



# Beyond Academic Excellence

Oluwatobi Akanji  
Abraham Zhiri

This book is dedicated to God who has made us channels of  
blessings to His beloved ones.

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# Foreword

*"For by **wise counsel** you will wage **your own war**, and in a multitude of counsellors there is safety."*

*Prov. 24:6 NKJV [emphasis mine]*

The above is the word of wisdom from Solomon, one of the kings who lived in Bible times and was believed to have been the wisest man that ever lived. His sayings are worth looking into again and again to glean wisdom from them.

For those that would glean wisdom from the counsel of their predecessors, the academic journey would be such an exciting journey whereby you would easily avoid the mistakes made by the predecessors, and the excellent result would rather be the testimony of such.

Tobi and Abraham are two industrious brothers whom I will always be grateful to God for bringing them to my path in life. The Lord has greatly helped the two understand the academic journey. Through their experiences, they have learnt what it takes to wage their wars of academics and to stand out among their equals. They added hard work to their faith in God and knew what negligence, assumption, anxiety and fear could cost a student, though a believer in Christ Jesus. The Lord does not want you to make the mistakes they made during their academic journeys; hence He stirred them to pen this down for you.

This treatise consists of chapters of nuggets and impactful testimonies which, if you receive them as counsel and act upon them, would launch you into excellence and extraordinary success in your life's endeavours.

I implore you to read through all the chapters patiently.

Rev. Michael Afolabi Oladeji,

*Chaplain,*

*Chapel of Grace, FUTMinna.*

# Introduction

*"Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it".*

*Habakkuk 2:2 NKJV*

Over the years, several Christian students have grappled with attaining academic excellence in their studies; however, academic excellence seems to elude them. Although academic excellence is taught in the University's Chapel and various fellowships on campus in most Nigerian universities, many are yet to enjoy the words they have heard; their reality contradicts their confession.

In this book, Beyond Academic Excellence, we chronicle how God has helped us on the journey to academic excellence and how we applied the lessons learnt in various spheres of our lives: walk with God, work, and relationships. I, Oluwatobi Akanji, begin by establishing how the foundations set by my parents and tutors helped me reach a level of academic excellence. Notwithstanding the mentorship in academic excellence I received from my parent and tutors, I had to acquire other skills to enjoy a new phase in academic excellence. I also outline how God has helped me use the academic setbacks I encountered to launch me into a new dimension of renewed excellence.

I have had the inspiration to share my knowledge and experience regarding academic excellence over the years but sought out ways to use a seminar or talk show to reach out to people. However, during the Peace House Student and Youth Congress (SAYCO) 2022, the recurrent theme in the pacesetter

and pathfinders session was that many Christian brethren still languish in the abyss of academic failure despite being spirit-filled Christians. The recurrent theme of academic failure prompted me to write this book. The ideas within this book describe what has worked for me over the years. That is, during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies. As much as God will use this book to unravel the mystery behind academic excellence, I will implore you to explore other methods that may suit you. You may need to explore additional techniques that work for you because some of the ideas here depend on your personality and environment.

Furthermore, Abraham Zhiri captures some of his views in an extra chapter. Once the compilation of his testimony is complete, it will form the second part of this book. Although most of the strategies put forth here have been attested to by Christian brethren who have achieved academic excellence, some are subject to your personality. Therefore, we pray that God will use this material to enrich you as you pursue academic excellence and beyond.

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# Chapter One

## The Foundation

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it”.

Proverbs 22:6 NKJV

# The Foundation

*"Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it".*

*Proverbs 22:6 NKJV*

I have been a stellar student since my primary and secondary school days. This achievement is due to the foundation of the perspective on learning that I received from my parents. I had fun while learning because it enabled me to understand new concepts. For instance, I loved to read because, aside from learning about new things, it served as a portal into another realm from which I gleaned lessons and participated in the story's plot through my imagination. Reading gave me many ideas and things to explore, of which few were fruitful; a good number were either impractical or too expensive to execute.

My love for reading helped me devour literature beyond my age group's reading proficiency and comprehension. The desire to learn aided me in discovering new concepts and formulating correct perspectives about various aspects of life. Whenever I had no new book to read, I turned to reading the Bible stories in the Old Testament and learning about people in the Bible. The Bible Study also contributed to my knowledge of the Old Testament stories. In all, my approach to learning helped improve my vocabulary and ideas about the world and shaped my curiosity. The learning framework I had ever since I was young was about to be tested as I prepared for the West African Secondary School Examination (WASSCE) and the University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) in preparation for proceeding to the University.

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Your perspective towards learning  
determines your success in life.



You may not have grown with the perspective of seeing learning as fun; however, there might be a thing that makes you tick, something that fuels the curiosity within you. You can learn concepts swiftly by harnessing your interest. For instance, some individuals love to sing or create songs from what they have read or heard. The pieces of songs crafted by such an individual can aid memorisation. That is why some people might point to their nursery and primary school days as the best time they had fun while learning. Some people find learning during nursery and primary school fun because their tutors do all the creative work to make learning fun.

