Why I stayed out of relationships in university – UNIPORT best graduate

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Overall best graduating student, University of Port Harcourt, Victory Abanjo, who got a 4.89 CGPA, shares with GRACE EDEMA the secret behind her academic success, personal struggles that inspired her passion for counselling, and her vision for industrial psychology and youth mentorship  
  
How does it feel—coming out as the best among your peers?  
  
It feels great. I’ve always believed in hard work, and this recognition confirms that hard work truly pays off. Although I never experienced it in such a big way before now, becoming the best graduating student of the University of Port Harcourt has been amazing.  
  
It has opened me up to many opportunities, given me the chance to speak with young people, and provided a platform to mentor others who are aspiring to reach such heights. So, I would say it’s something great. It feels so good.  
  
How did you achieve this feat?  
  
It was simply a product of hard work, consistency, and identifying a system that worked for me and staying committed to it. So, it was a combination of hard work, consistency, and finding my own effective method of studying.  
  
What was the system you discovered that worked for you?  
  
When I got into 100-Level, some senior colleagues often came around to talk to us about how to succeed academically. They usually advised that we should form study groups—read together, ask questions, and so on. I tried it, but it didn’t work for me.  
  
I discovered that I learnt far better when I studied alone than in groups. That was the first thing. Secondly, unlike others who identify as day readers or night readers, I didn’t fit into any of those categories. My style of studying was different, and I had to embrace it.  
  
I could read at any time I felt like reading. Once I discovered this was what worked for me, I stayed consistent, and that became my system.  
  
How many hours did you read in a day?  
  
Honestly, I can’t give a fixed number of hours. But anytime I sat down to study, I usually put in nothing less than three hours at a stretch. After that, I would take a break—maybe visit a friend, walk around, eat, sleep, or just do something entirely different. Then, whenever I returned to study, I would give another solid three hours.  
  
So, what was your reading pattern—your best time or environment for studying?  
  
I don’t have a specific pattern or preferred environment. Sometimes I might be watching a movie or playing a game, and suddenly I would feel like reading. Immediately, I would pause whatever I was doing, pick up my books, and study. So, I can’t say, ‘I read every night’ or ‘I read only in the morning.’ It really depends on when the urge to read comes. That was exactly how I studied throughout school.  
  
Are you saying you read according to your mood? But how were you able to keep up, especially with many distractions—movies to watch, social events on campus, games to play? To graduate with a first-class degree, people usually believe you need to read more than others.  
  
Yes, that was my mindset when I got into school. I thought I needed to out-read everyone else. But along the line, I discovered that whenever I forced myself to read when I wasn’t in the mood, I ended up doing more of cramming. I could sit for over three hours, and nothing would really sink in.  
  
So, instead, I decided to maximise the moments when I actually wanted to read. Within those three hours, I would make optimal use of the time, and it was far more productive than forcing myself. That became my method.  
  
Another thing that also helped me was that I started quite early in my academic journey.  
  
How did you usually start your academic routine when lectures resumed?  
  
I give myself about three weeks to settle in and allow everything to stabilise. After that, I start early. I also made sure I attended classes with almost 100 per cent attendance every semester.  
  
That really helped me because it meant I didn’t have to start reading everything all over again during exams. Since I was always in class, I listened attentively and took notes in my own unique way—not like everyone else. So, by the time I needed to revise, I just went over my notes, and it all made sense.  
  
How did you manage your relationship with your fiancé without allowing it to affect your studies?  
  
Well, about relationships, the last relationship I had was in 200-Level. I was still top of my class at that time, but we ended things because I discovered that was not what I wanted. So, I stayed out of relationships throughout the remaining years I spent in school.  
  
Did you engage in extracurricular activities while in school?  
  
Yes I engaged in extracurricular activities, especially those ones that involved other students from Delta State. It was like home away from home.  
  
Did you face any challenge during your studies and how did you resolve such a challenge?  
  
The major challenge I faced was finance, especially in my first year. Aside school fees which were readily available, getting textbooks, working on term papers and upkeep were quite difficult at that early stage. So, I went into online business, particularly VTU (airtime) vending.  
  
My academic performance at 200-Level opened several doors as I got lots of cash rewards from well meaning organisations such as the Heart of Grace Foundation.  
  
