**AN EXAMINATION OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH CLASS RANK AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL ADJUSTMENTS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Class ranking remains a prevalent practice in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, yet research has not explored how Nigerian students perceive and experience this practice. This study sought to address this gap in the literature by delving into four Nigerian primary and secondary school alumni’s experiences and perceptions of the class ranking practice. Through their unique stories, this narrative inquiry study sheds light on the extent to which class ranking has impacted them. The findings of this study revealed that class ranking had a profound influence on the participants, both within and beyond the classroom setting. It shaped their self-perception, influenced their approach to learning, affected their interactions with parents, teachers, and peers and had implications for their academic and personal adjustments. These insights provide a valuable understanding of the potential consequences of the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. .

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**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

My goal as an educator is to provide students with educational opportunities that positively impact their academic outcomes and overall lives. I strive to create learning environments that foster growth and development in students, engage students in meaningful and relevant learning experiences, provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in life, and ultimately allow students to feel fulfilled and satisfied as they progress through their educational journey and beyond. It is, therefore, crucial for me to continuously assess the full range of my pedagogical practices and the practices used within the institutions I work in to understand how these practices impact students within and beyond the learning environment. This motivation underpins the central inquiry of this research study, which investigated alumni students’ experiences with class ranking used in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended. The research focused on understanding the impacts of these experiences within the specific context in which class ranking is practiced and the broader impacts beyond that context.

Class ranking is a common practice in many Nigerian primary and secondary schools that involves ordering and publicly disclosing all students’ performances in a specific classroom from highest to lowest (Añulika et al., 2014; Olaniran & Roach, 1994). For example, at the end of each school term, in a class of 50 students, one student will be ranked first, another will be ranked last, and others will be ranked in between. The Nigerian education system is based on a

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6+3+3 system, in which students attend primary school for six years, junior secondary school for three years, and senior secondary school for three years. At these levels of education, students are subjected to both internal and external assessments, with internal assessments conducted within the school by teachers and external assessments conducted by the government (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The internal assessments are used to determine student rank positions in Nigerian primary and secondary schools (Añulika et al., 2014). In Nigerian primary and secondary schools, the classroom teacher is typically tasked with establishing students’ class ranks, which entails the teacher performing or collecting continuous assessments of students in various forms, such as assignments, tests, and end-of-term examinations, to evaluate

each student’s overall performance during a given school term (Añulika et al., 2014). The class teacher then records, totals, and calculates an average score for each student’s performance on all assessments for that specific term and establishes their class rank positions based on that average score (Añulika et al., 2014).

Class ranking is a practice used in many educational systems around the world (Añulika et al., 2014; College Board, 2020; Gill et al., 2019; Ladant et al., 2023). However, many schools, particularly in Western countries, have eliminated the use of the practice for a variety of reasons, all of which point to the practice not being effective in showcasing students’ true academic abilities, as well as it being generally more harmful to students than beneficial. For instance, Lang (2007) conducted a survey involving 232 of the 500 largest public school districts in the United States, and the results revealed a significant disparity in the approaches taken by different schools when determining class rankings. It was found that many of these approaches were flawed, as they unintentionally incentivized students to opt for easier courses or discouraged

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them from taking additional courses if these actions would negatively impact their class ranking (Lang, 2007). Guskey’s (2014) article illustrated that the practice of class ranking prioritizes the identification of talented students rather than nurturing and fostering talent within students.

Additionally, it was indicated that with the exception of the student ranked at the top, class rank does not enhance students’ perception of their own self-worth, confidence in the learning process, or motivation to acquire knowledge (Guskey, 2014). This suggests that class ranking may hinder the development of students’ abilities and potential, and by solely focusing on selecting talent, class ranking overlooks the importance of nurturing and enhancing students’ skills and interests.

Additionally, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) has discovered that the significance of class rank in college admission decisions has declined over time as a result of the inconsistent ways in which schools determine and use class rank, resulting in many secondary schools opting to discontinue reporting student rankings (Clinedinst & Koranteng, 2017). Despite reports that schools around the world are phasing out the use of class ranking, many primary and secondary schools in Nigeria continue to rely on this practice. This is interesting considering the variety of reasons why other schools have chosen to abandon class ranking, such as inconsistencies in implementation and the negative impact it can have on students’ learning process and overall well-being.

Furthermore, researchers in Western countries studied the effects of class ranking on students and discovered that it could have a positive or negative impact depending on the context of the inquiry, with positive effects attributed primarily to higher-ranking students and negative effects attributed to both higher and lower-ranking students. In terms of the positive impacts of

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class ranking, Murphy and Weinhardt (2020) discovered that students with higher ranks in primary school attain higher test scores in secondary school, and students with higher ranks in a specific subject area have greater confidence in that subject. It was also found that students’ rank positions have a major impact on their educational success later in life and that students with higher ranks perform better in graded exams, are significantly more likely to complete secondary school, enroll in college, have higher expectations about their future career, a higher perceived intelligence, and receive more support from their teachers (Elsner & Isphording, 2017; Elsner et al., 2021).

As to the negative impacts of class ranking, it was discovered that the use of class rank may have unintended effects on cooperation. For instance, individuals with high ranks are much less willing to cooperate (Garcia et al., 2006; Guskey, 2014). Another negative impact can be seen in the study results of Elsner and Isphording (2017), which show that low-ranked students under-invest in their human capital even if they have higher ability than most students their age. For example, if two students with the same ability are ranked differently in their respective cohorts, the higher-ranked student is significantly more likely to complete high school, attend college, and earn a four-year college degree (Elsner & Isphording, 2017). Although these studies provide insight into how class ranking practices may affect students, they do not give sufficient information on how students who are directly impacted by the use of the class ranking experience class ranking, nor do they provide students’ perception of the impacts of class ranking. Researchers debating whether class ranking practices are “good” or “bad” for students base their claims primarily on quantitative evidence, often neglecting to consider the

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perspectives and voices of students when assessing the ramifications associated with the implementation of such practices.

At the time when this study was developed, no studies were found that specifically investigated how students experience class ranking, nor were there studies that explored how students’ experiences and perceptions of class ranking practices impact their overall academic outcomes and personal lives. Without this research, it becomes difficult to fully understand how class ranking influences students’ learning processes and behaviors. Equally concerning is the absence of research on how Nigerian students experience and perceive class ranking practices. Their experiences and perspectives are crucial in determining the impacts of class ranking on student academic and personal adjustments. LaPlante (2003) echoes the need for student opinions when examining the effectiveness of school practices because students are major stakeholders in schools. Students’ perception of the effects of school and instructional practices impacts their behavior, engagement levels, and academic outcomes in the learning environment (Kaplan et al., 2002). So, it is critical to assess the impacts and effectiveness of school practices, such as class ranking, through the lens of the student’s experience and perception of the practice. Using students’ perspectives, we can evaluate how well our school practices work and then use that information to change our methods in ways that foster and value positive relationships in the classroom (LaPlante, 2003).

As a result, this dissertation study sought to investigate the impacts of the use of class ranking in Nigerian schools through the lens, voices, and perceptions of individuals who have had firsthand experiences with class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. This study endeavored to bridge this noteworthy gap in the existing literature by delving into the

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firsthand experiences of individuals who have encountered the practice of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary education. The objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how class ranking affected these individuals within and beyond the educational setting. Additionally, this study aimed to shed light on the implications of these experiences with class ranking on academic and personal adjustments. This study adopted a retrospective approach, focusing on participants’ past experiences with class ranking. It investigated and gained insights into participants’ perceptions, emotions, and thoughts associated with their past encounters with class ranking.

**Background of Study**

My motivation for conducting this study stems from a profound reflection on my encounters with class ranking as a student and teacher. Through these experiences, I have witnessed the potential impact that class ranking can have on students’ well-being and academic experiences. This has instilled in me a strong drive to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding class ranking and its impact on students. By sharing my personal experiences and observations, I aim to establish my positionality within this research study and highlight my connection to this study’s participants. I believe that my first-hand insights will enable me to provide a nuanced perspective and enhance the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, my personal journey with class ranking underscores the significance of this research topic to me. It is not just an abstract concept but a lived reality that has influenced my own educational trajectory. Recognizing this, I am driven to examine the impacts of class ranking from diverse angles, seeking to inform educational practices and policies that prioritize the well-being and academic success of all students.

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In conducting this study, my intention was to shed light on the complexities and implications surrounding the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, as well as contribute to a wider understanding of how class ranking impacts students. I aspire to make a meaningful and positive impact in the educational field by providing experiential-based insights that can inform decision-making and foster more equitable and supportive learning environments. Overall, my motivation for undertaking this study is rooted in a deep curiosity and a genuine desire to explore, understand, and address the implications associated with the use of class ranking. Through my research, I hope to contribute to the ongoing conversations and efforts aimed at improving the educational experiences and outcomes for all students.

***My Experience with Class Ranking as a Student***

The use of class ranking in Nigerian schools is a topic that is deeply personal to me. Having experienced this practice firsthand, it has had an influence on how I perceived myself and my abilities during my academic journey. I completed my primary and secondary education in Nigerian schools that employed the class ranking system. This practice involved evaluating my academic performance and establishing where I stood in the class in comparison to my peers. I was assigned a numerical rank based on the average of my overall scores on assessments for each school term. These ranks were sometimes publicly displayed or called out, making every student in the school aware of where I stood in comparison to my peers in classes.

Throughout my primary and secondary education, I consistently achieved high rankings in my class, earning me the reputation of being an intelligent student. Praise, rewards, and recognition were regularly bestowed upon me by my parents, teachers, and peers, further solidifying this perception. I thrived on the attention and enjoyed being labeled as a smart kid.

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However, this incessant identification with intelligence had unintended consequences. It led me to avoid situations that might demonstrate any lack of intelligence. I was afraid to take on challenging classes, fearing the possibility of failure. I also shied away from learning approaches that could help me truly master learning content, opting instead for methods that boosted my performance in the short term. While being perceived as intelligent brought me a sense of satisfaction, it also hindered my personal growth. I missed out on valuable opportunities to stretch my abilities and develop new skills. Furthermore, I maintained the belief that I possessed superior academic abilities compared to my peers, who were ranked below me. It was important for me to maintain a sense of confidence in my own academic abilities. However, as I encountered students who were ranked higher than me, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of jealousy and insecurity. These emotions would often arise when I witnessed their success and accomplishments. It was challenging to reconcile my own belief in my abilities while also acknowledging the achievements of others.

During my primary and secondary education, I consistently maintained a high ranking in my class by focusing on the necessary skills to excel in assessments. This deliberate approach directly impacted my class ranking, as I became adept at memorizing learning materials and regurgitating information during exams. My sole priority during this period was to perform well on assessments, as it appeared to be the only factor that truly mattered. My learning processes did not include striving to gain a deep understanding of the learning content itself, and unfortunately, I seldom achieved deep understanding.

However, at the time, this lack of comprehension did not concern me much, as it seemed that both my peers and teachers shared a similar emphasis on performance rather than true

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comprehension. Their acknowledgment of my high achievements further solidified my belief in my abilities, even though deep down, I felt conflicted. From time to time, I would question my own authenticity, feeling like a fraud. These thoughts would arise, but I quickly dismissed and disregarded them. Instead, I intentionally chose to deceive myself about my lack of genuine learning. I had convinced myself and come to the conclusion that if the system deemed my performance to be satisfactory, then I must indeed be performing well. This conviction was grounded in a sense of logic and rationality, as I believed that the system’s assessment was an accurate representation of my abilities and progress.

In addition, adopting a cramming approach and relying on rote memorization was an effective strategy for achieving high grades and class rankings. I firmly believed that if I deviated from this method and followed my natural flow of learning, I would not have sufficient time to fully comprehend the learning material, ultimately resulting in lower grades and a plummeting class rank. The thought of ranking at the bottom of my class was something I actively wanted to avoid, as I observed how those who held such positions were often treated unkindly. I was determined to ensure that I did not become one of “them.”

Being able to pass examinations and improve class ranks solely through cramming and regurgitating information raises important concerns about the effectiveness and relevance of these assessments in truly assessing my learning. The flaws in the design of these assessments become evident when it does not allow students to showcase critical thinking and a genuine understanding of the subject matter. While this assessment design allowed me to excel and be at the top of my class, I have come to recognize the limitations of this approach in terms of developing critical thinking skills and a genuine passion for learning. Unfortunately, I did not

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develop either of these during my primary and secondary education. I soon realized that my habit of cramming learning materials did not foster a deep understanding of the subjects I studied. It merely enabled me to perform well on exams. This realization hit me hard when I moved to the United States to pursue higher education. During my first year of college, I struggled immensely in courses that required critical thinking and formulating my own interpretations. If there wasn’t a definite right or wrong answer, I found it challenging to navigate.

The struggle began when I enrolled in an English Composition course during my first year of college. This course was a required part of my program of study, and it involved a significant amount of reading and interpretation. The professor would assign books for us to read and then ask us to write essays on our interpretations of the chapters. These essays would then be discussed in class. I distinctly remember feeling a sense of fear and anxiety about these assignments. I encountered difficulty when attempting to generate my own ideas, perspectives, or opinions in response to what I had read. This challenge gave rise to numerous conflicts, particularly in my perception of my actual academic abilities. Consequently, I was compelled to confront the shortcomings of my previous approach to learning. I came to the realization that my previous approach, characterized by the cramming of learning materials to achieve top rankings in primary and secondary education, did not equip me with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in higher education. In essence, I had been deceiving myself by prioritizing short-term academic achievement over genuine learning.

So, I was faced with a significant decision - whether to continue prioritizing my performance or instead embrace my natural learning process to achieve mastery of the content. After careful consideration, I chose the latter. Previously, my drive to constantly excel in the

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classroom led me to adopt unhealthy approaches such as cramming. The fear of being ridiculed if I ever fell behind pushed me to focus solely on attaining top rankings. However, stepping into the college environment brought about a significant change. The emphasis on class rankings disappeared, and the grades I received were meant solely for my own evaluation. This shift allowed me to redirect my energy towards a more holistic approach to learning. Instead of fixating on how I compared to others, I now dedicated myself to seeking out resources and implementing effective learning strategies that would facilitate the achievement of learning objectives and true mastery of the content.

However, even though my current focus moving forward has been on prioritizing the quality of my learning rather than solely on my performance on assessments, I must admit that it is something I consistently have to remind myself to prioritize. Due to my past experiences with class ranking, my instinct is to choose paths that minimize the likelihood of failure. I continue to fear being at the bottom, leading me to gravitate towards endeavors where I can excel rather than focusing on learning development and mastery. As a result, I find myself constantly wrestling with this internal struggle. It is a recurring challenge that requires me to remain vigilant and remind myself to pursue activities that genuinely interest me, help me grow my skills, and deepen my understanding.

***My Experience with Class Ranking as a Teacher***

After graduating college with my bachelor’s degree, I started teaching computer literacy courses in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, I noticed that the schools implemented class ranking practices. As part of my role, I would teach these classes, conduct assessments, and then provide the results of each student’s assessment to the students’ classroom teachers. These

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grades would be recorded and ultimately used to determine students’ class rank positions at the end of each term. Throughout my teaching experience, I made three noteworthy observations regarding students’ responses and behaviors in relation to the use of class ranking in Nigerian schools.

First, I observed that students’ learning behaviors change depending on whether or not an assessment is used to determine their class rank or has a significant impact on their class rank. Students were more concerned with passing assessments that would affect their class rank positions and thus were less concerned with achieving learning objectives or having a thorough understanding or mastery of the learning content related to the assessment. Students tended to prioritize achieving high marks in assessments and examinations to improve their class rank, sometimes at the expense of deeper understanding and critical thinking. When students realize that an assessment is low-stakes, will not be used to determine their class rank positions, or will have a minor impact on their class rank, they react in two distinct opposite ways. They either become completely disinterested in the learning process as a whole or engage in a relaxed, organic, creative, collaborative, and inquisitive manner during the learning process leading up to the assessment. On the other hand, when students are aware that an assessment will be used to determine their rank positions, their engagement in the learning process leading up to that assessment becomes more active, competitive and focused on extracting information about what they need to know or do to pass the assessment. This observation corresponds to what has been discovered across studies in that regardless of academic ability, students’ goals are focused more on grades and competition rather than learning for authentic purposes (Bergin & Cooks, 2000), and that students develop learning goals and exhibit learning behaviors aimed at performing well

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on assessments, even though students frequently perceive this goal and behaviors as competing with the more fundamental goal of gaining a deep understanding of the learning content and demonstrating mastering of a subject (Miller & Parlette, 1974; Snyder, 1971).

Secondly, I observed that during the learning process in the classroom, students are constantly asking their teachers questions about which areas of the learning content will appear in tests and examinations or what they need to do or focus on to ensure that they will achieve a desired grade in the class, rather than asking questions that would improve their understanding of the learning content. This observation is consistent with Elbow’s (1993) illustration that, due to the unreliability of ranking, particularly in the aspect of how different teachers can subjectively award different grades to the same work, students ask teachers what the teacher wants them to know or do in order to get an “A” in the class. According to Emaikwu (2014) and Moss (2013), what teachers assess, how they assess, and why they assess specific things during the learning process send unambiguous messages to students about what they are expected to learn, how they should go about learning, and what they need to do to perform well. Students’ attention is then drawn to determining which aspects of the learning content are important from the teacher’s perspective and how the teacher will grade them on assessments. In addition, the learning process is based on the teacher, the teacher’s interests, and what the teacher values rather than the student, the student’s interests, and what the student values.

Lastly, I observed that students are not achieving the learning objectives or retaining a significant portion of the information they have supposedly learned in the classroom because, following class assessments, students either exhibit difficulties in recalling information about the learning that occurred or experience challenges in applying what they have learned to other

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related topics or subject areas. This phenomenon has been researched and documented. For example, Lujan and DiCarlo’s (2006) study demonstrates that many students practice memorization of learning content in order to pass exams without actually comprehending the learning content, resulting in an inability to relate new information to existing knowledge or unique contexts. While memorization of learning content can help students do well on exams, research by Lujan and DiCarlo (2006) shows that this is not indicative of true comprehension of the material. Emaikwu’s (2014) study on issues in the assessment of effective classroom learning in Nigerian schools demonstrates that memorization of material without accompanying comprehension does not constitute true learning and that assessments should promote comprehension over memorization and be directed towards shaping learning and gauging student mastery of learning content.

***Reflection of Experiences***

My experiences with class ranking as a student and a teacher center on the idea that evaluative methods have a strong influence on how students approach their learning (Crooks, 1988). Also, these experiences highlight that assessments have significant direct and indirect impacts on students, necessitating careful planning and implementation (Crooks, 1988). Evaluative approaches that are not properly planned and implemented can be detrimental to students’ learning processes and may prevent students from achieving the desired learning outcomes (Bergin & Cooks, 2000; Elbow, 1993; Emaikwu, 2014; Lujan & DiCarlo, 2006).

Furthermore, my encounters with class ranking piqued my interest and motivated me to delve deeper into the topic of the implications of the use of class ranking practices on Nigerian students. I was particularly interested in examining the accounts of other people who had

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experienced class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, as well as the possible lessons that could be learned from such accounts. I wanted to document these experiences in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the class ranking practice. By exploring the narratives of those who have experienced class ranking, I hoped to shed light on the various ways in which class ranking can impact students’ academic and personal adjustments. My interest in learning about other people’s experiences with class ranking also stems from recognizing the significance of individual narratives in understanding the far-reaching effects of this practice. I was interested in investigating and documenting individuals’ unique experiences with class ranking, with the intent of highlighting the complexities and nuances of class ranking’s impact. Based on the narratives gathered, I hoped to gain valuable insights into the impact of class ranking and highlight whether or not the practice supports the well-being and overall success of all students.

**Statement of Problem**

Currently, there are only a few peer-reviewed studies investigating the effects of class ranking on students, and the effects of class ranking on students vary across studies. On the one hand, reports of positive effects are typically applicable to only higher-ranking students (Elsner

* Isphording, 2017; Elsner et al., 2021; Murphy & Weinhardt, 2020). On the other hand, reports of negative effects are typically applicable to both higher- and lower-ranking students (Garcia et al., 2006; Crocker et al., 2003; Elsner & Isphording, 2017). It is worth noting that none of the studies examined inquired into the experiences of students while investigating the effects of class ranking on them.

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The current body of literature predominantly relies on quantitative data to explore the impact of class ranking on students. Unfortunately, this approach often overlooks the subjective perspectives of students when it comes to understanding how class ranking affects their learning experiences and academic outcomes. While it is clear that students are directly affected by the use of class ranking practices in schools (Murphy & Weinhardt, 2020), their own experiences and perceptions of the effects of these practices have not been thoroughly investigated. Moreover, despite the continued prevalence of class ranking in many primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, there is a lack of studies that examine how students experience and perceive class ranking. Therefore, conducting a study on this topic would be crucial in order to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of using class ranking in Nigerian schools.

It is essential to investigate individuals’ lived experiences with class ranking, as this will provide valuable insights into how students perceive the impact of the practice. By delving into the subjective viewpoints of students and incorporating their perspectives, I hoped to complement the existing quantitative data and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of class ranking on students’ educational journeys. Overall, studying alumni students’ experiences with class ranking in Nigerian schools is necessary to fill the gap in current literature and shed light on the possible impacts and perceptions of this practice within the Nigerian educational context.

**Purpose of Study**

The primary purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to investigate the experiences of alumni students who completed their primary and secondary education in a Nigerian school that used class ranking within the last 20 years. One major reason for focusing on alumni students

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who experienced class ranking within the last 20 years is that they are no longer subject to it, reducing the potential harm associated with investigating individuals who may be experiencing active trauma as a result of their prior exposure to this practice while still having to engage in it after the study is completed. The likelihood of triggering any ongoing traumatic experiences during their participation in this study is reduced by selecting participants who have been removed from the system for an extended period of time. One additional factor was that alumni students may exhibit a higher propensity for introspection regarding their encounters with class ranking, which had the potential to yield a greater depth of understanding regarding the short-term and long-term implications associated with the use of class ranking.

Students’ subjective experiences in school contexts have been linked to identity formation (Erentait et al., 2018; Harter, 1990; Rich & Schachter, 2012). As a result, a secondary purpose of this study was to explore how alumni students’ experiences with the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools may have affected their identity based on how they construct and narrate their stories about their experiences. Assigning students rank positions in the classroom entails labeling them as either top-ranking, middle-ranking, or low-ranking individuals. Research has revealed that these labels, both those assigned by others and those internalized by students themselves, can greatly influence their development of identity (Iwasa et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aimed to explore how participants perceived themselves in different contexts and over time (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; van Hoof, 1999) based on their encounters with class ranking.

Furthermore, this research was designed to investigate the long-term impacts of class ranking on participants’ self-perception and sense of worth. By analyzing their narratives and

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personal accounts, this research sought to understand how the hierarchical structure of class ranking in Nigerian schools shaped their identity formation and influenced their educational journeys and career aspirations. This study also sought to shed light on the psychological and emotional consequences of the identities formed.

Class ranking practice is generally defined as the hierarchical ranking of students based on academic performance (College Board, 2020). This inquiry journey sought to learn about individuals’ lived experiences with the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools and the ways in which their experiences may have influenced their identity formations, which are the identities they assign and create through constructing their stories about their experiences (McAdams, 2001).

**Research Questions**

Below are the established research questions for this study that stem from its primary and secondary purposes.

* How do participants describe their experiences with the use of class ranking practices in their primary and secondary school years?
* In what ways, if any, do experiences with class ranking impact participants’ identities?

**Significance of Study**

Understanding how students experience and are impacted by the practices they are exposed to in the learning environment is critical because it can afford schools to determine which practices are positively impacting students and which are not. It is especially important for to hear from individuals who have experienced class ranking practices in regard to how they feel about the practice and how they believe it impacted them during their primary and secondary

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education and beyond—ultimately aiding in understanding some of the motives, behaviors, actions, and attitudes that are exhibited by students that learn in Nigerian primary and secondary schools that use class ranking practices. It is also critical to understand students’ experiences with the practices they are exposed to in the learning environment after they have had a chance to reflect on their experiences, particularly how those experiences have impacted their overall academic outcomes, personal lives, and future endeavors.

Despite the widespread use of class ranking practices in Nigerian educational institutions, there is a lack of research into the impact of these practices on students at the primary and secondary levels, as well as their perspectives on the practice. This research aimed to fill this gap in knowledge and provide a foundation for further investigations into how Nigerian students are affected by class ranking. This study aimed to shed light on the potential consequences of the use of class ranking in Nigerian schools. The findings from this study serve as invaluable assets for primary and secondary schools in Nigeria regarding the influence of class ranking on students, both within and outside of the educational setting. Additionally, the findings offer insights into the perceptions of individuals throughout and after their exposure to class ranking. This information can aid Nigerian schools in understanding the potential impact of class ranking on students and how class ranking may be perceived by those who are going through it, which can ultimately assist schools in making informed decisions about whether or not to implement class ranking as a practice. In addition, the findings can serve as a valuable resource for educational policymakers and researchers seeking to reevaluate the use of class ranking as a school practice in Nigerian schools. This study’s findings provide insights into the potential impacts of class ranking on students, which can inform decision-making and policy changes in these schools. By

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considering the implications of class ranking on students’ well-being, Nigerian schools can strive to create a nurturing and supportive learning environment that promotes positive academic development.

**Theoretical Framework Overview**

It is imperative that the impact of the practices employed within educational institutions align positively with what is currently understood about how students acquire and retain new knowledge and skills, as well as how they assess their learning and overall academic abilities. By ensuring this alignment, we can maximize the educational experience for students and foster their optimal growth and development during their academic journey. Research has provided valuable insights into the intricacies of how students learn best, and these findings should inform our decisions regarding the kinds of practices we subject students to. Hence, this study presents the three theories that underpin this research: Social Cultural Theory, Constructivist Theory, and Social Comparison Theory. These theories have been tested and are supported by empirical evidence and are widely recognized and utilized in understanding different aspects of learning. They also provide a rationale for students’ behaviors, actions, and motivations during learning processes, which are relevant to this study’s inquiry.

The social-cultural theory highlights the importance of social interactions in learning It suggests that learning takes place within a social context, where individuals acquire knowledge and skills through collaboration and communication with others (Vygotsky, 1962). In the context of class ranking, this theory suggests that the social dynamics that exist within the learning environment may influence students’ experiences with class rank or their perception of the purpose and significance of class ranking. It suggests that the interactions, relationships, and

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hierarchies formed among students can contribute to their understanding and interpretation of class ranking and its impact. The constructivist theory, on the other hand, emphasizes that learning is an active process where students construct their understanding through the exploration and organization of new information and experiences (Piaget, 1954). This theory suggests that school practices students are subjected to, such as class ranking, should be designed and used in a way that encourages students to have a high level of personal engagement with their learning and supports the development of meaningful connections from their educational experiences. The social comparison theory focuses on how individuals assess themselves and their abilities by comparing themselves to others (Festinger; 1954). In the context of class ranking, this theory suggests that students may use their class rank positions in comparison to their peers to assess their academic abilities, and that students may perceive their class rank relative to their peers as a true indicator of their academic competence.

All three of the aforementioned theories are used as lenses in this study to examine the study’s participants’ experiences and perceptions of class ranking practices, specifically by emphasizing the relationship between the participants’ experiences and perceptions of class ranking and what these theories suggest in terms of how students learn and assess their learning.

**Overview of Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research method to investigate participants’ experiences with class ranking and how their experiences with class ranking impact their narrative identities. The qualitative research approach is known for producing non-numerical data, which is valuable for understanding people’s perspectives, experiences, attitudes, actions, and relationships (Pathak et al., 2013). It provides insight and depth into various aspects of human behavior and allows

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researchers to delve into the complexities of the subject matter (Pathak et al., 2013). In qualitative research, the researcher plays a crucial role in accessing the emotions and thoughts of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). It is the researcher’s responsibility to create an environment where participants feel comfortable and open to sharing their experiences, perspectives, and emotions (Creswell, 2013). By establishing rapport, building trust, and employing effective communication techniques, the researcher can effectively delve into the rich and nuanced aspects of the participants’ subjective understandings (Creswell, 2013). This allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic, providing valuable insights and contributing to the depth and richness of qualitative research findings.

Narrative inquiry, a type of qualitative research method in which participants’ stories are used as raw data (Butina, 2015), is employed specifically for this study. Narrative inquiry is ideal for this study because it allowed participants to tell a detailed account of their experiences, stories, and perceptions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). The use of narrative inquiry enabled a deeper understanding of the participants’ perspectives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). It provided a platform for participants to share their stories, giving voice to their individual perspectives and shedding light on their individual thoughts on the impacts of class ranking. By allowing participants to share their stories, this method allowed for a rich and nuanced exploration of their lived experiences. It offered participants the opportunity to provide context, meaning, and complexity to their narratives. Through narrative inquiry, the study captured participants’ unique viewpoints, emotions, and subjective interpretations. This methodology recognizes the importance of the participants’ voices and emphasizes their agency in shaping and conveying their stories. Narrative inquiry also allowed me to obtain participants’

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experiences in the form of stories in ways that explored their personal characteristics or identity and how they perceive themselves in a personal and larger context (Haydon & Riet, 2017). In narrative inquiry, the role of the researcher is to collect data consisting of stories participants share and retell these stories by emphasizing their experiences in relation to a particular phenomenon (Haydon & Riet, 2017); these data are collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Kim, 2016).

For this study’s investigation, semi-structured interviews were used to collect narrative data from four participants who experienced class ranking in a Nigerian primary and secondary school within the last 20 years. These interviews provided a safe and supportive environment for participants to share their stories openly and reflectively. The collected narratives were meticulously analyzed and subsequently retold, with a focus on presenting the experiences in a coherent and chronological manner. This approach aimed to provide a thorough understanding of each participant’s journey with class ranking. By organizing the narratives in a logical and sequential fashion, I sought to shed light on the various aspects and complexities of class ranking as experienced by each participant. The analysis and retelling process was conducted with great care and attention to detail, ensuring that the final presentation accurately depicted the participants’ experiences and their perspectives on class ranking.

Furthermore, I employed purposive sampling for the participant recruitment process to guarantee that the selected participants would fulfill all the necessary criteria aligned with the study’s purpose and objectives. Purposive sampling is a widely-used qualitative research technique that aims to maximize the value of available resources by prioritizing participants who can offer the most insightful and informative perspectives (Patton, 2015). This methodological

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approach ensures that the research outcomes are based on an intentional selection of participants who possess the knowledge and experiences relevant to the study’s goals. Additionally, narrative analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the four participants. Narrative analysis shed light on the context of the accounts participants presents and the motivations behind their presentation (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative analysis proved to be an invaluable tool in uncovering the inner workings of participants’ experiences and perceptions of class ranking. This analytical approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of their encounters with class ranking, both within and outside of the specific context in which they were subjected to this practice. By delving into the narratives of the participants, narrative analysis allowed for a deep exploration of their lived experiences. Through this form of analysis, I was able to gain insight into the intricate nuances of participants’ experiences and perceptions. By examining their personal narratives, I could discern their motivations, emotions, and attitudes toward class ranking. This understanding was crucial in identifying the underlying factors that influenced their experiences and perceptions. Using narrative analysis also allowed me to go beyond the immediate context in which class ranking occurred. By examining participants’ narratives, I was able to identify broader patterns and themes that cut across their experiences. This allowed for a more holistic understanding of the influence of class ranking on the participants’ lives, both within and beyond the classroom. Narrative analysis was used to highlight the uniqueness of all participants’ experiences and place them in more general contexts (Andrews et al., 2008; Squire, 2008).

**Positionality**

Positionality refers to the particular viewpoint, convictions, and principles that an individual possesses, which influence how they perceive the world and engage with it (Holmes,

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2020). It acknowledges an individual’s social, cultural, political, and personal context and how these factors impact their understanding and interpretation of events and information (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; and Rowe, 2014). This concept acknowledges the significance of individual experiences and biases in shaping how people approach various situations. By taking the time to reflect upon our own experiences and biases, we can attain a greater understanding of our own perspectives. This, in turn, enables us to engage with others in a more critical and empathetic manner, fostering deeper insights and connections.

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), establishing positionality in research involves recognizing whether a researcher occupies the role of an insider or an outsider. An insider is a researcher who is deeply involved in and has personal experience or knowledge of the subject they are studying (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2013). They may have existing relationships with individuals or organizations within the field and have firsthand understanding of the context in which their research takes place (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). This familiarity allows them to gain access to insider perspectives, insider knowledge, and to interpret data within the specific cultural, professional, or social framework of the subject (Braun & Clarke, 2013). On the other hand, an outsider researcher is someone who approaches a subject without prior personal involvement or direct experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bonner

* Tolhurst, 2002). They may come from a different field or background and have a limited understanding of the subject matter (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). As a result, they are more like impartial observers, relying on formal research methods and existing literature to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bonner
* Tolhurst, 2002).

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My position in this study is that of an “insider”. I bring my personal and professional experience to this research work as I share particular attributes with the participants. I am a 27-year-old African woman who was born and raised in Ibadan, Nigeria. My primary and secondary education was completed in Nigerian schools that used class ranking, thus giving me first-hand experience with the practice. As an educator in Nigerian schools, I have also observed students’ reactions and responses to class ranking. I acknowledge that this research cannot be divorced from personal values, recognizing that my subjectivity, personal experience, emotions, and worldview has an impact on the research process (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Being an insider researcher for this study added significant value to the overall research process. With my insider perspective, I possessed an intimate understanding of the experiences and viewpoints expressed by the participants. This familiarity enabled me to establish a genuine connection and foster authentic social interactions during the interview process (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). This insider knowledge allowed me to ask probing questions and delve deeper into their personal experiences, creating a more natural and fruitful interview environment. By relating to their unique circumstances, I was able to evoke more nuanced and meaningful responses from the participants, ultimately enhancing the quality and depth of the research. In addition, this insider perspective helped build trust and rapport with the participants, facilitating open and honest conversations. Overall, my role as an insider researcher was crucial in adding a valuable dimension to this study.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The following are key terms used in the study.

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* Class ranking: “Class ranking is a mathematical summary of a student’s academic record compared to those of other students in the class.” (College Board, 2020).
* Primary Education: This is the formal education provided for children aged 6 to 12 and lasts six years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).
* Secondary Education: Secondary education is what children receive after primary school but before entering higher education. Secondary education is divided into two stages: junior secondary and senior secondary school, each lasting three years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).
* Continuous assessment: Method of evaluating a student’s performance in a course that does not rely solely on a final exam (Muskin, 2017).
* Personal Adjustments: Refer to the psychological process individuals go through as they grow up and mature, which involves the individual learning how to cope with the challenges and changes that occur in their life and developing or adopting strategies to effectively navigate them (Boring, 1945).
* Academic Adjustment: refers to the extent to which students adapt to their academic demands, including attitudes toward curriculum, engagement with course content, and

academic effort (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Gfellner & Córdoba 2020; Li et al., 2021).

**Chapter One Summary**

This first chapter introduced the study’s background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, significance, theoretical underpinning overview, research design overview, researcher’s positionality, and definition of key terms. This study is exploratory in nature, as it investigates the impact of class ranking from the perspective of those who have experienced it

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and highlights individual experiences with class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. The second chapter will present the study’s literature review, presenting what is known about the Nigerian education system, the features and effects of class ranking, the theoretical underpinnings for this study, and other concepts used as lenses for this study.