Generally, nursery and primary schools deliver lessons as rhymes, songs, or activities that stimulate pleasure while assimilating the concept taught. In addition, when a person understands that mistakes also aid learning and have no repercussions, there is a tendency that the person will find learning to be fun as the person explores and engages their curiosity. The lack of repercussions and the presence of an explorative atmosphere is why some people are reminiscent of their nursery and primary school experiences, where students

take home painting assignments. Since the painting assignments have no clear-cut right or wrong, the painting outcome largely depends on the student's perspective. Therefore, the student takes ownership of the painting task.

Even if your learning foundations have been faulty, trust God to use this material to help you amend your faulty foundation as you apply the excellence in learning to other spheres of life.



## Chapter Two

### Challenged to Recharge

“Then he said, ‘Take the arrows’; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, ‘Strike the ground’; so he struck three times, and stopped”.

2 Kings 13:18 NKJV

# Challenged to Recharge

*"Then he said, "Take the arrows"; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground"; so he struck three times, and stopped".*

*2 Kings 13:18 NKJV*

Riding on my emotions to learn worked well for me in Primary and Secondary school as I engaged with appealing subjects, thus creating the fun-learning effect. However, I could not go further as the strategy failed in other scenarios where it was battle-tested. Like King Jehoash of Israel, I did not go the extra mile while studying for the WASSCE examinations. Instead of studying the subjects in-depth, I skimmed through the textbooks and skipped some aspects that were not fun to learn. Instead of striking several times, I struck three times and stopped. Before I realised I was ill-prepared for the WASSCE examination, I had already written some papers and knew I had done poorly in the examinations. I could have made up for the perceived poor performance in the WASSCE and National Examination Council (NECO) examinations; however, I could not turn the tide around because of the short break between the WASSCE and NECO examinations. As expected, I had a landslide of poor performance; again.

However, my poor performance during the WASSCE and NECO examinations spurred me to prepare better for the UTME to gain entry into a Nigerian university. Because the UTME focuses on four subjects, I had a smaller reading scope that enabled me to study the subjects in-depth. The

examination subjects were English, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. While reading for the UTME examination, I prioritised reading Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and English in this order. The decision to rank the subjects to read was because of the perceived weakness of the examination subjects. So, I was most unsure of my knowledge of Biology, while I was least unsure of English. God helped me study in-depth as I focused more on Biology and Chemistry than Physics and English. As a result, I achieved a score of 260 in the UTME examination in 2011 and secured admission to study at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. I was elated and soon threw away the academic lessons I learned while preparing for UTME. Like King Jehoash, I failed to drive the success home.

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**The extra mile reveals ephemeral  
success but validates genuine ones.**



The ability to reflect on your failures and successes is a skill to covet if you aim for excellence. At all times, you need to tell yourself the truth about your performance. However, it does not stop at telling yourself the truth. It would be best if you took action to yield the desired result. My ability to reflect on my failures in WASSCE and NECO examinations helped improve my performance at the UTME. Likewise, you must be

ready to understand the "why" behind the "what". Previously, I only dwelt on what I read and did not seek to know the reasoning behind some concepts. Whenever I overlooked the logic behind what I read, I struggled to grasp some easy concepts because I needed to perform an in-depth study.

You must be a person of depth who seeks to unravel and understand the core principles behind concepts. Your comprehension will improve if you go beyond the "what" to comprehend the "why". You need to strike more than three times.



## Chapter Three

Lull

"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man."

Proverbs 24:33 NKJV

# Lull

*"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man".*

*Proverbs 24:33-34 NKJV*

My time in the first year of University, 100 level, was a gentle ride. When I got into the University, I knew I wanted to be excellent but did not desire to graduate with a first-class cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Therefore, I settled in my heart for a second-class upper CGPA. I hinged the decision on what I heard people say. Some students say: "First-class students only thrive on books. Once they leave the school environment, they struggle and later get hired by students who had second and third class grades in the university". Others say: "Getting a first-class is hard and requires intense reading". Therefore, I settled for a second-class upper, a grade enough to relieve me of unnecessary reading and hiring stress. So I thought.

As a 100-level student, I attended most lectures and took copious notes. I bought most course handouts and past questions. However, I folded my hands to rest for a while. For the notes I took, I neither studied them in-depth on returning to the hostel nor breakdown concepts I needed help understanding. It was because I did not have an internet-enabled phone in 2011, but I had access to the MTN Foundation ICT library, which I could have used judiciously for research. I studied the past question papers briefly before getting tested on the course; therefore, I was not adequately

familiar with the question formats. At other times, after studying past questions, I feel intimidated by the gap in my knowledge of the course. Consequently, I either reviewed the question papers without finding the correct answers to questions I did not know about or skimmed through the question papers to tick the task off my mental to-do list. Therefore, I only realised that a good number of questions I had seen in the examinations I had taken were similar to questions in some of the past question papers I possessed.

