



Original Article

## The Path to Persistence: How Conscientiousness and Social Integration Shape Academic Resilience in Higher Education

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*Conscientiousness,  
Social Integration,  
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Persistence.*

Research on academic persistence is foundational to higher education studies, as it directly impacts student success, retention, and graduation rates. Of the many factors influencing these outcomes, personality traits—especially conscientiousness—and social integration are particularly significant. This study examined the role of conscientiousness and social integration in promoting academic persistence among undergraduate students at Makerere University. Guided by a post-positivist perspective, the research employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, prioritizing quantitative data to assess relationships between conscientiousness, social integration, and academic resilience, followed by qualitative interviews to provide deeper insights. A sample of 754 final-year students was surveyed, with follow-up interviews conducted with 14 participants selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative findings revealed significant positive correlations between conscientiousness, social integration, and academic persistence, with conscientiousness emerging as a strong predictor of persistence ( $\rho = .261, p < .01$ ). Additionally, findings showed that social integration significantly mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and academic persistence ( $b = .15, p = .22$ ). Qualitative data provided further understanding of these results, illustrating how traits such as diligence and organization, alongside supportive peer and faculty interactions, foster a sense of belonging and commitment to academic goals. The study concludes that fostering conscientious behaviours and social connectedness within university environments can enhance students' academic persistence. Recommendations include institutional policies that encourage peer integration, mentorship programs, and support for personality development. These findings contribute to the literature on academic persistence by highlighting the critical interplay between personality and social factors in students' success and by offering practical strategies to support student retention and achievement.

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## INTRODUCTION

The journey to academic persistence in higher education is increasingly challenging, as institutions face persistent dropout rates and diverse student needs. Identifying the factors that drive student commitment and success is thus essential. Among these, conscientiousness and social integration stand out as critical components that substantially influence academic resilience. Conscientiousness—characterized by among others diligence, organization, and responsibility—strongly correlates with positive academic outcomes, including heightened motivation and improved performance. Meanwhile, social integration, rooted in Tinto's (1993, 1975) institutional integration model, reflects the relationships students cultivate within their academic communities, fostering a sense of belonging and support.

This dual focus on personality traits and social environments highlights their interplay in promoting student persistence. Accordingly, this study examines how conscientiousness and social integration synergize to strengthen academic persistence, thereby uncovering pathways to enhanced persistence and success in higher education. Understanding these relationships is crucial for developing targeted interventions that support academic success and holistic well-being within the dynamic landscape of higher education.

### Objectives

- To explore the influence of conscientiousness on both college CGPA and persistence.
- To examine the indirect effect of conscientiousness on specific learning

outcomes, such as CGPA and academic persistence, via social integration.

- To explore students' subjective explanations for the significant quantitative findings, using thematic analysis to identify common themes and insights.

### Problem Statement

Student retention and academic resilience are pressing concerns in higher education, affecting institutions worldwide, including Makerere University in Kampala. With challenges such as high dropout rates, low persistence, and academic struggles, Makerere University faces barriers that hinder students' ability to complete their studies and achieve academic success (New Vision, 2019; Okello, 2019). These challenges are exacerbated by limited resources, large class sizes, and a diverse student body with varying backgrounds, all of which create obstacles to sustained engagement and resilience (Nagitta, 2024; Sserugo, 2024).

Research has shown that personal traits, especially conscientiousness, alongside supportive social integration (Hossain et al., 2024; Sévère-Barnett, 2024; Wildman, 2009), are crucial for fostering academic resilience—the capacity to withstand academic challenges and persist toward graduation (Yu et al., 2024). Conscientious students often display goal-oriented behaviours like diligence and responsibility, which enhance their academic performance (Godfrey et al., 2024; Quito-Calle & Cosentino, 2024). However, without strong social integration, characterized by meaningful connections with peers, faculty, and the academic community, these students may lack the support systems needed to fully engage, which could limit their resilience and persistence.

Despite the recognized importance of personality and social factors in student retention, limited research has explored how conscientiousness and social integration interact to shape academic resilience within Makerere University's specific context. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how these factors jointly influence persistence and resilience among students, providing insights that could guide the development of targeted support interventions and policies to improve student retention and academic success at Makerere and similar institutions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Academic Persistence in Higher Education

In this study, we conceptualized academic persistence as a student's ability to navigate and overcome challenges in their educational journey. Studies show that academically persistent students often use adaptive coping strategies, maintain high motivation levels, and achieve academic success despite obstacles (Herdiensyah & Fauziah, 2024; Yang & Geng, 2024). Factors influencing persistence range from personal characteristics, such as personality traits, to external supports, such as social networks (Hossain et al., 2024; Sévère-Barnett, 2024; Wildman, 2009). Understanding these factors is essential for designing interventions that bolster resilience within higher education environments.