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**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Introduction**

My experience with class ranking as a student significantly impacted how I perceived my abilities and even myself throughout my academic journey. It shaped how I approached my studies and other aspects of my life. I still find it necessary to remind myself to prioritize genuine interest, learning, and skill development over solely focusing on performance. Initially, the pressure to constantly perform and maintain my position in the class ranking consumed my thoughts. Being constantly aware of my class ranking created a heightened sense of pressure to perform well academically. It became all too easy to equate my worth and abilities solely based on my position in the class rather than my genuine interest in learning and developing my skills or knowledge. This mindset led me to focus more on achieving high grades rather than truly engaging in the learning process. I equated my worth and intelligence purely to my academic achievements. This mindset led to anxiety and self-doubt. I often questioned whether I was truly capable or deserving of success outside of the classroom setting. As I progressed through my academic journey, I gradually began to realize the limitations of class ranking. I understood that it didn’t define my true abilities or potential. It became essential for me to shift my perspective, to view education as a means of personal growth rather than a competition for ranking.

However, it wasn’t until I started teaching in Nigerian schools that I witnessed firsthand how class ranking influenced other students’ learning processes. I observed how my students

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became fixated on their rankings and how it influenced their motivation and engagement in the classroom. Witnessing this reinforced the importance of addressing the dominant narrative surrounding class ranking. As an educator, I strive to foster an environment that nurtures a genuine love for learning and helps students develop their individual strengths and passions rather than perpetuating a culture solely focused on competition and rank. I actively work to ensure that my approach to various aspects of life is not solely based on performance but on a sincere desire to learn and grow. While a good performance is certainly desirable, I constantly remind myself and my students that true success lies in the pursuit of knowledge and personal development. Therefore, it was imperative for me to explore further and document how class ranking may be influencing students and their approach to learning in order for educators to devise strategies that prioritize comprehensive learning rather than solely focusing on performance.

As part of this research, I meticulously searched for peer-reviewed journals that shed light on class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. The intent behind this search was to gain an understanding of the existing knowledge and practices surrounding class ranking, as well as its impact on students. To my surprise, despite the widespread implementation of class ranking in many Nigerian schools (Añulika et al., 2014), in my search for relevant literature, I was unable to locate any comprehensive studies that delved into students’ experiences with class ranking and the impacts of class ranking on Nigerian students. This absence of research addressing the implication of class ranking in Nigerian schools leaves a gap in our understanding of how this practice affects students who are subjected to it. This is concerning. Understanding how the use of class ranking impacts Nigerian students is crucial to fully comprehending the

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implications of class ranking practices on the academic, social, and psychological aspects of the student’s lives.

**Organization of the Review**

This literature starts off by providing an overview of the Nigerian education system, including the assessments employed in primary and secondary education. By shedding light on how Nigerian students advance through the education system and the methods used to evaluate their progress, this review seeks to underscore the importance of efficient assessment practices in promoting educational growth. The literature review then proceeds to provide an overview of what is known regarding the features and effects of class ranking, although the focus is primarily on what is generally known and not specific to Nigerian schools or students. Despite the scarcity of peer-reviewed literature specifically addressing class ranking in the Nigerian context, this review aimed to situate the information regarding the features and effects of class ranking within the Nigerian primary and secondary education system. Furthermore, this review discusses the theories that underpin the study, namely the sociocultural theory, constructivist theory, and social comparison theory. These theories serve as useful frameworks to examine the experiences of the participants in the study. Finally, the literature review presents a range of concepts that are crucial for comprehending the experiences and perceptions of class ranking. Personal and academic adjustments, identity formation, labeling, and learned helplessness are all concepts that have been extensively explored and are often associated with students’ motivation, behavior, actions, and decision-making processes. The data collected for this study were thoroughly analyzed through the prism of these concepts.

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**Nigerian Education System**

***Overview***

The Nigerian education system is a comprehensive framework carefully designed to provide quality education to its citizens (Awokoya, 1981). The National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria, developed by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, serves as a guiding document that outlines the standards schools within the country are expected to adhere to in order to ensure the provision of quality education for all Nigerians (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Ibukun & Aboluwodi, 2010; Odukoya et al., 2018). This policy serves as a reference for educational institutions, ensuring they meet the requirements to deliver an effective and efficient learning experience. However, there have been reports indicating that the implementation of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigerian schools, particularly in primary and secondary education, has faced some challenges and has not been as successful as anticipated. These challenges include a shortage of qualified teachers, limited funds, a lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities, low motivation among teachers, and a lack of guidance and counseling services (Okoroma, 2006).

Furthermore, The NPE emphasizes that in order to achieve the goals of education in Nigeria, educational activities at all levels of education in Nigeria must be student-centered (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Student-centered learning is an educational approach that focuses on the needs of the individual learner, and it does what its name indicates: it places students at the center of the learning process and gives them an active role in what they are learning (Cheang, 2009). Student-centered learning personalizes learning, is competency-based, and students advance when they demonstrate mastery of content (Reif et al., 2016). The student-

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centered approach holds that learning is not limited to classrooms and that students should be given opportunities to take ownership of their learning by allowing them to incorporate their interests and skills into the learning process (Reif et al., 2016). Therefore, the NPE implies that the outcomes of all instructional and school practices in Nigerian schools must align with the nature and characteristics of student-centered learning. It suggests that school and instructional practices used within the Nigerian education system must prioritize students’ needs and interests.

***Levels of Education in Nigeria***

The education system consists of three main levels of education: primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Ibukun, 2010). Primary education in Nigeria typically lasts for six years and is compulsory for all children between the ages of six and eleven (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Ibukun, 2010). The curriculum focuses on foundational subjects such as English language, mathematics, social studies, and basic science (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Primary education also emphasizes civic education and moral values (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Secondary education in Nigeria is divided into two tiers: junior secondary and senior secondary (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Mbahi, 1991). Junior secondary education spans three years, while senior secondary education covers another three years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). During this time, students study a range of subjects, including mathematics, English language, sciences, social sciences, and technical/vocational subjects (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). At the end of senior secondary education, students sit for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) or other recognized external examinations such as the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). After completing secondary education, students

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can use the results from their external examinations to pursue tertiary education at universities or other higher education institutions.

***Selecting Concentration***

It is crucial to emphasize that during the transition from junior secondary education to senior secondary education, students are typically mandated by their respective schools to opt for a concentration in either Science, Commercial, or Arts (Kashim & Adelabu, 2010). Consequently, when students sit for their external examinations, such as WAEC and JAMB, to progress into higher education, they undertake the examinations for subjects that align with their chosen concentrations (Olamide, 2023).

Choosing a concentration is undoubtedly a crucial phase in the life of a Nigerian student. The decisions they make during this period could greatly impact their college major and subsequent career path. For instance, students opting for a science concentration may pursue majors and careers in fields such as engineering or medicine. Similarly, those with a focus on commerce might gravitate towards majors in accounting or finance. Also, students interested in art may choose majors and careers related to fine arts, music, or humanities. Ideally, selecting a concentration should be driven by personal interest. However, it is unfortunate that certain stigmas associated with specific concentrations can influence students’ choices, regardless of their genuine interest in a particular field (Mbahi, 1991). For example, Enamhe (2013) and Mbahi (1991) highlighted the discouragement some Nigerian parents express towards their children pursuing arts based on the misguided notion that art is for lazy individuals or those who are destined for a less successful life.

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It is essential to recognize that such stereotypes limit the potential of students to explore their true passions and talents. Each concentration offers a unique set of skills and knowledge that can contribute significantly to society and personal growth. It is crucial for Nigerian students and their families to challenge these stigmas and allow students to pursue concentrations based on their genuine interests and aptitudes. By breaking free from these preconceived notions, students can embark on a path that aligns with their passions and strengths. This, in turn, will likely lead to a more fulfilling educational experience and open up a world of opportunities in their chosen field. It is imperative for society to support students in making well-informed and unbiased decisions when selecting their concentration.

***Types of Assessments in Nigeria Primary and Secondary Schools***

Many educators recognize the value and necessity of assessing students. Student assessments aid in evaluating the progress of students’ learning, as well as providing vital information about students’ strengths and weaknesses during learning processes or skill development, allowing for the improvement of teaching and learning (Beatty et al., 2001). Studies have also shown that performance on assessments can impact students within and outside of the learning context. For instance, Stobart and Eggen (2012) found that student performance on assessments can significantly impact their future prospects, such as their career choice, educational endeavors, and overall success in life. Assessments are critical during the learning process, and education systems frequently use some form of student assessment to track student learning and ensure that students are achieving desired learning outcomes. The Nigerian education system is no exception, with two types of assessment used throughout primary and secondary education. Internal assessments and external assessments are the two types of

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educational assessments that occur at the primary and secondary school levels in Nigeria’s education system (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Ughamadu et al., 1991).

The internal assessments, which are often referred to also as school-based assessments or continuous assessments, are implemented by schools and teachers within the school (Kennedy & Iyamu, 2021). Internal assessment includes continuous assessments such as assignments, tests, examinations, projects, and practical work that are typically developed, administered, graded, and recorded by the teacher and then used to determine class ranks and promote students from one class to the next (Aduloju et al., 2016; Ali & Akubue, 1988; Añulika et al., 2014; Kennedy

* Iyamu, 2021; Ugwu, 2023). Internal assessments are intended to provide information regarding learning, specifically to pinpoint a student’s learning progress, identify students’ areas for improvement, and suggest ways to motivate and sustain students’ attention during the learning process (Aduloju et al., 2016; Awomolo, 1992; Junaidu & Onuka, 2007; Kennedy & Iyamu, 2021; Mkpae & Obowu, 2017). Internal assessments in Nigerian schools are conducted by teachers, and they involve the implementation of continuous assessment of students at intervals in the three domains of learning—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, and are intended to stimulate continuous evaluation and adjustment of the teaching and learning programs (Aduloju et al., 2016; Ali &Akubue, 1988). In addition, internal assessments are conducted in Nigerian primary and secondary schools to prepare students for external assessments (Kennedy & Iyamu, 2021). One of the major problems of internal assessments in Nigerian schools, however, is that they are often carried out by teachers who do not have the necessary skills to implement assessments that effectively target all three domains of learning (Aduloju et al., 2016; Ali & Akubue, 1988). This suggests that Nigerian schools must train their

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teachers to effectively administer these internal assessments, especially when they are used to determine students’ class rank positions; otherwise, the validity of the assessment used to rank students will be compromised.

External assessments, on the other hand, are the required assessments that students must pass in order to advance to the next level of education in Nigeria, (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), and they are carried out by independent government organizations that are in no way associated with the educational process that students go through (Kennedy & Iyamu, 2021). For instance, in order for a primary school student to progress to secondary school, they must pass the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), and in order for a secondary school student to progress to tertiary school, they must pass the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). This suggests that, regardless of a student’s class rank, if they do not pass these national examinations, they will not be able to advance to the next level of education. A student may have outstanding academic outcomes and a high-class rank as a result of internal assessments, but if they perform poorly on external assessments, they will be unable to progress to the next level of their education. Therefore, it is important that, in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, the internal assessments are aligned with external assessments at all levels of education (Awomolo, 1992) and that students’ class rank should not be the only or main factor considered when determining a student’s ability and likelihood of passing the external assessments.

Overall, this is an informative overview of the Nigerian education system, offering valuable insights into its structure, levels of education, transition processes, and assessment methods. By exploring these aspects, readers gain a comprehensive understanding of how

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Nigerian students advance through the education system and how their class ranks are determined and used. The following section presents what was found in literature regarding the features of class ranking and how they relate to the primary and secondary school context in Nigeria.

**Features of Class Ranking**

Class ranking is a practice that involves hierarchically comparing student academic performances to determine where students stand in comparison to their peers (College Board, 2020). It involves assigning a single, holistic numerical score to summarize a student’s performance, and it implies a single scale, continuum, or dimension upon which all performances are hung (Elbow, 1993). This section presents what is known about the general features of class ranking and how they apply in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, specifically looking into how class ranks are determined, how students’ class rank positions can fluctuate throughout their academic journey, how schools determine criteria for ranking students, how schools and class populations influence rank positions, and how schools use different assessment methods to evaluate students’ learning.

As mentioned in the overview of Nigeria’s current education system, students spend six years in primary school and six years in secondary school, with secondary school divided into two stages: junior secondary education and senior secondary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), and class ranking practices are used in many Nigerian primary and secondary schools (Aduloju et al., 2016; Añulika et al., 2014). The most common method used to determine class rank in schools is by comparing student Grade Point Averages (GPA) in the class, which is an average of all the student’s grades in the class (Guskey, 2014). Students’ class rank positions

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in Nigerian classrooms are also determined by comparing students’ GPAs, albeit the term GPA is not widely used to refer to the average of a student’s grades. Nonetheless, in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, the majority of the assessments given to students are rank-oriented, and all assessments given to students over the course of a term are averaged and compared to establish each student’s class rank positions (Aduloju et al., 2016; Añulika et al., 2014; Ugwu, 2023). Class rank positions are often recalculated each term as new grades are added to student records (Añulika et al., 2014; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2021). This demonstrates how students’ class rank can fluctuate significantly across terms and during their education. For example, if an academic year has three terms (Term A, B, and C) and the school reassesses student rank positions each term, a student may have a lower rank position in Term A, a higher rank position in Term B, and a lower rank position in Term C.

Next, the criteria that are used to determine the class rank positions vary across schools (Arcidiacono et al., 2012). For instance, many schools use unweighted or weighted GPAs to determine class rank positions (Guskey, 2014). An unweighted GPA represents the average value of students’ final grades and does not account for class difficulty, whereas a weighted GPA considers class difficulty as well as the student’s grade in them (Downs, 2000). So, certain schools in Nigeria may determine class rank based on weighted GPAs, while other schools may determine class rank based on unweighted GPAs. Another criterion for determining student class rank is that some schools may determine class rank based on students’ grades from all the courses they have taken, while other schools may determine class rank based on specific courses (Guskey, 2014). Some schools in Nigeria, for example, may not include student grades in specific subject areas or electives, such as Food and Nutrition, when determining students’

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average grade scores to determine their class rank positions, while other schools would. While class rank is generally established by comparing students’ GPAs, schools essentially determine the particular criteria that would be used to calculate students’ GPAs. Because each school has its own set of criteria for computing GPAs and giving students class rank positions, a student’s class rank may change and be different depending on which factors are used to calculate it. For example, if a student’s rank is established solely on the basis of their weighted GPA, their rank may be lower than if the school uses an unweighted GPA. Essentially, schools determine the metrics they will use to rank students, and these metrics can differ significantly from school to school. Consequently, unless all schools use the same metrics to rank their schools, student rank positions are restricted to their independent schools and classes. In addition, students’ class rank positions can vacillate over the course of their academic journey due to the lack of a standardized criterion for determining class rank positions and the schools’ ability to independently decide at any time the criteria that will be used to determine class ranks (Lang, 2007).

There are no standard ranking procedures; thus, students with the same ability can be ranked differently in different schools (Elsner & Isphording, 2017; Guskey, 2014; Lang, 2007). With this in mind, it is also crucial to mention how class size can influence class ranking positions. A student could be the first in their class, but the class could have a total population of 10 students, whereas another student in the same grade level but a different school could be the fifth in a class population of 50. On the surface, the first student is at the top of their class, while the second student is not. However, it is possible that if the student who ranked fifth is placed in the same school as the first student, they may be at the top of the class instead. In addition, schools can use a variety of assessments to evaluate their students’ learning, which can affect

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their class standing. Some schools may administer less rigorous assessments to their students, while others may administer more rigorous assessments. Consequently, a student may rank lower in a school that employs rigorous assessment procedures but ranks highly in a school with simpler assessment procedures.

**Effects of Class Ranking**

The effects of class ranking include both positive and negative effects. Regarding positive effects, Murphy and Weinhardt (2020) discovered that students with higher ranks in primary school achieve higher test scores in secondary school, and students with higher ranks in a particular subject area have more confidence in that subject. Elsner and Isophording (2017) also found that students’ rank positions significantly impact their educational success later in life and that students with higher ranks are significantly more likely to complete high school and enroll in college. They found that students who ranked higher in the class were more optimistic about their future professions and more confident in their abilities (Elsner & Isophording, 2017). This finding aligns with the study conducted by Ladant et al. (2023), which indicated individuals who attain high-ranking positions experience notable benefits such as enhanced self-esteem, improved career prospects, increased confidence in their abilities, stronger relationships with peers, and a more favorable perception of the education system. It is important to emphasize that the positive effects of using class ranking from these studies favor highest-ranked students exclusively and do not apply to lower-ranked students.

Another positive effect of class ranking not specific to the highest-ranked students is that it fosters students’ motivation to improve their academic performance. Elsner et al. (2021) demonstrated that a student’s class rank can influence the amount of support they receive from

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their teachers or peers, which can lead to increased motivation and effort and overall improved performance during the learning process. The type of support students can receive as a result of class ranking includes teachers challenging high-ranking students and higher-ranking students assisting lower-ranking students during the learning process (Elsner et al., 2021). However, no evidence was found that an improvement in performance meant that students achieved the learning objective, understood the learning content better, or achieved mastery of the learning content. Essentially, the use of class rank in schools may motivate some students to want to improve their performance, but this does not necessarily mean such improvement in their performance would also lead to or is intended for a better understanding or mastery of learning content. Lujan and DiCarlo (2006) and Emaikwu (2014) stressed this idea as well, demonstrating that students’ increasing or high performance on assessments does not always imply that they achieved the learning objectives or obtained a deeper knowledge of the learning topic.

Regarding the negative effects of class ranking, Covington’s (1992) study found that class ranking may reduce students’ motivation to improve performance and that for many students, exerting effort to improve performance may be frightening, as a combination of effort and failure implies low ability. Covington (1992) discovered that, although students were rewarded for performance and penalized for a lack of effort, many students found the prospect of risking failure associated with trying hard and failing too overwhelming. Garcia et al. (2006) also found that class rank may have unintended effects on cooperation, as their results suggested that individuals with high ranks were much less willing to cooperate, even when such collaborations have the potential to be beneficial to them. This is consistent with the findings of Elsner et al. (2021), who discovered that students’ satisfaction with peer interactions decreased with

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increasing rank and that students with higher ranks rated peer interactions less positively. Their findings also indicate that students’ beliefs about their abilities are influenced by their class rank positions (Elsner et al., 2021). As a result, when making important career decisions, students tend to use their rank positions as a heuristic (Elsner et al., 2021). Class rank is not necessarily indicative of a student’s abilities because of the variability in the methods employed for determining it (Elsner & Isphording, 2017; Lang, 2007). Therefore, it can be harmful to students to make career decisions based on their assessment of their abilities as a result of their class ranks, as their true abilities may not be aligned with their class rank positions, and they may pursue career opportunities that are not aligned with their true abilities. Elsner and Isphording (2017) highlight this phenomenon as well, demonstrating that low-ranking students underinvest in their human capital despite having higher abilities than most students their age. According to Elsner and Isphording (2017), students can place a high value on their class rank positions and perceive their class rank position as a reflection of their abilities, even when this is not the case, leading them to make life decisions based on what may be an inaccurate representation of their abilities. For example, a student who consistently receives a low-rank position may internalize that being ranked low implies that they have low intellectual abilities, causing them to underinvest in themselves and make academic decisions or interact in the classroom based on that perception of themselves. Lang (2007) also found that the flaws of class ranking practices, specifically the lack of a standard procedure for ranking, provide incentives for students to take fewer challenging courses or forego enrolling in additional ones if they fear it will lower their class rank.

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Individuals with higher ranks, on the other hand, become too competitive and tend to avoid collaborations due to fear of peers extracting information from them that will lead to them being outranked (Garcia et al., 2006). Guskey (2014) discussed how the use of class ranking could create a competitive environment, and Crocker et al.’s (2003) study demonstrated that there is a negative association between competitiveness and social interaction in the learning environment. Class ranking can encourage students to place more value on their ability to outperform their peers than on their actual competence (Crocker et al., 2003). Therefore, class ranking systems can hinder the formation of cooperative networks, which is a significant indicator of positive learning experiences (Crocker et al., 2003). It is critical to emphasize that the negative effects of class ranking affected both the highest and lowest-ranked students.

Furthermore, Goulas and Megalokonomou (2021) conducted a study that uncovered intriguing findings concerning the disclosure of rankings and their impact on students. Their research revealed that high-ranking students tend to derive benefits from the disclosure of rankings while low-ranking students are negatively affected by such information (Goulas & Megalokonomou, 2021). Gill et al. (2019) examined the role of effort and argued that knowledge of one’s class ranking can significantly influence the level of effort exerted by students. Specifically, students who are informed that they rank among the top or bottom performers demonstrate a significantly higher level of effort compared to those who are informed they rank in the middle (Gill et al., 2019). Additionally, Goulas and Megalokonomou (2021) discovered that feedback has lasting effects on performance and outcomes. For high-ranking students, feedback leads to improved subsequent performance, whereas for low-ranking students, feedback actually contributes to decreased performance. These findings shed light on the importance of

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considering not only the disclosure of rankings but also the provision of constructive feedback to students in educational settings.

**Theoretical Framework**

This section delves into the theoretical framework that informs the present study, specifically sociocultural theory, constructivist theory, and social comparison theory. These theories are considered relevant for exploring and understanding experiences with class ranking. Sociocultural theory posits that learning and development are shaped by the interplay between social and cultural factors (Pathan et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1962). Constructivist theory emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their own understanding and knowledge. Social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes, abilities, and achievements to those of others. By employing these theoretical frameworks, the study gained a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and impacts of class ranking on students.

***Sociocultural Theory***

The sociocultural theory looks at learning through a social lens and emphasizes that social interaction plays a major role in shaping an individual’s thoughts and actions (Pathan et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1962). Founder of the sociocultural theory, Lev Vygotsky (1962), believed that children learn through interacting with people and the environment and that they learn through communicating with others. Vygotsky (1962) looked at how our social environments affect learning, and he proposed that learning occurs when students engage in conversations with one another and with teachers and other knowledgeable people. This suggests that for effective learning to take place, students must be exposed to school and teaching practices that permit

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social interactions during the learning processes, as they learn best when they have ample opportunities to engage in meaningful conversation, teamwork, and mutually beneficial critique and reflection with their instructors and classmates. Vygotsky (1962) argues that culture is a primary determining factor for knowledge construction and that individuals learn through this cultural lens when interacting with others. The context with which culture is being described can be stretched far beyond ethnicities, as it can also be described as the students’ beliefs based on their experiences and exposure.

Within sociocultural theory, learning is considered to be a cooperative and collaborative effort (Donato, 2002). The theory emphasizes the importance of peer interactions for effective learning (Lantolf, 2000; Pathan et al., 2018). This suggests that school and instructional practices should support and promote peer interactions to enhance students’ learning experiences. According to West (2018), the sociocultural viewpoint emphasizes learning from experience and discourse and considers learning to occur through interaction, negotiation, and collaboration in the solution of real-world problems. It is critical for learners to make personal connections between what they are learning and how it will be applied in the real world in order for the student to internalize the relevance of the learning (Rule, 2006). This theory postulates that students’ ability to retain and apply knowledge is enhanced when they engage in real-world activities with relevant contexts (Brown et al., 1989). As a result, when examining individuals’ experiences with the use of class ranking, this study explored if and how those experiences were related to ideas from sociocultural theory.

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***Constructivist Theory***

This study is grounded in the notion that learning occurs on a social and individual level. The sociocultural theory is focused on how learning occurs on a social level, while the constructivist theory is focused on how learning occurs on an individual level. The sociocultural theory is concerned with the social conditions required for effective learning and knowledge construction, whereas the constructivist theory is concerned with the individual conditions required for effective learning and knowledge construction. Sociocultural theory is concerned with interactions that occur during the learning process (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), while constructivist theory focuses on an individual’s own perspective and experiences during the learning process (Eggen & Kauchak, 2020). While sociocultural theory emphasizes the significance of the learner’s interactions with others and their surroundings, constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of the learner’s unique perspective and experiences.

Constructivist theory centers on the fundamental idea that learning is a constructed process (Eggen & Kauchak, 2020; Phillips, 1995). In this process, learners use their prior knowledge and learning as a foundation to build new knowledge (Brandsford et al., 1999; Eggen

* Kauchak, 2020; Phillips, 1995). Based on the constructivist theory, previous knowledge and learning inevitably affect the development of new or existing knowledge (Brandsford et al., 1999; Eggen & Kauchak, 2020; Phillips, 1995). This theory highlights the active role of learners in constructing their understanding and emphasizes the importance of connecting new information to existing knowledge (Brandsford et al., 1999; Eggen & Kauchak, 2020; Phillips, 1995). The constructivist theory, as outlined by Arends (1994), is predicated on the notion that meaning is constructed, rather than transmitted to the learner, as a result of experience. This

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theory suggests that students are active agents in their own learning processes, and their unique individual perspectives and experiences impact and shape their learning. In constructivist theory, the teacher’s role is to support students by engaging them in learning that fosters their problem-solving and inquiry skills (Shah, 2019). The constructivist theory also emphasizes the need to make the learning process meaningful to students and that teachers should focus on and target students’ interests for effective learning to occur (Shah, 2019). By catering to individual interests, teachers can create a learning environment tailored to students’ needs and preferences.

This study used a constructivist lens when examining individuals’ experiences and perceptions. The constructivist theory informed this study in that for ideal learning experiences to occur, practices used on students must allow each student to be an active participant during the learning processes and be given the opportunity to construct their knowledge.

***Social Comparison Theory***

While the sociocultural theory and constructivist theory focus on the social and individual conditions required for effective learning to occur, the social comparison theory focuses on how students have an innate desire to compare their own performance and abilities to those of their peers during their learning processes. When examining individuals’ experiences with class ranking, the social comparison theory is important because it can help in understanding the dynamics between individuals’ experiences with class ranking and how they evaluated themselves and their performances during their learning journey. This theory provides insights into how students may navigate in the academic environment in terms of how they assess and evaluate themselves in relation to others. The Social Comparison Theory was proposed by Festinger (1954), and it illustrates that individuals are innately driven to evaluate themselves,

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often in comparison to others. Festinger (1954) argues that competitive behavior is a common consequence of the social comparison process. Other studies have also investigated specific factors that influence the social comparison processes. For instance, Taylor and Lobel (1989) found that people alter their comparison strategies according to their current motivation. People who desire self-enhancement seek social comparison with those who are worse off than them (Friend & Gilbert 1973), while people who have the desire for self-improvement seek social comparison with those who are better than them (Gruder, 1971). Also, Seidner et al. (1988) found that with age, students’ experience of pride becomes more strongly related to social comparisons and less to mastery of learning topics.

Social comparison theory acknowledges that the presence of competitive and achievement-oriented environments can exacerbate the tendency to engage in social comparisons (Festinger, 1954). When examining individuals’ experiences with class ranking, it is essential to consider social comparison theory because the nature of class ranking can serve as a structure that encourages students to compare themselves to their peers, which can influence their academic outcomes and classroom interactions, behaviors, attitudes, and actions. For instance, a student who ranks fifth position in their classroom, as Friend and Gilbert (1973 ) suggest, if they only want to feel good about their fifth position; they might decide only to engage or want to collaborate with peers that have ranked positions lower than them; however, if the student wants to improve their rank positions, as Gruder (1971) argued, might decide only to engage or want to collaborate more with the students who have higher ranks than them.

A student with a goal of self-enhancement while performing social comparisons will likely behave, act, and make decisions during their learning process in ways that boost their

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sense of superiority or higher rank positions (Pyszczynski et al., 1985; Wills, 1981). They may choose to compete with others, aiming to outperform their peers, and may prioritize achievements and recognition over the actual learning experience (Pyszczynski et al., 1985; Wills, 1981). They might seek feedback and evaluation to confirm their superior status and actively compare themselves to others whom they perceive as less capable or successful (Pyszczynski et al., 1985; Wills, 1981). This type of student may focus on maintaining their self-esteem and may be motivated primarily by external factors such as praise, rewards, and status (Pyszczynski et al., 1985; Wills, 1981). On the other hand, a student with self-improvement goals while performing social comparisons will likely behave, act, and make decisions during their learning process in ways that prioritize personal growth and development (Collins, 1996; Gruder, 1971). They may seek to learn from others and compare themselves to individuals who are more skilled or knowledgeable in a particular area (Collins, 1996; Gruder, 1971). This behavior will be driven by a desire to learn, develop new skills, and close the gap between their current abilities and their ideal self (Collins, 1996; Gruder, 1971). These students are more likely to embrace challenges, value effort, and perseverance, and be motivated intrinsically to improve their own performance (Collins, 1996; Gruder, 1971). They may seek feedback and evaluation with the aim of identifying areas for improvement rather than seeking validation or superiority (Collins, 1996; Gruder, 1971). Overall, while both types of students engage in social comparisons to motivate their learning processes, the student seeking self-enhancement will primarily focus on maintaining a superior rank position and external validation (Pyszczynski et al., 1985; Wills, 1981), while the student seeking self-improvement will prioritize personal growth, learning, and internal motivation (Collins, 1996; Gruder, 1971).

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**Social Comparison in Classrooms.** Students often rely on social comparison to assess their own abilities and measure their progress in the classroom. This phenomenon, as Chafel (1984) discovered, begins as early as preschool and becomes more prominent as students grow older (Aboud, 1985; Stipek & Tannatt, 1984). Feldlaufer et al. (1988) conducted a study that specifically examined the transition from elementary school to junior high school. They found that during this transition, students’ use of social comparison for self-evaluation becomes more dominant. This research insights shed light on the developmental progression of social comparison as a tool for self-evaluation among students. This reliance on social comparison as a means of self-evaluation underscores an aspect of social interactions that take place in the classroom. When examining participants’ experiences with class ranking, this study explored the extent to which participants report using their class rank positions to evaluate themselves in comparison to their peers during their primary and secondary education, as well as how the comparison occurred and the outcomes of the comparisons.

**The Effects of Social Comparison in the Classroom.** In regard to the effects of social comparison in the classroom setting, Seidner et al. (1988) found that with age, students’ experience of pride becomes more strongly related to social comparisons and less to mastery of learning topics. This is consistent with Butler’s (1989) findings that also illustrate that with age, students compare themselves to their peers less to develop mastery and more to assess their relative ability. Butler (1992) also found that students who were instructed to develop mastery of the learning materials were more interested in information relating to the task given to them, whereas students that were instructed to develop performance ability were more interested in social comparison information. This study explored the relationship between students’

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experiences with class ranking and the social comparisons that may arise from their rank positions. It aimed to explore whether students used their class ranks to assess their performance and abilities relative to their peers, and whether their focus was in surpassing their peers or in enhancing their understanding and knowledge. It is worth noting that, by the nature of class ranking, every student, except for the top-ranked individual, has the potential to improve their rank position. Hence, this study sought to shed light on the implications of class ranking in the educational context.

**Conceptual Framework**

The primary objectives of this research were to examine the lived experiences of individuals regarding the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools and to understand the potential implications of these experiences on their academic and personal adjustments, as well as their identity formations. Consequently, it was crucial to discuss certain concepts that were utilized to interpret and comprehend the participants’ experiences in this study. The concepts explored in this research include Personal and Academic Adjustments, Identity, Labeling, and Learned Helplessness. These concepts were informed by a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the topic and were employed as conceptual frameworks to guide the analysis of the data collected in this study.

***Adjustments***

Adjustments can be understood as a dual concept encompassing both a process and the outcome that the process produces. This can be prompted by new experiences or a reevaluation of existing experiences as individuals embrace new ideas, definitions, values, or realizations. Adjustments is a continual process through which individuals strive to maintain a harmonious

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balance between their individual needs and the external circumstances they encounter (Arul & Arul, 2016; Crow & Crow, 1956; Devika, 2014). This suggests that adjustments involve continuously assessing, analyzing, and implementing alterations to achieve a desired result or state, and the process can be prompted by a reflection of experiences.

However, adjustments also encompass the final result or attainment that is achieved through this process. These outcomes can manifest in diverse forms, including personal growth, an enhanced situation, or the successful attainment of a specific goal (Arul & Arul, 2016). This suggests that adjustments can be both ongoing and finalized; individuals can engage in the process of adjusting, and they can also have experienced the state of being adjusted. In essence when combining the process and outcome interpretations of adjustments, adjustments can be described as a continuous cycle of examining our circumstances, identifying areas that require change, and implementing those changes to achieve a desired outcome. It implies that adjustments can vary from person to person and situation to situation. Therefore, on-going adjustments can be necessary as circumstances and individual needs evolve over time (Devika, 2014), whether adapting to changes in one’s personal life or making necessary modifications in the academic setting. In some cases, adjustments may reach a point of finality, where individuals have successfully attained the desired state of being adjusted (Arul & Arul, 2016). This can involve successfully adapting to a new environment, integrating changes into daily routines, or achieving a sense of balance and stability (Arul & Arul, 2016). However, the attainment of this final state does not imply that adjustments will never be required again. Life is dynamic, and unforeseen circumstances can arise, necessitating further adjustments. Recognizing the importance of ongoing adjustments as well as acknowledging the possibility of a finalized state

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of adjustment afforded this study to understand participants experiences with class ranking with greater clarity and flexibility. An objective in this study was to investigate the implications of class rank on academic and personal adjustments in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how class rank impacts students’ lives. This research delved into the experiences of participants and identified key instances that led to adjustments, while also providing a detailed description of the adjustment process. By exploring the implications of class rank on adjustments, this study aimed to shed light on the academic and personal challenges that students face, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex impacts of class rank on students.

**Personal Adjustments.** Personal adjustment is a vital psychological process that individuals experience as they move through different stages of life (Boring, 1945). It entails acquiring the necessary skills to effectively cope with the various challenges and changes that arise, enabling individuals to develop strategies for successfully navigating through these experiences (Boring, 1945). The ultimate goal of personal adjustment is to foster a positive outcome, promoting the individual’s overall well-being, satisfaction, and mental health (Dufner et al., 2018; Phalet, 1996). Kurt and Paulhus (2008) assert that personal adjustments refer to the level of emotional stability and positivity a person experiences in their subjective experiences. These experiences encompass feelings of happiness, self-worth, and overall well-being. Put simply, personal adjustments concern an individual’s overall positive emotional and psychological functioning. Additionally, it suggests that by implementing various strategies and interventions to improve personal adjustments, one can potentially enhance overall well-being and life satisfaction. Smith (1961) adds that a positive personal adjustment is characterized by a

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realistic and satisfactory experience. It entails effectively dealing with and minimizing frustrations, tension, and anxieties throughout the adjustment process (Smith, 1961). Positive personal adjustment is a key component of an individual’s wellbeing (Dufner et al., 2018). When someone has positive personal adjustment, it means that their psychological and emotional outcomes are stable, positive, realistic, and ultimately satisfactory (Dufner et al., 2018). This suggests that they have developed effective coping mechanisms, possessed a healthy self-concept, and had a strong sense of self-efficacy.

**Academic Adjustments.** Academic adjustment refers to the extent to which students are able to adapt and meet the demands of their academic environment. This encompasses various aspects such as their attitudes towards the curriculum, level of engagement with course material, and the effort they put into their academic pursuits (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, academic adjustments may involve making changes to study habits, adopting effective time management techniques, or seeking additional support and resources. Ultimately, the aim of these adjustments is to enhance both student performance and their overall well-being, by establishing a harmonious equilibrium between their personal needs and the external factors that shape their academic journey (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Wang et al., 2021).

