous research linking ergonomic deficiencies to suboptimal academic performance (Boampong et al., 2015; Kapoor et al., 2021).

Sanitation presented another significant infrastructural challenge, with 52.9% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the cleanliness of washroom facilities. Unhygienic conditions served as a source of distraction and anxiety, emphasising the necessity for well-maintained sanitary infrastructure to support student well-being during examinations.

Psychological stressors, including examination anxiety and unfamiliarity with tertiary-level assessment protocols, disproportionately affected first-year stu-

dents. These challenges were exacerbated by perceived unfavourable invigilator conduct, reported by 48% of respondents. Stringent or unsupportive behaviour from invigilators frequently increased students' stress levels, compromising their concentration and self-assurance during examinations (Awoniyi et al., 2024).

The study also identified deficiencies in procedural aspects of the examination process. For instance, while 94% of respondents affirmed that examination questions were aligned with course content, the absence of effective feedback mechanisms left many students feeling inadequately prepared to address future challenges. Furthermore, the reliance on traditional written examinations without exploring diverse formats limited the assessment's inclusivity and failed to accommodate students' varied learning styles.

5. Conclusion

The research explored the first examination experiences of students in their first year at the University for Development Studies (UDS). The study specifically targeted the School of Engineering and the Faculty of Physical Sciences. The results presented students' experiences both positively and negatively. While a majority of the students felt that the examination questions were relevant to what was taught in the course, serious obstacles such as lack of infrastructure, poor sanitation, and psychological tension were noted. Furthermore, students faced several challenges due to the aggressive behavior of some invigilators and the absence of comprehensive feedback.

For STEM enrollment, gender disparities were observed, reflecting the problem of equity in the science and engineering professions. These findings point to the need to address these difficulties to improve the academic experiences and performance of first-year students. A supportive and more inclusive examination environment will ensure that students are satisfied, hence reducing their stress and enhancing their performance.

6. Recommendations

Key recommendations are proposed to improve the students' examination experiences. Firstly, the institution needs to start upgrading the infrastructure of examination halls to ensure sufficient lighting, ventilation, and ergonomic seating arrangements. It is useful to make sure that routine electrical systems, windows, and furniture are regularly maintained to create a conducive environment for examinations.

Implementing a routine cleaning of lavatory facilities and ensuring an adequate supply of necessities such as water, soap, and tissue paper will enhance hygiene. Mechanisms must also be put in place to promptly report and track sanitation issues during examinations to ensure that students' discomfort is minimized and they are not distracted.

The conduct of invigilators is vital in helping foster a good examination environment. The University should assist the invigilators through training so that

they can be more supportive and professional. During examinations, students' anxiety levels and concentration could be improved by clear communication, fair treatment, and a calm demeanor among invigilators.

The overall success of the evaluation exercise will largely depend on establishing a means to capture students' feelings about the process. The university should also set up other feedback systems where students can make comments or complaints anonymously. Some measures are going to encourage and promote the willingness to be involved in the management of academic activities as well as what areas need to be worked on.

Another important recommendation is to vary the formats of examinations at the university. UDS should consider conducting oral examinations, practical exams, and project works, which cater to different types of learning and abilities. As always, ensure that the assessments are not contrary to the objectives of the course and that they promote deeper understanding instead of just memorization.

Addressing gender disparities in STEM enrollment is critical in promoting equity in the academic space. Some of these initiatives include mentorship schemes, scholarship awards, and active outreach to female students to promote their interest and participation in engineering and the physical sciences. These measures will develop female students' confidence and help them succeed in these disciplines.

The orientation programs should be improved in scope to address the needs of first-year students. In addition, workshops on time management, study skills, and examination techniques should be organized to help prepare them for higher education assessments. Students also need continuous academic and psychological support to help them deal with the stress that comes with pursuing higher education.

If these recommendations are implemented, the University will achieve a more equitable, supportive, and effective examination environment. These efforts are bound to improve the students' examination experiences and assist in their holistic development as future professionals, enhancing their academic achievement and retention in the long term. We recommend a follow-up study in level 300 or 400 to assess the medium/long-term impact on their examination experiences.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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