Academic persistence, often defined as the capacity to adapt and thrive amid academic challenges (Green, 2024; Josiah, 2024; Mackh, 2024), is closely linked to academic resilience and is reflected in metrics like retention rates and progression through programs (Tinto, 1993). Positive outcomes of persistence include higher GPAs, improved retention, and increased graduation rates (Duckworth et al., 2012). In light of ongoing dropout issues, investigating the factors contributing to persistence and resilience is critical for institutions.

Extensive research identifies various individual and environmental influences on persistence, including personality traits, family background, social support, and institutional engagement (Collie et al., 2024; Mtshweni, 2024; Tulowiecka, 2024; Schotthofer, 2024). Together, these findings underscore the

importance of understanding these influences to develop strategies that enhance retention.

### The Interplay Between Conscientiousness and Social Integration

An increasing body of research highlights the significance of conscientiousness—a personality trait associated with responsibility, organization, and goal-oriented behaviour in conjunction with social integration as crucial predictors of academic persistence. Conscientious students generally seek out group activities and develop connections within their academic communities, which strengthens their social integration. The proactive nature of conscientious students helps them build supportive networks, which not only enhance their sense of belonging but also contribute to academic satisfaction (Jusri & Lechner, 2024).

Conscientious students frequently take on active roles within collaborative settings, fostering a balanced group dynamic and establishing trust among peers (Godfrey et al., 2024). These organized approaches encourage positive academic and social engagement, facilitating successful social integration and supporting academic achievement. In balancing academic and social demands, conscientious students benefit from supportive connections without sacrificing their academic focus. Studies by Chapa (2016) and Eshun et al. (2023) underscore this dynamic, suggesting that conscientious students derive satisfaction from meaningful social interactions, which reinforce their commitment to their academic goals.

However, while social integration usually has a positive impact, excessive involvement in non-academic social activities may sometimes detract from academic achievement. Findings by Loes et al. (2024) and Trolan and Parker III (2023) indicate that highly socialized students risk decreased GPA if their interactions are predominantly non-academic. Conversely, conscientious students manage this balance effectively, focusing on academic-oriented interactions that reinforce their academic and social integration (Ishitani, 2016; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

## Conscientiousness as a Predictor of Academic Success

Conscientiousness is a well-established predictor of academic achievement within Costa and McCrae's Five-Factor Model (2010 & 1999). Characterized by goal-directed behaviour, organizational skills, and time management, conscientiousness is strongly associated with positive academic outcomes (Quito-Calle & Cosentino, 2024). Empirical research, such as studies by Meyer et al. (2024) and Shaninah and Mohd Noor (2024), reveals that conscientious students tend to engage more, miss fewer classes, and meet deadlines—all contributing to their academic performance.

Beyond academic achievement, conscientiousness fosters behaviours that enhance both social and academic engagement (Meyer et al., 2024). Conscientious students often participate actively in discussions, apply self-regulated learning strategies, and manage their time effectively (Duckworth et al., 2012; Dumfart & Neubauer, 2016; Munir et al., 2024). Such behaviours not only support individual success but also foster positive group dynamics, positioning conscientious students as leaders who build trust among peers, reduce social loafing, and promote collaboration (Yang et al., 2024). Findings by Burak and Atabek (2023) further connect conscientiousness with self-regulated learning behaviours, such as goal-setting and self-discipline, which are fundamental to academic success.

As part of the Big Five personality framework, conscientiousness includes attributes like self-discipline, organization, responsibility, and a strong sense of duty (Costa & McCrae, 1999). These characteristics predict both immediate academic success and long-term goal achievement, positioning conscientiousness as a cornerstone of academic resilience and persistence. Evidence indicates that students high in conscientiousness excel in time management, have clear goal orientations, and maintain consistent study habits, which support resilience during academic challenges (Kurmanova et al., 2024; Payan-Carreira et al., 2022).

While many retention models prioritize demographic factors over personality traits, conscientiousness consistently emerges as a primary

predictor of academic behaviours. Highly conscientious students demonstrate industriousness, systematic organization, and high motivation to succeed (Meyer et al., 2024; Shaninah & Mohd Noor, 2024). This intrinsic motivation translates into greater academic effort, higher performance, and increased persistence toward degree completion (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2020).

Conscientiousness also bolsters self-regulated learning strategies, encompassing effective time and environmental management (Mahama et al., 2022). It influences students' behaviours through intrinsic motivation rather than external pressures (Akpur, 2024; Weidman & Tracy, 2013). Moreover, conscientiousness has both proactive and inhibitory dimensions: proactive conscientiousness drives achievement pursuits, while inhibitory conscientiousness relates to moral values (Costantini et al., 2015; Gniewosz et al., 2020). Each facet of conscientiousness—competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation—uniquely contributes to educational outcomes (Apostolov & Geldenhuys, 2022).