There are numerous milestones in a student’s academic journey that may require them to make certain academic adjustments. One such milestone is the transition from secondary education to higher education, which can be quite overwhelming for many students. This transition entails navigating a new academic setting with different expectations and increased independence (Robinson, 2009). According to Adams and Proctor (2010), one of the key factors that can determine a student’s success in higher education learning is their ability to adjust to the

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demands of the new learning environment. In their research, Adams and Proctor (2010) found that students who had difficulty adapting to the academic environment were more likely to drop out. This finding highlights the importance of providing support and resources to help students transition smoothly into higher education. By assisting students in adjusting to the new academic environment, educational institutions can increase the chances of student success and retention. Furthermore, the research conducted by Dyson and Renk (2006) suggests that the

adjustment level of each student varies depending on their age-wise development. This means that students may require different levels of support and guidance during their academic journey. Building upon this, Wang et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of academic adjustments in addressing emotional challenges faced by students. They argue that by actively adjusting, students can effectively overcome anxiety, depression, loneliness, and withdrawal (Wang et al., 2021). Recognizing the significance of academic adjustments in addressing mental well-being, it becomes evident that providing appropriate support to students is crucial.

***Learned Helplessness***

Regardless of a student’s academic standing, how entities within the learning environment, such as teachers and peers, react to a student’s performance can affect the student’s perceptions of their abilities, and students who have a fixed mindset about their abilities can develop learned helplessness (Dweck, 2007; Dweck, 1975). Learned Helplessness is a severe form of disengagement caused by conditioning in which students blame their academic failures on their fixed ability rather than their actions or effort (Dweck, 1975; Yates, 2009). When individuals repeatedly convince themselves that their actions will not affect the outcome of a stressful situation or their failures, they develop learned helplessness (Abramson et al., 1978;

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Seligman & Maier, 1967). According to Walling and Martinek (1995), failure in a variety of achievement situations is one of the primary causes of learned helplessness. Students who experience failure over and over again often develop a fatalistic outlook on their situation. These students believe that a lack of ability is a fixed and constant factor in the outcomes of their efforts (Walling & Martinek, 1995). Students of all academic abilities can experience learned helplessness (Dweck, 2007), but low-achieving students are more likely to do so than their higher-achieving counterparts (Prasetya, 2013). Learned helplessness was also found to be more common among students who viewed themselves as failures compared to those who saw themselves as successful (Prasetya, 2013).

Students are ranked each school term in Nigerian primary and secondary schools that use class ranking (Añulika et al., 2014), and there may be instances where a student can either consistently rank high or consistently rank low and thus associate their consistent rank positions to their abilities, potentially developing learned helplessness as a result. In such cases, students who consistently rank high and have a fixed mindset about their abilities may develop learned helplessness and exhibit behaviors such as avoiding difficult problems out of fear of failing and being perceived as unintelligent, whereas students who consistently rank low and have a fixed mindset about their abilities may begin to minimize the value of effort and set lower standards for success for themselves (Dweck, 2007).

**Poverty and Learned Helplessness.** Exposure to stressful or traumatic situations due to experiencing poverty is another risk factor for developing learned helplessness (Brown et al., 2016). Evans and Cassells (2014) argued that students who experience poverty are more likely to develop learned helplessness. Children of low-income families are negatively impacted by their

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parents’ daily stressors and may develop learned helplessness as a result of these experiences (Brown et al., 2016). Children living in poverty may be less motivated to put forth the effort necessary to succeed in school because of the daily stressors they experience (Brown et al., 2016). Although Nigeria is one of the richest countries in Africa, nearly half of its population lives in poverty (World Bank Group, 2022), making it important to consider, if applicable, the role that poverty plays in the relationship between the perceived effect of class rank and the development of learned helplessness in individuals who have experienced class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools.

***Labeling***

Learned helplessness can also be traced back to the labels that are assigned to students because students often internalize and identify with the labels that are attributed to them, leading to a state of learned helplessness (Dweck, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to examine what the act of labeling is and what is known about how it affects students. Labeling is a category into which something is placed. Hobbs (1975) describes labeling as the act of categorizing students or assigning them to a specific position in a class system. This is what the class ranking of students does precisely, as students’ performances are compared, and based on that, each student is assigned a class rank position. Labels can reflect and influence how one perceives themselves and others. Labeling can permanently stigmatize a person and alter their social interactions and how others perceive them (Goffman, 1959; Heward et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to consider that the labels students receive may impact them well beyond the confines of the classroom and the original context in which they were assigned the label. Labeling in the

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classroom has both advantages and disadvantages, which have been extensively documented in the research as presented below.

The most significant advantage of labeling found in literature is that labeling can help to identify if a child has a problem, allowing one to locate the resources that would be beneficial to the child’s improvement and success (Reid, 1996). For instance, if a student is labeled as the lowest-ranking student in the class, one can access and identify the subject areas in which the student appears to be struggling the most and provide them with resources and support to help them improve their performances in that specific subject area. Hobbs (1975) suggests that classification systems should be refined to match the child’s problems with the services the child needs to succeed. As a result, when a student receives a label, the label should include details about the reason for the label as well as specific areas that may require improvement. However, there are many significant disadvantages to labeling found in the literature. For instance, according to Taylor et al. (2010), individuals’ low self-esteem and lack of confidence stem in part from the negative labels they’ve been given. Heward et al. (2018) argue that a child’s low sense of self-worth can be exacerbated by the stigmatizing effects of labels, which can cause negative social interactions between the child and their peers. The disadvantages noted for labeling in literature should not be ignored or dismissed because they can significantly impact the child’s learning processes and experiences, and behaviors in the learning environment in a negative way. Although the identified disadvantages of labeling are severe, it is important to stress that this study is not advocating for the eradication of labels because this study accepts the notion that labeling is essential to human communication and problem-solving in many regards (Heward et al. 2018; Hobbs, 1975). Instead, this study advocates for reexamining how we use

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labels in the learning environment to ensure that students are not experiencing and suffering from the negative consequences of labeling. According to Hobbs (1975), if the goal is to minimize the negative consequences of labeling while also ensuring access to effective tools for the child’s improvement, more precise categories and perceptive ways of describing children are required.

Labeling as a result of class ranking can have a positive or negative impact on students, and this study can identify some of the ways and extent to which assigned labels as a result of class ranking can impact students by examining individuals’ experiences with class ranking. This study will examine the influence of labels prescribed to students as a result of class ranking on their approach to learning. This study will also examine the influence of the labels prescribed to students on how they viewed themselves (their identity) and how they were treated by their peers, family, and school officials.

***Identity***

The experiences students have in the learning environment, as well as the labels they internalize, can have a significant impact on their identity formation (Iwasa et al., 2022). Identity is the manner in which individuals perceive themselves across space and time (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; van Hoof, 1999). Studies have shown that students’ experiences with school and instructional practices can have an influence on their identity. For instance, Harter (1990) found that the experiences adolescents have in the learning environment have consequences on what they think about themselves–their identity. Furthermore, identity formation is a lifelong process that begins in childhood, particularly during adolescence and continues throughout an individual’s life (Erikson, 1968). McAdams (2001) also argues that individuals create an identity through constructing stories about their lives, which is referred to as narrative identities, and an

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individual’s narrative identities begin to emerge in the late adolescent and early adult years. Our identity is constructed and can continuously be reconstructed as we are exposed to new experiences or come to an understanding of our past experiences (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Examining identity through the lens of Erikson’s (1968) and McAdam’s (2001) ideas, we may be able to see how individuals begin to form identities in their adolescent years, and as they grow and have various experiences, they reconstruct their identities. Thus, identities have tendencies to go through various transformations. With this in mind, the formation of identity is not a static occurrence, nor is it fixed; instead, it is an ongoing effort to make sense of who we are as we reflect on our past, present, and future experiences (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; McAdams & McLean, 2013). An individual’s identity is, therefore, continually changing and involves subjective interpretations.

In this study, I used narrative identities as a lens to examine the concept of identity in order to determine how participants perceived themselves when they were ranked in primary and secondary school and whether or not this perception carried over into their higher education, careers, or other areas of their lives. Narrative identity is an individual’s internalized, ever-changing life story that they construct by weaving together stories from their past, present, and future in order to give their lives cohesion, meaning, and purpose (Bauer et al., 2008; Kerr et al., 2019). McAdams (1988) and Ricoeur (1990) demonstrated that as people change, the ways in which they tell stories about the things that have happened to them in their lives may also change, suggesting that their narrative identity is malleable and subject to transformation. This indicates that one’s narrative of a life event may change after engaging in reflection and reflexivity. Given this study’s goal of assessing the relationship between individuals’ experiences

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with class ranking and their narrative identities, it was important that this study examined how class ranking practices may have affected participants at the time of their learning in a Nigerian primary and secondary school and beyond that learning by listening to their accounts of their experiences with class ranking after some time has passed since they experienced the use of the practice. It was imperative to explore the experiences of the participants when they were adolescents and how they perceived the effects of class ranking during that particular time in their life to identify if these perceptions had an impact on how they perceived themselves or their ability in the classroom during their overall academic journey and career path. Also, Fauchart and Gruber (2011) argue that individuals’ identities guide their decisions, actions, and behavior. Therefore, this study aims to investigate if and how individuals’ perceptions, as a result of their experience with class ranking, influenced their actions, decisions, and behaviors in the learning environment and during their overall academic journey.

**Chapter Two Summary**

This chapter presented a review of literature on the Nigerian education system, the features and effects of class ranking, and the theories and concepts that served as analytical frameworks for examining participants’ experiences with class ranking. The literature on the effects of class ranking is not specific to Nigerian schools because no literature on the effects of class ranking in Nigerian schools was found. This is the first and most significant gap in the literature addressed by the present study. Furthermore, no studies were discovered that examined the effects of class rank on students by examining students’ lived experiences with the practice, which is the second identified gap in the literature that this study addressed. This chapter also introduced three theories: sociocultural theory, constructivist theory, and social comparison

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theory. These theories were essential in analyzing the data. Furthermore, other relevant concepts—adjustment, learned helplessness, labeling, and identity—were also presented. These concepts were also used as lenses during the analysis of participant experiences. In the following chapters, I present the methods that were employed for this research study and aided in addressing two identified gaps in the literature.

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**CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

**Methodological Justification**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the firsthand experiences of alumni students who completed their primary and secondary education in Nigerian schools that implemented class ranking practices. In addition, a secondary purpose of this study was to delve into how the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools might have influenced the construction and narration of alumni students’ personal stories, particularly in terms of their identity. The study aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the alumni students’ experiences with class ranking, including any potential long-term effects on their perception of self and their narratives surrounding their educational journeys. Below are the research questions that guided this study:

* How do participants describe their experiences with the use of class ranking practices in their primary and secondary school years?
* In what ways, if any, do experiences with class ranking impact participants’ identities? This study employed qualitative research methods, using a narrative inquiry research

design to explore participants’ experiences with class ranking practices used in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended. The use of a qualitative research method was ideal for this study because it allowed for a thorough investigation of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, with special attention paid to the richness of the accounts they told and the

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variety of forms in which those accounts took shape (Creswell, 2013; Grbich, 2013; Miles & Saldana, 2020). Range, frequency, and objectivity, as seen through a cause-and-effect lens, were not the focus of this investigation (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, due to the varied applications of class ranking practices, participants’ accounts contained nuances that needed to be carefully considered and preserved to gain a full understanding of their experiences and perspectives. Goodwin and Goodwin (1984) argue that qualitative research methods are best in this situation, as they are ideal for the exploration and preservation of complex phenomena, the identification of individuals’ perspectives, and the detailed description and interpretation of a phenomenon. Another reason for using a qualitative research method is that interviews, particularly semi-structured interviews, are one of the most common data collection methods, and using interviews allows for a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (Gill et al., 2008), such as understanding participants’ experiences and perceptions of class ranking. Data gathered in this study were in the form of words rather than numbers (Punch, 2013). The data gathered in the form of words were obtained using semi-structured interviews because this study sought to obtain information from key informants who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs related to class ranking (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Using semi-structured interviews allowed for the collection of qualitative and open-ended data, the exploration of participant thoughts, the extraction of feelings and beliefs about class ranking, and the diving deeply into personal and sensitive situations participants may have experienced in relation to class ranking (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Furthermore, this study employed narrative inquiry design because it is well-suited to its stated purposes and research questions. Narrative inquiry, a type of qualitative research method

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in which the stories themselves become the raw data (Butina, 2015), was used specifically for this study’s investigation. In narrative inquiry, the role of the researcher is to collect data consisting of stories participants share and retell these stories by emphasizing their experiences in relation to a particular phenomenon (Haydon & Riet, 2017); and these data are collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Kim, 2016). This study employed a narrative inquiry research design to elicit critical stories from the individuals who have learned in Nigerian primary and secondary schools that utilized class ranking practices, mainly to capture their experiences with class ranking and their construction and perception of the impact of class ranking on their academic and personal lives. Narrative inquiry involves personal storytelling (Lichtman, 2013) with the goal of revealing the meanings of the individuals’ experiences (Wang et al., 2015). Therefore, narrative inquiry is ideal for this study because it allowed participants to tell a detailed account of their experiences and perceptions (Clandinin, 2013; Kim, 2016). Using narrative inquiry, I was able to obtain individuals’ experiences in the form of stories that highlighted their personal characteristics and identity and how they perceive themselves in a personal and larger context (Haydon & Riet, 2017). Therefore, a narrative inquiry approach was also useful in this inquiring process, as it allowed for the characterization of individual perceptions of the effects of class ranking while also allowing for a deeper understanding of how the use of the class ranking impacted participants. To fully understand participants’ narratives of their experiences with class ranking, it was important that the investigation process involved an in-depth exploration of individual stories. As underlined previously, how class ranking is used and how class ranks are determined can vary from school to school; therefore, narratives may

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provide a deeper understanding of this variation. Also, the subsequent reactions and outcomes to students’ rank positions may vary.

Additionally, fluctuations in class rank positions throughout an individual’s academic journey can have varying effects on them. When using class ranking practices, some schools may decide to rank only the top three students, whereas others may rank all students. Some schools may rank students based on all subject areas, whereas others may choose to rank students based on specific subject areas. In addition, when schools use class ranking practices, some students may consistently rank high, while other students may consistently rank low. Some students may rank high in particular school terms but then rank low in another school term, while some students may rank low in particular school terms and then rank high in another school term. Consequently, this study recognized that each individual who has learned in a Nigerian school that utilized class ranking will have stories, experiences, and perceptions of class ranking practice that vary and are unique. Therefore, to preserve the complexity and temporal context of the lived experiences of these individuals, it was important that this study focuses on individual stories. Narrative inquiry provided a useful format for gaining an in-depth understanding of the unique and individual experiences of participants, as well as the complexities and nuances of the participants’ experiences as they reflect on them (Fontana & Frey; 2005; Kim, 2011; Lai, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1995).

**Research Paradigm**

According to Mertens (2010), a paradigm is a “way of looking at the world” that consists of a set of philosophical assumptions that serve to guide and influence one’s thoughts and actions. This study is situated in the constructivism paradigm because it is aligned with the belief

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that knowledge is constructed from human experience and that reality is a construct of the human mind and, thus, subjective. Lincoln and Guba (2011) illustrated that the constructivism paradigm’s goal is to describe individual perspectives, experiences, and meaning-making processes. The constructivism philosophical paradigm holds that people learn about the world by experiencing and reflecting on their experiences (Honebein, 1996), and it is predicated on the idea that humans construct most of what they learn via experience (Cashman et al., 2008; Hein, 1991). Constructivism asserts that knowledge is produced by researchers and influenced by their context (Lichtman, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), constructivist researchers strive to comprehend the research participants’ experiences in order to uncover their subjective truths and perceptions. Constructivism is a belief that embraces the concept of multiple truths, suggesting that there can be various interpretations and understandings of a given phenomenon (Lichtman, 2013). It acknowledges that truth is not fixed or objective but rather influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the participant(s) under investigation (Lichtman, 2013). This perspective recognizes the role of the researcher’s own experiences, biases, and cultural background in shaping their understanding of reality (Lichtman, 2013). Constructivism opposes the assumption that there is objective truth in realities that can be retrieved mechanically by researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, in constructivism, reality is multiple, subjective, and mentally constructed by individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 2011). By acknowledging the subjective nature of truth, constructivism allows for a more nuanced and holistic approach to research and knowledge acquisition (Lichtman, 2013).

The constructivism research paradigm is exemplified in the study’s overarching goals and inquiries. The purpose of this research is to explore participants’ experiences with class ranking

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and how those experiences may have impacted their identities. The stories that participants told were analyzed to reveal their own realities and perspectives on the impacts of class ranking. In addition, this study recognized that the experiences and perspectives of the participants may differ, that the stories they present are wholly unique to them, and that the meanings they attach to events are the consequence of their own conceptualizations based on their interpretations of those occurrences. This study was focused on how individuals describe and interpret their experiences with class ranking, and open-ended inquiry through research questions were used to explore their experiences and perceptions.

A well-known limitation of the constructivist research paradigm is that it does not permit generalizable conclusions across populations (Lichtman, 2013). However, it is important to note that this study is not intended to generalize its findings to all students; rather, its purpose is to utilize the narratives shared by participants to bring attention to the various ways in which class ranking can be experienced, and extent to which it can impact students. The findings from this study are intended to serve as an informative resource for Nigerian primary and secondary schools considering class ranking as a practice. This study’s findings are also intended to serve as an informative resource for the Nigerian government when implementing educational policies. This study does not claim objectivity, nor does it claim that its findings can be applicable to a large population. This study embraces subjectivity in the inquiry process, and the findings are not intended to be generalized to all students who experience class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools; rather, the findings highlight the realities of specific individuals based on their experiences with class ranking practices in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended, as well as their interpretations of those experiences. By embracing subjectivity,

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this study recognizes the unique perspectives and diverse range of experiences that students have in relation to class ranking. It acknowledges that each individual’s perception and understanding of class ranking may vary, influenced by factors such as personal background, cultural context, and educational environment. Therefore, the findings of this study should be understood within this specific context. They provide insights into the lived experiences of the participants, as well as their own personal interpretations of those experiences. By focusing on individual experiences, this study aims to contribute to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in class ranking within the Nigerian education system. It encourages further exploration and conversation, with the aim of informing and improving educational practices for all students.

**Role of Researcher**

In a qualitative study such as this, the researcher is the primary tool of the research and actively participates in the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Narrative researchers collect accounts of individuals’ experiences and retell them in order to understand a specific phenomenon (Haydon & Riet, 2017). As the researcher for this study, I collected narrative data from participants, analyzed the data, and retold the stories participants shared about their experiences with class ranking, in a chronological manner. Subjectivity and values are also seen as inevitable and desirable in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 2011). The analysis and interpretation of the data collected were subjective due to the study’s emphasis on the participants’ construction of their own reality (Lincoln & Guba, 2011).

**Research Design**

This section will describe the procedures that guided this narrative inquiry study.

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***Participants***

According to Kim (2016), when conducting a narrative inquiry research study, the number of participants one can use varies, and there are no concrete rules on the number of participants to use. Miles and Huberman (2020) also illustrate that qualitative research tends to focus more on depth and details, so having a carefully planned number of participants is a must. This study aimed to gain a thorough understanding of participants’ past experiences with class ranking and their perceptions of the impacts of class ranking. Therefore, the study was more focused on the depth in which the individuals’ experiences and perceptions are understood, analyzed, and represented.

Four participants between the ages of 25 and 40 were selected to participate in this study, which included 1 male and 3 females. In particular, the study looked into the experiences of two groups of participants (Group 1 and Group 2). Group 1 (two participants) consisted of individuals who have completed their primary, secondary, and higher education in Nigeria, while Group 2 (two participants) consisted of individuals who have completed their primary and secondary education in a Nigerian school but completed their higher education in a Western country. For this study, completing higher education means the participants achieved a bachelor’s degree or higher. The purpose of investigating these two groups is that a many Nigerian students, after completing their primary and secondary education, leave Nigeria to study abroad mainly in western countries (Okoroma, 2006). I examined the stories share by these two groups to see if any insights can be gathered in terms of there were any similarities and differences in their perceptions of the impacts of class ranking, particularly in the context of the transition from secondary education to higher education. During the recruitment process, I

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obtained information about where each individual completed their primary, secondary, and tertiary education and confirmed that they indeed completed their primary and secondary education in Nigerian schools that used class ranking, as well as confirmed that they have completed their higher education either in Nigeria or in a Western country. This was done to ensure that I recruited participants that met the criteria for participating in this, and it also helped me identify which of the two groups participants fell in.

*Table 1: Group 1 and Group 2 Participants Characteristics*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Group 1 (Two Participants)** | **Group 2 (Two Participants)** |
|  |  |
| ❖ Completed Primary Education in | ❖ Completed Primary Education in |
| Nigeria | Nigeria |
| ❖ Completed Secondary Education in | ❖ Completed Secondary Education in |
| Nigeria. | Nigeria. |
| ❖ Completed Higher Education in | ❖ Completed Higher Education in a |
| Nigeria | Western Country |
|  |  |

**The Rationale for Participant Selection.** The purpose of selecting participants who have learned in a Nigerian school that used class ranking practices over participants who are currently learning in a Nigerian school that uses class ranking practices is because most students who are currently learning at K-12 Nigerian school are under the age of 18 years. This study assumes that gathering experiences from students who are currently a student in a Nigerian school that uses class ranking may risk the well-being of the student. This is because these current students may share some elements of their experiences with the use of class ranking that involves them relieving active traumatic experiences. To avoid this, this study explored the experiences of alumni. It is expected that individuals who are alumni of primary and secondary schools that used class ranking in Nigeria, to some extent, will have reflected on how class

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ranking affected them, and they will be less likely to be dealing with active trauma relating to their experience with class ranking. Therefore, this study was able to gather rich information about experiences with class ranking and perceptions of the effects of class ranking from individuals who have experienced it, without risking their well-being. Additionally, this study investigated the stories told by both groups when describing their perceptions of the impacts of class ranking on their overall academic outcomes and personal lives, with the goal of discerning any differences and/or similarities between the narratives reported by individuals who completed higher education in Nigeria and those who completed higher education in a western country. Exploring these two groups of participants shed light on the possible implications of class ranking on students’ personal and academic adjustments during their primary and secondary education in Nigeria, as well as their higher education journey both within and outside of the Nigerian education system.

**Participants Recruitment.** Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling, which is consistent with the aim of identifying a specific group of participants who can provide rich information about their past experiences with class ranking in a Nigerian primary and secondary school. Purposive sampling is ideal for recruiting these types of participants because it is a technique that involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Another reason for employing purposeful sampling is that it allowed me to efficiently target individuals who are available and willing to participate in the study (Bernard, 2011; Spradley, 2016). Purposeful sampling allowed me to recruit participants that have the

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ability to communicate their experiences and perceptions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Bernard, 2011; Spradley, 2016).

Participants were searched for and recruited via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. A recruitment message (Appendix C), comprising the study specifications and criteria information, was sent to potential participants’ direct message social media inboxes.

Potential participants, who received the recruitment message, were identified based on who the I knew to have a close match to the participant selection criteria. Individuals who responded to the recruitment message, indicating that they are interested in participating in the study, and met the participant criteria were considered as qualifying candidates to participate in the study. I selected four participants from those who responded to the recruitment message and were willing to participate in this study, with two of those participants fitting the Group 1 specifications and the other two fitting the Group 2 specifications. I then sent all four participants the informed consent form (Appendix B) and scheduled them for their individual interviews. The consent process occurred online. One week prior to conducting each interview, I emailed each participant to explain the study as described in the informed consent. Participants were informed to sign the consent form to participate in the study. They were given approximately one week to decide whether or not to give their consent to participate in the research study. Potential participants of this study were informed that their participation or non-participation will have no effect on any aspects of their current lives such as jobs, education, relationships etc. Participants were also informed that they will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study and were told that their participation in this work may add to the knowledge of the field of education and

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support Nigerian schools in understanding the possible impacts of the use of class ranking on students.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.** This section provides the criteria that were used for selecting the four participants for this study. The individual must:

* Be at least 25 years of age.
* Have completed primary and secondary education in a Nigerian school that utilized class ranking practices.
* Have completed higher education in a Nigerian school (Group 1) or completed higher education in a school within a Western country (Group 2).
* Have completed higher education in a school that **did not** use class ranking practices.
* Have earned at least a bachelor’s degree.
* Be willing to consent to two recorded interviews where they will share their experiences with class ranking.

***Study Setting***

For this study, I conducted two separate interviews for each participant, and these interviews were conducted virtually. The first interview had a duration of approximately one hour, the second interview, however, varied between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the unique content and depth of the conversation. By utilizing a virtual platform, I was able to effectively gather the necessary data while maintaining efficiency and adaptability to the participants’ schedules. Furthermore, the first interview was at least a week apart from the second interview, which was done to allow time for reflections. During these interviews, participants were asked to share their experiences with the use of class ranking practices in the

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Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended. These interview sessions were requested via email, and when an agreed date and time are solidified, the interview meeting were scheduled. Once the interviews were scheduled, participants were provided with a TEAM’s meeting link. TEAMS is a video conferencing tool I used to meet with each participant virtually to conduct the interviews, and the interview sessions were recorded with permission from the participants. These recorded interviews were later transcribed and reviewed.

***Data Collection***

The data collection method used in this study allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ experiences and perspectives. A narrative inquiry research method was employed, as it allows for the revelation of unique perspectives and a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon under study. A popular data collection technique used in narrative inquiry is conducting recorded interviews that are subsequently organized in a chronological narrative (Lichtman, 2013). In this study, narratives shared by the participants served as the primary data, and these were obtained through individual interviews conducted in two sessions. The first interview aimed to gather the participants’ experiences and perceptions, while the second interview was allocated for obtaining additional information that participants wanted to share following further reflection on their experiences and the first interview. Additionally, the second interview served the purpose of clarifying any information from the first interview and posing any additional questions deemed necessary. Collecting narrative data for this study proved to be ideal as it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of participants’ experiences with class ranking practices. Furthermore, the use of narrative data collection facilitated the exploration of

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participants’ thoughts, emotions, and attitudes towards their encounters with class ranking practices.

Furthermore, Nigeria is home to over 500 languages, which are considered the "native languages" of its citizens (CLEAR Global, 2022). Despite this linguistic diversity, English is the language of instruction at all levels of education across Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The participants in this study had successfully completed primary and secondary education in Nigeria and obtained at least a bachelor’s degree in either Nigeria or a Western country. Consequently, all the participants were fluent in reading, writing, and speaking English. This ensured that they comprehended the informed consent written in English and were able to effectively share their stories during the interviews.

The participants’ fluency in English allowed me to conduct the interviews in English. However, it is important to note that some participants occasionally expressed aspects of their stories in their native languages. Luckily, when this occurred, the Language was Yoruba, and I am fluent in speaking, reading, and writing Yoruba. So, during the interviews, I understood what they meant if they said something in Yoruba, and during the transcription and review process of each interview, I was easily able to translate what was said into English. However, if participants spoke other languages that was not Yoruba, I planned to use Google Translate to interpret what was said to English and then email the participants to confirm that the translation is accurate.

**Data Instrumentation.** Interviews are widely acknowledged in qualitative research to improve our understanding of social phenomena (Silverman, 2005); therefore, this study used this as an instrument and technique to delve deeper into the experiences and viewpoints of participants. When little is known about the research topic or when participants need to provide

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specific perspectives, research interviews are best, and they are also ideal when discussing sensitive matters related to a phenomenon (Silverman, 2005). Since no studies were uncovered that addressed the topic of class ranking and its impacts on Nigerian students, the use of interviews helped in gathering narrative data to address this gap in the understanding of how Nigerian students experience class ranking, and how class ranking affects them. In addition, given the features of class ranking and the complexities in how individuals may have experienced class ranking, the use of interviews was beneficial in capturing participants experiences in a more holistic manner. There are various types of interviews used in qualitative research, and Stuckey (2013) describes three main types of interviews commonly used in qualitative research: structured interviews, semi, structured interviews, and narrative interviews. Stuckey (2013) illustrated that the main distinction between all three types of interviews is the degree to which the interviewer controls and directs the interactions. For instance, in structured interviews, the researcher asks a sequence of questions in a planned order, with a limited number of response options; in semi-structured interviews, the researcher sets the outline for the topics covered, but the interview is guided by responses given by the participants; and in narrative interviews, the researcher typically begins the interview by asking the participants a wide open-ended question about their experiences, and while they narrate their experiences, they are rarely interrupted (Stuckey, 2013). Due to the need to delve deeply into the experiences and viewpoints of participants, this study’s inquiry is more in line with semi-structured interviews and narrative interviews than with structured interviews. However, semi-structured interviews were chosen over narrative interviews because while the study is interested in collecting detailed accounts of participants’ experiences with class ranking, it is also interested in exploring some specific

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aspects of those accounts, such as participants’ perceptions of the effects of class ranking on their academic outcomes and their personal lives. Semi-structured interviews are more appropriate for this study because it allowed me to ask several key questions that help to define the areas to be investigated in the study while also allowing myself and participants to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in greater depth (Gill et al., 2008). The adaptability of this approach, in particular, allowed for the discovery or elaboration of information important to participants but not previously considered by me, the researcher (Gill et al., 2008). All four participants’ narrative data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants’ experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations in relation to class ranking to be explored and captured.

**Interview Process.** Two semi-structured interviews were conducted for each participant. The first interview, which lasted one hour, aimed to collect demographic information to provide context to the study’s inquiry. Additionally, this first interview served as a platform for participants to share their stories and experiences regarding the use of class rankings in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended. The first interview involved mainly asking participants open-ended questions with the purpose of providing the participants ample opportunity to share their stories relating to class ranking and to provide in-depth information about their experiences with class ranking. This is related to the concept of the Narration Phase when conducting an interview in a qualitative study. According to Kim (2016), the Narration Phase is an extensive narration by the interviewee, during which the interviewer restricts their interventions to the bare minimum while keeping the narration going. In the first interviews, my contribution to the discussion was minimal, and my main role during this interview was to

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facilitate the discussions and ask participants questions in ways that allowed them to share their experiences with class ranking in an in-depth manner. The second interview, which lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, was used for clarification and verification purposes, as well as to provide participants the opportunity to share any additional information they may have reflected on or any new feelings and thoughts that had occurred after the first interview. This second interview is related to the concept of a Conversation Phase when conducting an interview in a qualitative study. A Conversation Phase is an interview process where questions and responses comprise the interview, and the interviewee responds to the interviewer’s relevant questions, which will continuously inform the evolving interview process (Kim, 2016). In the second interview, I was more involved in the discourse, and the participants were asked questions that were necessary to ensure that their stories had been accurately captured. During this second interview, I also clarified the participants’ responses and asked follow-up questions. The interview protocol that will guide the interviews is attached as Appendix A. The interview protocol designed for this study served as a guiding framework for the interviews conducted. However, participants were not expected to address all the predetermined questions identified beforehand. Instead, the participants were encouraged to freely share their stories and experiences related to class ranking. In some instances, participants naturally addressed certain questions while sharing their narratives. The main emphasis was placed on the stories that participants wanted to share, allowing them to provide a comprehensive and genuine account of their experiences. Below is a table that depicts the alignment of this study’s research question to the interview questions.

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*Table 2: Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **1st Interview** |
| **Research Question** | **Interview Question** |
| How do participants | • I understand you completed your primary and |
| describe their | secondary education in a Nigerian school that used |
| experiences with the | class ranking practices. |
| use of class ranking | o What is your understanding of class ranking, |
| practices in their | and why Nigerian primary and secondary |
| primary and | schools use class ranking? |
| secondary school | • Can you share some stories regarding your |
| years? | experiences with Class Ranking in the Nigerian |
|  | schools you attended? |
|  | o How did this make you feel? |
|  | o How do you feel telling this story now? |
|  | o Where does that feeling/emotion come from? |
|  | • Can you describe the dynamics of your rank positions |
|  | throughout your primary and secondary schooling? |
|  | o Did you consistently have high, low, or |
|  | fluctuating rank positions? |
|  | ▪ What was this experience like? |
|  | ▪ How did your rank positions impact |
|  | your learning in the classroom? |
|  | ▪ How would you describe the quality |
|  | of your learning during this period? |
|  | ▪ {Consistently Low} How did you deal |
|  | with consistently ranking low? |
|  | ▪ {Fluctuating} How did you deal with |
|  | the fluctuation of your rank positions? |
|  |  |

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*Table 2 (continued)*

* Can you share stories about how your **classmates** reacted to your class rank positions?

o How did you think your peers perceived you in the classroom?

* + How did your peers react to you if you ranked low or lower than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
  + How did your peers react to you if you ranked high or higher than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
* Can you share stories about how your **teachers** reacted to your class rank positions?

o How do you think your teachers perceive you?

* + How did your teachers react to you if you ranked low or lower than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
  + How did your teachers react to you if you ranked high or higher than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
* Can you share stories about how your **parents/guardians** reacted to your class rankpositions?

o How do you think your parents/guardians perceived you?

* + If you ranked low or lower than expected in class, how did your parents/guardians react to you? (Please provide an example)
  + If you ranked high or higher than expected in class, how did your parents/guardians react to you? (Please provide an example)

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*Table 2 (continued)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | • How would you describe your transition from secondary |
|  | school to college/university? |
|  | o What was your college/university first-year |
|  | learning experience like? |
|  | o Did you face any significant academic challenges |
|  | while pursuing your higher education? |
|  | ▪ (If yes), can you describe the challenge(s) |
|  | you encountered? |
|  | o How will you describe the quality of your primary |
|  | and secondary learning experience? |
|  | o How will you describe the quality of your |
|  | college/university learning experiences? |
|  | **2nd Interview** |
| How do participants | **Reflection Questions** |
| describe their | • Have you reflected on the experiences and stories you |
| experiences with the | shared with me since the last time we met? |
| use of class ranking | o If yes, do you have any new insights, thoughts, or |
| practices in their | feelings about your experience with class ranking |
| primary and | since our last interview? |
| secondary school |  |
| years? |  |
|  | **Follow Up Questions** |
|  | *(This will be established based on the stories shared in the* |
|  | *first interview. Also, if the sub-questions in the first interview* |
|  | *were not asked or addressed and are important to know* |
|  | *based on the stories the participants shared, the questions* |
|  | *will be asked as a follow-up question in the second* |
|  | *interview.)* |
| In what ways, if any, | • How do you think your experiences with class ranking |
| do experiences with | impacted key decisions you made during your academic |
| class ranking impact | journey? (Why) |
| participants’ | • How do you think your experiences with class ranking |
| identities? | impacted how you perceived yourself? (Why) |
|  | • How do you think your experiences with class ranking |
|  | impact how you perceive your abilities now? (Why) |
|  | • How do you think your experiences with class ranking |
|  | impacted where you are now in life? (Why) |
|  | What did you learn from your experiences with the use of |
|  | class ranking? (Why) |

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*Interview Time Frame*. In the first interview, each participant had one hour allotted to them. The first 5 minutes of the interview involved welcoming the participants to the interview and gathering some demographic information from them. The rest of the interview was dedicated to the narration phase. The second interview followed a similar pattern, and each participant had a maximum of 1 hour. The first 5 minutes of the second interview involved exchanging pleasantries, and the rest of the interview was dedicated to the conversation phase. Additionally, some participants shared stories that included illustrations of traumatic events that stressed or overwhelmed them. Breaks were given upon request.