Fortunately, I got a 3.52 grade point average (GPA) in the first semester examinations. The average GPA was because I took two Biology and a Chemistry elective in which I had a B grade in both biology courses and an A in the Chemistry course. When I was about selecting elective courses during course registration, most of my coursemates picked Geography courses and urged me to pick them too. However, God did not lead me to select the Geography courses because of their perceived easiness but to select the Chemistry and Biology courses because I had good knowledge about them stemming from the time I prepared for the UTME examination. In my core departmental courses, Mathematics and Physics, I got an A, numerous C, and an E. Although the result was average, I was elated because I felt it was a good start. I was determined to make the examination result better in the second semester; I was determined to shake the sleep off my eyes; all by myself. And I did, but I got an unexpected result.

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In-depth self-study is a tree which  
yields fruit for its owner.



Your mindset towards academics affects your performance. People will always have opinions about academics, but it is up to you to define the perspective you see. Although what people say may be true, that does not mean you are to dwell on their viewpoint. Ask God to help you evaluate the situation and seek advice from people who have achieved what God has set in your heart to achieve. Taking notes during lectures is one of the steps towards attaining academic excellence in a course, but it must be backed by studying the notes copied. If the copied notes are not reviewed, the purpose of taking such notes is defeated. Analysing the notes does not mean you should dwell only on what you copied, but you are to draw insights also from what you have read concerning the course. Also, there might be some online resources on platforms like Youtube that will aid in studying the aspect copied in the note in-depth. As much as you might have learned, you should keep sight of the examination you are preparing for. Getting past questions on the course helps you understand the course's questions format.

Furthermore, studying past questions helps identify knowledge gaps. Finally, academic excellence is a deliberate effort that starts from the point of course registration. In most courses of study in the University, it is required that you pick some electives in addition to the core/compulsory courses for the session or semester. Ensure that the elective courses you choose resonate with your interests, your basic knowledge of the elective course, and God's leading. Do not

pick elective courses just because your friends and coursemates have chosen them. The Biology and Chemistry elective courses I selected resonated with my foundational knowledge of the courses, my interests and the prompting of God. Most of my coursemates and friends who joined the bandwagon of picking the Geography elective course eventually got low grades of C, D, and E. Do not let the crowd effect affect you. Before joining a bandwagon, ask yourself this question: if it were unpopular, would you still choose it? Otherwise, you might be on a journey to sleep or slumber.



## Chapter Four

### Bear in the Lull

“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.”

Genesis 12:10 NKJV

# Bear in the Lull

*"Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land."*

Genesis 12:10 (NKJV)

The second semester of the 100 level started, and I began studying notes, past questions, and reading other textbooks to expound on the topics I learnt. I studied hard and will soon find out if it paid off. Meanwhile, I attended academic seminars at the Chapel of Redemption ABU Zaria, where guest speakers taught academic excellence concerning Joshua 1:8, which says:

*"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua 1:8 (NKJV)*

However, I could not make anything out of it because I wanted to take hold of academic excellence principles at the University. I knew that God wanted me to be academically excellent, and I prayed for God's help in my academics, but all seemed as if I was to be average. Then came the second-semester examinations, which would serve as a litmus test for all my efforts to study hard. During the examination, I experienced the grace and mercy of God. Most notable is the compulsory statistics course, STAT 102. When I was to write the objective exam, I saw questions outside the topics the lecturer taught. I answered a few questions confidently, but on counting the number of questions I had responded to, I

saw that I was still to make an F grade. That was when God helped me notice that all the correct answers I picked had a different font weight. If option A were to be a correct answer, the letter A of the option would be significantly thicker than all other options. I had no choice but to tick the bold options compared to the others. Surprisingly, I made an A in the course when the results were out. When the results were out, my grades improved slightly in the second semester; I got a GPA of 3.64 and a CGPA of 3.57. When I saw the increase in GPA, I was unhappy because I expected more. I was not grateful to God for what he had done, and to ask him to open my eyes to understand the mystery behind academic success at the University.

Therefore, I complained. Then at the 200 level, I was less focused during lectures and did not strive to understand complex concepts. During tests and examinations, instead of dropping the book some minutes before the test, I do read into the test or examination hall, which made me a bit uneasy after seeing the questions. Therefore, I got low grades during tests and on some exams including a core course, COSC 211 (Object Oriented Programming). I did not understand computer programming concepts, let alone the programming language: Java. Therefore, I was reluctant to learn the core programming concepts through intensive self-study. As a result, I got an F in the course, which meant an automatic carryover. However, because a good number of my coursemates also failed the course, the department waived the prerequisite status of the course because the COSC 211 course was a prerequisite to COSC 212 (Object-Oriented Programming II) in the second semester of the 200 level.