Substantial evidence supports the relationship between conscientiousness and academic outcomes. For instance, Meyer et al. (2024) found that conscientiousness moderates the relationship between cognitive ability and achievement, while Zajenkowski et al. (2024) documented a significant correlation with grades, especially among conscientious students. These findings align with Paunonen and Ashton's (2013) research, which consistently links conscientiousness to course grades. However, some studies reveal nuanced findings. For example, Grant (2024) found that conscientiousness did not significantly predict academic performance among online doctoral students, and Wilson et al. (2022) reported minimal impact, suggesting that the influence of personality traits on academic performance may differ across contexts.

Ultimately, conscientiousness is a defining trait for academic success and persistence, consistently associated with responsible behaviour and sustained academic commitment (González-Brignardello et al., 2024; Hakimi et al., 2011; Shaninah & Mohd Noor, 2024). Conscientious students demonstrate

resilience through effective coping mechanisms and proactive behaviours, enabling them to manage academic stress more effectively (Conrad & Patry, 2012).

In group settings, conscientious students often play key roles, in promoting responsibility and trust within team dynamics (Godfrey et al., 2024). Their self-regulatory skills enhance academic engagement, thereby fostering persistence and resilience when challenges arise. Consequently, cultivating conscientiousness is essential for academic success and preparation for professional environments, where diligence and attention to detail are highly valued (Rieger et al., 2022).

### **Social Integration and Its Influence on Academic Persistence**

Social integration, as conceptualized by Tinto (1975) in his model of institutional integration, refers to students' ability to assimilate into their academic and social environments, developing connections with peers, faculty, and staff that foster a sense of belonging within the university. This sense of belonging is a cornerstone of academic persistence, directly linked to improved student well-being and academic performance (Booker, 2016; Dukhie, 2023). Research consistently shows that students who feel socially integrated tend to stay engaged in their studies and are more likely to graduate, as social integration is a strong predictor of retention (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2023; Paolini, 2024; Schotthofer, 2024). A meaningful connection with the academic community builds commitment, thereby supporting long-term academic persistence (Atobatele et al., 2024; Behr et al., 2020; Fernandes, 2024a; Oxendine & Taub, 2021).

Social integration represents a student's holistic adaptation to the academic and social settings of the institution (Abood et al., 2020), manifesting as a sense of acceptance and involvement (Farokhian, 2024). The experience of belonging, described by Booker (2016) as being accepted, valued, included, and supported, positively influences both academic achievement and student well-being. Such supportive environments, underscored by Oxendine and Taub (2021), are fundamental to fostering a sense of belonging, a crucial factor in enhancing

academic performance (Arnst, 2024; Atobatele et al., 2024).

Substantial research, including studies by Karp et al. (2008) and Schotthofer (2024), emphasizes the importance of robust social ties, demonstrating that students who establish meaningful connections are more likely to persevere. Tinto's model, examining students' decisions to leave college voluntarily, finds reinforcement in contemporary research, indicating that academic and social integration is crucial for retention (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2023; Carvalhal, 2024). Studies confirm that students engaged in constructive relationships with peers, and faculty, and through extracurricular activities exhibit greater academic continuity, reinforcing the importance of high perceived integration in shaping persistence (Schotthofer, 2024).

Empirical findings further solidify the role of social integration in retention, with high-quality peer and faculty interactions directly enhancing commitment and supporting persistence (Barbera et al., 2020; Braxton et al., 1997, 2000; Lane, 2016). For example, students reporting high social integration are statistically more likely to progress academically and attain graduation (Altman, 2017; Booker, 2016; Huang et al., 2024). This correlation highlights that satisfaction with social and academic environments reinforces academic commitment, thereby improving persistence and academic outcomes.

Moreover, positive social experiences bolster resilience and reduce feelings of isolation, thereby promoting motivation and academic success (Cox, 2013; Guzzardo et al., 2021). Such socio-academic support impacts students' intentions to continue their education, as demonstrated by Bessidhoum (2024), who observed that positive faculty interactions, including informal engagements, significantly strengthen students' resolve to persist. Effective interactions not only enhance academic performance but also increase students' overall sense of value within the academic community (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2023; Altman, 2017; Loes et al., 2024; Norwani et al., 2009).

### The Mediating Role of Social Integration in the Relationship Between Conscientiousness and Persistence in Higher Education

Conscientiousness influences persistence indirectly through behaviours that foster social integration, aligning with Tinto’s (1993) interactionist theory. This theory posits that persistence is shaped by both individual characteristics and social contexts, suggesting that conscientious students are more inclined to engage socially. This proactive engagement builds a stronger attachment to the institution and enhances their likelihood of degree completion.