*Interview Location.* The four interviews for this study were conducted virtually via TEAMS. According to Litchman (2013), when choosing a setting to conduct an interview, it is important that the setting is quiet and private. Although the interviews were conducted virtually, participants were informed to be in an environment that is quiet and private so that they can feel comfortable and safe to share their stories during the interview period.

**Data Security.** All data collected was securely stored in Box, a cloud system mandated by the University of South Florida’s Internal Review Board (IRB). To protect the confidentiality of participants, all personal information, such as names and the names of any other individuals or institutions they may have attended, was removed from the data. In place of this information, unique identifiers, which are pseudonyms either chosen by me or the participants, were used. Additionally, a key linking the participants’ names to the identifiers was stored separately from the data in my personal USF Box account, which only I have access to. This rigorous data protection protocol ensures the privacy and anonymity of all participants involved in the study. The collected data will be retained for a period of five years following the submission of the final

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report to the IRB. Upon the expiration of this timeframe, the recorded videos will be permanently deleted from Box, including any copies in the recycle bin. This measure protects the participants’ data once the research study is completed and helps to uphold professional standards of data management and privacy.

***Data Analysis***

The data gathered from the four participants were analyzed using narrative analysis. The narrative analysis aided in addressing the two research questions for this study: “*How do participants describe their experiences with the use of class ranking practices in their primary and secondary school years*?” and “*In what ways, if any, do experiences with class ranking impact participants’ identities?”*

Narrative analysis was used to shed light on context of dialogues as well as the motivations behind how these dialogues are presented (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative analysis allows one to determine the various narratives that have been told about a studied phenomenon and that have been used to symbolize that phenomenon in various cultural and social contexts (Squire, 2008). Narrative analysis also aids in emphasizing the uniqueness of each participant’s experiences and situating them in broader contexts (Squire, 2008). Narrative analysis allowed for the organization of the experiences and stories shared by each participant with the goal of structuring those experiences is a way that can not only be easily understood but also highlights the contexts and impacts of specific events, motivations, perceptions, and decisions mentioned in their stories.

Narrative analysis also aids in emphasizing the uniqueness of participant’s experiences and situating them in broader contexts (Squire, 2008). Narrative analysis allows the researcher to

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explore and construct meanings from the stories that participants tell as they narrate their experiences to present the implicit argument made by the participants (Feldman et al., 2004). While constructing meaning during narrative analysis, the focus is not on whether participants viewpoints are right or wrong, or if the events they describe occurred, but rather it is on the understandings that the participants communicate through their stories (Feldman et al., 2004). Narrative analysis investigates the meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences by examining various parts of their stories, such as the plot, characters, setting, and themes, in order to find the underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes that create the story (Oliver, 1998). Furthermore, identity emerges in and via narratives, (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997), and analyzing participants’ story elements and constructing meanings from them can provide insights into the ways in which participants construct their identities, understand their relationships with others, and make sense of the world (Watson, 2012).

Using narrative analysis, I interpreted the stories shared by participants, and as a result, four narratives were constructed that convey the main themes, plot, characters, and events of the accounts shared by the participants. Using narrative analysis, the stories participants told were presented in a digestible, engaging, and chronological manner. Overall, the data gathered from the individual interviews was analyzed to form the meaning of the participant’s experiences and perceptions. The data analysis included transcribing the recorded interview videos, reviewing the transcriptions, and constructing stories based on participants experiences.

**Approach to Narrative Analysis.** One aspect of qualitative research that I thoroughly enjoy is the freedom to present findings in a unique and creative manner. Unlike quantitative research, there are no strict guidelines or formulaic structures for sharing results. Using

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qualitative methods for this study allowed for a more imaginative approach to presenting the research findings, which enabled me to truly capture the experiences of the participants examined. In particular, I appreciated being able to highlight significant parts of the stories shared by participants and explore various aspects of how class ranking impacted them. This aspect of qualitative research allowed me to delve deeper into the narratives and create a presentation that showcases the nuances and complexities of their experiences. However, it is important to note that the process of analyzing participants’ stories was not a linear one. It involved exploring various ways to present the findings, which adds another layer of creativity and flexibility to the research process. This flexibility enabled me to adapt my approach to effectively convey participants’ experiences and best reflect the richness of the stories they shared.

To begin the narrative analysis, I transcribed each individual interview and meticulously cleaned up the transcription. This entailed listening carefully to the interviews to ensure that the written text accurately captured what participants were saying. This attention to detail was crucial in maintaining the integrity and authenticity of their stories. Once each transcription was fully cleaned, I carefully listened to and watched each participant’s recorded interviews multiple times. This approach helped me capture the crucial elements of their stories and determine the chronological order of their experiences. By watching the interviews repeatedly, I was able to pick up on subtle nuances such as tone of voice and facial expressions. These factors played a significant role in analyzing the participants’ narratives because they provided additional context to their experiences and shed light on their emotions while recounting their stories. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive analysis of the participants’ accounts, and as a

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result, the stories shared by each participant were used to construct four narratives. However, during this process, I also came to realize that the voices of the participants were somewhat lost in my attempts to convey their stories. To rectify this, I made the decision to include the exact words of the participants alongside the constructed narratives. By doing so, the narratives gained richer depth and provided an opportunity to directly hear from the participants themselves. Additionally, I carefully examined each narrative and identified five themes that showcased commonalities present across all four narratives. Overall, using narrative analysis allowed for a creative and customized approach to presenting this study’s findings, emphasizing the significance of participants’ experiences. Although the analysis process may not follow a linear path, it provides an opportunity to explore multiple perspectives and ultimately create a comprehensive portrayal of the research findings.

***Ethical Consideration***

Ethical considerations were applied throughout this study, which mainly involved upholding informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy (Kang & Hwang; 2021). In terms of upholding informed consent, before participants agreed to participate in this study, they were formally informed about the purpose of the study and their role in the study. In terms of upholding confidentiality, participants’ real names and the names of others they mentioned during the interview were not identified in this study; instead, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and other names of places and people mentioned by participants. In terms of upholding privacy, all data gathered for this, including video recordings and researchers’ notes were stored in Box, a secure cloud system required by the USF IRB, that only the researcher has access to.

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***Trustworthiness***

The trustworthiness of the findings is the foundation of reliable qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016), and member checking is frequently used to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results. (Doyle, 2007). Member checking is used to ensure the accuracy and quality of the collected data for this study. One way to conduct member checking involves sending data or results to participants to verify accuracy and to ensure a meaningful connection has been established (Birt et al., 2016). Another way to complete member checks is through the use of the member check interview approach (Birt et al., 2016). This study uses both approaches for establishing trustworthiness for this study’s findings.

The first member check that was conducted in this study was the use of the member check interview approach. In a member-checking interview, information from the first interview serves as a jumping-off point for the second interview, in which the researcher confirms, modifies, and verifies the data obtained from the first interview (Birt et al., 2016). The member check interview method is interactive and consistent with social constructivism epistemology in that knowledge is constructed (Birt et al., 2016). This study conducted two separate interviews for each participant, and the member check interview approach was used. This member check interview approach was used in relations to Kim’s (2016) Narration and Conversation phase concept. Kim’s (2016) strategy of dividing the interview into the Narration phase and Conversation phases is similar to the Birt et al. (2016) member check interview method as it will allow for the opportunity to divide each interview into two phases in order to attain member checks during the interview. The first interview was dedicated to the narration phase, and at this phase, my contribution to the discussions be minimal, and participants were asked open-ended

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questions that allowed them to provide in-depth information about their perceptions and experiences. The second interview was dedicated to the conversational phase, and in this phase, I was more involved in the discourse, and the participants were asked questions that were needed to ensure that their stories were accurately captured. During this conversational phase, I will ask follow-up questions and clarify participants’ responses to previous questions.

The second member check employed involved sending each individual participant the stories that were developed based on the experiences they shared during the interviews. The purpose of this check was to ensure that the participants confirmed the accuracy of their experiences as represented in the stories. Following the anonymization of data, the interview transcripts were shared with participants (Miles et al., 2020; Roulston, 2010). They were given the opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure their validity and confirm the removal of any identifying information (Miles et al., 2014; Roulston, 2010). This method of member check adds an additional layer of validation to the findings of the study (Miles et al., 2020; Roulston, 2010).

***Transferability***

This study aimed to gather insights into class ranking experiences and perspectives from a specific group of participants, chosen as a representative sample from a larger eligible population. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that the findings of this study cannot be generalized quantitatively. However, it is essential to emphasize that the primary goal of this study was not to establish generalizability but rather transferability. Transferability is an important qualitative validity concept that was considered in this study. It is the degree to which the findings and interpretations from a study can be applicable and relevant to contexts or settings that are different from the specific research context (Guba, 1981). The aim of

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transferability is to determine whether the knowledge gained from a study can be applied to similar situations, populations, or settings (Guba, 1981). This enhances the potential for broader a understanding and practical utility of the study’s findings (Guba, 1981). To enhance transferability in this study, I provided detailed descriptions of the research context and methods used, as well as insights into the relationships and dynamics observed during the study. This allows readers and practitioners to assess the degree to which the findings may be transferable to their own contexts. The research findings from this study hold significant transferable value, as they provide an opportunity for readers to establish connections between the study’s findings and their own personal experiences. Although the study centers on Nigerian schools, its findings possess a remarkable level of transferability to schools outside of Nigeria. This is because class ranking is a practice that is prevalent in educational institutions globally. As such, the insights derived from this study, along with the implications that arise from these findings, can be readily applicable to other schools worldwide that also adopt class ranking as a practice.

**Assumptions and Delimitations**

This section presents the study’s assumptions and delimitations.

***Assumptions***

This study is predicated on the following assumptions:

* The stories participants share accurately represent their experiences with class ranking.
* Participants attended and completed their primary and secondary education in Nigerian schools that used class ranking practices.
* Participants earned at least a bachelor’s degree.

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* Participants attended and completed higher education in a school that did not use class ranking practices.

***Delimitations***

This study focused on investigating the experiences and perspectives of individuals who have previously undergone class ranking but are no longer subjected to it. By focusing on this specific group, I anticipated that participants will be able to provide a reflective and insightful understanding of their class ranking experiences in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended. Selecting individuals who are no longer experiencing class ranking reduces the risk of any re-traumatization that may occur as a result of their participation in the study. Therefore, to be eligible for participation, individuals must had completed their primary and secondary education in a Nigerian school that employed class ranking for at least one year prior to the study. Individuals currently experiencing class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools were excluded from this study.

**Chapter Three Summary**

This chapter presented the methodology for conducting this study as well as its rationale. The proposed research design was presented in this chapter, which included information on the study’s participants’ selection, setting, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. This chapter also discusses the research paradigm in which the study is situated, the role of the researcher, the ethical considerations that were applied while conducting the study, and the approach to establishing the validity of the study. This chapter also concludes by providing information on the study’s assumptions and delimitations. The results of data collection and analysis are presented in the following chapter.

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**CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

The oral narratives provided by the study participants served as the main source of data for this study. This chapter presents the detailed narratives of each of the four participants in this study, which showcase how they describe their experiences with class ranking in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended. The study aimed to reconstruct the narratives of each participant in a way that would create a cohesive representation of their experiences and effectively convey the meaning behind those experiences. A key aspect of this study involved presenting the participants’ voices in their authentic form, capturing the natural flow of their thoughts as they reflected on their class ranking experiences. This approach allowed for a real-time glimpse into the participants’ thought processes, as they formed and derived meaning from their individual experiences. By doing so, the study sought to afford readers the opportunity to grasp the profound meanings participants derived from their experiences, almost as if they were experiencing those moments in real time.

Throughout the process of constructing their narratives, it became evident that participants recounted some of their thoughts exactly as they played out in their minds. They narrated these thoughts by directly referring to themselves, as if they were reliving those moments once again. Therefore, to stay true to the participants’ narratives, each reconstructed story was accompanied by excerpts of participants’ own narratives. This study sought to not only present a comprehensive picture of the participants’ experiences, but also to honor and respect

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their individual voices and the unique perspectives they contributed to the research. Throughout this study, utmost professionalism was maintained to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the participants’ narratives. This included meticulous attention to detail, rigorous adherence to ethical guidelines, and a commitment to maintaining confidentiality. I treated each participant with dignity and respect, fostering an environment where individuals felt comfortable sharing their experiences openly and honestly. It is through this faithful representation of their experiences that we can gain a deeper understanding of the impact of class ranking on individuals and the meaning they derive from it. Lastly, this chapter provides an overview of the major themes identified through the analysis of all participants’ unique narratives. By considering these themes collectively, a combined meaning emerges, offering a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ experiences.

**Overview of Participants**

Table 3 provides the demographic information of the four participants who were interviewed for this study. To safeguard the participants’ identities, pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant and were used. To maintain confidentiality and protect the participants, no specific schools, family members, teachers, or friends mentioned by the participants during their narratives have been identified. This measure was taken to ensure anonymity and foster trust, as the participants shared highly sensitive, detailed, and at times traumatic stories during the interviews. It is important to note that the participants willingly shared their stories based on their trust in my commitment to maintaining confidentiality. Furthermore, two of the study participants who are in Group 1, Dele and Bukola, completed their primary, secondary, and higher education in Nigeria, while the other two participants who are in

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Group 2, Funke and Salewa, completed their primary and secondary education in Nigerian schools, but higher education in a Western country.

*Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

**Group 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pseudonym** | **Highest** | **Country** | **Career** | **Type of** | **Type of** |
|  | **Level of** | **Completed** |  | **Primary** | **Secondary** |
|  | **Education** | **Higher** |  | **School** | **School** |
|  |  | **Education** |  | **Attended** | **Attended** |
|  |  |  |  | **in** | **In Nigeria** |
|  |  |  |  | **Nigeria** |  |
| Dele | Master’s | Nigeria | Architect | Private | Private |
|  | degree in |  |  |  |  |
|  | architecture |  |  |  |  |
| Bukola | Master’s | Nigeria | Social | Private | Private |
|  | degree in | (Bachelors); | Worker |  |  |
|  | health and | United |  |  |  |
|  | social care | Kingdom |  |  |  |
|  |  | (Masters) |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Group 2** | |  |  |
| Funke | Bachelor of | Canada | HR | Private | Private |
|  | Arts in Labor |  | professional |  |  |
|  | Studies |  |  |  |  |
| Salewa | Bachelor of | United | Project | Private | Private |
|  | Arts in | Kingdom | Management |  |  |
|  | Business |  |  |  |  |
|  | Management |  |  |  |  |

**Narrative 1: Dele’s Story**

***Background***

Dele was born and raised in the vibrant city of Ibadan, but now he calls Lagos his home. From his early years of education to his higher studies, he proudly completed all of his schooling in Nigeria. Driven by an unwavering passion for architecture, Dele’s talents extend beyond designing awe-inspiring structures. He has also established a thriving furniture company,

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showcasing his creativity and craftsmanship. Dele has also found success as a middleman in the real estate development industry. What sets Dele apart is not just his professional achievements, but also his unwavering appreciation for the opportunities he has been given. He understands the privilege of pursuing his true passion in Nigeria, a privilege not afforded to many of his fellow Nigerians. Instead of merely striving to make ends meet, Dele counts himself fortunate to wake up each day and engage in work that he loves wholeheartedly.

***Understanding of Class Ranking***

Dele has a firm grasp on the concept of class ranking, understanding that it involves ordering students based on their average percentage scores. Although he’s uncertain if it’s a mandatory government requirement, he hasn’t come across any primary and secondary schools in Nigeria that don’t utilize this practice. When asked why class ranking is employed, Dele initially admits his uncertainty, but then suggests that it could serve the purpose of identifying students who excel and those who struggle. Additionally, he points out that class ranking allows students to gauge their own performance in relation to their peers. During his time in both primary and secondary schools, not only were students ranked in their classes, but the schools also assigned rankings based on individual subjects. This meant that students not only received an overall rank based on their average scores across all subjects, but they also received separate rankings for each subject.

***First Time Questioning Academic Abilities***

Dele reminisced about his early years in primary school, where he excelled and consistently topped his class from Primary 1 to 5. However, things took a turn when he transferred to a new school for his final year in primary school, Primary 6. The adjustment to the

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new environment proved to be challenging for Dele, especially when he realized that his classmates were academically more advanced than him. It was disheartening for him to see how much more knowledge they possessed, and it made him question his own academic capabilities for the first time. Yet, despite these initial setbacks, Dele persevered. After two terms in the new school, he was able to bridge the gap and catch up with his peers. He said:

The first thing that happened was I went to summer school to prepare for the new year in that school. On the first day, there was a test, and it was on General Knowledge. So, it draws from all subjects. I remember I didn’t know half of the questions. I didn’t know half because I’d never heard of them. I’d never been taught. And then the kids that were coming from their own primary five into primary six all got it like 10/10, and I got like 4

* 10. That was the first thing. I was like, oh boy! And then spoken English. I think that was really where my English started getting challenged, you know. They just used a lot of words that I hadn’t heard of. And then even when we resumed, it was just more organized., The curriculum was more organized. They had sports, they had so many clubs. There was the Jets Club, Boy Scouts, Girls Guide, Science Club, and Pens Club. I didn’t have that in my other primary school. I just knew that these kids were more advanced, man. They knew a lot more, a lot more. The school even offered a few more subjects I hadn’t done before. I was so sure that I was a few a few steps behind.

But I think I caught up, though, at least by the third term I was able to catch up. In the

first and second term in this new school, I did not do well. I ranked 12th and 13th in the class of about 20 students, but by the term I had improved and ranked 7th.

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***Critical Story***

*“I can never forget, I was 9th…I never really recovered from that. I thought I was really smart. But when I came ninth man, I thought I was really dumb. It was so easy to get defeated.”*

After completing his primary education, Dele embarked on his secondary education at a new school. His initial term in JSS 1 saw him soar to the top of his class, securing a prestigious 1st-rank position. However, the second term brought an unexpected twist as he plummeted to the 9th rank. This sudden drop left him astounded, leaving an indelible mark on his life from which he believed he could never fully recover. It shattered his self-perception, transforming him from a confident academic achiever to someone who deemed himself unintelligent. The impact of this experience extended beyond his self-image, influencing his approach to future academic pursuits. Rather than fueling a desire to strive for a higher rank, it left him disheartened, hesitant to exert too much effort for fear of facing similar disappointment. He said:

The first term I showed up, I came 1st, but the second term they called me to the office and was like, man, you didn’t do so well. It’s like you’re going to come like third or fourth. That is what the principal just told me. I was like, well 3rd or 4th is not so bad. Why would you call me to your office to tell me I’m going to come for 4th.

And then when my results came, I was 9th, man! And we were like maybe 13 in the class. We were not many. So, I was at the back, and we had two special needs students in our class. So, I mean those two special needs students were always coming last and second to last and last. So, it was almost like amongst, let’s say 11 students, I was 9th. It was really bad.

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That was the worst holiday of my life. The truth is it wasn’t just about the position. The position made it worse, but my scores were actually really low. My scores in each subject were really low. The truth is I never really recovered from that.

I remember a lot of people were even wondering maybe I was just being favored the first term because the school owners knew my parents. I know the owner of the school was very friendly with my mom and speculative things like that were coming up till I finished secondary school.

I never recovered because the thing is, I thought I was really smart. I thought I was really smart. But when I came ninth man, I thought I was really dumb. It was so easy to get defeated. That was one thing about me, personality-wise, I was not very strong. It wasn’t like, OK, you know what, I’m going to prove them wrong or I’m going to fight. I was just feeling sad, down, and dejected. I never really pushed much after that because I think the third term, I came maybe 4th or 3rd but it was that. From then till I left it was just 4th, 5th, 6th. You know I was just in the middle of the class.

A few people that know me will always tell me that you’re like you’re really, really smart.

You’re really, really smart. You should be doing better. You should be coming higher. My mom, my dad. I mean even them, and I never came first again until I left secondary school. This is the only major story that comes to mind when I think about class rank.

***What Caused the Shift from 1st to 9th Position***

Dele initially took the blame for his sudden drop from 1st to 9th position. He believed that his playful nature might have been the cause. However, as he continued his narrative, he

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revealed that he had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) shortly after this incident. Before starting medication for his condition, he struggled to concentrate in the academic setting. This made it difficult for him to keep up with the fast pace of the new academic setting. Even during exams, he found it impossible to focus. Unfortunately, neither the school nor his parents recognized that he needed assistance. Despite his significant drop in rank, no one in the academic environment noticed or considered that there might be an underlying issue affecting him. He said:

To be honest, I think it was just me, man. I mean the truth is I was very playful. In the first term, I think what might have helped was the learning in the school I went to for my primary six. Like I said, the school was a bit more advanced. But the truth is I was very playful. I was. I was more interested in playing than work, academics, or anything like that. So, I think I came 1st not because I was proof full hardworking. I just probably knew it. I just probably knew the answers to the questions.

I was diagnosed with ADHD a few years after JSS 2 or JSS 3. But the truth is, reading, sitting down to study, sitting down to read were major challenges. Even in class, being able to sit down and listen and concentrate, I was getting distracted.

I remember I wasn’t writing notes. In secondary school, teachers will come to the class and just write a lot of notes on the board, and you just have to follow. I had never done that before. That was not how primary school was. So, my notes were incomplete. So, I couldn’t really study.

And then even being at home, my attention was horrible, and I was extremely impulsive. I would just do things and I’ll be thinking about why I did it after. And so, it was hard for

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me to focus even during the exams, to just sit down for that one hour and just answer questions. It was a struggle.

Ohh, man, I’m just remembering the whole of my JSS before I really started taking medication for ADHD. It was a struggle, and my parents didn’t understand. My dad was frustrated. My dad couldn’t deal. Nobody was expecting it. Nobody was expecting 9th. I just had a hard time in school. I just had a hard time concentrating in class, listening to the teachers, reading at home, and doing assignments. I had a hard time, man. I couldn’t. I just couldn’t. And so, and the results showed, I guess.

***Taking ADHD Medication Helped, But...***

Dele often spoke about the profound impact ADHD had on his life. For a long time, no one could figure out the root cause of his inability to focus and his impulsive behavior. People simply dismissed him as a careless student, blaming his poor grades and low-class rankings on his supposed lack of seriousness. But then, he received a diagnosis of ADHD. His aunt, a psychiatrist, observed his behavior during her visits and voiced her concerns to his parents. They agreed to have him medically evaluated, and during this process, his ADHD was finally identified. With the help of medication, Dele noticed a significant improvement in his academic performance. He attributed this progress to his newfound ability to stay calm and concentrate in class. Although he never reclaimed the top spot in his class, consistently ranking in the middle, he felt somewhat satisfied with his learning progress but still believed his rank could be better. He said:

I guess I just adjusted. But I still believe that even being 4th, 5th, 6th, I felt like I could do better, I could do so much better. But as I said, sometime in JS2, for example, I started

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taking my medication for ADHD. So, it was helping. I guess I could read a bit more, you know, I think ADHD really, really affected me though. So, I think once I started taking the meds for that, I was able to be more calm. I was able to concentrate a bit. But it still wasn’t like I was on top of it, but I was able to write most of my notes. I think I was able to adjust because my aunt who was a psychiatrist was the one that even mentioned it first that, you know what this guy might have this thing called ADHD. She was a psychiatrist, a child psychiatrist in fact, and she took me to another doctor that now diagnosed me. Before then I was just struggling.

***Parent***

*“I can’t remember whether I got beaten up or I got punished. I don’t even remember, what I remember is the fear.”*

Dele’s parents were far from pleased when they discovered his sudden descent from 1st to 9th place in the rankings. He anticipated their unfavorable reactions even before he handed over his report card, fully aware of the storm that awaited him. Their response to his significant drop in rank was far from encouraging, as they resorted to physical punishment and hurling hurtful insults at him. The traumatic events that unfolded left a lasting impact on Dele. He said:

When I got my report card, I wanted to hide it and just not take it home because I knew my parents. Growing up I was very afraid. I was very afraid of my father. My mom, not really. But my daddy was just not fair. He was just terrible because he had a strong personality. And I guess he couldn’t help himself. He was tough. We loved him, he was daddy, but I was afraid. I was afraid of him. I was afraid of my dad until probably maybe like just a few years ago. But he was registered in my soul that this man is fearful.

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So, all I remember was I didn’t not want to take that report card home. If not because my brother was attending the same school, I probably would have hidden the result and thrown it away or torn it. I would have gotten in worse trouble if I had done that, come to think of it now, because my dad would have asked where my report card was.

But the problem was my parents, my dad, especially my dad, he was not patient with people. He was not patient with me. I was, what, nine years old and he was in his 40s. He wasn’t patient with us. He probably really didn’t know what to say, man, 1st and then 9th. He’s all of a sudden realizing that one of my kids is not so brilliant. And I guess he just didn’t know how to go about it. I can’t remember whether I got beaten up or I got punished. I don’t even remember what I remember is the fear.

And the truth is, I don’t think my dad was one of those parents that was affectionate. He was not affectionate. So, he was not one that would say, “OK, you know what? You did badly, but you can do better. You just have to work harder.” Instead, it was more of “you are stupid, you are not serious, you don’t take anything seriously, you just want to play”. I remember that one. — “all you want to do is play” And it was just bashing, bashing, bashing! So, nobody was encouraging me, man. Yeah, it was bashing. It was hitting. I mean, I guess he just didn’t know better.

I think my mom was softer, but I don’t think she also knew better than to bash. My mom would try. Also, it was a little frustrating for her because, for example, she will ask me to bring all my past questions and work on them after I jumped from 1st to 9th position. Then I am supposed to sit down at the table and answer them. She goes away and comes back after 30 minutes, and I am still there having not completed any of the questions or maybe

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I am looking outside the window and I see a bird flying and then I am looking at the bird, or I hear a sound of a cricket and I stand up and go look for it. I couldn’t sit down in one place! So, when she comes back and sees that I probably just answered one question in 30 minutes, Frustration! Then she will go and bring a belt and beat me. My mom beat me even more than my dad because she did not know what to do. I guess everybody was just frustrated, really, everybody was just frustrated.

***Teachers***

*“He went on this long rant about “how can you be 9th”in front of everybody. In front of everybody, man. Even though I never came 9th again, I don’t think I ever believed in myself after that in school!”*

Dele recounted how teachers commonly used the top-ranking students to belittle and disparage their lower-ranking peers. Throughout his academic journey, he encountered both uplifting and demoralizing responses from his teachers regarding his rank. Some teachers approached him with words of encouragement, reminding him not to fixate solely on his position and expressing their belief in his brilliance. They urged him to persevere and continue putting in effort. However, there were also teachers who chose to embarrass him and undermine his achievements. Unfortunately, the negative remarks seemed to outweigh the positive ones, leaving a lasting impact on Dele. The drop from first to ninth place had already dampened his motivation, and the negative comments only served to further diminish his drive. The few positive comments he received were simply not sufficient to reignite his motivation. He said:

I’m sure everybody knows this happens where you have teachers using the person who comes 1st as an example to shame the other kids or to talk down on them. That was pretty common. So, everybody’s used to that. I remember that that happened to me, man. A

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teacher will come into class and ask, “what was your position and then I’ll say, I came

9th. Then they say “You came 1st and how can you be coming 9th now? He used to be a business studies teacher. He came to the class that day and he went on this long rant about “how can you be 9th”in front of everybody. In front of everybody, man. I didn’t recover from that. Even though I never came 9th again, I don’t think I ever believed in myself after that in school.

I remember there were a few positive comments though. I remember Mr. Donald; he was more encouraging. He would say things like “I don’t care about you rank, you’re a brilliant kid, you just have to work harder.”

But I mean, like I said, I was defeated, man. You know I remember My. Donald and Mr.

Oladipo, always tried to encourage me to work harder. But I don’t know, man.

I became a strong personality SS2 jumping into SS3, before that I was not strong minded. I don’t think I wanted to prove anybody wrong. I don’t think I was looking for a reason to work hard. And I guess, I mean, I was a kid, but there were some kids that were the other way. There were some kids that were really just hard working. Not even hard working. Anybody can be hardworking, but something has to motivate you to be hard working.

And I don’t think I had that; I didn’t have it.

***Peers***

“*That was really painful, man. I just, I just wasn’t that guy anymore… people would come to you to ask for help. People wanted to sit down beside you during tests. And I just became the guy that people really said, “Guy. You are not one of them.”*

Dele shared his perspective on how many of his peers perceived him based on his academic ranking. He noticed a stark difference in their attitudes towards him when he ranked 1st

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compared to when he dropped to 9th place. Not only did his peers not react positively to his decline in ranking, but it also seemed to affect how they viewed him overall. When he was at the top of the class, they were eager to interact with him and be academically connected to him. However, after his rank dropped, their interest in him seemed to diminish. Also, Dele recalled a situation where one of his peers reacted so negatively to his decline that it nearly escalated into a physical confrontation. He said:

I remember. I mean it doesn’t matter who. But I remember two people. They were girls. When we came back in third term, and I mean everybody found out about who came 1st, who came this, who came that. Everybody probably thought I was going to come 1st.

Then people started mentioning I came first, I came second. I came that, bro, where were you? And then I said I came 9th. I remember the first comments were like, ha ha.

I remember these two girls who started talking about the fact that they were guessing that I wasn’t that brilliant and that when I came 1st in the first term, teachers were probably favoring me because, the owners of the school knew my parents. That was really painful, man. I just, I just wasn’t that guy anymore. You know how it is because people would come to you to ask for help. People wanted to sit down beside you during tests. And I just became the guy that people really said, “Guy you are not one of them”.

I remember I had this friend of mine. They used to call us twins. I remember he came to meet me one day. I was literally crying, you know, I don’t think he knew I was crying. But he just came and said what’s up now? I was like, brah, man, I came 9th. I was sad because the gist was going around. I just felt like I was the kid and then I wasn’t. So, it really hurt. And he said something along the lines of “guy it is what it is, man. let’s just

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keep it moving.” And it was the truth. Look at today, nobody really cares about what position you got.

I also remember this one. One of the guys who was like tallest guy in in class, Kunle. We almost got into a physical fight because his comment was “thank God I automatically became dumb so that he was able to come 1st, 2nd, or 3rd.” I was like “what did you say?” And then he’s like “you’re not as smart” and we almost got into physical fights. Yeah, it was a bit rough.

***Subject Concentration (Transition from JSS3 to SS1)***

*“…the cool guys were doing science, man. So, I was like “nah man, I have to do science. I’ll be the only guy in art class.”*

During the transition from Junior Secondary School to Senior Secondary School, Dele made a pivotal decision to focus on science. This choice was driven by the prevailing social stigma that associated intelligence and seriousness with science concentration. According to him, the top-ranking students predominantly opted for science, while the middle- and lower-ranking students leaned towards other concentrations. As a result, choosing a science concentration was associated with intelligence, while pursuing any other field was seen as lacking in intellect. Consequently, when the time came to select their concentrations, students tended to gravitate towards science if they desired to be perceived as intelligent. There was an undeniable pressure for students to align themselves with science in order to be perceived as smart, serious, and cool. Consequently, Dele felt compelled to opt for science, despite having a genuine interest in the arts. He believed he had no alternative but to pursue science, even though, in reality, he did have other options. However, as he embarked on his higher education journey, he couldn’t help but

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regret not exploring art classes. He realized that his chosen career path could have greatly benefited from the creative skills and knowledge gained through Arts related subjects. He said:

English was one my best subjects in JSS 1-3. I always did pretty well in English. So, I wanted to do literature, man. I wanted to do literature so bad, but I couldn’t because it was part of the Arts.

I used to write stories. I used to write poetry. Of course, I had to stop all that because I chose science. So, oftentimes I wish that we were just allowed to pick. I would have studied fine art. I would have taken literature.

But in JS3 going into SS1, it was more of this-the cool guys were doing science, man. So, I was like, “nah, man, I have to do science. I’ll be the only guy in art class.”

It was not a deep decision it was one of those kinds of things. I had to be a science student. Science students were the really cool students. It was supposed to be more challenging. You were doing physics and chemistry. They were difficult. It was challenging, not like food and nutrition, not like literature.

But I think it was a mentality. I don’t know about now, but when we were in school, it just seemed like the serious ones go and do science. The serious students go to do science, and then the rest of them go and do art. Science students were the smart ones. Now getting into architecture school, I had a course. It was creative writing. It was one of the architecture courses, and the lecturer said, “we want to use this first year to activate your creative juices, so whatever you know that you have an interest in, it could be music, it could be writing, it could be drawing, take it as a course in your first.” Then it just hit me. Initially, I thought Architecture was supposed to be strictly a science course,

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but then I realized that at the end of the day, it is such a creative concept that science alone doesn’t do it justice. I realized that architecture is a creative science. There are no rules to how you design a building. You just have to create it in your head and then it comes out. But there’s nothing creative about all the sciences we learnt in primary and secondary school.

***Last Year in Secondary School - The Turning Point***

*“…the only focus was if this basketball thing works out, it cannot be my scores in school that would stop me.”*

Dele’s journey through secondary school was marked by a significant drop in his academic ranking, leaving him feeling unnoticed and disregarded. This experience had transformed him into a timid and reserved student, lacking confidence in his abilities. However, his final year brought about a change as two pivotal events unfolded, capturing the attention of others and instilling newfound confidence within him. The first turning point came when Dele discovered his talent for basketball. His skill on the court not only earned him recognition within the school but also garnered attention from the entire city. This newfound recognition outside of the academic realm served as a significant boost to his confidence. Simultaneously, Dele’s performance in the JAMB, a standardized examination required for Nigerian public universities, surpassed that of his peers who had previously outranked him. This achievement further solidified his confidence in the academic setting, as he was now recognized for his abilities both on and off the court. It was during this transformative period that one of Dele’s teachers enlightened him about the potential for a basketball scholarship abroad, highlighting the importance of excelling in academics as well. This revelation ignited a deep interest within Dele, spurring him to take his studies more seriously. Motivated by the prospect of furthering his

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education through a scholarship, he dedicated himself to his academic pursuits. As a result, Dele’s commitment and hard work paid off, leading to exceptional performances in external examinations and ultimately securing admission into universities to pursue his higher education. He said:

Up until my last year in secondary school, I was the kid that nobody knew. The last time I came first was in my first term in JSS 1, and ever since I came 9th I was always in the middle of the class. I was quiet. I was very shy.

Then in SS3, I became this very popular kid. Not just in school but in Ibadan because I played basketball. So, I really started gaining confidence in myself again. Also, when I took JAMB, I got 261, which was the highest in my school of all the kids that took the exam. That also boosted my morale. That really boosted my morale.

Then one of my teachers mentioned that me being really good in basketball can get me a scholarship to go and play basketball in America or somewhere in Europe and that I just needed to take my book more seriously. That lit a bulb in my head, as it was now something to work forward to. At this time, I was also already taking ADHD meds. I started reading more in SS3 and the only focus was if this basketball thing works out, it cannot be my scores in school that would stop me. I did well in my JAMB and WAEC, so I was able to get into Uni easily.