Also, COSC 211 was a prerequisite to COSC 301 and COSC 401 in 300 and 400 levels each. If not for the waiver, I could have gotten an extra year to spend in school. Before I knew about the status of my 200 level first semester result, it was already halfway through the second semester of the 200 level. Unfortunately, I had written some tests before I was aware of the abysmal performance; therefore, I was on another road to either another carryover or an average 200-level result. Because of the F grade in COSC 211 and an E grade in COSC 203 (Discrete mathematics), the 200 level first semester result crashed my CGPA from 3.57 to 3.39, having gotten a GPA of 3.09 in the first semester. So there I was in the second semester staring at another potentially harmful result coming my way in the second semester. However, God had a redemption plan; the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike most Nigerian students in Federal universities dread. The 6-month ASUU strike began in 2013, and I packed my bags, leaving the academic famine that plagued the Federal Universities for home.

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Excellence in any sphere is a  
journey of grit and perseverance.



Attending academic seminars is an excellent way to understand the principles of academic success. However,

you need to ensure that there are actionable points that you can pick from such seminars. The speaker may emphasise studying notes, attending tutorials, and solving past questions in some academic workshops. Still, suppose discussions on methods of studying notes, approaching tutorials, and extracting insights from solving past questions do not hold, you may not achieve academic excellence despite applying all the strategies taught. There is no silver bullet to attaining academic excellence, but there are principles that may seem minor to affect anything but have a profound effect on your academics. I studied hard and went through past questions in my 100-level second semester but could not get the glorious result I expected. In the journey to academic excellence, you also need to trust God, as there will be times when all the principles fail because of unforeseen circumstances. Just like during the STAT 102 examination, most of the questions were outside of the courses' scope as taught by the lecturer, but God still showed me favour in such a time. The STAT 102 experience was an exception, and that was the only time I had answers not based on what I had read or known. Finally, excellence in any sphere is a journey of grit and perseverance where there are complex things to learn and do. It would be best if you prepared your mind to face those complexities and persevere. Perseverance does not mean you do it alone. It means you use the resources around you to achieve the goal even if the initial plan does not work out. Learn to ask for help and be unapologetic about it. Be bold and admit you do not know or understand a concept, but do not stop at recognising the gap in your knowledge. Take steps to fill the gap using the resources at your disposal. Youtube is a great place to learn about the same concept from several people. Leverage what you have.



## Chapter Five

### Gratitude

“...Even then, my work didn’t amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it.”

1 Corinthians 15:10 (MSB)

# Gratitude

*"...Even then, my work didn't amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it."*

1 Corinthians 15:10 (MSB)

When the 6-month ASUU strike commenced, I was happy because I would take a break from the fast pace with which school had been going and have time to assimilate the core concepts of the subjects I did not make out time to understand initially. So I packed my bags from Suleiman Hostel in ABU Zaria and moved back to Jos in Plateau State. Back in Jos, I was soon bored with the stay-at-home and started to look for books to read to keep me busy. On scouting the collection of Christian books I had on my laptop, I saw the School of the Spirit by Robert Liardon. I picked an interest in the book and started to read. As God would help me, I understood the purpose of God redeeming man starting with the illustration in the story of Noah and the Ark. I knew I had to rededicate myself to God anew and experience him in a deeper dimension. Through my encounter with the book, I became more committed to studying and meditating on the word of God. That was when I set a goal of studying the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, which I accomplished. Reading the School of the Spirit marked the beginning of my walk with God.

Furthermore, during the strike, I was committed to studying the core concepts in the practical courses I needed help understanding. I studied COSC 212 Object-Oriented

Programming II in-depth and had to read a Java textbook to comprehend the concepts of Java programming language pat-down. Through God's help, I was able to understand Java concepts in-depth. The 6-month ASUU strike in 2013 allowed me to know God more and understand the core concepts in the subjects that eluded me. I studied out of sheer curiosity to understand the "how" and the "why" behind the subjects. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) later called off the strike, and I resumed school. Some unwritten tests were scheduled, and from the course's test results, I knew God had placed me on the right track.

Nevertheless, I still made some mistakes. In MATH 208 (Linear Algebra II), an elective, I did well on the test but performed poorly in the examination due to examination anxiety. Instead of dropping my notes some minutes before the examination commencement, I kept poring over the notes into the examination hall. This act made me anxious about waiting for the arrival of the examination paper and glossing over the questions on the examination paper. I knew how to arrive at the correct solution for most of the questions, but I only answered a few haphazardly because I lost my composure. When the results were released, I eventually got a C in MATH 208. My test performance helped prop up the grade; if not, it would have been another poor grade. I achieved a B in COSC 212, the second section of COSC 211, which I failed in the first semester. Then I knew that God was unto something great with my academics. This time, I was grateful for the improvement, having gotten a GPA of 3.53 and a CGPA of 3.42. The subtle mistakes I made in the second-semester examination, especially in MATH 208 made me develop some principles I stuck to throughout the remaining

years of my stay at the University. It was God who gave me the work to do and the energy to do it.