Social integration acts as a key mediator in the relationship between conscientiousness and academic persistence, creating a feedback loop where social connections reinforce the commitment and motivation of conscientious students (Yu et al., 2024, 2021). These students often maintain high levels of academic engagement and resilience due to their social integration, bolstering their determination to achieve long-term academic goals (Erbe et al., 2024; Gregorio, 2024). This mediation highlights the potential for institutions to support persistence by fostering environments that encourage both conscientiousness and social integration.

The interplay between conscientiousness and social integration underscores the intricate relationship between personality traits and social environments

in higher education. Conscientiousness, characterized by traits such as organization, responsibility, and goal orientation, supports academic success through disciplined self-regulation, while social integration fosters a supportive academic community that enhances persistence and well-being. Recognizing these dynamics provides educational institutions with an opportunity to develop targeted support systems that promote both traits, ultimately leading to improved retention and academic success.

### METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, framed within a post-positivist paradigm to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches. The post-positivist perspective supports combining both methods to explore objective and subjective phenomena, thus enhancing the robustness of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Dawadi et al., 2021; Tanlaka et al., 2019). In this approach, we prioritized quantitative data collection to establish statistical relationships between variables. The subsequent qualitative phase aimed to explain these statistical findings, providing deeper insights through interviews with selected participants. This method allowed for complementary perspectives, strengthening the study’s capacity to address complex research questions (Kelle et al., 2019).

### POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND SAMPLE DETERMINATION

The target population comprised 1,274 final-year students across four schools in the specified academic programs, distributed as follows:

No.	School	Programs Combined	Population
1	School of Education	Bachelor of Arts/Sciences in Education	562
2	School of Psychology	Bachelor of Industrial & Organizational Psychology and Community Psychology	248
3	School of Natural Sciences	Bachelor of Science in Petroleum Geosciences and Production	107
4	School of Engineering	Bachelor of Mechanical, Electrical, Civil Engineering & Urban Planning	357
Total			1,274

### Sampling Technique and Sample Determination

This study employed stratified random sampling to ensure representative coverage of the target population comprising 1,274 final-year students

across four schools. The stratified approach was selected because the target population is heterogeneous, encompassing students from distinct academic programs within the School of Education, Psychology, Natural Sciences, and Engineering.

Stratified sampling ensured that each subgroup (stratum) was proportionally represented in the sample, thereby improving the precision and generalizability of the findings.

### Sampling Technique

The population was stratified based on the four schools, serving as the strata. Each stratum comprised students enrolled in specific academic programs as follows:

- School of Education: Bachelor of Arts/Sciences in Education (562 students)
- School of Psychology: Bachelor of Industrial and Community Psychology (248 students)
- School of Natural Sciences: Bachelor of Science in Petroleum Geosciences and Production (107 students)
- School of Engineering: Bachelor of Mechanical, Electrical, Civil Engineering, and Urban Planning (357 students)

Within each stratum, a simple random sampling method was employed to select participants, ensuring every individual had an equal probability of selection. This approach minimized bias while maintaining the proportional representation of each school.

### Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for finite populations, given by:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Where:

N is the total population (1,274)

e is the margin of error (5% or 0.05)

Substituting these values:

$$n = \frac{1274}{1+1274(0.05^2)} = \frac{1274}{4.185} \approx 304$$

The calculated sample size of approximately 304 was then proportionally allocated across the four strata based on their respective population sizes. The proportion for each stratum ( $n_i$ ) was computed as:

$$n_i = \frac{N_i}{N} \times n$$

Where  $N_i$  is the population of each stratum, N is the total population, and n is the overall sample size.

### Proportional Allocation

The resulting sample distribution was as follows:

- School of Education:  $\frac{562}{1274} \times 304 \approx 134$  students
- School of Psychology:  $\frac{248}{1274} \times 304 \approx 59$  students
- School of Natural Sciences:  $\frac{107}{1274} \times 304 \approx 26$  students
- School of Engineering:  $\frac{357}{1274} \times 304 \approx 85$  students

### Final Sample Distribution

The final sample comprised 134 students from the School of Education, 59 from the School of Psychology, 26 from the School of Natural Sciences, and 85 from the School of Engineering, yielding 304 participants. This sample size ensures statistical validity with a 5% margin of error, while the stratified random sampling method guarantees proportional representation across all schools. This sampling approach was adopted to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the study findings by capturing the diversity within the target population.

### QUALITATIVE PHASE: SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

For the qualitative phase, the study utilized criterion sampling, a purposive sampling technique. This method involves selecting participants who meet predefined criteria relevant to the study's objectives. In this study, participants were drawn from those who had provided consent during the quantitative phase to participate in one-on-one interviews. This criterion ensured that the selected participants could provide relevant insights to address the research questions. The qualitative phase aimed to explore and explain significant findings from the quantitative phase through the subjective perspectives of the participants.