***Transition into Higher Education***

*“There was no class ranking. It was just me focusing on my course. It was very different because you knew who you were competing with, but you did not feel like you were competing for a position.”*

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Dele’s plans for higher education abroad fell through, leading him to attend a university in Nigeria instead. However, this unexpected turn of events didn’t dampen his newfound confidence. His talent in basketball and impressive performance in the external examinations had given him a sense of self-assurance that he had long suppressed due to his disappointing class rank positions. These triumphs finally affirmed to Dele that he was indeed worthy and intelligent, contrary to what his class rank positions may have suggested. As he embarked on his university journey, he carried this newfound belief with him, focusing not on his performance, but on truly understanding the subjects at hand. He said:

I felt like a different person, I was not the kid that was not smart anymore. I really felt like I was really good at something, like I was MVP at something.

I remember the first test in uni was, probably like two months into architecture school. The test was something in building construction, and I got 18/20, and I said yes, I’m going to kill it! I remember that significantly because even though my CGPA dropped towards the end of my second year. It was just that nobody else would know your result. There was no class ranking. It was just me focusing on my course. It was very different because you knew who you were competing with, but you did not feel like you were competing for a position. It was different because you just want to be able to graduate and know you understood things. There was no my CGPA is higher than yours, as long as you are doing well.

I needed to learn to know what I was doing. There was no ranking. It’s you against you. It’s you against your learning. In short, it was more that I just needed to be good. It

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wasn’t about coming 1st in class anymore. This is my profession now. I need to be good

at it.

***Career Choice***

*“I didn’t want to do any other thing apart from architecture and basketball.”*

Dele’s passion for architecture stemmed from his upbringing in a household where both his parents worked as architects. Inspired by their dedication and observing their work in the field, he decided to pursue architecture for his higher education. While he had initially entertained dreams of becoming a professional basketball player, Dele recognized that a career in architecture was his true calling. Thus, when his basketball aspirations didn’t pan out, he wholeheartedly embraced architecture as his chosen path. Throughout his educational journey, Dele excelled, earning both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in architecture. He said:

Both my parents are architects. Yeah, my mom and my dad are architects, and the truth is, I think as far back as I can remember I knew that’s what I was gonna do if basketball didn’t work out. I always told myself that I would do architecture because I was exposed to it at a young age. At the age of 9, I started sketching houses and sketching buildings.

There were drawings all over the house. It was always buildings; I was always in love with buildings.

I would just see my dad on his drawing board, because then it was hand drawings. They didn’t really use computers. And I just used to be so amused. I would just be watching him like “this thing that you’re drawing, somebody will build it someday.” I was amazed. So, once it was time to actually choose what I wanted for my career, that was what I

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wanted and chose. There was nothing else on my mind. I didn’t want to do any other thing apart from architecture and basketball, man.

***Reflection – Interest and Motivation Mattered***

“*I couldn’t graduate and not be good enough to work for my father.”*

As Dele looked back on his experiences with class rankings, he couldn’t stress enough the significance of his interests and motivation. These factors were crucial for his success throughout primary and secondary education. Dele noticed that when he lacked interest or motivation in certain subjects, he would easily lose focus and struggle to perform well on assessments. This ultimately affected his class rank positions. Conversely, when he was genuinely interested in a subject, he found it easier to concentrate and excel. This realization became even more evident to Dele when he entered university and began pursuing his passion for architecture. Ever since he was young, Dele had dreamt of becoming an architect, inspired by his parents’ work in the field. His genuine love for architecture fueled his interest and motivation to master the courses he took. Rather than solely focusing on academic performance, Dele aimed to become a true master of his craft. He said:

Primary school you are learning everything, secondary school you are still almost learning everything until you get to SS., I hated chemistry for example. I didn’t like chemistry. I didn’t like economics. I loved geography, I loved technical drawing. I was okay with maths, but I hated further maths. The were a lot of subjects that I just didn’t like. It could be the teacher too, but there were a lot of subjects I didn’t like. I remember integrated science too. Oh, I didn’t like integrated science. I didn’t like business studies. We also used to learn something called shorthand, which was like this thing where

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secretaries in like the 18th century as far as I’m concerned were using to write fast. What is that, and why do we have to learn it? Even agriculture, I did not like it. And those were the subjects I didn’t really do well in.

But I remember subjects like intro tech, and even math, which were not bad. But I think it was because if I actually could concentrate in class, I would just learn. I remember PHE, CRK, music. Those were my subjects. No matter how many 9th positions I got CRK&PHE, I was always 1st in those subjects. And if you remember who the teacher was, Mr. Donald. So, I guess that’s why he was always like “guy you are smart”. I was always focused in his classes, and I always did well but I guess a lot of other subjects I was either not interested in or not motivated to like to learn.

But in uni, I don’t think I had a course that I didn’t like, maybe structures. Structures was the only course in the whole of the four years I was in school that I didn’t like.

Also, when I got into uni, I was still taking the pills. I was still on medication for ADHD. My first and second years were a bit challenging, but I just kept telling myself that that this may have affected me in secondary school, but this stops here. I was going to work as hard as I could because I felt like I had more to lose than anybody else in my class. My two parents are architects. I couldn’t graduate and not be good enough to work for my father. I remember that I worked hard in uni, and it felt good. I actually worked hard, and that was because I wasn’t going to accept being average anymore. I started to believe in myself. I realized how good I was at basketball, and it just flowed into every other thing.

***Reflection-Class Ranking Impacted Confidence***

*“And when I look back, I wish there was no class ranking. I wish we didn’t have positions.”*

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Reflecting on his own experiences, Dele revealed that his encounter with class ranking had a detrimental effect on his confidence throughout his secondary education. This, in turn, greatly influenced his approach to learning. He couldn’t help but wish that his school had not implemented class ranking as a practice. While he acknowledged that the intention behind class ranking was to motivate students to strive for excellence, he also recognized that it had an unintended consequence. Dele believed that class ranking prepared students for the real world, where competition is constant and standing out is crucial for recognition. However, he emphasized that the real world is not solely about excellence, but also about competence and finding one’s own unique strengths. He said:

If I was to say what class ranking did for me, I think it really affected my confidence. That thing held me back for a long time, and I don’t know that I ever truly recovered from it until SS3, and my confidence came from something else. And when I look back, I wish there was no class ranking. I wish we didn’t have positions. At the end of the day, I think life generally is competitive, and that’s enough. You’re always competing with everybody else, and there should not be something that now puts it more in your face. And I think at the end of the day, it’s not about who comes 1st; it’s about who is more competent. It is about everybody finding their own edge.

But at the end of the day, you’re still competing, and I feel like class ranking was one of our first exposures because it’s a dog world, and everybody is fighting against the other person. And I think, as kids, it was good for us to know that there’s no participation trophy. You don’t get to participate and get an award for that. You know, you have to excel to be recognized. You have to excel, and you have to push. And you know,

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excellence is something that you have to strive for because there’s a lot of mediocrity around. That’s the truth. And excellence is something that I will always strive for.

I mean, I thought about it. If when I was in school, when I came 9th, I got hugs and kisses, I don’t think it would have registered in my head that, that was a bad result. I mean, at the end of the day, for someone like me, it didn’t motivate me to work hard. But I was still not comfortable. I feel like it was important for us to learn as children that that’s how life is, because now it’s still the same thing.

But you know how it is as human beings; you will still doubt yourself once in a while. But my confidence now comes from my track record, where I’ve been doing this for ten years now, and I’ve been constantly excelling at it. It’s like I’m him now! Whereas back in the day, when constantly seeing bad results, it is stating constantly that someone is smarter than you, and you’re just there. You won’t be confident.

***Meaning Formed from Experience with Class Ranking***

*“It needs to evolve.”*

Dele holds a particular viewpoint on class ranking - he sees it as beneficial only for the top three students while detrimental for the rest. His personal encounters with class ranking have left him with a negative impression, as he believes it only served him when he was at the top. Dele suggests that the practice of class ranking should be refined to acknowledge and reward students who excel while also providing special attention and support for those who rank lower. He emphasizes the importance of addressing individual needs and motivations, as every student is unique. Dele firmly believes that a low-class ranking does not indicate a lack of intelligence but rather a need for assistance and guidance. He said:

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I think class ranking only favors the people that come first, second, and third man. This is my problem with it. Every child is different. I feel like, for me, it didn’t help me, man. But it helped in primary school. It helped me in my first term of JS1, and then it stopped helping me.

Someone like me, growing up, once I find it difficult to succeed at something, I get discouraged. That was me. My brother, on the other hand, when he finds it difficult to succeed at something. He gets more challenged. I would get discouraged. I want to give up. You can’t keep putting last or second-to-last positions in that child’s face and expect they will be motivated.

So, I really feel there’s a good side to it. But I know something. It needs to be more refined.

I don’t think it should be scrapped because I think it’s good for people to know that if you excel at something, you’re going to be rewarded, you’re going to be announced, and you’re going to get a price for that.

But I feel like for those people that are at the back, they’re not dumb kids. I think some kids just need more motivation and some people don’t get motivated the same way. Some might give up quickly. Imagine seeing the last position your report card, that might make you want to give up. It needs to evolve in some kind of way.

**Narrative 2: Bukola’s Story**

***Background***

Bukola’s journey began in Abuja, where she spent her formative years and received her primary and secondary education. She then ventured to Port Harcourt for her higher education,

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pursuing a bachelor’s degree in accounting. Little did she know that her path would take an unexpected turn. Eventually, Bukola found herself across the oceans in the United Kingdom, where she currently resides. It was here that she delved into a completely different field, earning a master’s degree in health and social care. Now, as a dedicated social worker, she uses her newfound knowledge and skills to make a difference in the lives of others. The stark contrast between Bukola’s bachelor’s and master’s degrees reflects an intriguing shift in her academic journey. It was not a decision made lightly, but rather influenced by her experiences with class ranking. Curious to know more? Let’s explore the reasons behind this transformative choice.

***Understanding of Class ranking***

Bukola did not hesitate to express her strong disapproval of the implementation of class ranking in Nigerian schools. She firmly believed that it was unjust to assign positions to students solely based on their academic performance, as this method completely overlooked their individual talents and abilities. Furthermore, she was deeply concerned about the neglect of students with learning disabilities, who were left at a significant disadvantage under this system. She said:

My understanding is that class ranking is giving a particular position based on a student’s performance. So, the higher you score in your grades, the higher your position. I think one of the motivations for Nigerian schools using it is that they feel like it’s a way to motivate students or the child to do better. However, I think that’s very controversial, personally. This is because Nigeria is a developing country, or should I say, underdeveloped.

So, they don’t take into consideration the diverse characteristics of students. So, they

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could be a child with a learning disability or a child that’s dyslexic or a child that’s going through something that is making it difficult for them to understand or simulate, or a child that just doesn’t like academics really, and they can learn in different ways. So, because Nigeria is a developing country, I don’t think it’s right because they don’t take into consideration the various factors that a child goes through in school. Yeah, that’s why I think it’s controversial.

***Critical Story***

*“So, going from the 1st to the 5th, I think I had a bit of an identity crisis.”*

Bukola consistently held the top spot in her class from primary to secondary school. However, there came a term when her ranking plummeted from 1st to 5th position, leaving a profound impact on her self-perception and family dynamics. She confessed that this sudden change in rank left her feeling disheartened, as she had come to internalize her identity as being solely defined by her academic achievements. Doubts about her abilities and self-worth began to creep in, causing her to question not only her academic prowess but also her very sense of self. It was during this identity crisis that she realized just how much importance she had placed on her class rank, and how it had shaped her perception of herself. She said:

I mostly ranked high, but the higher I went, the more difficult it was. So, I did drop a bit, but I was still amongst what they’ll say are the best few; however, it’s not where I was initially. And I know the impact that that had on myself and my family and people around me who were now looking up to me. So, yeah, it wasn’t fluctuating; it was mostly high but not stagnant.

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I was within the first five positions. So, I was 1st for a long time and then I dropped to 5th. And I didn’t feel good about myself at all. Growing up as a teenager, we have all the issues being a teenager and trying to find yourself and have autonomy, and all of that. So, one thing I associated myself with was being the best in the class. So going from the 1st to the 5th, I think I had a bit of an identity crisis. Who am I? If I’m not the best in the class, then who am I really? And then it made me realize how much I attributed to that you know position.

***Approach to Learning***

Despite Bukola’s impressive academic performance, it became apparent that her high-class rankings did not necessarily reflect her deep comprehension or successful achievement of learning objectives. She candidly admitted that her approach to exams involved last-minute cramming and regurgitating information, leading to short-term memorization rather than true understanding. Once the examinations were over, she found herself unable to recall any of the material she had hastily absorbed. Bukola confessed that she only made an effort to truly comprehend the material when she found a genuine interest in the subject or topic at hand. Bukola also brought up another intriguing facet of her experience - an overpowering guilt and feeling of being a fraud. This guilt stemmed from her heavy reliance on cramming and regurgitating information, which had ultimately resulted in her impressive academic accomplishments. Despite her ability to pass exams with flying colors, she couldn’t shake the nagging realization that she lacked a true grasp of the subjects she was studying. She said:

The way I approached learning is I would wait until it counts. So, am I gonna have a test? I would read before the test. Am I gonna have an exam? I would read before the exam.

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Honestly, if I’m being asked, questions afterward, I would space out because I was literally, trying to grab all this knowledge, to pour it back out, to get that position, to get that grade. And then afterwards, I wouldn’t exactly go back to it except I actually enjoyed the subject or the topic that I was looking at. I would say it was very much trying to gather the knowledge to actually pour it back out and not necessarily to learn. It was more just regurgitating information.

Also, there was definitely an element of guilt. I literally just read this last night. You ask me next week. I’m not sure I can be very elaborate. I sort of felt like, ohh, you might be a fraud. You know, you’re literally just pouring this out and then you are moving on. I knew class ranking wasn’t a measure of my abilities to understand, to assimilate. I had that first positions and I had a high-ranking position. However, I don’t think I don’t think it directly relates or interrelated to my understanding of what the topics were for some of them, especially the ones that I don’t enjoy, I literally would read to throw it back at the teacher. And so, I yeah, there was an element of guilt.

***Parent***

*“I changed my position. I actually scribbled on my report when I came 5th in my class.”* Bukola had always been the 1st in her class, so when she suddenly found herself in 5th

place, she couldn’t help but feel like she had let her parents down. She had always believed that her parents favored her because of her academic achievements, and she couldn’t bear the thought of losing that special treatment. Observing how her parents treated her siblings, who didn’t excel academically, only reinforced her fear. Determined to maintain her parents’ approval, Bukola decided to alter her report card to improve her rank. Unfortunately, her actions only deepened

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her father’s disappointment. He was not only disappointed by her drop in rank but also by her attempt to deceive them. Bukola had changed her report card out of a desperate desire to preserve the positive interactions with her parents that she believed were contingent on her academic success. She said:

You know the Nigerian parent’s dream is to have that child that you can boast about when your friend’s coming home. Yeah, my daughter was the best in this and that. So, that there was very much that was very much going on. It was clear that my parents were happy about the success. So, when I dropped from 1ST to 5th position, I felt disappointed in myself and that I wasn’t keeping to the status quo, the expectations from my parents. There’s a funny story behind that, actually.

I changed my position. I actually scribbled on my report when I came 5th in my class. And when I showed my dad, he just looked at me like, are you joking? Like you obviously changed this. I was like, ohh, no I didn’t. I said my teacher told me they made a mistake and obviously he found out and he was disappointed in me. He was disappointed in me for dropping from what he knew me to usually get and then changing my reports as well. It completely shocked him and everyone else.

I changed my report because I knew that there was an expectation of me from my parents. They did a bit of comparing myself and my siblings and I very much felt their likeness for me was tied to my abilities really with my academics. I felt very disappointed. I felt like some of the ways I was being treated were attributed to how well I was doing at school. Some of my siblings didn’t do very well and I saw how they were being treated. I will always get the birthday cake even if my siblings didn’t get one. I

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would always get like a gift or something, and it’s usually when I come back with the results of the report.

I wanted them to be proud of me. I wanted them to continue to be proud of me. And so, I felt like I may have disappointed them. So, I felt the need to change it because I didn’t want to be met with an opposite feeling from what I’ve been getting from them.

***Teachers***

*“I felt proud of myself in that particular moment. But then when she started speaking down on everyone else, I felt very conscious and uncomfortable.”*

According to Bukola, the teachers showed preferential treatment towards the top-ranking students in the class, often using their achievements to belittle those who ranked lower. While she appreciated the recognition she received as a top-ranking student, she couldn’t ignore the negative impact it had on her classmates’ self-esteem. This realization left her feeling uneasy, as she understood that the lower-ranking students were being disregarded and made to feel inferior. She said:

I got really favorable treatment from teachers. I feel like I have a story to any and everything. But I do have a story for this one. So, I was in class, and then a teacher said, “Who’s got the highest in this test?” And I stood up, and she goes, “I knew who was gonna be you.”. So, in my school, we had positions for each subject and then an overall position. So, she asked again, “Who had the first position last term?” And I stood up again. And then she said, “You lot should be ashamed of yourself. She’s a girl, and she’s doing better than all of you. And she has been better the last few times; what are you doing with yourself?”. She really spoke down on everyone else and just said, “Yeah, it’s clear that you have a promising future; just sit down.”

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Being told that “Oh, you’re gonna be, you’re gonna be the student that does this and this for me because you’re good at this.” And then just really picking particular students to do the heavy lifting in the classroom and making it very obvious that you’re favoring them over the other students. I felt proud of myself in that particular moment. But then, when she started speaking down on everyone else, I felt very conscious and uncomfortable because she made me stand up in front of everyone else. And then she was praising me. And then I looked into like people’s eyes, and I could see them looking like, yeah, whatever. And yeah, I didn’t feel really good about myself afterward. Also, they had nicknames for students that don’t do well. They didn’t treat them well at all. There was a clear difference in how the teachers saw students that do well and students that struggle. They automatically write them off, see them as delinquents., I didn’t want to be seen like that.

***Peers***

*“I was a very late bloomer, and I wasn’t the society’s standard of pretty at the time. And so, I felt like the only way my voice would be heard is by doing this thing that I know how to do best, which is doing well at school because I wasn’t a very socially acceptable person.”*

Bukola was well aware of the envy that some of her lower-ranking classmates harbored towards her. It was no secret that the teachers highly favored those at the top of the class, and this only fueled the envy further. Despite this, she also noticed that some of her peers respected her for her academic achievements. They might not have wanted to socialize with her outside of the classroom, but they were more than willing to engage with her when it came to anything academic-related. This respect brought her a sense of accomplishment, but it also came with a heavy burden. As she witnessed her friends who struggled to keep up with their rankings,

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Bukola’s joy in her own achievements began to waver. It was difficult for her to revel in the accolades when she saw others grappling with their studies. However, her empathy for them ran deep. Having a sibling who also faced similar struggles with academic performance, she understood firsthand the challenges her peers were going through. This understanding shaped her approach. Bukola chose not to let the envy or treatment from others deter her from helping those in need. Regardless of how they perceived or treated her, she made it her mission to assist her struggling peers as much as she could. After all, she knew the importance of lending a helping hand, especially to those who were going through the same difficulties as her own sibling. She said:

You’re a teenager and you don’t want to be sat there and then be told your friend is way better than you. So, there was a bit of envy that I couldn’t understand from particular people, and it was very obvious, and they say things like don’t sit with us, you can do your thing and go over there kind of thing.”

Also, the reason I liked to do well in school was because I was a very tiny teenager.

I was a very late bloomer, and I wasn’t the society’s standard of pretty at the time. And so, I felt like the only way my voice would be heard is by doing this thing that I know how to do best, which is doing well at school because I wasn’t a very socially acceptable person.

I didn’t meet society standard of pretty. I was good with academics and stuff, but I wasn’t good enough to be like your friend because you’re not cool enough. You don’t look cool enough. You don’t know the cool things that we’re doing. I didn’t fit the standards and

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things like that. And so, I didn’t have a lot of friends and people weren’t exactly willing to make friends when we except they wanted me to do the assignment or something.

A particular encounter was I wouldn’t be invited to things after school. I wouldn’t be told about a social event. So, you’re good enough to pass and sit with us for this test, but you’re not good enough to go to the cafeteria or something like that I had that quite a bit.”

However, there was a bit of respect from my classmates. A very fond memory I have was walking into class quite late, and then I saw a group of students from other classes waiting for me. They were like, “oh, Bukola, they told us that you were the only that could solve this problem.” It was a math question. And I felt really proud, like, Oh yeah, yeah, that’s me, I can.

This respect I got made me feel a sense of self-accomplishment. However, I had friends who were struggling, and so there were times I didn’t really feel good about myself because I would sit with someone, and then I could see the difference. I felt really proud of myself; however, I saw first-hand how other people were treated because of their lack of understanding when everything wasn’t put into consideration. Looking back now, I can see that there were definitely people I was in class with that had learning disabilities, that had dyslexia, that were struggling with difficult emotions. And that’s probably why they were unable to “pass” and be at the top.

I had a sibling who struggled academically, so I always felt sentimental about people that struggled as well because I saw first-hand how difficult and how extremely hard it was for him. The first thing that comes to mind is to help when I see my peers struggled. I

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never spoke down on someone that wasn’t doing well because I always felt there has to

be more to it.

***Subject Concentration (Transitioning from JSS3 to SS1)***

*“I didn’t feel good at all knowing that decisions being made about me were not particularly based around my abilities. However, they were around past experiences that had nothing to do with me in particular.”*

Upon transitioning from Junior secondary school to senior secondary school, Bukola faced a difficult decision. She had always dreamt of becoming an Engineer and had a strong interest in Science. However, her parents had other plans for her. They were concerned about the lack of success her siblings had experienced in the Science field and wanted Bukola to take a safer route by focusing on commercial studies. Despite consistently ranking at the top of her class, Bukola couldn’t help but feel that her parents lacked faith in her academic abilities. It was disheartening for her, as she had a genuine passion for calculations and mathematics, which were the driving forces behind her desire to become an engineer. To her surprise, her parents didn’t completely dismiss her love for numbers. Instead, they suggested that she consider a career path in Accounting, where she could still utilize her mathematical skills. Seeing this as a potential compromise, Bukola decided to concentrate on commercial studies and used it as a steppingstone towards pursuing a higher education in accounting. She said:

I wanted to go into science class. However, my older siblings had just finished secondary school and didn’t do well and so my parents were paranoid and felt like, you know what? It seems like science is too hard. You’re gonna to be in commercial class.

I initially wanted to be an engineer because I did enjoy maths and calculations and all of that. But my parents were paranoid and felt like they didn’t want to have to deal with me

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also not doing well in science class. My siblings just had their WAEC results, and it

didn’t look exactly great. So, they were like, yeah, no, don’t do that. You’re just gonna do this. That term, I was really annoyed because I knew that there’s nothing I want to do in commercial. And so, I held onto accounting because I was told, well, you can still do some calculations.

First of all, I didn’t feel good at all knowing that decisions being made about me were not particularly based around my abilities. However, they were around past experiences that had nothing to do with me in particular. So, I didn’t feel really good. Despite the track record showing I was able to do well at school to the best of my abilities. It didn’t count for anything and so that didn’t really make me feel good at all because I felt like I was working under the shadow of someone else or being judged because of somebody else’s experience.

***Transition into Higher Education- The First Turning Point***

*“It was very daunting. It was very daunting because I had that perception about myself academically and how well I’m supposed to do. The realization of how the real world is was a shock to me. I couldn’t just soak in and pour out for a particular test.”*

Bukola’s journey into university life was marked by unexpected challenges. Having excelled in her earlier academic years, she entered the world of higher education with the belief that her tried-and-true method of cramming and regurgitating information would continue to serve her well. However, she soon discovered that this approach was no longer effective in this new environment. With each passing semester, Bukola realized that simply memorizing and reciting facts was not enough to guarantee success. It became clear that if she wanted to thrive in university, she needed to cultivate a deeper understanding of the subjects she was studying. This

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realization came about halfway through her studies, prompting her to make a pivotal decision - she needed to change her approach. Determined to achieve true comprehension rather than mere performance, Bukola embraced new strategies that focused on enhancing her understanding. She sought out resources, engaged in discussions with her peers, and actively participated in class. Gradually, she discovered the joy of learning for its own sake, rather than solely for the sake of grades. Bukola’s transformation was not without its challenges. She had to unlearn old habits and adapt to a style of learning that demanded more from her. However, her perseverance paid off as she began to see remarkable improvements, not much in her academic performance but definitely in her understanding of what she was learning. She said:

Yeah, it was a huge shock on natural reality. I struggled in uni. I did. I struggled in uni. And oh gosh, there was no position. There was no test that I could show to everyone that I was the best. There was no acknowledgement, there was no reinforcement. There was nothing. It was a huge change.

Also, it’s uni, you cannot read two weeks before and then throw back the knowledge, you need to understand what you’re actually doing. And so, everything had to change. My reading style, everything, my learning style. I had to sit down and figure out what my learning style is. Why am I doing this? Do I enjoy this? Like it was a huge change for me. It was like a slap to reality. I fell from cloud nine when I came into uni. Because all that, yeah, you’re the first position. None of that was there. I had to figure out how to. Yeah, navigate through the world of getting the BSc on my own.

“It was very daunting. It was very daunting because I had that perception about myself academically and how well I’m supposed to do. The realization of how the real world is

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was a shock to me. I couldn’t just soak in and pour out for a particular test. Because obviously uni is quite different from secondary school or primary school where there’s a particular scope of subjects, and we are not just doing random subjects. We’re actually majoring in something. And so, it was quite daunting to find out that you cannot always just win things. You have to understand what you’re doing.

It was when I had my first semester result. I was like, that’s definitely not mine. Somebody made a mistake, that can’t be mine. I was shocked. No, I was extremely shocked because I did exactly what I was doing in secondary school, like I’m gonna wing this. I’m sure I’m gonna pass. I actually went around telling people, yeah, I’m that kind of person that once I look at something, well, that’s it. Ohh, no, it was a huge shock. Yeah. When I saw my results, that’s when I had that realization.

Yeah, something like pause everyone. Like I had C’s and I think there was a D in there actually and probably an E if I’m being honest. Yeah, I was shocked. I was actually devastated is the word because like I said, I attributed my personality to this. So, Bukola is the person that does very well. So that’s who you are. You’re the one that does not have any challenge in your academics. Yes, you may have this, and you may have that, but you’re really good at this. And so, I was like waited a damn minute. It was very much like I had an identity crisis at that point because if you’re not the person that knows how to do this and that and then now, you’re also not this person, so who are you? Like, who exactly are you?

Immediately I saw my results. I felt like, yeah, let’s go back to the drawing board. What went wrong? What can we do better? Because obviously I didn’t want that to happen

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again. But then I put a lot of pressure on myself. The change did not exactly happen immediately because I did, you know, put my hand in different things to see how I can be better. But then what it ended up with is putting a lot of pressure on myself. Like, you need to learn how to do this. You need to try this learning style. It took a while for me to get to understand my learning style because I would try what this person did, this person got this grade, what did this person do? I’m gonna try that, and then I’m gonna try this. It wasn’t until midway through uni. Because if those didn’t work, the next semester result wasn’t looking too far off from the initial one, so I still felt really bad.”

I remember a time when I took my phone, and I sent a really long paragraph to my parents. I said, “I’m not that person you know anymore; I’m failing now.” I was very emotional. I said, “I’m actually disappointing you here.” Because obviously, you don’t get your results sent back to your parents every term like you would in secondary school. So, it was just like PSA: I’m failing, and just don’t expect anything from me. But that was midway, but then I sat back, and I think I had to take away that identity I formed around being the best in the class to actually sit back and say, “Well, you need to understand what you’re doing, why you’re trying to be an accountant? What do you enjoy about this course? Do you even want to be an accountant? Like I had to understand why. Why aren’t you doing well in this course? Do you actually not like it? Why are you here? So, I had that moment that I had to sit back and reflect and speak to myself, and I think that was midway through uni.”

I really struggled through the first two years at uni because I tied my identity to me being the girl that knows what to do in class, to me being the “smart one”. Then coming into

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uni and I am finding it really difficult. One because I there wasn’t anything to gauge how well I was doing there. There’s no comparison to anything except yourself. So that was really difficult for me because my identity was tied to being the top in the class. You’re not competing with anyone at uni, you’re just trying to scale through. And so, it’s impacted on my life generally because I then had identity crisis and then I had to take myself out of the idea that my whole and person is formed from being a smart one. There was a lot more to me than just being the girl that knows how to do the things that I thought I did. So yeah, it definitely did impact my life.

I think it was definitely halfway through uni when I was like, okay, something needs to change. It was when I was finding it extremely difficult because I was in a position, I did not think I would be in. The thing is, we weren’t ranking, so it’s you against yourself, you against how you did in the previous semester. So that was an interesting one. So, I think halfway through, seeing that what I was doing initially is not working anymore. But I noticed that when I actually try to understand the full scope of what this topic entails, what the course entails, that’s when I do better. That’s when I caught on when I changed my style of reading because, as I mentioned earlier, I had to find my learning style. So, understanding my learning style was what really influenced me. So, it wasn’t exactly the results I got because I don’t think they were very different from the previous one, but my understanding in the class. I completely understand that. So that’s when I caught on.

***Career-The Second Turning Point***

*“I completed the four years because I felt stuck. I didn’t feel like I was able to come back and say, do you know what, I don’t want to do this, I need to do something else.”*

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Bukola’s decision to pursue accounting was heavily influenced by her parents’ suggestion during her transition from junior secondary school to senior secondary. Despite her interest in science, her parents urged her to pursue commercial studies, and since she enjoyed calculations, they told her accounting was a viable option. Initially, she believed it was good comprise, but deep down, she knew it wasn’t her true passion. However, she continued down this path to avoid disappointing her parents. As she delved into her accounting studies, it became clear that it didn’t ignite any interest or passion within her. Nonetheless, she persevered, driven by a desire to meet her parents’ expectations. Eventually, she earned her bachelor’s degree in accounting, but she couldn’t ignore the fact that it wasn’t the career she wanted to pursue. Determined to follow her true calling, Bukola made the decision to pursue a master’s degree in a field that aligned with her passion for helping others. Along this path, she discovered a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that she had not experienced before. She said:

I never actually liked accounting. My first year, I knew I didn’t like it. I just never enjoyed it at all. I never decided to want to be an accountant. I just studied it in uni based on my parent’s recommendation. So, I do like math a lot. That’s the thing I enjoyed. I didn’t just do it for doing it for the sake of doing it. I actually really enjoyed it, Math. I still do. And so, I thought, you know what? I’m gonna be an accountant. And jokes on me. I do like math, but I don’t like balancing accounts. That’s one thing I can tell you for sure. So, I never really wanted to be an accountant. I never really enjoyed it. Of course, I did because it was suggested that this is something that you may like based on what we see that you can do really well.

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I completed the four years because I felt stuck. I didn’t feel like I was able to come back and say, do you know what, I don’t want to do this, I need to do something else. Yeah, I didn’t feel like I had that choice to go back and say actually, “I don’t think this is something I want to do anymore”. So, I felt stuck, and I felt like I had to see through. I felt like there was an expectation. You’re not the person that goes back to see.

And coming from a family where there’s an expectation and seeing how things were for the other siblings, I didn’t want to be that additional burden. So, I wanted to finish because I felt like it’s something that my parents would need, that child that actually finished doing this because things weren’t going too great for the rest. So, I didn’t want to add to the pressure.

So, I never actually practice accounting. I just struggled through it and gave it to my parents, and I was like, here you go but I’m not doing this. I really, I really hate this. And then I went into what I really enjoyed, which was a lot of humanitarian work. It just came straight to me really quickly. My first job was in presidential amnesty, and it just resonated with me. Actually, how I got the job wasn’t my choice at all. I had to do my NYSC, and then I had to work within presidential amnesty. And then I immediately enjoyed it.

And why I’m doing social work is because I’ve always been that sibling who everyone would want to tell their problems to, the one everyone wants to talk to. And so, I’ve been the family therapist for the longest time. So, social work/psychotherapy was the closest I could get to that position because it came like second nature to me.

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I was always the one who would, you know, try, and unpick things in the family. So, I knew for a fact that that’s where I wanted to be. It was where I could blossom in because it was something I extremely enjoyed, and I felt it came second nature to me.

So, immediately I went to presidential amnesty and then I went to do things similar to that. And then I was like, do you know what, I’m going to get this degree and then I’m going to try and do this. And then the goal is to be a psychotherapist at the end of the day. I loved what I studied for my masters. I enjoyed it so much. And then it felt like my streak of good luck came back. I was like, oh yeah, now we’re talking because I really, really enjoyed it. I had an award at the end of my degree for a project I did, and I was really proud of myself, for myself, not for anyone else, for myself, because it’s something I actually enjoyed doing. It felt like a Eureka moment the first time I walked into the class. From the first word that the professor said I was like, yes, this is where I should have been all this while.

And what’s interesting about this one is that my grades weren’t exactly my priority at all. I want it to do well, obviously, But I really enjoyed what I was doing. I enjoyed what I was reading, I enjoyed every research. So, it was definitely more what I was learning than, you know, the grade I was gonna get at the end of the day.

***Reflection- Impact***

*“It took a while for me to understand that it is OK to fail and try again.”*

Class ranking played a pivotal role in Bukola’s academic journey, influencing her decisions and shaping her self-perception. She relied heavily on her rank to determine her abilities, often choosing to study topics or take courses based on how well she believed she could

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excel in them according to her ranking. Even if she didn’t fully comprehend a subject, if her results indicated she was proficient, she would consider herself a master in that area. Thus, there was a discrepancy between her perceived abilities and her true abilities, greatly impacting her understanding of her own potential and how well she could grasp the concepts being taught. Bukola carried this mindset beyond the classroom, believing that her experience with class ranking permeated every aspect of her life, including her relationships with others. Furthermore, she struggled to accept failure and took a considerable amount of time to realize that it is acceptable to stumble and then rise again. Her entire identity and personality were intertwined with the notion of always passing exams and being at the top of her class. However, Bukola’s perspective has shifted. She now recognizes that true understanding should be her priority, gauged by the effort she puts in and the depth of her knowledge, rather than relying solely on a rank as an indicator of her abilities. She said:

I think class ranking played a huge role in key decisions I made throughout my academic journey, because I would most likely learn a topic or do a course within my abilities according to what the results would say. If the results say, I’m really good at this particular thing despite me not really understanding the topic or course after completing the tests or exams, I feel like I’m excellent at that topic. If I’m being realistic my desire to become an engineer came from there. So, it played a huge role in the way I saw myself and in my understanding of how well I could assimilate or understand the things that was being taught.

To be honest, I think this followed me all through my life, to Uni and every area of my life, and relationships in every aspect. And it’s funny how this just comes from a position

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in a class. But the huge impact you had in every area of my life because I always felt I should be the best in this. Well, that’s what the statistics say; I have been the best all through my life, so I should do this really easily. I always take “failure” very difficult. I struggled even though I know that is literally part of human life—to fail. It took a while for me to understand that it is OK to fail and try again.

And it stems from being at the top through primary school and secondary school and then in uni when things don’t add up it throws me off completely. I had actually attributed myself to this person that even though you are not able to do anything you are able to pass exams and do well at them.

I perceive myself now quite differently, I’ll say. I think my understanding is based on what I know and not what a report tells me. I weigh my understanding not on what a result says or what report says, on how well I’ve researched the topic. This is something I’m very confident this is something that I know, so I don’t go by any report. Obviously as a professional you do need those professional certificates and all of that. However, my knowledge is from my understanding of things rather than what a report is saying.