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**Focus on the things you can  
control.**



Times of delay, such as an ASUU strike, might be a time of renewal for you; it all depends on your perspective. An ASUU strike is not a desired event, but what will you do if it happens? You could react negatively to the situation you have little to no power to control or ask God to help you make good use of the renewal time provided. Such periods are times for growth in several aspects. First, it is time for spiritual development when you use the period to deepen your knowledge of God. Second, it is time for intellectual development when you read books that improve your perspective on life, finances, and career. Third, it is time to take a break from the pressure of reading to pass tests and examinations but use the freed-up time to pick up tangible skills which interest you. Fourth, it is time to evaluate how your life has been thus far and chart a way forward. Finally, it is time to use the energy God has given you to do the work he has provided. In all, do not forget to give thanks to God for the successes He has helped you achieve.



## Chapter Six

### Turbo Rocket

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but God made you grow. It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow"

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 (MSB)

# Turbo Rocket

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but God made you grow. It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow"*

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 (MSB)

The 300-level first semester brought challenges, but I resolved to overcome them. First, I had to register for the COSC 211 carryover course, which had a compulsory laboratory module with a chunk of the total marks. The COSC 211 course and three other courses had laboratory modules which were to last for a maximum of 3-hour. Therefore, I had about 12 hours of laboratory per week. As I prepared for the semester, a roommate introduced me to a book at the Kashim Ibrahim Library (KIL) called "POWER Learning: Strategies for Success in College and Life" by Robert Feldman. In the book, I learned about academic and life success principles. I picked lessons from the book to implement, which helped me plan and manage my busy academic schedule.

Furthermore, I started to use the Microsoft weather app on my laptop to gain insight into what the weather in Zaria would be like so that I could decide on the time to wash my clothes. I used the weather app because if it were to rain when I wash my clothes, it would be difficult to find a container to place the wet clothes in due to the nature of my room in the hostel. I was in a room of 4 with eight occupants; therefore, I could not guarantee the state of my wet clothes because someone might end up soiling my clothes.

Because I enjoyed reading in the room, I had to deal with distractions while reading. Therefore, I used headphones which played a gospel song from my laptop and was on repeat. Placing the music on repeat helped block the noise and improve my concentration. However, I only used this for courses where I needed to understand concepts, not when I needed to memorise things. To memorise, I find a quiet place either on the last floor of the block or the extreme edge with low footfall.

Furthermore, whenever I return from lectures in the evening, I strive to understand the concepts taught. Sometimes, I download the textbook from which the lecturer extracted the PowerPoint slides to aid the comprehension of the concepts taught earlier. Reading the textbook helped me understand the concepts taught in class better. On the other hand, when I had no textbook access, I downloaded multiple youtube video tutorials about the topic and watched diligently to understand the concepts.

Furthermore, God has proved to be good to me in my academics by pointing me to areas where I need to prepare for tests and exams. For instance, while preparing for the MATH 311 Mathematical Modelling course, I was invited to the Catholic church for a brothers and sisters fellowship picnic. At first, I was reluctant to attend the picnic on Sunday because I was to write the MATH 311 test on Monday. However, I honoured the invitation and went because I felt I had exhausted what I needed to cover for the test. When I returned from the picnic, I had a prompting to pick up the MATH 311 note to check out what I had studied. Then my eyes fell on a group of formulas I still needed to learn. I learned the formula. During the test on Monday, one of the questions was to write just one out of the three formulas I knew for ten

marks. I quickly wrote it down. I scored a 30 out of 40 on that test and subsequently made an A in the course.

Also, I strive to earn high on tests so that I will not have to work extra hard to make an A in the course by getting higher scores in any examination. For instance, in a COSC 305 System Analysis and Design test, the test format was unknown to us, the students. We wondered if it would be an essay, objective, or subjective. Whenever I encounter such situations, I opt to study the course as if the format of the questions would be subjective. The study method is because preparing for subjective questions helps one know the words used for definitions and describing concepts. Furthermore, preparing for the subjective questions helps one understand the in-depth parts of the concept and successfully reproduce it if an essay examination is administered. Such a study method is advantageous if the test or examination has either objective or essay questions. The lecturer then gave us subjective questions mixed with essays and a few objectives. The reading strategy I employed helped me to ensure that I was in a safe spot. Consequently, I scored 37 out of 40, the highest on the test.

Whenever I prepare for exams, I try to think like my lecturers. I ask myself, "If I were to be the lecturer, where would I set the questions from?" Sometimes I say to myself, "If I were the lecturer and wanted to make as many students fail but was restricted to what I have taught, how would I frame the question?". Asking myself such questions makes me look for keywords that serve as pointers to what any question might refer to. Furthermore, I strive to understand each of my lecturers' personalities. Whenever I come in contact with a lecturer, I place them in two categories: those who want

things given to them verbatim as they have offered and a lecturer who loves practical things and gives students the latitude to explain concepts in their own words. Understanding the category a lecturer belongs to helps me to know how to approach any question posed by any lecturer. It helps me to see whether I have to strive to place more critical points in the definition or explanation of concepts or to place them in keywords that rhyme with my understanding of the concept asked.