The criterion sampling approach also ensured proportional representation across the four schools, enabling the collection of diverse perspectives that aligned with the target population's distribution.

### Sample Determination and Proportional Allocation

Initially, 56 participants from the quantitative phase consented to interviews, distributed as follows: 24

from the School of Education, 17 from the School of Engineering, 8 from the School of Psychology, and 7 from the School of Natural Sciences. From this pool, a final sample size of 14 participants was determined.

**The selection of 14 participants was based on proportional allocation to ensure representation across the schools, as detailed below:**

School	Consenting Participants	Proportion ( $\frac{\text{consenting participants}}{\text{Total}}$ )	Sample Size ( $n_i$ )
School of Education	24	$\frac{24}{56} = 0.4286$	$0.4286 \times 14 \approx 6$
School of Engineering	17	$\frac{17}{56} = 0.3036$	$0.3036 \times 14 \approx 4$
School of Psychology	8	$\frac{8}{56} = 0.1429$	$0.1429 \times 14 \approx 2$
School of Natural Sciences	7	$\frac{7}{56} = 0.125$	$0.125 \times 14 \approx 2$

The proportional allocation was calculated by dividing the number of consenting participants from each school by the total number (56) and multiplying the result by the final sample size (14). Following rounding adjustments, the final distribution ensured representation as follows:

- School of Education: 5 participants
- School of Engineering: 4 participants
- School of Psychology: 3 participants
- School of Natural Sciences: 2 participants

### Data Saturation Principle

The final sample size of 14 participants was also guided by the principle of data saturation, which is widely regarded as a benchmark in qualitative research. Saturation occurs when additional interviews yield no new themes or insights. During the interviews, it was observed that the responses of the 14 participants began to exhibit redundancy, with consistent patterns and recurring themes emerging across all schools. At this point, it was determined that sufficient depth and richness of data had been achieved, and further interviews were unnecessary.

Data collection involved both a survey and interviews. The self-administered questionnaire, given to all final-year students in the 2021/22 academic year, measured key constructs. Conscientiousness was assessed using the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) tool, comprising 30 items (Ypofanti et al., 2015), while social integration was measured by the Student Institutional Integration Scale, with 12 items focusing on peer and faculty interactions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Academic persistence was evaluated using the Academic Persistence Scale, adapted from Lindheimer III's College Persistence Questionnaire (Version 3), rated on a five-point Likert scale. Quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS Version 26 to conduct correlation, regression, and partial mediation analyses, identifying key relationships between academic performance and persistence outcomes. The qualitative data from interviews was examined using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework (2006), which facilitated the identification of themes related to students' academic journeys. Ethical protocols were rigorously followed, with approvals from Makerere University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and the Uganda National Council



for Science and Technology. Informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were prioritized, with pseudonyms used in reporting to protect participant identities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Correlation between Conscientiousness and Social Integration

Table 1 shows the correlation analysis examining the relationship between Conscientiousness and Social Integration.

**Table 1: Correlation of Conscientiousness and Social Integration.**

		Social Integration
Conscientiousness	$\rho$	.253**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

N=754

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between conscientiousness and social integration ( $\rho = .253$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that students who exhibit higher levels of conscientiousness tend to be more socially integrated into university life than those with lower conscientiousness. Through the qualitative analysis, the study identified three themes that elucidate why conscientious students are more likely to engage socially with peers and lecturers: ‘hard work’, ‘self-organization’, and a ‘proactive attitude’.

**Hard Work;** Conscientious students demonstrate a pronounced sense of duty, resilience, goal orientation, attention to detail, collaboration, and consistency—qualities that drive them to excel in their academic endeavors. One respondent articulated this sentiment:

*“I’ve always believed that hard work is the key to success, so I put in a lot of effort in everything I do at university. I’m usually the one organizing study groups and making sure everyone understands the material because I know it not only benefits me but also my peers. I attend every lecture, take detailed notes, and consistently strive to exceed expectations with my assignments, whether individual or group projects. I also make it a point to ask lecturers questions whenever I don’t understand something. This constant effort has helped me stay on top of my studies and build strong connections with both my classmates and lecturers, making my university experience much more rewarding.” (Q1A-RD)*

Another participant added:

*“Being conscientious means that I can’t just sit back and relax when there’s work to be done. I’m always pushing myself to stay focused and give my best, whether it’s through participating in class discussions or collaborating with my peers on projects. I set high standards for myself and ensure I meet them, even if it means long hours at the library or sacrificing weekends to study. I thrive on being reliable and consistent, which has not only improved my academic performance but also helped me form meaningful relationships with my peers and lecturers, who appreciate my dedication and commitment.” (Q1A-R-J)*

These narratives underscore how the diligent nature of conscientious students fosters both their academic engagement and social integration, reflecting their strong sense of duty and commitment to excellence.