***Meaning Formed from Experiences with Class Ranking***

*“It doesn’t just affect children in the classroom. It affects them in every area of their life.”* Bukola’s takeaway from her experience with class ranking is that seemingly innocent reports

or attempts to motivate students can actually have a significant impact on their lives. She realizes that ranking can shape how students are perceived and treated, both within and outside of the academic environment. This, in turn, can influence their approach to education and even their career choices. Bukola acknowledges that the class ranking system worked in her favor because

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she was a top-ranked student. As a result, she received abundant recognition and rewards. However, she also recognizes that her high academic standing did not necessarily equate to true learning or a genuine desire to learn. She believes that the use of class ranking can spur some students to strive for improvement, but it can also have a detrimental effect on others, making them feel inadequate. She said:

One thing I’ve definitely learned is that what might seem like a harmless report or a way to encourage students is definitely something that follows on through the rest of your life in terms of like their social classes, like your peers. It affects how you’re being seen. It affects you personally at home with your siblings. It affects your relationship with your parents. So, it’s not just a report. It’s something that carries on for a very long time. There are people that are still struggling. And if you take a step back to see what the root cause is, it comes from it either being treated differently because you weren’t doing well, because you were the lowest in class, or being given favors because you were the top in class. It starts off the child very wrongly. It takes a toll on different areas of your life. Your self-esteem, your relationship with people around you, your peers. Honestly, when I saw your topic, I immediately said ohh wow, somebody has finally said it! It literally follows you on and it starts really early, which is really unfortunate. This is such amazing research, honestly.

I have always been like a competitive child and person, and so I would say the system “worked for me” because I was always striving to want to be the 1st. But then again, looking back, why did I feel like I needed that validation? With my class position, I wasn’t exactly striving to learn. I wanted to be the top of the class for the sake of it.”

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And then looking at my siblings’ experience, who I believe have learning needs, and how they struggled because of this class system.

So, having to repeat a particular class and obviously, the shame that comes with it and every other thing. So, I’ll say it’s not particularly a very good experience, really.

From my perspective, I think it challenged me to do better, but then again, why did I want to do better? But then, from my sibling’s perspective, it made him feel very less of himself. And then that pressure from family, saying why can’t you do it like this other person and why can’t you be like your sister, and she’s doing. But obviously, we’re all different people. So, it doesn’t just affect children in the classroom. It affects them in every area of their life. How they’re being seen by their peers, parents, and the community.

**Narrative 3: Salewa’s Story**

***Background***

Salewa has had the opportunity to live in various parts of Nigeria, from bustling Lagos to serene Shagamu. It was during her time in these places that she completed her primary and secondary education. However, after finishing her studies, Salewa made the bold decision to move to the United Kingdom in pursuit of higher education. And that’s where she has made her home ever since. Armed with a bachelor’s degree in business management, Salewa has carved a path for herself in the project management field. Although currently unemployed, her most recent role was as a PMO analyst. When asked about her career choice, she admitted, **"It’s not exactly my passion, but it pays the bills."** There was a sense of dissatisfaction in her voice, andupon delving deeper into her experiences with class ranking, a connection became clear.

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Salewa’s discontent with her career path was intricately tied to her past encounters with class

ranking.

***Understanding of Class Ranking***

Salewa had always perceived class ranking as a method of categorizing students based on their test or exam scores, assigning them a specific position within the classroom hierarchy. In her understanding, there would always be one student who excelled above all others, as well as another who found themselves at the bottom. She harbored a belief that Nigerian schools employed this practice as a means of incentivizing academic excellence, perhaps as a way to inspire students to strive for the honor roll. In the educational institutions she attended, those who ranked within the top five were duly acknowledged and rewarded with various accolades and prizes. She said:

What I understand is that class ranking is using the scores from your tests or exams and classifying you into a position in the classroom. There is a student who is the best, and there’s one who is the lowest in the class.

And looking back right now, Nigerian schools might be using it as a reward system in the sense of maybe to motivate people. That’s the only thing I can actually think of, to maybe motivate the students to do very well. One thing that I remember as well is, the 1st to the 5th would get an award ceremony where they get prizes and stuff.

Well, looking back now, I want to believe that it was done to maybe motivate other students to want to be part of this honor roll students.

***Critical Story***

*“It was a time of horror knowing my scores.”*

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During Salewa’s primary school years, she consistently achieved satisfactory class rank positions, ranging from 1st to 10th place. However, everything changed when she entered secondary school. Her rank positions became unsatisfactory, consistently placing her in the middle or at the bottom of her class. Salewa realized she needed extra support, suspecting an undiagnosed learning disability and struggling with test-taking. In primary school, she resided at home, benefiting from her parents’ resources that aided her education. However, when she transitioned to a boarding school for secondary education, she lacked the necessary resources to support her learning. Consequently, her performance suffered, and she eventually found herself in the second-to-last rank position, which was a source of deep embarrassment. The school’s practice of publicly displaying everyone’s rank positions intensified Salewa’s shame. She internalized the blame, believing that her lack of sufficient studying or inherent abilities led to her low rank. She said:

I remember that I used to do very well in terms of being one of the 1st to 10th in the class in primary school, and that was good. Now, I feel like when I got to secondary school, the game changed in the sense that I went to a boarding school. There wasn’t any mom or dad guiding me, telling me to read my books, and I didn’t.

I remember having extra coaching in primary school, but when I went to secondary school, I remember having an unpleasant feeling when it’s time for exams because I was always worried about how I would perform.

I particularly remember that the ranking system in the first secondary school I attended was particularly terrible because I remember that there were three categories of classes.

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The first one was distinction class. Everybody knows that these are the smart ones, the really, really intelligent ones, the ones between, I don’t know, 1st to 20th. The second one is the credit class, which was where the average students fell.

The third one is the special class. Everybody knows special means you were part of the bottom part of the of the of the of your school year’s ranking.

So if, for a particular term, you are in distinction class, you best believe if you’re not studying or straightening your belt, you can easily move from distinction class to credit class, and you can easily move from distinction class to special class in which everybody knows that you didn’t do very well in your tests.

That’s one thing I remember that was brutal because I remember feeling a bit of shame and being moved a lot to the special class because I wasn’t doing very well a lot of the time. I remember being in the special class because, personally, I don’t think that I was tested as a child.

It was a time of horror knowing my scores. I feel like I had a bit of a learning disability. I struggled with sitting still; I feel like I struggled to settle down and study. So, a lot of the time, I found myself in special class because of my low ranks, and I felt a bit of shame and stigma to that. Like, ohh, I wasn’t very clever.

I remember one experience where I was second to the last in the class, and Oh my God it was the worst break from boarding house because my mom was embarrassed.

ohh, I remembered a very brutal part of that system as well. So, they would paste your scores on the door so everybody would see who came first and who came last.

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And I remember that particular experience where I came second to the last and everybody knew that I was second to the last. And it was embarrassing. I was embarrassed.

So, there were a lot of punishments and name-calling that came as a result of this. There was also a lot of self-blame that came from that ranking. I didn’t study enough. I’m not good enough. It was me, me, me. I always felt that it was my fault that I didn’t study enough.

***Approach to Learning***

*“I’m not proud to say this. I’m actually really embarrassed to admit it. But I cheated constantly between my SS1 and SS3.”*

Salewa revealed a secret: she had resorted to cheating numerous times during assessments. She confessed that her poor performance in tests had led her to believe that she was incapable of doing well. Frustrated and desperate, she saw cheating as her only way out. It seemed that everyone around her placed an excessive emphasis on test scores, leaving her feeling helpless and trapped. To her dismay, she noticed that even some teachers supported and facilitated cheating among both high-achieving and struggling students. This unfortunate reality further highlighted the lack of faith that even educators had in their students’ abilities. She said:

I’m not proud to share this. I totally forgot this when I was talking to you the first time, but during my reflection, I remembered this. I’m not proud to say, but I think that, actually, it’s not that I think; I know for a fact that cheating was major in that particular school. Definitely, if you’re cheating, you’re not learning. And I remember that I did it. I’m not proud to say this. I’m actually really embarrassed to admit it. But I cheated constantly between my SS1 and SS3. Well, at least in some exams. I did not entirely

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cheat. There was somewhere, obviously, I did it by myself. Although I did get caught once, and I got slapped by a teacher for cheating, I just only got better at it.

I remember even cheating on my JAMB exam. I remember paying someone for that. I’m not proud of paying to cheat, but it was all about the scores. Actually, I did not do that test based on my knowledge, none of it. I literally copied what I was given. And it’s not as if I scored the highest mark. There was a way to make it look believable, and my parents were very proud that I passed my JAMB.

In my final exams in secondary when completing WAEC, some of the teachers would take the exam questions, work it out, and give us the answer in the exam hall. I think there was some form of bribery and corruption going on there. I remember reading a novel during my exams instead of studying. I remember reading the novel and not reading at all for that exam.

But yeah, everybody got and used the answers that the teachers worked out, including the top-ranking student. In my opinion, everybody got it, but I’m inclined to say most people got it, but those who got their first were those who were paying the teachers.

So, my parents paid for an extra lesson, not knowingly, but as in in terms of the cheating. They paid for extra lessons for my math teacher. So, I used to go after school when some of my mates were in the hostel doing other things; I’d go for extra lessons. And she actually did coach us, but that then gave me the privilege to get the answers to the math exams earlier than the rest. And I think I scored a B, and I’m not proud of that at all.

I think that the teachers did this to increase the rating of the school. So ohh, this school

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got, it’s all about ranking. This school got the highest-scoring students in the state. That’s what I think was the motive.

So, number one, the first thing that came to my mind was, oh God, thank God. At that point, I’ll be honest with you. Thank God I’m not going to fail this. And my parents don’t need to find out about this. And I would get into good universities. I think that’s all I thought about during that time; thank God there’s a way because I didn’t have a very good record of testing well in my secondary school years. I was very worried because you get a terrible score in your secondary school exams, and you are left with the least of the least schools. I don’t even think anywhere would take you if you have terrible scores, and you might have to either repeat the class or go to another school and complete your final exams.

The idea of repeating that class was too shameful. I was definitely not doing that. I

wasn’t; my mindset wasn’t to do that. I think I was just like thank God my parents are not going to be ashamed of me because I might have failed.

Looking back now, I felt that it was disgusting because that is not what you should be teaching. That shouldn’t be your focus at school.

We were paying almost half a million naira back then for that school, which was supposed to be the top private school in the city. I don’t believe that they should be encouraging cheating, and if that school was doing it, there were other schools that were definitely doing it as well. Looking back now, I think it’s disgusting.

The messaging is that the school didn’t even believe in their own students; otherwise, that wouldn’t have happened. However, whether the principal of the school knew about that, I

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don’t know. The motive for the teachers, I suspect, might also be if you’re not teaching properly or if you’re teaching properly, why are your students failing? So, it might not have been the school in general encouraging such practice. It might have been the teachers who did that illegally or in a sneaky way to ensure they didn’t get sacked or to earn a bonus.

So, if you ask me questions about what I learned, then I don’t remember anything.

I was saying to myself I don’t remember anything from geography, from biology. Maybe a few things stuck because you have to learn that in your practical life. But in terms of the actual learning what I did, and the topics that I did, I don’t remember because the focus was not on learning. I will tell you that the focus was never on learning.

***Parent***

*“I took the rat poison on the floor, and I said I was going to kill myself.”*

Salewa endured constant name-calling and endured physical punishments whenever she brought home a lower-class rank. It seemed that her mother’s love and affection were contingent upon her academic performance, as measured by her rank. The unfair treatment she received from her parents due to her rank left her feeling like a disappointment. This overwhelming sense of disappointment led her to the brink of despair, and she found herself on the verge of contemplating suicide. She said:

Another thing that is in my earliest memory is being afraid and terrified that my parents would come and pick me up after my boarding experience for that term and find out that I was at the bottom of the class. Because it was a Catholic school as well, I remember going into the, the Chapel and praying. There was a rumor that said that there’s these

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little hearts thing in the middle of the Chapel right at the altar in which they said if you ask Virgin Mary to pray for you to Jesus, that it would favor you when your parents find out that you didn’t get a good score. So, I remember being terrified like, Oh my God. I’m gonna lose my privileges.”

Because I was in this special class and my mom would not be happy with me.

I think it’s OK. I feel OK telling you about that particular incident. I remember as a 12

going on 13-years-old. My mom got a cook and I remember her asking the cook to come

to the house. She told her to make a bowl of chicken Stew, a common Nigerian dish. And

I think that she mentioned in front of me saying to the cook that please pack up the Stew

left because Salewa eats a lot and she’s going to eat all of the food. And I remember for

some reason being really angry that why did she say that? That was so embarrassing.

Why would she say that somebody I don’t know, and why would you say I’m gonna eat

everything? Why would you?

And I think unknowingly, I hissed.

And you as a Nigerian girl, know that there’s no way your mother, your Yoruba mother, would take you hissing lightly. It is the worst thing you’d ever do to hiss at your mother. To hiss at your mother or to bombastic side. I think it was both of the two that I did. And oh, no, worst decision ever.

She took me to the room and spanked me good. And I remember feeling so angry and frustrated and feeling so deflated. With all of the things going on in my head at that time, I took the rat poison on the floor, and I said I was going to kill myself, but then, I thought, oh, rat poison might be bitter. So, I took a pack of paracetamol. It was time for me to go

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for my extra summer camp, and I was like, I’m going to take this pack of paracetamol and die. That’s what I wanted to do. I wanted to kill myself. I didn’t even realize that what I was doing was suicide. I didn’t realize as a Christian, it meant I would go to hell. So, I remember saying it so casually in the car what I was planning to do., I didn’t think that there was anything bad. I just thought that you know what, I’m just gonna take my myself out of this place, out of her life. I don’t want to be around her because I already viewed her as a monster, and we had a very rocky relationship back then.

And one of my friends told me, do you know that if you kill yourself, you’re going to go to hell?

And I’m like, what, go to hell? No! And that’s what stopped me from following through with it. I did not want to go to hell.

But looking back at that, that is classic depression right there. I was depressed as a child. I still had to be on medication as an adult. Whether it’s linked, I don’t know.”

But looking at myself back then and the pressure that I had, most especially the thing that always caused the major problem with myself and my mom was school. It was always school. It was always my result. It was always her calling her cousin saying I don’t know what is wrong with this child, she ranked so low in her class. That’s all I remember during that time, me just being a disappointment to my parents, not achieving what I should have been achieving as a child. And it’s horrible.

And looking back now, I was depressed as a child, and being an adult now, looking back, that was sad. I can’t imagine seeing my child be so pressured in that way.

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I wouldn’t put that pressure on my mom; it was all she knew. That’s the system she grew up in as well. But thank God for exposure and thank God for your study reviewing what the system is about because I want to believe that so many people have so many experiences with class ranking.

***Teachers***

Salewa felt a sense of disappointment as she reflected on her teachers’ apparent lack of concern for her academic standing. Throughout her time in school, she couldn’t recall a single instance where they had tried to help her improve or even discuss her low ranking. She said *“The teachers come in, did their jobs, and left. They didn’t care that much, to be honest. They know their top students and ones who are at the bottom of the class.”*

***Peers***

Salewa explained that there existed a pervasive culture among students wherein they assessed and categorized each other solely based on their rank positions. She elaborated on the existence of three distinct leagues of students within this system. The first league comprised the students who were perceived as brilliant students, those who consistently ranked at the top of the class. The second league consisted of average students, those who found themselves in the middle of the class ranking. Lastly, there was a league for those who struggled academically, the students who consistently found themselves at the bottom of the class. She said:

There was a reputation that these are the top students, and these are the clever ones. These are the ones who will probably go into science class because they are so smart. There was a league of the average students who were in commercial class and there was a

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league of those that did not do that great and they were in arts class. So, in terms of how my mates saw me, it was not particular to me.

***Subject Concentration (Transitioning from JSS 3 to SS1)***

*“I don’t think there was anybody that said you must go to commercial class, but I feel like because of the ranking that was the only place that there was space for me.”*

Salewa believed that while course concentrations are meant to be chosen based on a student’s interests, it’s common for students to use the ranking system as a determining factor for their own concentration choice. And she, too, fell into that pattern. She said:

Science class and commercial class and art class is not about the ranking, it shouldn’t be about the ranking, it should be because of your interest. However, if you are low on the scoring there’s no way with your score and being at the bottom of the class you would end up in science class. There were really clever ones who were actually in commercial class and art class, but everybody knew that the majority of those people who fall in art class are those ones who are not that high of the ranking.

I actually wanted to be a doctor as a child. I always thought that I wanted to be a doctor, but I wasn’t good in my sciences. So, I automatically did not choose science. Looking back at it, that really changed the course of my life because I literally thought that I was going to be a doctor but because of not ranking high in class, I chose not to pursue science.

I ended up being in commercial class and to be honest for the longest time I never really wanted knew what I wanted to do because all my childhood I had already said ohh, I wanted to be a doctor.

I wanted to be a doctor but then my reality and my dream clashed, and it was obvious that

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there was no way I could be a doctor if I’m not in the science class. I felt sad. I don’t think there was anybody that said you must go to commercial class, but I feel like because of the ranking that was the only place that there was space for me.

***Transition into Higher Education***

*“The focus was on the right thing; it was on what learning rather than ranking or fixation on the ranking.”*

Salewa’s transition to university proved to be a breath of fresh air. Unlike her previous academic journey, where testing and class rankings were the norm, she now found herself in an educational system that emphasized learning rather than competition. Of course, there were challenges to overcome as she adjusted to the new environment after moving to the United Kingdom, but overall, Salewa managed to navigate her way successfully. As her university journey progressed, Salewa noticed a significant shift in her relationship with her mother. The pressure to constantly achieve high rankings was no longer a factor, and instead, her success was measured by her ability to progress through the different levels of the university. This change allowed Salewa to focus on her own personal growth and development rather than simply striving for external validation. During her secondary school years, Salewa had aspired to become a doctor. However, the constant low rankings had deterred her from pursuing science as a concentration. But now, in this new academic environment where she felt liberated to explore new avenues, Salewa did not consider pursuing medicine again. She never attempted to follow her original career interest. She said:

I definitely did good. I was majorly in distinctions when I moved here. It was a bit tough at the beginning because I need to get used to the education system, and getting used to how things are done.

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However, there was more focus on assignments and research, it may be due to the particular course that I did. But in terms of doing the assignments, doing the research, getting reports out, I was in distinction.

Although, I still struggled in some of the courses that had exams. I don’t think I test good. If you speak to me generally and try to understand what I know about a topic, I can talk up a storm. I can convince you and explain what I know. I am gingered to do that, rather than sitting in an exam hall and writing what I know.

But I definitely did better in uni and my parents were a lot happier. My mom was very proud of me because I was a distinction student and as she would report me back then that I didn’t do very well is the same way she would tell all the aunties and uncles and everybody that cares to listen that Salewa is scoring distinctions.

She was very proud to share that information as well. And to be honest my relationship, my mom I think to a degree and improved, in terms of the focus was not on the fact that oh she’s the last or she did badly. It was just Oh, are doing good enough.

The focus was on the right thing, it was on what learning rather than ranking or fixation on the ranking. I was then able to settle and finally be like, ok, this is what works for me. I tried some courses. I did psychology, didn’t do very well but I didn’t feel bad that I didn’t do very well because I knew that OK that wasn’t for me. I wanted to try something else and go on a different path. So, there wasn’t any distraction in what I wanted to do at that point.

I definitely felt better about myself in terms of ohh, So I’m not all bad and I know that it

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really sounds really dramatic, but it actually felt like I did something for myself. I was proud of myself.

However, I’m not really sure of what limited me to actually not going back to revisiting my interest of pursing medicine. I think it was a mental thing because I don’t think there was anything actually stopping me. I’ve never actually thought about that before. I don’t think there was anything that stopped me from taking biology in A level to actually pursue being a doctor. I think I just assumed that I couldn’t do it. That hasn’t crossed my mind. I think I just assumed that I wasn’t good at it. So, what is the point of going back to something I’ve already tried, and I don’t know how to do properly. I actually didn’t think that it was a new start, a fresh start.

I think because of the assumption that I’m not good in sciences, I just didn’t bother going back in. I was already on this track that is safe. The decision to do business management arose become I could not be a doctor. So, what else can I hide under and just keep going.

***Career***

*“There’s a bit of regret there because if I had followed the path that I think I wanted to follow, I think would feel more fulfilled.”*

After completing her Bachelor of Arts in Business Management, Salewa ventured into the world of Project Management. Although she previously worked as a PMO Analyst, she finds herself unemployed at the moment. As she reflects on her career choices, she realizes a lack of passion for the path she has chosen and doubts whether she will ever find that passion. Regret starts to creep in as Salewa realizes she should have pursued a career that aligned with her natural inclination to care for others. She firmly believes that had she chosen a path that

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resonated with her interests and passions, she would have a greater sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in her life. She said:

I think that I think that there’s a bit of regret, I would say, because at the end of the day, like I mentioned even before I said anything, you know in your interview that I don’t think I’m enjoying my role. It’s, but it’s paying bills, or it’s what we pay the bills.

I think that as I’ve grown, I’m 32 and you know, you, you tend to, especially through your children’s eyes, you know, seeing them have and you know, an opportunity, this whole new world that they could explore and choose their path.

I think there’s a bit of regret because in even what I do, I have realized that I’m a person who actually likes to care for people, who actually likes to be in the position of a doctor. It’s not even just about treating or knowing how to. I have seen myself or I’ve realized that I’m the kind of person who likes to be in a position to help, to care for. I’m not saying that you don’t get that position in, in, in in in other areas of your life. But I would have loved to make a living based on my true passion. And I don’t think right now I’m in what I would call a true passion of helping and getting those personal feelings of achieving something. I don’t think I have that in my role, and I don’t think I would ever have that in my role.

And there’s a bit of regret there because if I had followed the path that I think I wanted to follow, I think would feel more fulfilled. I don’t think that I have that at the moment, and I don’t think I would have that in the role that I’m currently in.

I will tell you why I say that. There was a time when I was in uni, and I worked as a healthcare assistant, and it was quite interesting because I did that to earn some money

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while I was in university but back then if you had asked me when I was working there, I could do that for free. Because it was somewhat close to what I actually wanted to do as a child. I wanted to care for people, and I enjoyed that feeling. So, there’s a bit of regret towards that change of course due to the ranking.

I wish that things were not the way they were. I wish that it was in a way where the focus was on encouraging children to follow their natural path as to what they want to do. And I see my child being in that position because the focus is on the right place, they’re learning their interest what they want to do what they’re interested in what they want to see what they want to become.

I still have times when I catch myself being very overcritical about myself. I still feel like, to a degree, I have some degree of depression in my life right now, in other areas of my life. Why is this happening to me? I’m out of a job. I was made redundant, and I still had that conversation with my partner, with my husband. Why am I not performing good? Why am I not the best? Why are people not choosing me to work?

I still have that over-critical mentality about myself. Why have I still been looking for a job for three months? I remember saying I’m ashamed.

Why should you be ashamed because you haven’t gotten a job? It’s just not the right time. Why should I be feeling like I failed? Because I don’t have a job? It’s not my fault. I am applying. I’m doing everything I should, but I can’t push the feeling away.

***Reflection- Positive Note***

*“And I see myself going back to the drawing board and finding a way to achieve self-fulfillment.”*

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Although Salewa is not content with her current career path, she remains hopeful that one day she will conduct a comprehensive self-evaluation to examine different facets of her life. Her ultimate goal is to realign herself and pursue a path that brings her complete satisfaction and fulfillment. Salewa acknowledges her limitations, yet firmly believes that her potential is boundless. With dedication and perseverance, she is determined to evolve into a woman who is genuinely happy and fulfilled. She said:

Thank God for the environment that I’m in right now. I don’t feel that limited anymore. Here, even if you get a degree, it’s your experience that they’re looking for what you’ve actually done. It’s not whether you scored first class.

My ability is not just based on the course that I did, it’s a steppingstone. It’s part of my story. It’s part of my experience. It’s part of what they used to gauge if you’re suitable for a role, but it doesn’t stand there, it doesn’t stay there.

I don’t think that I would want to be a doctor, but I see myself reevaluating where I am, and whether or not I am doing what makes me happy. And I see myself going back to the drawing board and finding a way to achieve self-fulfillment.

There’s a degree of box still boxing myself, but I know that I can easily lift up those barriers and say, look, I know that this is your comfort zone to gauge yourself and sit in that box. I know that I can take those barriers off and say look, OK, yes, but this is what I could do, you know, this is what I can still do, right.

***Meaning Formed from Experiences with Class Ranking***

*“It was a horrible time for me.”*

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Salewa’s perspective on class ranking is that it proved to be a hindrance throughout her academic journey, imposing unnecessary restrictions. She firmly believes that her experience with class ranking was predominantly unfavorable, as it diverted the focus from genuine learning. In Salewa’s eyes, the emphasis on ranking undermined the acknowledgment of students’ potential and individual talents. She argues that class ranking instills an unhealthy self-criticism in students, leading to a detrimental influence on their academic choices and decisions. She said:

It doesn’t work. I can’t say about anybody else, and it did not work for me. It did not work for me. It’s created this limitation for me. It did not work for me as a child. It did not work. It was not a good experience for me, and I feel like I could have achieved a lot more if the focus was on me as a child and my learning. And I say this very confidently because I see how in the UK with my child again, you know, I’m a mom, I will always make that reference to my child, you know, and just seeing how they are growing up much more different from how I was, how I was raised.

I feel like a lot of a lot of potential was missed back then and now, yes, I’m an adult and I can change the course of things. I think that that would have made a lot of decisions I’ve made in life a lot easier and even just the mentality of what I can do and what I can’t do, you know, being over critical of myself even though I know I’m doing the best that I can. I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t want to put my child in that situation. I wouldn’t want to go back to that situation. It was a horrible time for me.

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**Narrative 4: Funke’s Story**

***Background***

Funke was born in Lagos, Nigeria, but her journey began when she moved to Abuja at the age of 4. It was in Abuja where she completed her primary and secondary education, shaping the foundation of her academic endeavors. After graduating secondary school, Funke relocated to Canada, where she pursued her higher education. She eventually achieved a bachelor’s degree in labor studies. Equipped with her newfound knowledge and skills, Funke carved a path for herself in the field of Human Resources and works as an HR professional.

***Understanding of Class Ranking***

Funke’s understanding of class ranking is that it is a practice used in Nigerian primary and secondary schools to evaluate students’ academic performance in relation to their peers. However, she questions the purpose of class ranking and its effectiveness in motivating students. In her opinion, class ranking can have adverse effects on both high-ranking and low-ranking students. For high-ranking students, the pressure to maintain their position at the top of the class can be overwhelming. This constant need for validation may hinder their self-perception and undermine the value of their hard work. On the other hand, low-ranking students who consistently receive low rankings may become disheartened and lose interest in putting effort into their academics. She said:

I don’t know why they use it. Maybe they need to readdress the whole class ranking situation because it doesn’t really encourage people. Especially when you’re like the last three or the last five, you could be the top-ranked student, and it could still have some sort of negative impact on you because it might force you to feel like you have to keep

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that first place. And then, if by any chance you know you get second or third place, then it diminishes the person that you are or discredits the work that you’re doing. So that’s my take. I don’t think it’s an effective practice to assess students, and I don’t think it provides that opportunity for people to do better. I had friends that would usually come like last three or last five, but they just didn’t care because that’s what they were. They were used to it.

***Critical Story***

*“I always saw myself as an average student because I never came 1st, 2nd, or 3rd and just never thought I was that smart.”*

Throughout her primary and secondary education, Funker consistently found herself in the middle of her class rankings. However, she recalls her primary school years with fondness, as she was more focused on the joy of learning rather than the pressure of being ranked. Back then, she had access to valuable resources that greatly assisted her in her studies. But when she transitioned to boarding school for secondary education, everything changed. The resources she once relied on were no longer available to her, and she began to struggle academically. Suddenly, the emphasis on class ranks became more prominent. It was during this time that Funker started seeing herself as an average student and approached her studies with that mindset. Despite her diligent efforts, her rank within the class remained consistently in the middle. As a result, she stopped putting in the effort to truly understand the subjects; instead, she aimed to pass and move on to the next stage. Her secondary school had the practice of publicly displaying students’ rankings, which she found unnecessary and unpleasant. It only served to bring her shame whenever others caught a glimpse of her position in the class rankings. She said:

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Primary school was a lot better, and I just didn’t pay attention to the class ranking. It could be just the innocence of being that young, and you have lesson teachers teaching you what to do, how to solve math, how to write English, and things like that. So, I had that privilege—that extra privilege. But in secondary school, you don’t have that. It’s boarding school. You’re in, you’re out.

In secondary school, I was an average student. I’ll usually rank 8th, 9th, 10th, and sometimes, if I’m having a bad semester, 12th or 13th. And in hindsight, I would say I was just focused on passing. I was just focused on doing average work. That was literally my focus. I wasn’t trying to understand, I just wanted to pass.

“I tried to put in effort, but it won’t change. Like every time I study, I study to try my best to pass. It just ends up being that average. I don’t know what the special thing is that the people who came 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, did. But it just ended up being that I would always just sort of stay around the middle. So, I just got used to it, where it was almost like I was studying to just maintain my average place in the class.”

I always saw myself as an average student because I never came 1st, 2nd, or 3rd and just never thought I was that smart. I feel like that sort of went into university as well. I just never saw myself that way.

I always felt anxious, especially when some of those class rankings were posted on the board. I don’t know why they had to do that. I don’t know what the purpose of that was, but it’s like everyone can see where you’re ranked in class.

Back then, I didn’t know I was experiencing anxiety because I didn’t know what anxiety was. But when I look back, I’m like, Yeah, that was like a whole anxiety experience.

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I think I was in SS2, and we had a final exam where they told us that they were going to post the results before they gave us the official results. You’re just going to post the ranking on the board. And I just remember seeing my name and, once again, just being in that average spot, and then, you know, people that came first, second, and third. It’s like this egoistic thing going on. And then you just feel like, oh yeah, OK, oh well, I don’t know. There’s nothing to celebrate here. Let me just keep going.

But it was a little bit shameful as well because other people could see where I was ranked. And it wasn’t just like my class. It was the entire school as well. When I look back, I’m like, Yeah, that’s unnecessary. It’s unnecessary to post it for everyone to see. It’s one thing if I’m taking my report card home and I see, oh, I’m like 8th in a class of like 15th or 20th, I know I can keep that to myself, but then having to post it for everyone to see it’s unnecessary.

***Parent***

*"Well, the person that came 1st doesn’t have two heads.”*

Funke admitted that a sense of fear and anxiety would always grip her whenever the time came to bring her report card home. She was acutely aware that her parents, particularly her father, would often react unfavorably. She said:

My mom was OK. She’s not so hard when it comes to things like that. Just do your best; that’s her mindset. My dad, on the other hand, because of his own upbringing, places education on a very high pedestal. So, I don’t think he was content, let me put it that way. He was just not content and always thought I could do better. And I will always hear comments like, "Well, the person that came 1st doesn’t have two heads" or "How come

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you cannot come 1st, 2nd, or 3rd." Once again, anxiety! So, when I get the report card, I am always afraid to take it home because, once again, it’s the constant name-calling.

***Peers***

Funke was naturally drawn to students who had similar academic rankings as her. These were the individuals she primarily interacted with during her educational journey. She made it clear that she didn’t really concern herself with how her peers viewed her. She said:

I mean, the people that I hung out with, they were usually around the same ranking, like not so far from each other. So, we’ll just maybe laugh about it. I did not pay attention to anyone’s impression of me.

***Teachers***

According to Funke, it was a frequent occurrence for teachers to show preference towards the highest achieving students or those who excelled in their subjects. She said:

Teachers were typically nicer to the people who were doing well in the class or in their subject. That’s what I found. At least the French teacher—I remember her. She was always nice and warm to me, and she was not that way too many of the other students in the class. But I noticed that it was a trend among all other teachers as well. For example, if they ask questions, they usually want to point out to the person that they favor to answer the question, or if that person raises their hand, it is usually them that would go first. They would also give less punishment to those students as well.

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***Subject Concentration (Transitioning from JSS3 to SS1)***

When Funke made the transition from junior secondary school to senior secondary school, she decided to focus her studies on the arts. This choice stemmed from her lack of interest in science. She said:

I was an Arts student, I just remember I didn’t have any interest in chemistry, biology, or physics. I just didn’t have any desire for those core science courses. I didn’t have any desire to do anything in the future regarding that. So, I just never went that route. There was something in particular about it that wasn’t interesting at the time.

***Approach to Learning***

Throughout her years in primary and secondary education, Funke had adopted a rather passive approach to learning, relying solely on memorization and regurgitation. Understanding and truly grasping the learning content seemed to take a backseat in her educational journey.

Consequently, much of what she had learned during her formative years seemed to slip away almost as soon as it had been acquired, leaving her with little retention. Unfortunately, this approach continued to prevail throughout her higher education as well. She said:

I memorized to pass; I did not memorize to take in any information. I have no frosty clue what biology is about. I would cram to pass, and once that term is done, it’s out of my brain. After the exam, I don’t know what I read; I just want to pass. That’s literally my focus. I wasn’t trying to understand; I just wanted to pass. And that’s just how I coped until I went to university. And when I got into university, I did the same thing. But by like my third year, I’m like, It’s not possible. You can’t cram all this information to pass. So, you have to actually study, join the groups, study every week, and things like that.

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***Transition into Higher Education- Turning Point***

*“I crammed in uni because that’s all I knew. I didn’t know any other way.”*

As Funke embarked on her university journey, she held onto the belief that she was just an average student lacking in intelligence. Throughout her first semester and into her third year, her academic performance suffered greatly because she relied solely on cramming and regurgitating information. This strategy had served her somewhat well in primary and secondary school, but it was failing her in the university setting. Faced with the harsh reality of potential expulsion due to her poor grades, Funke was forced to search for a new approach. Determined to turn things around, Funke made a conscious decision to approach her studies with more purpose and intention. Instead of simply memorizing facts, she focused on truly understanding the material. To her surprise, this shift in mindset started yielding positive results. With each passing day, Funke felt herself improving as she delved deeper into the subject matter and sought to comprehend it rather than just mindlessly regurgitate it. She said:

I also saw myself as an average student because I never came 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in my class, and just never thought I was that smart. That carried on into university as well. I just never saw myself as more than average.

In my first semester in uni, I failed. I did not do well because I was in an environment where it was like, oh wow, I can party. I’m on my own. I can do this. So, I didn’t take anything seriously. Honestly, I missed classes. I’ll go here and there. I just wanted to be with people. I just didn’t understand how important it was to be in university. Like the opportunity I had, it just didn’t make sense to me. So, when it’s time for an exam, I cram

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to pass. But clearly, that did not work. I crammed in uni because that’s all I knew. I didn’t know any other way.

However, it got to the point where I was like, I can’t cram anymore to pass exams. This is not working. This happened in my third year. It happened when I noticed that I was going down a very scary hole. I had to buckle up. When you are threatened with getting kicked out. That was the threat I was getting. So, I had to buckle up and just get my act together and be in class.

When I noticed that I was involved in class doing what I was supposed to do, I was like, oh, OK, I can actually get decent grades. So yeah, that was what changed my mind. I started attending classes and taking notes. I made the most out of just talking to other people. I was in the library. I just remember being in the library a lot. So, it’s just doing what I was supposed to do—keeping up with my reading. It’s not leaving 10 weeks of reading until it’s closer to exam time.