Furthermore, this helps me to know how to approach studying the subject. I focus more on memorising concepts for courses taken by lecturers who love to have answers verbatim as given. In contrast, for lecturers that provide students with the leeway to express themselves and who love applied questions, I focus more on understanding the concepts. The shift in focus based on the lecturer does not mean that I don't strive to understand and equally memorise but depending on the nature of the lecturer, I do one in a higher proportion than the other. A lecturer who likes verbatim can easily be known because they love to read from the book, while a lecturer who loves that students express themselves seldomly reads from a book during lectures. An expressive lecturer likes to ask questions, formulate new questions, and think up scenarios, while a less explicit lecturer wants to stick to what is in the lecture note. They seldomly deviate from the topic nor give real-life examples or application of concepts. Also, if a lecturer seldomly writes on the board and decides to write something, whatever the lecturer has written is essential because it deviates from the lecturer's normal behaviour; hence it serves as a pointer to a potential test or examination question.

Also, I use a black pen to write all my tests and examinations. The choice of pen is because I believe the lecturers are used to black text on white paper. That is, lecturers mostly read black text on a white background which could be on paper or mobile devices. Therefore, I use a black pen to make my letters more familiar to the lecturer. In addition, using the black pen helps the lecturer focus on the letter forms and see how they form into words instead of adjusting to reading blue ink.

Furthermore, once given a test or exam question paper, I usually spend the first one to two minutes scanning through the questions to pick the ones I have more confidence in answering correctly. I flip through the questions because starting with questions I am unsure of the answer to might make me panic and lose concentration in answering the ones I am sure of their solutions. Usually, the courses require that I pick a maximum of four out of 6 questions to answer, of which I usually select the first four questions I am confident in answering. When I fail to find the best four questions I am most optimistic about answering correctly, I find the first two sets of questions that I have a higher probability of answering correctly than the remaining four. Whenever I finish answering those two, I evaluate the other questions to find the remaining two I need to complete the maximum number of answerable questions allowed.

Furthermore, for questions where the lecturer assigns marks, I attempt questions with a sub-question with a higher mark and a higher probability of answering correctly. In some situations, I might know the answer to all the questions in the question paper. Here, I force rank the questions from the easiest to the most difficult though I can answer all the questions. Then I chose four easy questions to answer,

starting with the question I perceived to be easiest. In writing the answers to questions, the first question I answer is the question which I am most confident has the highest probability of getting a full mark or the most marks. The last question to be answered is one with the lowest likelihood of getting a full mark or most of the marks among the four questions I have chosen. Structuring how I answer questions helps improve my confidence while writing the examination. Furthermore, because I have responded to the preceding questions correctly, I answer questions with the most negligible probability of gaining a full mark last. Answering the question with the least likelihood of acquiring a full mark last is because a lecturer might be lenient in marking the question since the answers to the preceding questions were answered correctly.

Also, before exams and tests, I stop reading at least one hour before the examination time. Halting all readings helps to reduce the examination anxiety usually experienced. Sometimes, while I wait for the test or exam to begin, I look at nature. As I stroll around, I stay by the test venue but away from my coursemates, who are still doing some last-minute reading. For some individuals, reading at the last minute works fine, but for me, it increases my anxiety levels which reduces my recall rates during the examination. Tutorial sessions also aid in academic excellence, but I treat them as the last thing on my checklist after I have read. Most times, having prepared for an examination adequately, I attend tutorial sessions to get a feel of what I might have missed while studying. Sometimes, those sessions have proven to be valuable as I learn concepts I had overlooked earlier or gain access to a past question I needed to lay my hands on. I use

tutorials to fill in the knowledge cracks while I focus on reading to fill up the knowledge chasm. You are responsible for what you learn.

"

There is a way things work. Your  
know-how is hinged on it.





## Chapter Seven

### Life Long Skill

“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them”

Acts 18:1-3 (NIV)

# Life Long Skill

*"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them"*

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 (MSB)

Acquiring skills is usually time intensive and requires a high concentration level. Interestingly, skills learnt are typically transferable into different domains, making the skill acquisition process worthwhile. As much as one may acquire a skill, hard or soft, one needs to understand how to apply each to whichever domain one finds oneself. The skills I built during my academics have proven useful outside the academic environment. It has helped me adapt to the workplace, foresee challenges and proffer comprehensive solutions that address them.

First, having acquired time management skills, which helped me juggle between courses to study, the craft has also aided me in managing the work I am assigned. It has helped me value time within the business context and how my timely or untimely decisions affect the organisation's bottom line. As much as I focus on completing tasks early, I also focus on doing the tasks in a way that maximises business impact. Being able to prioritise tasks with significant business impact is similar to the time management skill I exercise during an examination. As much as I need to answer the examination questions within the specified timeframe, I also need to provide the answers that give the best marks.

Second, self-motivation, self-management, and self-learning have proven to be skills that offered me immense value within and outside the walls of the lecture halls. During my time at the University, I had to take the initiative to learn concepts that were not taught in-depth by the lecturer and understand concepts in-depth. When the ideas seemed too hard to grasp, I had to muster the strength to motivate myself as God strengthened me. Little did I know these skills would form the bedrock of my career. Ever since I graduated, I have had to learn many hard skills on my own using the self-motivation, self-management, and self-learning skills I have developed over the years.