**Self-Organization Skills;** Another characteristic of conscientious students is their exceptional organizational skills. They exhibit discipline, self-awareness, and a drive to achieve, which enable them to maintain personal relationships and pursue individual goals, such as attaining a high CGPA or securing scholarships. One participant shared:

*“I’ve developed a strict schedule that helps me manage my time effectively. Every day, I allocate specific hours for attending lectures, studying, group discussions, and personal time. This level of organization keeps me on track with my academic goals, such as maintaining a high*

CGPA. I also ensure I stay ahead on assignments, so I'm never rushing at the last minute. Being organized has improved my academic performance and allowed me to allocate time for socializing, and building strong connections with my lecturers. I feel more in control of my university experience, and it's fulfilling to see my efforts pay off." (Q1A-RF)

Another student added,

"For me, being organized is essential to achieving my goals. I plan my week in advance, setting aside time for classes, studying, and meeting with peers. I use a planner to track deadlines and make sure that I'm balancing academic work with other commitments. This helps me stay disciplined and ensures I'm prepared for exams or meetings with my lecturers. My self-organization skills not only enhance my efficiency but also positively contribute to my image among peers and faculty. I'm motivated to excel because I know that being well-organized is key to securing better job prospects after graduation." (Q3A-R-I)

These insights highlight how effective self-organization allows conscientious students to improve their academic performance while also enhancing their social interactions with peers and lecturers.

**Proactive Attitude;** Additionally, conscientious students are characterized by a proactive attitude towards academic challenges. They exhibit enthusiasm, curiosity, confidence, adaptability, and career aspirations. These qualities, spurred by future ambitions such as pursuing postgraduate studies or achieving intellectual growth, drive them to engage constructively with peers and lecturers. One participant emphasized this approach:

"I believe that being proactive is key to success, so I always take the initiative in my studies. Whether it's volunteering to lead group projects, seeking additional resources to grasp challenging topics, or approaching lecturers for feedback, I ensure that I'm actively involved in

my learning process. I don't wait for opportunities to come to me; I create them. This mindset has helped me forge strong relationships with my peers and lecturers and keeps me motivated to pursue my goal of postgraduate studies. My proactive stance not only supports my academic excellence but also increases my connection to the university community." (Q1A-R-E)

Another respondent expressed similar sentiments:

"I'm always eager to learn and improve, which is why I take a proactive approach in everything I do at university. I regularly participate in class, ask questions, and seek advice from lecturers, even beyond the course material. I also encourage my classmates to engage more, often organizing study sessions or sharing useful study tips. My enthusiasm for learning drives my academic success. Being proactive has allowed me to stay ahead while also fostering meaningful interactions with those around me." (Q1A-R-J)

These narratives illustrate how the proactive attitudes of conscientious students, fuel both their academic engagement and social integration, reflecting their commitment to continuous learning, goal accomplishment, and constructive interactions within their academic environment.

Collectively, these themes reinforce the correlational findings and further elucidate why conscientious students are more likely to be socially integrated within university settings. Their hard work, self-organization, and proactive attitudes facilitate constructive relationships with peers and lecturers and active involvement in academic activities. These elements not only enhance their university experiences but also contribute to their overall academic success.

### **Correlation of Conscientiousness, CGPA and Persistence**

Table 02 illustrates the correlation results for the relationship between Conscientiousness, CGPA and Persistence.

**Table 02: Correlation of Student Conscientiousness, CGPA and Persistence**

		CGPA	Academic Persistence
Conscientiousness	$\rho$	.068	.261**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.062	.000

N=754

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, we discovered a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and academic persistence ( $\rho = .261, p < .001$ ), suggesting that students who are more conscientious tend to be resilient and persist in their university studies. Two key themes emerged from the qualitative data to explain this relationship: commitment and supportive friendships.

**Commitment;** Interviews showed that conscientious students displayed a high degree of commitment, characterized by determination, self-discipline, and resilience. Motivated by their goals, a strong sense of personal accountability, and high standards, these students worked persistently and diligently until they achieved their degrees. This is evident in the following participant narratives:

*"I have always felt a deep responsibility to myself and my family, knowing how much my parents sacrificed to get me here. I set daily goals and stick to my schedule, no matter how tough it gets. When I feel overwhelmed, especially with piled-up assignments or looming exams, I remind myself that giving up is not an option. I follow a routine—waking up early, reviewing notes, and staying prepared for every lecture. Even when things don't go as planned, I keep pushing forward because I believe my efforts will eventually pay off. My personal mantra is 'Stay focused, stay disciplined, and never give up,' and it keeps me going, even when others might lose motivation." (Q2B-RA)*