In university, you actually have to study to understand what you’re doing because, eventually, you’re going to go work in that field. So, in my 3rd year, I actually started to try to understand what they were teaching me, and I found that when I did that when it was time to study for an exam, I understood what I was reading as opposed to just trying to cram an entire textbook just to pass the exam.

***Career***

*“In my third year, I switched.”*

Funke initially pursued Business Administration and Economics for her higher education, mainly because she was unsure about her career path. However, she soon realized that she was

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struggling to excel in this field due to the lack of passion. It was during her third year that she began adopting a new approach to learning, one that emphasized understanding. This newfound perspective prompted her to reevaluate her current education, and she came to the conclusion that her major did not ignite any passion within her. But then, something interesting happened. As Funke started taking HR-related courses, she found herself deeply engrossed in the subject matter. The learning process became enjoyable, almost like a fascinating journey rather than a tedious task. It was in this realization that she discovered her true calling – she wanted to be in the HR field. With this newfound clarity, Funke made a bold decision. She decided to change her major to Labor Studies, even though it meant extending her time at university by an extra year. The prospect of spending more time studying a subject she was genuinely passionate about outweighed any concerns about the additional time investment. And so, Funke embarked on a new academic journey, driven by her passion for HR. She knew that when she pursued a subject that truly interested her, learning became a joyous experience rather than a burden. Ultimately, she successfully graduated with a degree in labor studies and now thrives as an HR professional. She said:

I initially started studying business admin and economics, which was suggested by my dad. Normally, you know what you want to do, but I had no idea what I wanted to do. They chose the course for me, and I just went to school for it. But by the time I took some courses, in my 3rd, and 4th years, I began to like the idea of working in HR. I feel like I can relate to people. I can talk to people. I liked the HR courses I took. I did well in those courses. I just liked the discipline of HR. I would say it’s the HR-related courses that I took that sparked that for me for sure.

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But in my third year, I switched. That’s when I switched to labor studies, which is a part

of HR. I could transfer some of my courses into that program as well. I could have

graduated at 20, but I graduated at 21 because I had to take that extra year.

I was doing so well in the course; I liked the course. I enjoyed reading those HR-related

materials and histories about employment and things like that.

It wasn’t hard, it felt less of a chore. I looked forward to going to class, oddly enough. I

looked forward to reading the textbooks and things like that. So, I guess when you just

find something you like or that interests you, you want to learn more about it.

***Reflection***

*“That’s how I approach my work now. I do things afraid. Normally, I would not do things afraid back then because I’m just the average person. But now, if I see something and I know that it’s doable, even if it scares me to death, I’m gonna go ahead and do it. Because at the end of the day, if I don’t pass, this is not the end of the world. Or if I pass, good for me. That’s sort of where I’m at right now, right.”*

Despite Funke’s transformation in her approach to learning, where she became more focused

on pursuing her interests and understanding during her learning processes, her experience with

class ranking continued to affect her. She found herself avoiding tasks that she deemed

challenging, fearing failure. This fear spilled over into her work environment, causing her to

express apprehension whenever faced with tasks outside her comfort zone. However, through

years of gaining more experience and personal growth, Funke eventually managed to conquer

this fear. She said:

Ohh, I wouldn’t even try. For example, I had to write a very tough assessment at work. I

was afraid, and I was expressing my fear even to my manager. I couldn’t even envision

myself trying to do something that was outside of my comfort zone. If it’s hard, I just go

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in the other direction because I just saw myself as this average person. That’s how I thought, and even right after school, I still had that mindset.

But in the past few years, I’ve worked on myself, and I’m just at a place where you do it afraid, even if it scares you, as opposed to back then when I would just shy away from things that were scary. I would be scared of the workload itself. Or it could also be that I don’t want to feel shame. Yeah, there’s like this a little bit. Mostly shame because I’m probably just messing up. I think it was a level of insecurity that this whole class ranking system built up in me. So, I just wouldn’t try because I would rather not try. I don’t want to put myself to shame. I don’t want to. I just didn’t even think I had the capacity to do anything outside of my comfort zone.

What I experienced in my 3rd year in uni didn’t get me to where I am today. I would say maybe it was a foundation. It was a good foundation, but it wasn’t until I was 25. I’m 32 now, so it wasn’t until I was 25 that things really kicked in. Because I went to work for the federal government in Canada. So, I took a job that I did not want to work. But for some reason, I just saw it like, this is an entry for me to get to that HR job that I actually went to school for.

My grades were very, very average at university. I just thought, like, who’s gonna hire me with this grade? For crying out loud, let me just settle. I did call center jobs. I did odd jobs and things like that. But when I came to the government, I came in through a call center job I didn’t want to do. But when I came in, I said I could get there. I don’t know where it came from, but I can get there. And it took me, what about six years to get there just because there was just a shift where it’s like, OK, if I can get in the government, I

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can definitely get to where I need to be, OK.

After uni, my head definitely was getting on the correct path. Like I got really serious in my life. But often, I just saw myself as average. I don’t know how to explain it. Like I’m not there, I’m not, I’m not on the end of the spectrum. I’m just there, and I just saw my life as just average. There’s nothing special, there’s nothing horrible going on, just an average girl.

But by 30 or when I got a little bit serious and I pushed further and I was like, I can be above average. It’s possible, right.

Now, I would say that I’m just a firm believer that if you put your mind to it, you can accomplish what you’re trying to accomplish. Really and truly the sky is not the limit. That’s just sort of how I work now. That’s how I approach my work now, I do things afraid. Normally I would not do things afraid back then, because I’m just the average person. But now if I see something and I know that it’s doable, even if it scares me to death, I’m gonna go ahead and do it. Because at the end of the day, if I don’t pass, this is not the end of the world. Or if I pass, good for me. That’s sort of where I’m at right now, right.

***Meaning Formed from Experiences with Class Ranking***

*“Do I recommend it? No, I don’t recommend it at all.”*

Funke holds a generally negative view of class ranking, believing it has detrimental effects on students in various aspects, including how they are perceived and treated by others. Despite her own negative experience with class ranking, she finds a silver lining in the fact that overcoming her perception of being average allowed her to truly appreciate her own growth and

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potential. However, Funke does not endorse the use of class ranking. If it must be implemented, she suggests that students who rank low or fall in the middle should be provided with ample encouragement and recognition for their efforts, in order to prevent them from feeling defeated on their academic journey, as she once did. She said:

It’s a bad system, let’s just call it what it is. It’s a horrible, horrible system. It affects your life, and how people see you or how people talk to you. I had a bad experience. But in retrospect, it was good in the sense that it’s almost like you have to kind of walk through the fire to get to where you need to be. That’s sort of how I see it. Do I recommend it? No, I don’t recommend it at all. I saw myself as average for a while, and that was a bad experience, but now it’s almost like it has caused me to see that there’s a lot better than just average. It’s something along the lines of, you have to experience something bad to actually appreciate the good and know what good is.

What I’m trying to say is that encouragement should accompany ranks. You put in your best work, and then you got 8th in the class, but you did your best. Without encouragement, you just feel defeated, like the work you just put in is just garbage. So just encouragement, that’s what children need; that’s what people need. When you come into adulthood, it sort of affects you as well if you don’t have that support system from a young age. So, what would have really helped was if I had someone who encouraged me and acknowledged my efforts. I feel like that might even make me do better than I did the last time than just saying, I’m just going to cram and just get my pass and just move on with my life.

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So that is what I have learned. If anyone has gone through that system, you’re great, you’re amazing, you need the best. And, you know, yeah, and it really needs to change.

**Summary of Narrative Findings**

Before conducting interviews with each of the four participants, I had no prior knowledge of their personal encounters with class ranking. I was unaware of whether they consistently achieved high or low rankings throughout their academic journey, and I had no insights into the stories or perspectives they would share about their experiences with class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. The purpose of this study was not to advocate for or against class ranking, although the findings suggest that it may have negative consequences for students. Rather, the aim was to delve deeply into how individuals experience the practice and to what extent it impacts their lives. It sought to understand how participants themselves describe their encounters with class ranking and how they believe it has influenced their current circumstances. The stories shared by the participants accomplished just that. Through the interviews, they were able to reflect on their experiences with class ranking and provide significant narratives that shed light on how the use of this practice affected them during and beyond the immediate academic context, often in detrimental ways. The participants’ stories demonstrated that class ranking has an impact on students’ home lives, their transition into higher education, their career choices, their motivation, and various other aspects of their lives.

**Themes**

It became clear that while every participant shared their own distinct stories about class ranking, certain significant themes emerged from the four constructed narratives.

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***Theme 1: Class Ranking Impacted Self Perception***

One consistent aspect observed in all four participants’ experiences with class ranking was their association of rank positions with their academic abilities. This association had a noticeable impact on how they perceived themselves both within and outside of the learning environment. When ranked highly, participants tended to view themselves as intelligent and capable. Conversely, when ranked low, they often felt a sense of inadequacy and perceived themselves as not being academically gifted. This pattern suggests a link between class ranking and self-perception that influences participants’ beliefs regarding their intellectual capabilities. This was apparent when participants made statements such as:

**Dele**

*“I thought I was really smart. But when I came 9th, I thought I was really dumb.”*

**Bukola**

*“It played a huge role in the way I saw myself and in my understanding of how well I could assimilate or understand the things that was being taught.”*

**Salewa**

*“A lot of the time I found myself in special class because of my low ranks and I felt a bit of shame and stigma to that. Like ohh, I wasn’t very clever.”*

**Funke**

*“I always saw myself as an average student because I never came 1st, 2nd, or 3rd and just never thought I was that smart.”*

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***Theme 2: Focus is on Performance, not Learning***

All four participants provided accounts detailing how their primary and secondary education experiences were influenced by the emphasis on class ranking. They conveyed that their primary focus was not on learning but rather on attaining and maintaining high-rank positions through performance. All four participants expressed how the competitive nature of class ranking stifled their intrinsic motivation to acquire knowledge and develop a deep understanding of the subjects. Instead, their energies were directed toward performing well in assessments and exams in order to improve or secure their positions within the class. This preoccupation with rank position often led them to prioritize memorization and regurgitation of information rather than engaging in critical thinking and meaningful learning experiences. All four participants shared how they felt compelled to prioritize grades over genuine comprehension, as their class ranking became a defining metric of success and validation within their educational environment. In reflection, the participants expressed their concern about the long-term consequences of such an education system. They acknowledged the missed opportunities for personal development, intellectual curiosity, and a holistic approach to learning. This was apparent when participants made statements such as:

**Dele**

*“I needed to learn to know what I was doing. There was no ranking. It’s you against you. It’s you against your learning. In short, it was more of I just needed to be good. It wasn’t about coming 1st in class anymore. This is my profession now. I need to be good at it.”*

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**Bukola**

*“The way I approached learning is I would wait until it counts. So, am I gonna have a test? I would read before the test. Am I gonna have an exam? I would read before the exam.*

*Honestly, if I’m being asked questions afterward, I would space out because I was literally trying to grab all this knowledge, to pour it back out, to get that position, to get that grade. And then afterward, I wouldn’t exactly go back to it except I actually enjoyed the subject or the topic that I was looking at.”*

**Salewa**

*“It was not a good experience for me and what I feel like I could have achieved a lot more if the focus was on me as a child and my learning.”*

**Funke**

*“After the exam, I don’t know what I read; I just want to pass. That’s literally my focus. I wasn’t trying to understand; I just wanted to pass. And that’s just how I coped until I went to university. And when I got into university, I did the same thing.”*

***Theme 3: Teachers Favored Top-Ranking/High-Achieving Students***

Another important theme in participants’ stories is how teachers responded to students’ ranking positions. It was evident that some teachers displayed favoritism, showing positive attitudes towards high-ranking students while exhibiting negative attitudes towards lower-ranking students. This disparity in treatment based on academic achievement had a significant impact on the participant’s experiences in the classroom, which made them believe in not being treated fairly and not receiving equal opportunities for success in the classroom. This was apparent when participants made statements such as:

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**Dele**

*“I’m sure everybody knows this happens where you have teachers using the person who comes 1st as an example to shame the other kids or to talk down on them. That was pretty common.”*

**Bukola**

*“Also, they had nicknames for students that don’t do well. They didn’t treat them well at all. There was a clear difference in how the teachers saw students that do well and students that struggle. They automatically write them off, see them as delinquents., I didn’t want to be seen like that.”*

**Salewa**

“*The teachers come in, did their jobs and left. They didn’t care that much to be honest. They know their top students and ones who are at the bottom of the class.”*

**Funke**

*“Teachers were typically nicer to the people who were doing well in the class or in their subject.”*

***Theme 4: Undesirable Class Rank Led to Negative Responses from Parents***

All four participants in the study exhibited a common fear of taking their report cards home if they received low or lower-than-expected rankings. This fear was rooted in the negative responses they received from their parents in such situations. Participants shared the perception that their parents were not supportive or understanding, instead responding with disapproval and disappointment. This shared experience highlights the significance of parental reactions in shaping a child’s emotional response to academic performance. It underscores the need for

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supportive and constructive feedback from parents to foster a healthy academic environment.

Participants stated:

**Dele**

*“But the problem was my parents, my dad, especially my dad, he was not patient with people. He was not patient with me. I was, what, nine years old, and he was in his 40s. He wasn’t patient with us. He probably really didn’t know what to say, man, 1st and then 9th. He’s all of a sudden realizing that one of my kids is not so brilliant. And I guess he just didn’t know how to go about it. I can’t remember whether I got beaten up or I got punished. I don’t even remember what I remember is the fear.”*

**Bukola**

*“I changed my report because I knew that there was an expectation of me from my parents. They did a bit of comparing myself and my siblings, and I very much felt their likeness for me was tied to my abilities really with my academics. I felt very disappointed. I felt like some of the ways I was being treated were attributed to how well I was doing at school. Some of my siblings didn’t do very well, and I saw how they were being treated.”*

**Salewa**

*“The thing that always caused the major problem with myself and my mom was school. It was always school. It was always my result. It was always her calling her cousin saying I don’t know what is wrong with this child, she ranked so low in her class. That’s all I remember during that time, me just being a disappointment to my parents, not achieving what I should be achieving as*

1. *child, and it’s horrible.”*

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**Funke**

*“My dad, on the other hand, because of his own upbringing, he places education on a very high pedestal. So, I don’t think he was content; let me put it that way. He was just not content and always thought I could do better. And I will always hear comments like, "Well, the person that came 1st doesn’t have two heads" or "How come you cannot come 1st, 2nd, or 3rd." Once again, anxiety! So, when I get the report card, I am always afraid to take it home because, once again, it’s the constant name-calling.”*

***Theme 5: Focusing on Students Interest is Important***

Another theme that emerged from the narratives of all four participants is the link between personal interest and a positive learning experience. Each participant expresses that when they are engaged in the content and find it interesting, they have a more enjoyable and satisfying outlook on their learning experience. Furthermore, they demonstrate a heightened level of motivation and effort in gaining a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This theme highlights the significance of integrating personal interests and fostering an engaging learning environment to promote optimal learning outcomes. Participants stated:

**Dele**

*“I was always focused in his classes, and I always did well but I guess a lot of other subjects I was either not interested in or not motivated to like to learn.”*

**Bukola**

*“Honestly, if I’m being asked questions afterward, I would space out because I was literally, trying to grab all this knowledge, to pour it back out, to get that position, to get that grade. And*

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*then afterwards, I wouldn’t exactly go back to it except I actually enjoyed the subject or the topic that I was looking at.”*

**Funke**

*“It wasn’t hard, it felt less of a chore. I looked forward to going to class oddly enough. I looked forward to reading the textbooks and things like that. So, I guess when you just find something you like or that interests you, you want to learn more about it.”*

**Salewa**

*“I wish that things were not the way they were. I wish that it was in a way where the focus was on encouraging children to follow their natural path as to what they want to do. And I see my child being in that position because the focus is on the right place, they’re learning their interest what they want to do what they’re interested in what they want to see what they want to become.”*

**Chapter Four Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the research study. It critically presented the stories of all four participants, delving into their unique experiences and perspectives with the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. Each participant’s story is presented in a narrative that sheds light on specific aspects related to their experiences with class ranking. Additionally, the chapter presented the five themes that emerged from an examination of the participants’ stories. In the next chapter, I will engage in a discussion regarding the findings, explore the implications of the findings for academic and personal adjustments, discuss the research and practical impacts of the findings, provide some recommendations based on the findings, and present a final reflection and conclusion for the study.

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**CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND**

**CONCLUSION**

**Discussion**

My experiences with class ranking practices as a Nigerian student and teacher were what drove this study’s inquiry. Reflecting on my experiences with class ranking practices during my primary and secondary education, I realized how much a seemingly harmless practice had such a profound impact on me. It had a significant impact on how I approached learning and perceived myself in the context of being ranked and beyond. I really did not genuinely learn much during my primary and secondary schooling, as I was so focused on my performance that I was a passive learner. My goal was to prove that I was not a low-ranking student, not to be an engaged learner. I would avoid tasks that were challenging because of the fear of failing. For a while, I believed that it could not be the practice that was flawed because I was naïve, believing that if some students were excelling, it had to be me. I concluded I was the problem. My focus, then, became to find a way to cheat the practice. For instance, I would mainly engage or pay attention in the classroom when teachers identified or had discussions about specific areas of the learning content that would be assessed. When teachers provided clarity on what would be evaluated, I would begin cramming the learning content for those particular areas when it was time to study for the assessments. During this cramming process, I rarely put in any effort to truly understand and grasp the underlying concepts of the learning content. Instead, my main goal was to

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memorize as much information as possible in order to regurgitate it during the assessments. I believed that my performance on assessments depended on the amount of information I could regurgitate. This approach hindered my overall learning and comprehension of the subject matter. While it may have provided short-term benefits in terms of achieving desired grades, long-term retention and understanding of the material were often neglected.

Then I started teaching in Nigerian schools that used the same practice, and I saw my students exhibiting the same behaviors that I did when I was a student, and it became clear I truly needed to understand the nature of the practice, why Nigerian schools use it, and how Nigerian students experience and describe the impacts of the practice. However, combing through literature, I found nothing. No research was found that had looked much into the use of class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, and as a result, there is no knowledge in the extant literature that provides insights into how Nigerian students experience class ranking. This is what ignited this study and prompted the two research questions: “How do participants describe their experiences with the use of class ranking practices in their primary and secondary school years?” and “In what ways, if any, do experiences with class ranking impact participants’ identities?”

***Research Question 1***

*How do participants describe their experiences with the use of class ranking practices in their primary and secondary school years?*

Through the sociocultural theory lens, it became apparent that the utilization of class ranking had detrimental influence on social interactions within the learning environment. According to sociocultural theory, positive peer interaction is crucial for effective learning to

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take place (Lantolf, 2000; Pathan et al., 2018). Vygotsky (1962) also emphasizes the crucial role of positive social interactions in facilitating effective learning among students. According to Vygotsky (1962), learning is not an isolated process but rather a collaborative endeavor that takes place within a social context, where students learn best when they actively engage with both their peers and teachers. However, participants expressed how class ranking negatively influenced the dynamics between them and their peers. Dele recounted instances where he almost engaged in physical altercations with his peers due to his class ranking, while Bukola expressed feeling alienated by her peers who envied her and purposely avoided interacting with her in the classroom. In addition, participants also shared instances where class ranking influenced the dynamics between them and their teachers. Dele shared how his teacher publicly ridiculed him in front of the entire class because of his decline in rank.

On the other hand, Bukola received praise from her teacher for ranking at the top, but this success inadvertently led her to shame other students, leaving her feeling uneasy and self-conscious. Salewa shared that her teachers seemed indifferent to her poor performance and offered no assistance in improving it. Funke revealed that teachers displayed favoritism towards the top-ranking students, resulting in a less than favorable classroom atmosphere. The participants’ experiences with their teachers align with the findings of Elsner and Isphording (2017) and Elsner et al. (2021), which suggest that students with higher ranks tend to receive more support from their teachers. Collectively, these accounts from participants reveal that class ranking had a detrimental effect on their social interactions with both peers and teachers during their primary and secondary schooling.

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Viewed through the constructivist theory lens, the stories shared by the participants vividly highlight the significance of catering to students’ interests in order to foster effective and meaningful learning experiences. According to the constructivist theory, teachers must tailor their instruction to match the unique interests of each student (Shah, 2019). The narratives of all four participants demonstrate that when they lacked interest in a subject or topic, their academic performance suffered, and/or they struggled to engage in effective learning or derive meaningful experiences from their studies. Dele recounted how he excelled in subjects that captivated his interest while performing poorly in those that failed to engage him. Bukola admitted that only in subjects she found enjoyable did she invest the effort to truly comprehend the material; otherwise, she resorted to memorization and regurgitation, resulting in incomplete retention of the knowledge acquired. Funke, too, acknowledged that she memorized information to pass uninteresting subjects while eagerly delving deeper into subjects that captivated her curiosity. Salewa expressed regret for not being encouraged to pursue her passions in her educational journey, believing that doing so could have led her down a more fulfilling path in life. In sum, the accounts of all participants underscore the impact of interests on students’ classroom engagement and academic performance, as well as the need to address disinterest in order to promote effective and meaningful learning approaches. In addition, this study’s findings showed that when students have no interest in learning, they may still utilize learning approaches that improve their performance to improve or maintain their rankings, but this does not mean that they effectively learn or achieve meaningful learning experiences. This is also in line with the findings of Lujan and DiCarlo (2006) and Emaikwu (2014), who stressed the notion that increased performance or a high performance on assessments does not always imply effective

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learning has occurred in that students have achieved the learning objectives or obtained a deeper knowledge of the learning topic. It is, therefore, essential for educators and institutions to focus not only on facilitating performance improvement but also on fostering true understanding and engagement with the material. Prioritizing meaningful learning experiences instead of solely focusing on ranks or test scores will ultimately lead to more comprehensive and valuable educational outcomes.

The findings of this study shed light on an intriguing aspect of social comparison theory. The theory suggests that individuals have a natural tendency to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others, often resulting in competitive behavior (Festinger, 1954). This theory posits that when individuals directly compare themselves to others, it can stimulate a desire for self-improvement (Festinger, 1954). Additionally, the theory posits that individuals may be motivated to strive for similar levels of competence or success by observing others who possess desired qualities, skills, or achievements (Festinger, 1954). However, the findings of this study challenge the traditional assumptions of the theory and highlight the complexity of human motivations and self-evaluation processes. Contrary to expectations, this study reveals a surprising finding regarding the factors that influence students’ motivation to improve their class rank position and performance. Typically, it is presumed that individuals are primarily motivated to improve by comparing themselves to their peers (Festinger, 1954; Friend and Gilbert, 1973; Gruder, 1971). Participants indeed engaged in comparing their ranks to their peers, using this comparison as a means to evaluate their academic abilities, which aligns with Butler’s (1989) findings that students predominantly compare themselves to their peers to assess their relative ability. However, this direct social comparison was not the primary and only factor that

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influenced them to seek improvement in their performance or rank. Accounts from participants revealed that their response to receiving an undesirable rank position was either a motivation to improve or a demotivation to do so. Interestingly, this motivation was not solely and primarily influenced by them performing social comparisons with their peers but rather by other influential factors. Notably, the reactions of their parents and teachers to their rank positions played a significant role in influencing their motivation.

Participants’ parents’ knowledge of and responses to their class rank primarily had an impact on their motivation to want to improve their performance and rank. The findings of this research suggest that students’ motivation to improve performance and class rank is predominantly influenced by their parents’ awareness of their class rank position relative to their peers. Interestingly, it is not the mere parent’s awareness of the students’ class ranking that impacts the students’ motivation, but rather the reaction of the parents to this awareness. Specifically, when participants’ parents reacted negatively towards their class rank, it propelled them to strive for improvement. The desire to please their parents and receive favorable treatment from them became a significant driving force to enhance their rank and performance in class. This study challenges the assumption that peer comparison is the primary motivator for academic success. Instead, it highlights the influential role that parents’ awareness and reaction to their child’s class rank can have on their motivation. By recognizing the power of parental involvement in shaping their child’s drive for academic excellence, educators and parents alike can better support and encourage students in their educational pursuits.

Another factor that impacted participants’ drive to enhance their performance and class standing was the influence of their teachers. It was observed that negative reactions from

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teachers resulted in a decrease in motivation, while positive reactions had the opposite effect. However, when participants experienced a mixture of both negative and positive reactions from their teachers, it was found that the negative reactions had a more profound and influential effect on their overall motivation. This suggests that the power of negative teacher reactions should not be underestimated in shaping student motivation and performance.

Furthermore, this study also discovered that receiving a lower-class rank than expected challenged self-perceptions of academic abilities. This challenge, in turn, positively drove motivation to improve rank and performance. In this case, motivation was directed towards aligning self-perception of abilities with their rank positions or performance. The findings from this study also revealed that consistently receiving undesirable rank positions had a negative impact on motivation. This was especially true when the participants had put in considerable effort multiple times without any improvement in performance. As a result, this led to a state of learned helplessness, a severe form of disengagement where students attribute their academic failures to their fixed ability rather than their own actions or effort (Dweck, 1975; Yates, 2009).

***Research Question 2***

*In what ways, if any, do experiences with class ranking impact participants’ identities?* In the learning environment, students can have varied experiences that shape their

identity formation (Iwasa et al., 2022). In this context, identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves over time and in different contexts (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; van Hoof, 1999). One significant factor that can influence identities is the labels individuals receive from others, as it can have lasting effects on their self-perception and interactions with others (Iwasa et al., 2022). Research has shown that labeling can lead to stigmatization and influence how students

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are perceived by their peers (Goffman, 1959; Heward et al., 2018). One such labeling practice is class ranking, where students are categorized as top-ranking, middle-ranking, or low-ranking based on their academic performance. The findings from this study showed that participants internalized these ranking labels, which had a profound impact on their identity formation. The label of being a top-ranking student brought feelings of accomplishment and pride, shaping their self-perception as academically successful individuals. On the other hand, middle or low-ranking labels led to feelings of inadequacy and negatively impacted their sense of self-worth.

Identity is a lifelong process that begins in childhood, particularly during adolescence age, and then continues throughout an individual’s life (Erikson, 1968). The findings from this study showcased that experiences with class ranking impacted the identities formed and/or internalized by participants, and the identities formed evolved over time as they had new experiences. This is in line with the concept of narrative identity, which is an individual’s internalized, ever-changing life story that they construct by weaving together stories from their past, present, and future in order to give their lives cohesion, meaning, and purpose (Bauer et al., 2008; Kerr et al., 2019; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

For example, Dele had always considered himself to be a smart student until his rank dropped significantly. Suddenly, he began to see himself as dumb. However, when he took an external exam and excelled in it, his confidence in his intelligence was restored. Bukola, on the other hand, tied her identity to constantly ranking high in class. So, when her rank dropped, she experienced an identity crisis as her perception of herself did not align with who she believed she was. This led her to question her true identity. Salewa, who often found herself in a special class due to low rankings, struggled with seeing herself as clever. It wasn’t until her higher education

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that her perception began to shift, and she started to view herself as someone who was actually clever. Funke, however, never ranked at the top of her class during her primary and secondary education, causing her to perceive herself as average. This perception persisted throughout most of her higher education as well. It wasn’t until she reached the age of 30 and had undergone multiple life experiences that her perception of herself began to change. Finally, she started to consider herself better than average. This study’s findings highlight how participants’ class ranking had a significant impact on how they perceived themselves, both within the context of their rankings and beyond.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the profound influence that class ranking has on individuals’ identities and subsequent decisions and actions within the learning environment. As highlighted by Fauchart and Gruber (2011), individuals’ identities play a pivotal role in shaping their choices, behaviors, and overall approach to various situations. For instance, let us examine Salewa’s experience. Throughout her secondary school years, Salewa internalized the belief that she was not academically gifted. Consequently, when faced with the decision to choose a concentration in senior secondary education, Salewa disregarded her genuine interest in science and opted for commercial studies, aligning herself with her perceived lack of intellectual prowess. Similarly, due to her perception of being a poor test taker, Salewa resorted to cheating in order to pass assessments, a strategy she deemed necessary to compensate for her perceived academic shortcomings. Additionally, Funke’s story illustrates the impact of class ranking on students’ internalized identities. Identifying herself as an average student, Funke decided to diminish her efforts in the pursuit of knowledge. This perception of herself as someone with

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limited abilities led her to adopt a passive approach to learning, hindering her academic development.

These findings highlight the importance for educators and educational institutions to consider the potential consequences of labeling and ranking practices in the learning environment. By fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment, students can be encouraged to develop positive and multifaceted identities, beyond mere academic performance. This can help mitigate the negative effects of labeling and promote a more holistic approach to student growth and development.

***Groups 1 and 2***

I initially decided to explore the perceptions of two distinct groups of participants regarding the impact of class ranking. Specifically, I aimed to uncover any notable differences or similarities in their perspectives, especially in their transition from secondary to higher education. The first group consisted of participants who completed their primary, secondary, and higher education in Nigeria, while the second group comprised individuals who completed their primary and secondary education in Nigeria but their higher education in a Western country.

However, I quickly realized that each participant’s transition experiences into higher education were a deeply personal journey, characterized by individual stories and unique circumstances. Therefore, I made a conscious choice to present each story independently, avoiding any comparison of experiences. By adopting this approach, my intention was to ensure that no single participant’s account would be overshadowed or diminished by another. By refraining from direct comparisons, I aimed to honor the diverse experiences and perspectives of each participant.

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**Implication for Academic Adjustments**

The participants in the study expressed that their experiences with class ranking had a profound impact on their mindset and approach to learning. Being constantly labeled and defined by their performance in the classroom, they internalized these labels and allowed them to shape their perception of themselves as learners. This resulted in the development of harmful approaches to learning, characterized by a focus on superficial understanding and short-term memorization rather than in-depth comprehension. Participants felt pressured to achieve high grades and rank highly among their peers, often at the expense of true understanding and intellectual growth. However, as they advanced in their academic journey, participants began to recognize the limitations of these harmful approaches. They realized that true learning and meaningful engagement with the subject matter required a shift in mindset. As a result of their experiences with class ranking, participants became aware of the need to prioritize personal growth and lifelong learning over external validation. However, it is essential to emphasize that the participants in this study displayed differences in the timing and duration of the adjustments they made to reach their desired level of satisfaction. This observation is in line with findings from a study by Dyson and Renk (2006) that also noted variations in the adjustment levels of students. Interestingly, it was apparent that motivation and individual interests played a significant role in driving participants toward positive and successful academic adjustments.

For instance, prior to his last year in secondary school, Dele experienced a lack of motivation within the academic setting. This was primarily due to a drop in his rank at the beginning of his secondary education. However, his confidence was restored through his achievements in external examinations as well as his recognition in the basketball field in his last

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year in secondary school. These successes played a significant role in boosting Dele’s self-assurance, which then translated into his academic endeavors. Consequently, Dele became motivated to initiate changes in his approach to learning. He began dedicating more effort to his studies, which laid the groundwork for his future academic journey. Salewa’s experience with secondary schooling assessments revealed a prominent emphasis on traditional examinations and tests, areas where she did not excel. Consequently, she resorted to harmful practices like cheating in an attempt to enhance her performance. However, upon entering university, she observed a shift in focus towards practical work and application of knowledge. This realization prompted Salewa to reevaluate her approach to learning and make necessary changes. She eventually redirected her efforts towards genuine learning, leaving behind her former reliance on dishonest tactics. Bukola had always been labeled a high-ranking student throughout her primary and secondary education. Her consistent approach to learning, however, involved incessant cramming and regurgitating of content, resulting in a lack of long-term retention. This practice ultimately proved to be ineffective during her first year at university when she received an undesirable grade. It was at this moment that Bukola recognized the need for a change in her learning approach in order to succeed in her new academic setting. Realizing the urgency of the situation, Bukola wasted no time in adjusting her learning approach. However, it took time for Bukola to fully embrace and implement a new desired learning approach. It wasn’t until halfway through her university studies that she honed in on a method that worked best for her. This approach shifted her focus away from simply performing well and instead encouraged deep understanding and critical thinking.

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Funke, a student who had consistently ranked average throughout her primary education, approached her academic pursuits with a sense of complacency. This mindset led her to adopt a cram-and-regurgitate approach to learning, as she believed this was sufficient for her to maintain her average performance. This approach, unfortunately, carried over into her university years, and the consequences were not favorable. Despite the lack of success from her current approach, Funke remained resistant to change. It was not until her third year in university, when she was faced with the imminent threat of being expelled due to her consistently low performance that she was finally motivated to make some critical adjustments to her learning strategy. This pivotal moment, although disheartening, served as a wake-up call for Funke. Recognizing the need for improvement, she began exploring alternative methods of studying and embracing a more proactive approach to her education.

Overall, this study’s findings bring attention to the detrimental impact that class ranking can have on students’ approach to learning. It suggests that experiences with ranking can instill harmful learning habits, which can persist as they progress in their education beyond the confines of the ranking system. Additionally, the timing for students to modify this approach varies depending on the underlying factors that necessitate change. The implications of this research underscore the need for a thoughtful and individualized approach to fostering healthy learning attitudes among students.

**Implication for Personal Adjustments**

The ultimate goal of personal adjustment is to foster a positive outcome by promoting the individual’s overall well-being, satisfaction, and mental health (Dufner et al., 2018; Phalet, 1996). However, the findings showcased experiences with class ranking had negative impacts on

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personal adjustment. Participants shared accounts of their well-being being negatively affected as a result of their rank positions. For instance, Dele suffered physical punishments from his parents when his rank positions dropped, while Salewa’s relationship with her mom was soured for a long time, as she would constantly insult and beat her due to constantly ranking low. Similarly, Bukola’s parents expressed disappointment in her when her rank dropped, and Funke’s parents constantly ridiculed her for consistently ranking in the middle of the class. From participants’ accounts, it is clear that the use of class ranking does not promote a positive experience in their personal lives outside of the academic setting. According to Kurt and Paulhus (2008), personal adjustments are measured by the level of positivity individuals experience in their subjective experiences. Unfortunately, participants reported very minimal positivity in relation to how they were treated at home due to their class rankings. It is evident that their experience with class ranking had a negative impact on their overall well-being during their schooling.

**Research and Practical Implications**

The findings from this study cannot be generalized to a larger population of individuals who have experienced class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools due to the small population investigated. However, it is important to note that the aim of this research was not to achieve generalizability. Instead, the focus was placed on exploring the experiences of the participants in depth. Despite the limited scope, the study’s findings have yielded valuable research and practical implications. The insights gained from the participants’ experiences shed light on the impact of using class ranking practices in Nigerian schools. These findings can be used to inform educational policies and practices, as well as guide future research in this area.

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***Research Implications***

From a research perspective, these findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on class ranking and its impact on educational experiences. The study highlights the need for further investigation into different contexts and populations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. One of the primary motivations for undertaking this research stems from the recognition of a prominent research gap pertaining to the lack of investigations into the experiences and effects of class ranking on Nigerian students. This particular gap in research emphasizes the necessity of delving into and comprehending how students in Nigerian schools perceive class ranking, specifically in terms of its impacts. This study’s findings hold immense value as they initiate the discourse on this topic. By shedding light on the influence of class ranking on both the academic and personal lives of Nigerian students, these findings offer valuable insights into this unexplored area of research. This exploration provides the foundation for further investigation and analysis of the dynamics surrounding class ranking in Nigerian schools.