Third, the aspect of report writing and presentation at the University helped me improve my communication skills such that I could put forward ideas and arguments in text and other forms. Outside the University, I have used these skills to develop business presentations to ensure the continuity of contracts and drafted documents to bid for newer ones. Furthermore, my ability to infer possible areas from which the lecturer extracts questions has aided in my ability to infer what a client or teammate needs based on previous discussions and their personality.

Whatever you do in any sphere of life defines, redefines, and reaffirms who you are. The little actions, inactions, and hesitations shape your habits and behaviours. Overall, the ability to examine past actions and their results and learn from them is invaluable to attaining the height God has destined one to reach. Academics is an aspect of life that offers immense benefits concerning skills and establishing networks that may last a lifetime. The skills learnt during an academic pursuit may be of value in another sphere of life;

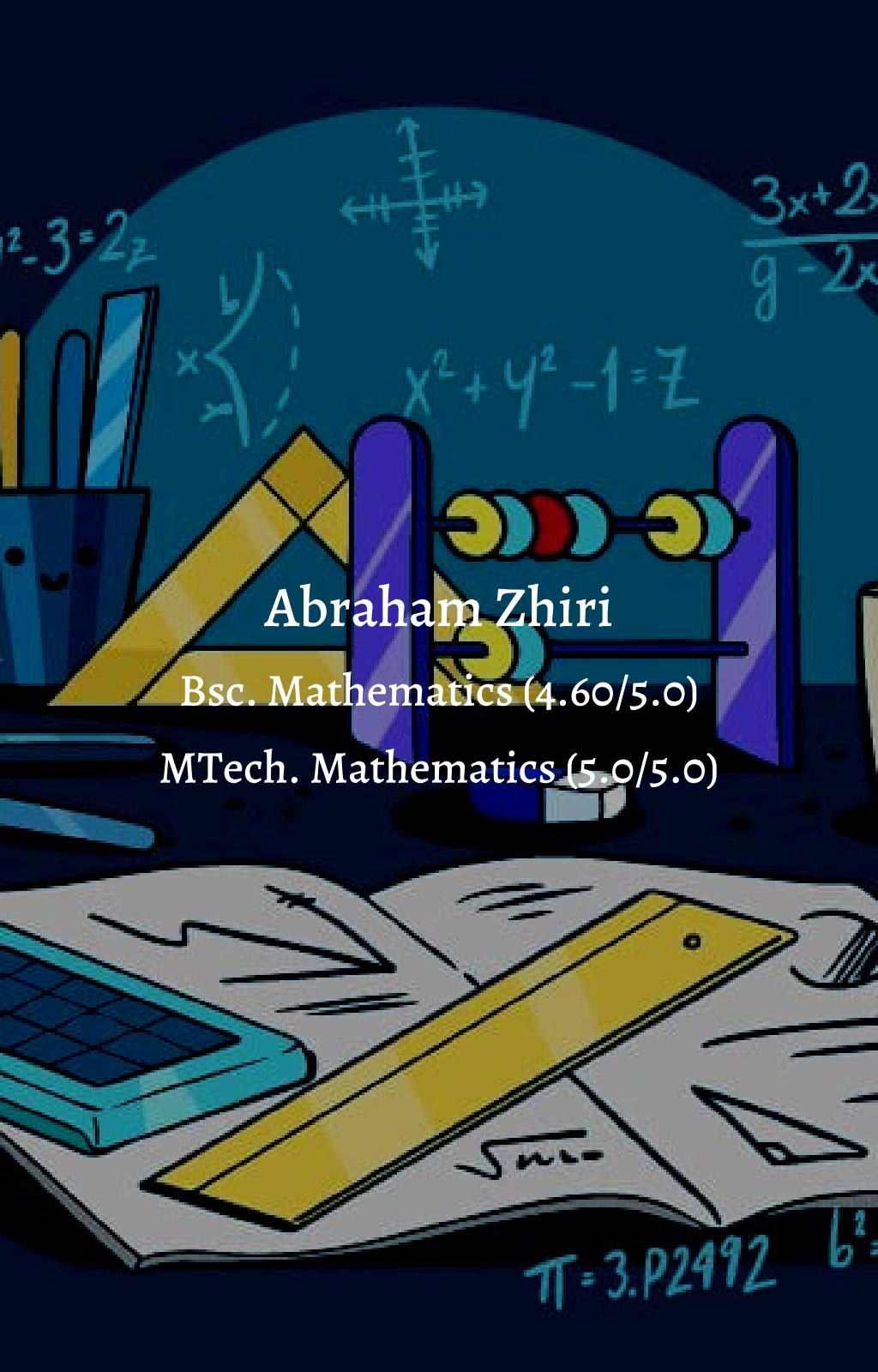
therefore, strive to acquire the core skills in whatever you do. Developing core skills helps you adapt quickly and helps in the transfer of talent from one domain to another.