Another reflected that,

*"Throughout my university experience, I faced many challenges, from balancing my studies to managing personal setbacks. Yet, quitting was never an option. I set clear goals at the start and held myself accountable at every step. There were times I felt overwhelmed, but I always*

*reminded myself of why I started and what I aimed to achieve. I promised to give my best effort, regardless of how tough things got. This unwavering commitment kept me focused, disciplined, and resilient, allowing me to push through and ultimately earn my degree." (Q2B-RE)*

**Supportive Friendships;** Thematic analysis also highlighted that conscientious students often form supportive friendships, both academically and emotionally. These relationships, built around shared academic goals and a mutual desire to avoid distractions, played a crucial role in helping these students persist and complete their studies successfully. This is illustrated in the following participant accounts:

*"Having friends with similar academic goals has been a game-changer for me. We hold each other accountable and motivated, especially in difficult times. When I felt like giving up, having a supportive study group made all the difference. We met regularly to review coursework, share study strategies, and encourage one another to keep going. I recall struggling with a particular course, thinking I wouldn't make it, but my friends helped me revise, gave feedback on my assignments, and didn't let me quit. Their support kept me going, and we all celebrated when we passed the course together. This sense of community has kept me engaged and persistent, knowing I'm not alone in this journey." (Q2B-RE)*

Another participant added

*"From the beginning of my studies, I surrounded myself with friends who shared similar academic ambitions and values. We formed a study group to help each other stay focused, meet deadlines, and prepare for exams. Beyond*

*academics, we provided emotional support during stressful times, keeping each other motivated and reminding ourselves of our purpose. These friendships became a vital source of strength and encouragement, helping me remain committed to my studies and succeed in completing my degree."* (Q2B-RF)

These themes, supported by personal narratives, help explain why conscientious students are more likely to persist and succeed in obtaining their degrees.

**The Relationship between Social Integration, CGPA, and Persistence**

Table 03 shows the correlation analysis examining the relationship between Social Integration, CGPA, and Persistence.

**Table 03: Correlation of student social Integration, CGPA and Academic Persistence**

		Academic Persistence	CGPA
Student Institutional Integration	$\rho$	.394**	.143**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000

N=754

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The statistical analysis showed a positive correlation between student social integration and academic persistence ( $\rho = .394^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as well as between social integration and CGPA ( $\rho = .143^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These findings suggest that students who engage constructively with peers and lecturers are more likely to persist in their studies and achieve higher CGPAs.

Another respondent remarked:

*"Being connected and integrated into the university community, especially with friends and some of my lecturers, has greatly influenced my academic journey. I made a conscious effort to build relationships with classmates and engage with faculty, which fostered a strong sense of belonging. This social integration has made me feel more supported and less isolated, significantly boosting my academic persistence and success. The support and friendship from my peers, along with guidance from my lecturers, have kept me motivated and helped me achieve a higher CGPA."* (Q3a-R-J)

Qualitative analysis revealed two key themes that explain the relationship between social integration and both academic achievement and persistence: a sense of belonging and academic collaboration.

These narratives emphasize the importance of a supportive social environment in promoting both persistence and academic achievement.

**Sense of Belonging:** The analysis found that socially integrated students often experience a strong sense of belonging, characterized by feelings of support and acceptance. This sense of belonging motivates students to persist and strive for academic success. The following narratives illustrate how belonging impacts academic performance:

**Academic Collaboration:** The analysis also highlighted that engaging in academic collaboration with peers—through group studies, joint projects, and discussions—enhances academic performance and persistence. This collaboration fosters mutual support and shared learning, contributing significantly to academic success. The following narratives highlight the benefits of academic collaboration:

*"From early on, I made an effort to connect with my peers and build strong relationships with some of my lecturers. Participating in study groups made me feel integrated into the university community and fostered a strong sense of belonging. This feeling has been a significant motivator, reducing my stress and enhancing my academic performance. I believe that my social connections have played a key role in my persistence and higher CGPA, as they have made me feel supported and valued throughout my studies."* (Q3a-R-F)

*"Collaborating with my peers has been crucial to my academic success. By actively participating in group studies, joint projects, and frequent discussions with classmates, I've*

*benefited from a rich, supportive learning environment. This collaborative approach has fostered a dynamic where we share knowledge and resources, which has deepened my understanding of the material. Additionally, working together on assignments and projects has kept me engaged and motivated. The mutual support and collective learning from these interactions have greatly enhanced both my academic performance and my commitment to persist in my studies.” (Q3a-R-G)*

Another participant shared:

*“Engaging in academic collaboration with my peers has been pivotal to my academic journey. Through working on group projects and participating in study groups, I’ve gained invaluable opportunities for shared learning and mutual support. These collaborative experiences have enhanced my ability to grasp*

*complex concepts and kept me motivated throughout my coursework. The teamwork and collective problem-solving involved have significantly boosted my academic performance and strengthened my commitment to persevere in my studies.” (Q3a-R-I)*

These narratives demonstrate the vital role of academic collaboration in fostering persistence and academic achievement among socially integrated students.