The findings of this study shed light on the complexities surrounding class ranking and its impact on Nigerian students. Specifically, it examines how class ranking can influence students both within and outside of the classroom. Within the classroom, the study reveals that class ranking has the potential to affect students’ motivation. One of the primary reasons for using class ranking has been that it motivates students to want to put in effort in the academic setting (Elsner et al., 2017); however, this study indicates that this may not always be the case. Instead, it reveals that class ranking can have a demotivating effect on students, highlighting the intricacies of this phenomenon. This is in line with Covington’s (1992) which illustrated that

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class ranking may reduce the rate at which students are motivated to improve their performance. For instance, the findings of this study reveal a concerning phenomenon where students, like Dele, who experience a significant drop in their class rank, may show a tendency to disengage and cease putting effort into improving their academic performance. Similarly, the study’s findings highlight the possibility that students, like Funke, who repeatedly strive to enhance their performance and change their class rank, but fail to see any improvement, may reach a point where their motivation dwindles, and they no longer exert effort in the academic setting. These results shed light on the potential impact of class rank on students’ dedication to their academic pursuits.

Further, the findings of this study highlight an important distinction between achieving high class ranks or high academic performance and experiencing a rich learning experience. Previous research studies, such as Murphy and Weinhardt (2020) and Elsner and Isphording (2017), that have explored the effects of class rank on academic performance often overlook the crucial aspect of whether high academic performance or improvement in academic performance aligns with meaningful learning experiences and the attainment of learning objectives. The results of this study demonstrate that the utilization of class ranking tends to narrow the focus of learning to surface-level performance, rather than promoting deeper comprehension or mastery of the subject matter. Participants in this study reported that the heavy emphasis placed on performance and class ranks overshadowed their desire to truly understand and engage with the learning that was occurring. Instead, their main concern became solely their performance, leading them to adopt detrimental learning approaches that did not foster meaningful learning experiences or attainment of learning goals and objectives. By solely prioritizing performance,

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students may be driven to adopt superficial learning strategies that provide short-term gains but do not facilitate long-term retention or application of knowledge. This insight is significant because it highlights the potential drawbacks of relying solely on class rank as a measure of academic success. Instead, schools and educators should strive to foster a learning environment that promotes meaningful learning experiences, where students are encouraged to understand and master the content. By doing so, we can enhance the overall quality of education and ensure that academic performance aligns with actual learning and the attainment of learning objectives.

***Practical Implications***

The findings of this study shed light on the intricacies of how class ranking is experienced among Nigerian students. The negative impact of class ranking on students’ self-esteem and motivation was evident throughout the research. These findings have important practical implications for teaching in Nigerian schools and suggest the need for alternative methods of assessment. The findings can inform educational policymakers, school administrators, and educators about the potential consequences of class ranking. By understanding the depth in which participants experienced class ranking, these stakeholders can develop strategies and interventions to minimize any negative effects and promote a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

One practical implication of this study’s findings is the necessity to reevaluate the emphasis placed on class ranking in Nigerian classrooms. This study’s findings suggests that class ranking practices may contribute to a sense of competition and stress among Nigerian students. Consequently, calling for reassessment of the way class ranking is conducted and communicated. Educational policymakers and educators should consider implementing strategies

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to support students in achieving their potential irrespective of their class ranking. This could involve providing additional academic and emotional support, fostering a positive learning environment, and promoting a growth mindset approach to education. Schools should ultimately consider alternative methods of assessment that focus on individual growth and progress rather than performance in comparison to peers. This shift in approach can provide students with a valuable perspective, helping them to recognize that their rank positions do not entirely define or accurately reflect their abilities. By encouraging students to view their rank as just one aspect of their academic journey, we can foster a more holistic understanding of their capabilities. Emphasizing the importance of personal growth, learning, and individual progress rather than solely focusing on rankings can empower students to set their own goals and measure their success based on their own achievements. This approach promotes a healthy and balanced mindset, allowing students to appreciate their unique strengths and talents beyond their numerical rankings.

Another practical implication of the findings of this study is the potential impacts of class ranking on students’ self-esteem and motivation. This study found that students who were ranked lower than their peers experienced feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which negatively affected their self-esteem. Additionally, students who consistently ranked higher in class reported feeling a heightened sense of pressure to maintain their rank, leading to a severe fear of failure and a decrease in intrinsic motivation. Ladant et al.’s (2023) study investigated the impact of class ranking on students’ self-esteem and confidence. Their findings indicated a significant positive effect, suggesting that class ranking can improve students’ self-esteem and boost their confidence. However, it is important to note that the present research findings highlight a

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nuanced perspective. Specifically, these improvements in self-esteem and confidence are observed primarily among higher-ranking students or those who are making progress towards their desired class rank. In contrast, lower-ranking students may experience lower levels of self-esteem and confidence within the learning environment. Therefore, the findings of this study underscore the importance of promoting a positive and supportive learning environment that focuses on individual progress rather than their class ranking. Therefore, educators must recognize the importance of maintaining a positive learning environment that fosters self-esteem and motivation. By emphasizing individual progress and growth, educators can help students develop a healthy sense of self-worth, boosting their motivation and enhancing their overall learning experience.

Another practical implication that arises from this study’s findings is the negative impact class ranking can have on students’ mental and physical health, specifically due to parents’ reactions to their class rank. The research discovered that when students do not obtain high rankings, they endure severe consequences at home, leading to elevated stress levels and psychological distress. This finding emphasizes the importance for educators and policymakers to reassess the utilization of class ranking as a metric for academic achievement, as it may unintentionally jeopardize the mental and physical well-being of students.

In addition, the findings of this study highlight how the role of the teacher is crucial in mitigating the negative impacts of class ranking, as teachers can play a vital role in nurturing students’ self-esteem, particularly those who may not perform well academically. By providing encouragement and support, teachers can help students develop a growth mindset and believe in their potential for success. In a study conducted by Elsner et al. (2021), it was found that a

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student’s class rank plays a significant role in the amount of support they receive from their teachers. Their study found that higher-ranking students tend to receive more support from their teachers, which in turn can lead to increased motivation, effort, and improved performance during the learning process (Elsner et al., 2021). The findings of Elsner et al. (2021) are consistent with the findings of this present study, further supporting the notion that teacher support can be influenced by a student’s class rank. Based on the participants’ narratives, teachers can display favoritism towards higher-ranking students, while neglecting or even ridiculing lower-ranking students. These findings emphasize the importance of equal treatment and support for all students, regardless of their class rank. Fair and impartial support from teachers can contribute to a positive learning environment, where students feel motivated and encouraged to succeed. It is important for educators and educational institutions to take these findings into consideration and address any biases or unfair practices that may impede the learning experience for students of lower-class ranks. Promoting equal opportunities and providing adequate support and resources to all students, regardless of their class rank, is crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, it is critical that teachers’ focus should not be solely on preparing students for examinations and achieving high ranks, as that can hinder their ability to provide a well-rounded education. The findings of the present study indicate that the use of class ranking can have a detrimental impacts on students’ learning approaches. This aligns with the previous study conducted by Lujan and DiCarlo (2006), which highlights that when the emphasis is placed solely on students’ performance, they tend to adopt memorization techniques to pass assessments without truly understanding the learning content. Consequently, this approach hinders their

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ability to relate new information to their existing knowledge or apply it in unique contexts. Therefore, teachers should focus on encouraging critical thinking and creativity amongst students, which can ultimately reduce or eradicate their use of rote memorization and regurgitation of information during the learning process. In addition, the findings of this study have also highlighted that one-size-fits-all approaches to education, such as class ranking, can overlook the unique developmental differences and varied learning needs of students. This study underlines the importance of acknowledging and addressing these differences in order to optimize students’ learning outcomes. Therefore, educators should strive to create inclusive classrooms that cater to diverse learning styles and provide appropriate support for students with different needs. By implementing differentiated instructional strategies, educators can ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed and thrive academically.

Lastly, the implications of class ranking extend beyond the individual student to the overall school culture. A heavy emphasis on class ranking can perpetuate a competitive and achievement-oriented school culture, where success is narrowly defined by academic performance. This can limit opportunities for students to explore their interests and develop other skills and talents. Schools should aim to create a more holistic and well-rounded educational experience that values diversity and provides opportunities for students to excel in various areas, beyond just academic achievement. By considering alternative measures of achievement and recognizing the diversity of student talents and strengths, educational institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This research suggests that reevaluating the current emphasis on class ranking could lead to the development of more effective and student-centered educational practices in Nigeria.

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**Recommendations**

Due to the research and practical implications of this study, recommendations for future research and policy change have been identified.

***Recommendations for Future Research***

One important recommendation for future research is to explore alternative evaluation methods to replace or complement class ranking. The current study’s findings strongly indicate that class ranking negatively affects Nigerian students’ self-perception, motivation to learn, and approaches to learning. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate alternative evaluation methods that can alleviate these negative consequences. For example, research could be conducted on the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing project-based assessments, portfolios, or competency-based evaluations. This would allow students to showcase their skills and knowledge in a more holistic manner, while also considering their individual learning styles and developmental differences. Such research would contribute to the development of more equitable and inclusive evaluation practices in Nigerian schools. Adopting a more comprehensive and individualized evaluation approach may also provide a more accurate representation of students’ abilities and encourage a healthier learning environment. Further research in this area can contribute to the improvement of educational practices and support the overall well-being and academic success of Nigerian students.

Another important area for future research is the impact of teacher training and support on student well-being in the context of class ranking. This study highlights the stress and trauma experienced by students as a result of the ranking system. However, the role of teachers in creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment cannot be overlooked. Further research

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could focus on examining the training and support needs of teachers, particularly in terms of promoting positive motivation and self-esteem among students. This could involve investigating the effectiveness of professional development programs that equip teachers with strategies to foster a growth mindset, provide constructive feedback, and actively engage students in the learning process. Understanding the role of teachers in mitigating the negative impact of class ranking would inform policy changes that prioritize teacher training and support for the well-being of Nigerian students.

Additionally, it is imperative for future research to delve into the psychological well-being of Nigerian students in schools that do not place emphasis on or implement class rank practices. By documenting the experiences and perspectives of these students, we can gain valuable insights regarding the impact of alternate assessment practices on student’s mental health and overall wellbeing during learning processes. This knowledge can then be utilized to effect policy changes aimed at prioritizing the overall well-being and emotional development of Nigerian students. By shifting the focus from class rank to holistic development, we can create a nurturing and supportive learning environment that fosters both academic excellence and emotional growth. By considering the psychological implications of class rank practices, policymakers can implement strategies and interventions that promote positive mental health outcomes. This may include adopting alternative methods of evaluation and assessment that consider individual strengths, interests, and progress, rather than assigning a rank based solely on academic performance.

Future research could provide valuable insights into the perspectives of teachers and school administrations regarding the class ranking practices employed in their schools.

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Investigating how these stakeholders manage the use of class ranking, their perceptions of its impact on students, and how they respond to students’ class rankings would deepen our understanding of this widely used practice. Understanding the strategies and approaches employed by teachers and school administrations in relation to class ranking could shed light on the potential benefits and drawbacks of this system. Exploring their management techniques, such as how they communicate rankings to students and how they support those who may be negatively affected, would offer valuable guidance for improving the implementation of class ranking. In addition, gaining insights into the perceptions of teachers and school administrations regarding the impacts of class ranking on their students is crucial. This research could examine how class ranking influences students’ self-esteem, motivation, and overall academic performance through the lens of teachers and school administrators. Understanding whether teachers and school administrations perceive these effects as positive or negative could inform future practices and policies surrounding class ranking. Furthermore, exploring how teachers and school administrations respond to students’ class rankings could provide valuable information on the support systems in place for high-ranking students as well as those who may be ranked lower. Investigating whether additional resources or interventions are provided to address the needs of students across the ranking spectrum would help identify areas for improvement and equitable treatment. By examining the perspectives of teachers and school administrations, future research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the implications and management of class ranking in educational settings. The findings from such research could inform policy decisions, improve current practices, and ultimately create a more supportive and equitable learning environment for all students.

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In addition, future research should focus on identifying developmental differences among Nigerian students and their implications for class ranking practices. By understanding individual learning needs, policies can be developed to create inclusive educational environments that provide appropriate support and tailored assessments. This research can provide valuable insights into creating a more equitable and accessible education system in Nigeria.

Lastly, future research could further explore class ranking in Nigerian primary and secondary schools by applying post-colonial theory as a critical framework. Post-colonial theory offers a valuable perspective to understand the long-lasting effects of colonization (Parsons & Harding, 2011). In the case of Nigeria, British colonial policies on education were imposed and continued to shape the Nigerian education system well into its post-colonial era (Okoroma, 2006; Sulaiman, 2012). In 1977, Nigeria eventually developed its own national policy on education, based on the country’s educational philosophy and goals (Okoroma, 2006). However, this educational policy has not been effectively implemented in many Nigerian primary and secondary schools (Enyiazu, 2022; Okoroma, 2006). This suggests that many schools in Nigeria may still be operating under practices that align with colonial agendas and goals for education. Consequently, future research could shed light on how historical colonization influences class dynamics and social stratification within the Nigerian education system. Investigations could explore the ways in which British colonial policies shaped educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes, as well as the effects on class ranking. A thorough examination of class ranking in Nigerian schools through the lens of post-colonial theory could provide insights into the ways in which colonial legacies persist and influence educational practices in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. This research could delve into the historical context of colonial education

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policies, investigating how they established and reinforced class-based hierarchies in Nigerian schools. Such research could contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between colonial legacies, educational policies, and social stratification in Nigerian primary and secondary schools.

***Recommendations for Policy Change***

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that there is a pressing need for policy change regarding the current implementation of class ranking in Nigerian schools. The study reveals that the drive to maintain or improve rank positions negatively impacts students’ overall well-being. It is crucial for policymakers to acknowledge these detrimental effects and take appropriate action. Therefore, a key policy change recommendation is to shift the focus of evaluation and assessment in Nigerian schools from class ranking to individual growth and development. Instead of pitting students against each other in a competitive environment, a more holistic approach that recognizes and celebrates individual progress and achievements should be encouraged. This policy change could involve implementing regular assessments that measure students’ progress against their own previous performances, rather than against their peers. By implementing alternative evaluation methods, policymakers can alleviate unnecessary pressure and anxiety among students. It is of paramount importance to create a learning environment that nurtures each student’s learning journey without subjecting them to the undue stress associated with class ranking. Therefore, it is highly recommended that policymakers review the existing policies and consider the adoption of alternative evaluation methods that focus on individual progress. This change will not only promote a healthier learning atmosphere but also address the concerns raised in this study. Additionally, providing students with regular feedback and

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personalized learning opportunities would also promote a sense of ownership and intrinsic motivation. By emphasizing individual growth and development, Nigerian schools can create a supportive and empowering educational environment that nurtures the full potential of every student.

Furthermore, class ranking assumes that all students progress at the same pace and have the same learning needs. However, this is not the case, as students have diverse backgrounds, abilities, and developmental differences. To address this issue, Nigerian schools should adopt a framework of differentiated instruction, which tailors teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. This approach allows for a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, minimizing the negative impacts of class ranking on students’ well-being and academic performance.

**Final Reflection**

The findings of this study have highlighted the need for a more intentional approach to teaching in Nigerian schools that use class ranking practices. Based on both the findings of this study and my own personal experiences, I strongly advocate for the immediate eradication of class ranking practices in all Nigerian primary and secondary schools. It is clear that these practices do more harm than good to students, and they serve no educational benefits for Nigerian students. Class ranking practices simply provide students with knowledge of their positions relative to their peers, without any substantial benefit and, in fact, often impacts students negatively. These practices do not determine college entrance into Nigerian higher education programs, nor are they required by the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigerian schools (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Therefore, it is evident that there is no

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significant need for the continuation of this practice. To ensure the well-being and optimal growth of Nigerian students, it is essential to move away from class ranking practices and adopt alternative methods that focus on individual progress, holistic development, and fostering a positive academic environment. By doing so, we can create an educational system that nurtures students’ potential and encourages them to thrive without the unnecessary pressure and negative consequences associated with class ranking practices.

Even though I advocate for the eradication of class tanking practices in Nigerian primary and secondary schools, I recognize that it is ultimately up to these schools to make the decision whether or not to continue using this practice. However, as a Nigerian educator, I understand that I still play a critical role in shaping the academic development of Nigerian students. The findings from this study have presented significant areas that I need to prioritize in my teaching to ensure that students have meaningful learning experiences. My professional duty as an educator in Nigerian schools that use class ranking practices goes beyond simply adhering to school policies. I need to actively work towards creating an inclusive and conducive learning environment for all students. This means focusing on individualized instruction, ensuring that students of different abilities are given appropriate support and opportunities to learn and grow. I also need to place emphasis on student engagement and participation. It is crucial to encourage students to actively participate in class discussions, ask questions, and express their thoughts and ideas. By fostering a collaborative and interactive learning environment, I can help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for their future success. In addition, I plan to prioritize mastery over performance. Rather than solely focusing on students’ grades and numerical rankings of students, I can instead emphasize the importance of understanding and

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deeply engaging with the material. By encouraging students to prioritize mastery, I can enable them to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter, enhancing their long-term knowledge retention and critical thinking skills.

Furthermore, the results from this study highlight the significant impact of class ranking on students’ well-being. This study reveals that class ranking can create a highly stressful environment, leading to increased anxiety and performance pressure among students. As a result, it is crucial to prioritize the mental health of students and minimize any stress or trauma they may experience during their learning process. This can be achieved by establishing a safe and supportive classroom atmosphere in which students feel comfortable seeking help, taking risks, and learning from their mistakes. I can also implement stress-reducing techniques, including mindfulness exercises, regular check-ins, and open communication, to ensure their students’ emotional and psychological well-being. By fostering a positive and nurturing learning environment, educators can inspire a passion for learning and promote the holistic growth and development of their students.

Overall, while I do not possess the authority to completely abolish class ranking practices in Nigerian schools, it is incumbent upon me to prioritize specific elements of my teaching practice to ensure that Nigerian students have purposeful learning encounters and promote favorable effects on their overall well-being. By prioritizing individualized instruction, student engagement, and talent development, I can play a role in positively shaping the academic progression and achievements of Nigerian students, irrespective of the methods employed in their educational institutions.

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**Conclusion**

The findings of this study proved to be illuminating, as they brought to light the diverse dimensions and magnitude to which class ranking can affect Nigerian students. The research revealed that class ranking carries significant implications that extend beyond its immediate context. This study’s findings present a significant contribution to the knowledge surrounding the impacts of class ranking on students’ lives, both within and beyond the academic sphere. It offers a deeper understanding of how class ranking practice shapes students’ academic journey and personal development. Notably, class ranking has substantial impacts on both academic and personal aspects of a student’s life. Within the academic realm, the study demonstrated that class ranking has the power to shape students’ self-perception of their abilities and their approach to learning. Additionally, it was found that class ranking impacts social dynamics between students and their peers as well as their relationships with teachers. Furthermore, the study uncovered that class ranking can influence the treatment and expectations students experience from their parents in their personal lives. These findings also underscore the potential impact of class ranking on the overall success of other school practices and educational objectives. Consequently, it is crucial for Nigerian primary and secondary schools that still employ class ranking practices to reassess the relevance of such practices in relation to their intended goals for students. The insights gleaned from this study can serve as a valuable resource during this evaluation process. Given that students are key stakeholders in the learning environment, it is vital that all school and instructional practices align with educational objectives, providing students with authentic learning experiences that positively impact their lives both within and beyond the educational setting.

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**APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW**

**First Interview/Narration Phase**

Hello {Participants Name},

In this first interview, we will discuss your experiences with the use of class ranking in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools you attended. Class ranking is still a common practice in many Nigerian primary and secondary schools, and very little is known about how students experience this practice and the implications of those experiences. So, in this interview, you will have the opportunity to share your stories about class ranking with me, which will help provide some insights into experiences with class ranking in Nigerian schools.

This interview is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation. Your responses will remain confidential, and your name will not be connected with them. This interview will be recorded for transcribing purposes, so do I have your permission to record this interview?

*[Researcher proceeds with interview only if permission to record is granted.]*

To set the context for our interview, I have questions to begin and guide this conversation, but it’s essential to know that we may go off-script. I may follow up on your initial answers with questions about your experience and ask you to add more detail. I want to understand things from your perspective, so it is essential to highlight that this is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions I will be asking you.

You will have the opportunity to tell your story, which may allow you to reflect, remember, and reinterpret your experience. Being a part of this study may change how you think about your experiences with class ranking and its impact.

If at any point you want to take a break or stop the interview, please just let me know, and we can work around it.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

*[Wait for a response and answer any question participants have at this point]* Okay, Let’s get started!

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**Background Questions**

* What part of Nigeria are you originally from?
* Where are you currently located?
* What primary and secondary schools in Nigeria did you attend? o Was it a public or private school?
* What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed so far?
* What is your degree in?
* Where did you complete your higher education?
* Did the University Rank students?
  1. If yes, was it from the first position to the last?
* What is your current occupation?

**Class Ranking Question**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Research Question** | **Interview Question** |
| How do participants describe |  |
| their experiences with the | • I understand you completed your primary |
| use of class ranking practices | and secondary education in a Nigerian school |
| in their primary and | that used class ranking practices. |
| secondary school years? | o What is your understanding of class |
|  | ranking, and why Nigerian primary |
|  | and secondary schools use class |
|  | ranking? |
|  | • Can you share some stories regarding your |
|  | experiences with Class Ranking in the |
|  | Nigerian schools you attended? |
|  | o How did this make you feel? |
|  | o How do you feel telling this story |
|  | now? |
|  | o Where does that feeling/emotion |
|  | come from? |
|  | • Can you describe the dynamics of your rank |
|  | positions throughout your primary and |
|  | secondary schooling? |
|  | o Did you consistently have high, low, |
|  | or fluctuating rank positions? |
|  | ▪ What was this experience |
|  | like? |
|  | ▪ How did your rank positions |
|  | impact your learning in the |
|  | classroom? |

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* + How would you describe the quality of your learning during this period?
  + {Consistently Low} How did you deal with consistently ranking low?
  + {Fluctuating} How did you deal with the fluctuation of your rank positions?
* Can you share stories about how your **classmates** reacted to your class rankpositions?

o How did you think your peers perceived you in the classroom?

* + How did your peers react to you if you ranked low or lower than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
  + How did your peers react to you if you ranked high or higher than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
* Can you share stories about how your **teachers** reacted to your class rankpositions?

o How do you think your teachers perceive you?

* + How did your teachers react to you if you ranked low or lower than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
  + How did your teachers react to you if you ranked high or higher than expected in class? (Please provide an example)
* Can you share stories about how your **parents/guardians** reacted to your classrank positions?

o How do you think your parents/guardians perceived you?

* + If you ranked low or lower than expected in class, how did your parents/guardians

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react to you? (Please provide

an example)

▪ If you ranked high or higher

than expected in class, how

did your parents/guardians

react to you? (Please provide

an example)

* How would you describe your transition from secondary school to college/university?

o What was your college/university first-year learning experience like?

o Did you face any significant academic challenges while pursuing your higher education?

* + (If yes), can you describe the

challenge(s) you

encountered?

o How will you describe the quality of

your primary and secondary learning

experience?

o How will you describe the quality of

your college/university learning

experiences?

**Closing**

Okay, those are all the questions I have for you today! Thank you so much for sharing your stories with me. Is there anything else you would like to add at this time?

*(Wait for a response and answer accordingly)*

I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me this {Morning, Afternoon, or Evening}. I hope you have a splendid rest of your day, and I look forward to our continuing discussions in the second interview!

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**Second Interview/Conversation Phase**

Hello {Participants Name},

Thank you for meeting me today.

In this second interview, I will ask you some reflection questions, as well as some follow-up questions.

Like the first interview, this interview will be recorded for transcribing purposes, so do I have your permission to record this interview?

*[Researcher proceeds with interview only if permission to record is granted.]*

Okay, let us get started.

**Class Ranking Questions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Research Question** | **Interview Question** |
| How do participants describe | **Reflection Questions** |
| their experiences with the use of | • Have you reflected on the |
| class ranking practices in their | experiences and stories you shared |
| primary and secondary school | with me since the last time we met? |
| years? | o If yes, do you have any new |
|  | insights, thoughts, or feelings |
|  | about your experience with |
|  | class ranking since our last |
|  | interview? |
|  | **Follow Up Questions** |
|  | *(This will be established based on the* |
|  | *stories shared in the first interview. Also,* |
|  | *if the sub-questions in the first interview* |
|  | *were not asked or addressed and are* |
|  | *important to know based on the stories* |
|  | *the participants shared, the questions* |
|  | *will be asked as a follow-up question in* |
|  | *the second interview.)* |
|  |  |
| In what ways, if any, do | • How do you think your experiences with |
| experiences with class ranking | class ranking impacted key decisions you |
| impact participants’ identities? |  |

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made during your academic journey?

(Why)

* How do you think your experiences with class ranking impacted how you perceived yourself? (Why)
* How do you think your experiences with class ranking impact how you perceive your abilities now? (Why)
* How do you think your experiences with class ranking impacted where you are now in life? (Why)
* What did you learn from your experiences with the use of class ranking? (Why)

**Closing:**

Okay, those are all the questions I have for you today! Thank you so much for meeting with me today. Is there anything else you would like to add at this time?

*(Wait for a response and answer accordingly.)*

All right, I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me this {Morning, Afternoon, or Evening}. I hope you have a splendid rest of your day!

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**APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT**

**Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

**Title:** Nigerian Students’ Experiences with Class Rank and its Implications for Academic and

Personal Adjustments: A Narrative Inquiry

**Study # STUDY005996\_\_\_\_**



**Overview:** You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by *Tobiloba Ojomu,* who is a *Doctoral Candidate* at *The University of South Florida.* This person is called the Principal Investigator. *She* is being guided in this research by Dr. Veselina Lambrev.

Study Details: This study is being conducted virtually using The University of South Florida’s password-protected video-conferencing application tool, called TEAMS. The purpose of the study is to investigate individuals’ experiences with class ranking practices used in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended in order to understand what the experience was like for them and the implications of those experiences on their academic and personal lives. This study will use a qualitative research method which will include conducting two individual interviews with each participant, the first lasting approximately one hour and the second lasting approximately 30 minutes to an hour.

Subjects: You are being asked to take part because:

* You attended and completed primary and secondary education in a Nigerian school that used class ranking practices.
* You have earned at least a bachelor’s degree from a school in Nigeria and/or a Western country.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start.

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Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.



Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to participate because you attended and completed primary and secondary school in a Nigerian school that used class ranking practices, making you a suitable candidate to provide class ranking experiences.

**Study Procedures:**

All study procedures will be conducted virtually using the University of South Florida’s password-protected video conferencing application tool, called TEAMS.

If you partake in this study, you will be asked to:

* Participate in a virtual interview conducted by the researcher. This interview will be video-recorded for later analysis. The researcher will arrange a time with you and request that you be in a quiet, distraction-free space that is most comfortable and convenient for the duration of the interview. The first interview is expected to last an hour, while the second interview is expected to last between 30 minutes to an hour.
* Consent to the interview being video recorded. As a participant, you are given the option to agree to be recorded. If you are not comfortable with being recorded, you have the option to withdraw from the study.
  + Only the researcher will have access to your video recordings.
  + Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of your data will be protected by being stored in a secured cloud system called BOX, which only the researcher has access to. Your complete anonymity is fully guaranteed.
  + Information provided by you will not be identifiable.
  + When submitting video recordings for third-party transcription, no personally identifiable information will be included to ensure anonymity. Upon completing the transcription and analysis process, all video files will be deleted from the third party’s hosting applications.
  + The recording will be maintained for five years after the final report is submitted to the Internal Review Board (IRB).

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* + After five years, the recorded video will be permanently deleted from Box and recycle bin.
* Answer open-ended questions regarding your experiences with class ranking used in the Nigerian primary and secondary school(s) you attended. There are no right or wrong answers.
* Choose a pseudonym, which will be assigned to all digital files. If you do not select one, one will be assigned to you.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation necessary. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will not be used in the analysis.

**Total Number of Subjects**

Between four to six individuals will take part in this study. The interview will be conducted online using a video conferencing tool called TEAMS. The researcher will arrange a time with each individual and request them to be in a quiet, distraction-free space that is most comfortable and convenient to them for the duration of the interview.

**Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

**Benefits**

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study. However, this work may add to the knowledge of the field of education in Nigeria and support Nigerian schools in understanding how students may experience class ranking and the possible impacts of the use of class ranking on students.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

**Costs**

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement**

There is no conflict of interest.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

* The Principal Investigator
* Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
* The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff, who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Your information or samples collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

A federal law called Title IX protects your right to be free from sexual discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. USF’s Title IX policy requires certain USF employees to report sexual harassment or sexual violence against any USF employee, student, or group but does not require researchers to report sexual harassment or sexual violence when they learn about it as part of conducting an IRB-approved study. If, as part of this study, you tell us about any sexual harassment or sexual violence that has happened to you, including rape or sexual assault, we are not required to report it to the University. If you have questions about Title IX or USF’s Title IX policy, please call USF’s Office of Diversity, Inclusion & Equal Opportunity at (813) 974-4373.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, call Tobiloba Ojomu at (727) 768-1432 or contact via email at [tojomu@usf.edu.](mailto:tojomu@usf.edu)

If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at [RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.](mailto:RSCH-IRB@usf.edu)

**Consent to Take Part in Research**

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form, I am agreeing to take part in the research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

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| Signature of Person Taking Part in Study | Date |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |
| Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study |  |

**Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date

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**APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT MESSAGE**

Dear {Participant’s Name},

My name is Tobiloba Ojomu, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida, USA. I am contacting you today to invite you to participate in a research study (USF IRB # **005996**). The study aims to investigate individuals’ experiences with class ranking practices used in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools they attended in order to understand what the experience was like for them and the implications of those experiences on their academic and personal lives.

This study will examine individuals who have completed primary and secondary education in Nigerian schools that utilized class ranking practices and have completed higher education in Nigeria or a Western country. You are invited to participate in this study because you completed your primary and secondary education in a Nigerian school that used class ranking practices and you have achieved at least a bachelor’s degree in a Nigerian or Western higher education institution.

If you choose to participate, I will conduct two individual interviews with you, the first lasting approximately one hour and the second lasting approximately 30 minutes to an hour. In these interviews, you will share your experiences with class ranking in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools you attended. You will also share your perspectives on the implications of those experiences on your academic and personal lives. These interviews will help me collect data for this research project. Participation is voluntary, and all answers will be anonymous.

Your involvement in this study will require that you engage in two interviews with me, each lasting no more than one hour. I will also ask to video record the interview. The interview will be conducted online. I will send you a link to an online meeting invitation using a secured video conferencing tool called TEAMS.

You may contact me with questions pertaining to this research at tojomu@usf.edu or by calling or texting my phone number (+17277681432). Participation in this research is voluntary. You should only agree to participate in this study if you wish to do so.

**Action Items:**

* Review the attached informed consent form for more details regarding the study.
* Respond to this email if you are willing to participate in this study.
* Respond to this email with your preferred days and times (including time zone) to conduct the first and second interviews.

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1. The first interview must be conducted between these dates: August 9th through August 15th.
2. The second interview must be conducted between these dates: August 17th through August 23rd.
   1. The first interview must be at least one week apart from the second interview.

* Once I receive your preferred dates, I will coordinate with you to schedule the interviews.
* Then, I will resend the Informed Consent document through DocuSign for your signature. Please keep in mind that you must sign the informed consent form before your first scheduled interview date.

Thank you,

Tobiloba Ojomu

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**APPENDIX D: CITI CERTIFICATIONS**

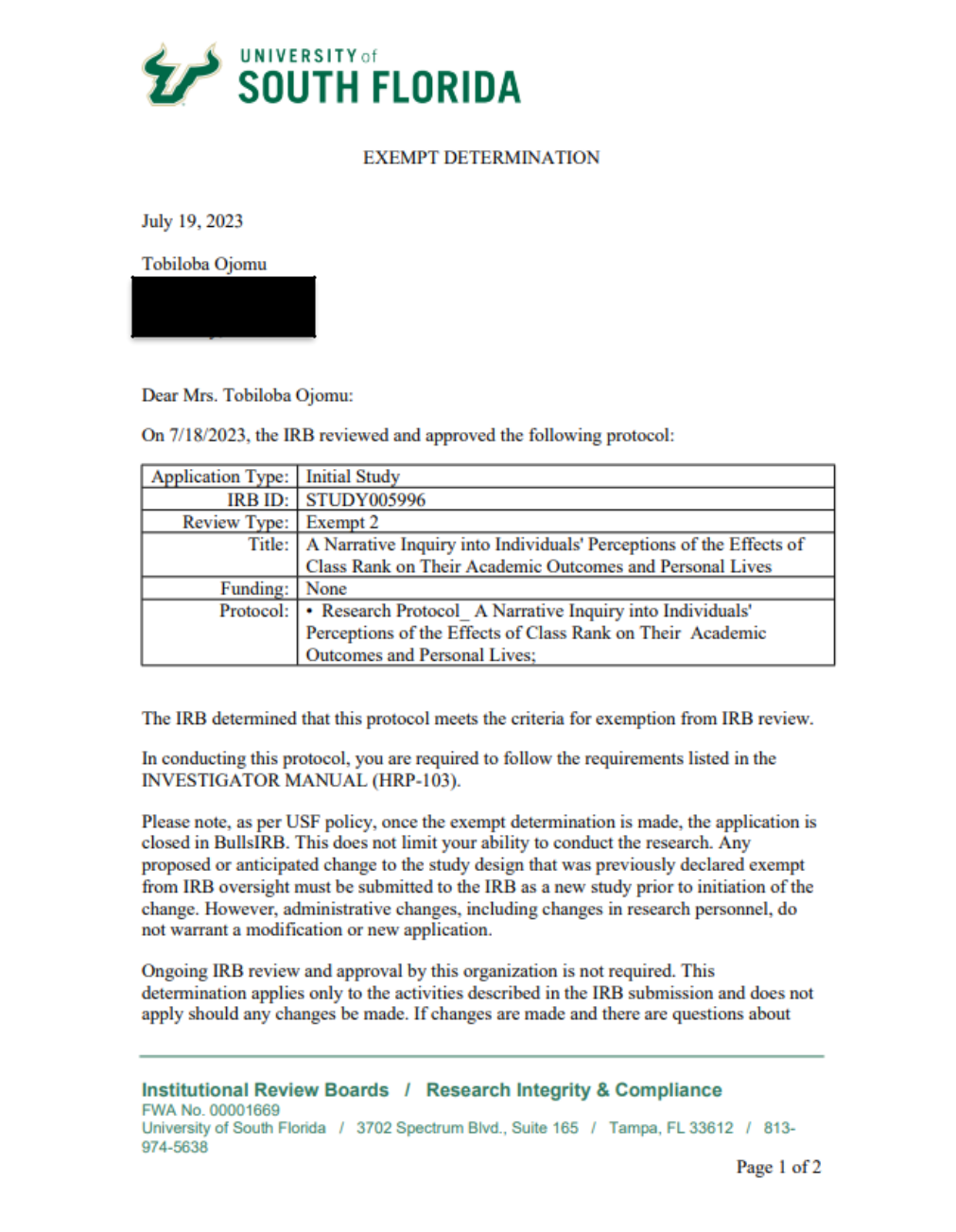


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**APPENDIX E: IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION**



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