Furthermore, strive to understand the reason behind a concept, phenomenon, or problem. In the academic world, many individuals focus on the "what" much more than the "why". The poor priority in focus impedes their ability to adapt once the scenario changes and makes them not realise the application of the skill or concept to other fields. Strive to be a person of depth. In conclusion, there are other soft skills not mentioned that I acquired while learning and interacting with colleagues in the University, which have been invaluable outside the academic environment. Most important is to allow God to use those skills to shine His light forth through you as you use the skills to bless others. The skills God has helped me cultivate are not temporary but are to be lifelong. You, too, can acquire lifelong skills that move you beyond academic excellence.

"

**Skills learnt are usually  
transferable to different domains.**





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# Chapter One

## The Power of a Positive Mindset

"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee."

Proverbs 23: 7 KJV

# The Power of a Positive Mindset

*"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee."*

Proverbs 23: 7 (KJV)

The human intellect is one of the marvellous gifts that God has bestowed upon humans. The ability to learn, think, and choose distinguishes us as human beings and has a deeper meaning. Your thoughts become a mirror of your true self. God is well aware of this, and he speaks about it in many places throughout the Bible; *"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee"* - Proverbs 23:7 (KJV). A good mindset is the first step toward success. Humans are entirely the product of what we think with our intellect. There is no such thing as a quick fix for success.

Since high school, I've tried to cultivate a positive mindset about anything I want to do, and this has set the tone or foundation for my preparedness to do it well and, if possible, to be the best. I enjoy approaching challenging jobs with a positive attitude, regardless of what others say or think about the subject's or course's complexity. Why was I able to do this when I was in secondary school? I remember deriving excitement in solving mathematics and other complex computation courses. The simple fact is that, from the onset, I have my mind set to be positive in all of my undertakings, particularly those that others perceive to be difficult. I've always wanted to show the rest of the world that there's nothing my God in heaven can't do. As a result, I can

confidently say that with God, all things are possible, as is written in the Bible, "*But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible*"- Matthew 19:26 (KJV).

As a result, I could easily understand, absorb, and integrate tedious tasks to my level of comprehension. My academic success came to fruition through the word of God, positive thinking, and confession. God took me to the Federal College of Education in Kontagora (FCE), where I studied Mathematics and Computer Science for three (3) years, from 2007 to 2010. When I first arrived at the school and received my admission letter, someone approached me and asked, "*Who are you that you want to study Mathematics?*" He claimed that computer science is better and simpler. "*I trust and believe God will keep us alive,*" I said boldly, "*and in three years, I will come and show you DISTINCTION in mathematics inscribed on my certificate.*" He was shocked and began to laugh, but as God would have it, what I confessed through the power Holy Spirit was fulfilled. In Mathematics and Computer science, I bagged Distinctions.

The distinctions I achieved are due to the power of positive confession and being positive in my mindset. Positive confession is the outcome of positive thinking because the Bible says in Matthew 12:34-35 (KJV): "*O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*" As sincere Christians, we should be able to find positive confessions among ourselves. I make positive confessions as I navigate through life's difficulties and, more specifically, in academics.

My positive attitude and confession of God's promises made it possible for me to graduate at the top of my class from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU). The same scenario occurred in FCE when I was admitted to the school and then at ABU, when I gained admission to study Bsc. Mathematics. But, with immediate effect, I rejected the intimidation and declared that I would succeed even in ABU Zaria; I am not a candidate for failure. I further told the guy that as long as Heaven and Earth exist and God is the one who created them, I will come and show you First Class written on my Certificate in the same Mathematics you claimed people were fleeing. Through all, God made it possible for me to graduate with First Class in Mathematics and the best graduating student in the department, among other honours, and I kept my word and showed him my First Class result.

Friends, being optimistic and making nice confessions have a lot of power. God's word is infallible and unchangeable. "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" - *Philippians 4:13 (KJV)*. You can do everything as a believer, according to the Bible, "not by your strength or our strength, but through Christ who strengthens us." The word of God is a solid basis upon which we can build good declarations. In my academic journey, I have never once doubted God's ability to achieve what people think is impossible. I believe in Him wholeheartedly, which keeps going on making positive confessions, and He continues to prove Himself to me.

I recently obtained a Master of Technology in Mathematics from the Federal University of Technology in Minna. "*We shall see if your FIRST class from ABU is real since you are taking your masters here*", someone said when I started the program. I promptly responded that God is in charge of everything and

promptly responded that God is in charge of everything and that if He wants to, He can do it again. I also stated that I would show you Distinction and you would congratulate me when it happens. It turned out that I graduated with Distinction, not just any type of Distinction, but the highest grade of Distinction. Obadiah 1:17 (KJV) says: "*But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions*". Our ability to thrive academically is a part of our possession, but it must originate from a positive confession and a positive mindset.

"

**A good mindset is the first step  
toward success.**





We believe that God has helped you to read through this book and pray that He will enable you put into practice the lessons learnt.

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Shalom.

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