Most of these rewards were part of what fuelled my motivation to do better which eventually paid off at the end.  
  
What was your course of study specifically?  
  
Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling.  
  
Do you think the course is lucrative?  
  
In this part of the world, Nigerians don’t really pay attention to counselling. People often say, ‘Better go and pray’, or ‘Flog the child very well’, instead of considering counselling. Yet, counselling is very important. Counselling is something we truly need.  
  
So, do you think it’s a lucrative course?  
  
Yes, I think it is. Psychology has many branches and areas to specialise in. But considering the kind of society we live in, I believe it’s not enough to just stop at a B.Sc. It’s advisable to pursue a master’s degree or obtain certifications in your field, and then also maximize social media.  
  
Some of my colleagues are already earning from counselling. They do online sessions, attend to clients virtually, and get paid. So, yes, it can be lucrative—if you know how to position yourself and play your part well. I also think it’s becoming more relevant now, especially with Gen Z and the rising emphasis on mental health.  
  
How do you intend to practise with your certificate?  
  
Yes, I have The Talkspace. My plan is to get additional certifications while also majoring in industrial psychology—that’s the branch I want to specialise in. At the same time, I want to fully register The Talkspace as a brand.  
  
So, while I pursue industrial psychology on one hand, The Talkspace will run on the side to serve teenagers and young adults, which is a group I’m particularly passionate about. That way, The Talkspace takes care of young people, while industrial psychology covers the workplace side of counselling.  
  
What advice would you give to other students in Nigerian universities who want to graduate with a first-class or even emerge as the overall best graduating student?  
  
There is no height too high for anyone to attain. If you know what you want, and you’re ready to do what it takes, you’ll surely get there. The first thing is to have a goal, have a purpose, and maintain focus.  
  
Then, find out what you need to do to achieve that goal and work consistently towards it. It’s not easy—you have to put in the work—but eventually, your results will speak for you.  
  
How would you rate Nigerians’ acceptance of counselling and therapy compared to the Western world?  
  
Honestly, it’s still a challenge. In Western countries, people easily recommend therapy for issues—marital, career, family, or otherwise. But in Nigeria, the common response is, ‘Go and pray’, or ‘Fast and pray’.  
  
That said, there has been a lot of progress. I think counselling was formally recognised in law about three years ago. While it’s still difficult to get people to willingly seek therapy, some progress has been made.  
  
In Port Harcourt, for example, I would rate acceptance of counselling at about 70–75 per cent. Most schools here now have full-time guidance counsellors who don’t teach but focus entirely on counselling students. So, yes, counselling is gradually gaining ground, and it’s beginning to make waves.  
  
Tell me about your background. Where are you from, and how old are you?  
  
I’m from Akoma in Abavo, Delta State. I’m 27 years old. My dad is a retired teacher, and my mum is a farmer. I’m the last child in a family of five—my parents and three children, all girls.  
  
After your NYSC, what do you plan to do next?  
  
After my service year, I want to fully establish The Talkspace as a standalone brand while also pursuing my career in psychology.  
  
Who encouraged you to start The Talkspace, and how old is the initiative?  
  
The project is almost a year old now. The inspiration came largely from my childhood experiences. Growing up, I had no idea what counselling was. During my transition from childhood to adulthood, I struggled a lot because there was no proper guidance.  
  
The same thing happened when I was moving from secondary school to university—it was overwhelming, and I didn’t know what to do. Later on, when I began interacting with teenagers in my community, I discovered that many of them were going through the same struggles I faced, and as usual, there was little to no help available.  
  
That was when I decided to create a safe space for young people where they could freely talk about their challenges. That became The Talkspace. Right now, we operate mainly on WhatsApp, where we organise programmes and invite guest speakers.  
  
For instance, about two months ago, we held a session on recovery from rape, which was very impactful.  
  
But have you begun making money from it?  
  
Not yet. For now, it’s more like an NGO. The vision is to grow it into a proper non-profit that can reach out to teenagers and young adults more effectively.  
  
Have you had any work experience after graduating?  
  
I am a certified counselling psychologist, a virtual assistant, and the CEO of The Talkspace. Yes, The Talkspace is a counselling initiative that offers guidance to teenagers and young adults. We are building a community where a team of counsellors provide support—emotionally, psychologically, mentally, and otherwise.