**Partial Mediation Analysis: Conscientiousness and Academic Persistence via Social Integration**

Table 04, shows the results of the partial mediation effect of student social integration on the relationship between conscientiousness and persistence to graduation among university finalist students. The analysis provides bootstrap estimates of the direct, indirect, and total effects of conscientiousness on academic persistence.

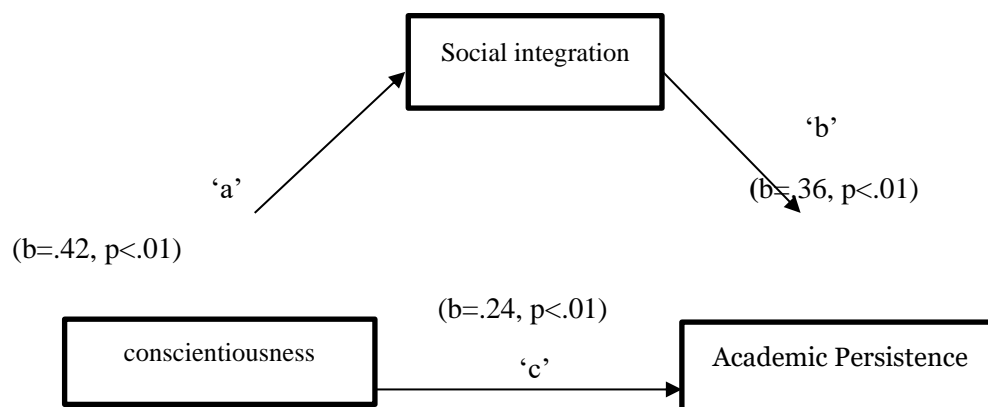
**Table 04: Bootstrap Estimates of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Conscientiousness on Academic Persistence via Student Social Integration**

Variable/Effect	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
Consci→ Persistence	.2448	.0573	4.2723	.0000	.1323	.3573
Consci→ integration	.4174	.0590	7.0755	.0000	.3016	.5332
Consci→ integration→ Persistence	.3577	.0343	10.4311	.0000	.2904	.4251
Effects	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
Direct	.2448	.0573	4.2723	.0000	.1323	.3573
Indirect	.1493	.0321			.0911	.2176
Total	.3941	.0593	6.6434	.0000	.2777	.5106

Based on 5000 bootstrap samples

Table: Mediation Analysis

**Figure 01: Standardized Mediation Pathway from Conscientiousness to Academic Persistence Via Social Integration**



The initial regression results showed that conscientiousness positively influenced both social integration ( $b=.42, p<.01$ ) and academic persistence ( $b=.24, p<.01$ ). The mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of conscientiousness on persistence via social integration ( $b=.15, p=.22$ ), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .0911 to .2176, indicating statistical significance. This suggests that social integration partially mediated the relationship between conscientiousness and academic persistence. Additionally, the direct effect of conscientiousness on persistence remained significant ( $b=.24, p<.01$ ), highlighting that higher conscientiousness was associated with increased persistence even after accounting for social integration. The total effect, combining direct and indirect effects, was also significant ( $b=.39, p<.01$ ). These results imply that conscientious students are likely to persist and graduate regardless of their level of social integration.

## DISCUSSION

### The relationship between Conscientiousness and Social Integration

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that higher levels of conscientiousness among students are positively associated with greater social integration, highlighting the critical role these factors play in promoting academic persistence. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and social integration, reinforcing previous research that identifies conscientiousness as a vital predictor of academic resilience and successful integration within educational environments (Jusri & Lechner, 2024; Godfrey et al., 2024). By examining the characteristics and behaviours of conscientious students, this study offers valuable insights into how personality traits and social connections interact to foster persistence and enhance academic success. These findings suggest that fostering conscientiousness in students may not only improve their individual academic outcomes but also strengthen their social networks, creating a supportive environment conducive to long-term educational achievements.

Conscientious students exhibit characteristics such as diligence, organization, and a proactive attitude, which foster both academic engagement and social integration. Narratives from participants reveal how these attributes translate into behaviours that enhance their university experience and academic outcomes. For instance, "hard work" was a recurring theme among conscientious students, who highlighted how dedication to their studies enabled them to organize study groups, actively participate in classes, and establish strong relationships with peers and faculty. This aligns with findings by Duckworth et al. (2012), who note that persistent, effort-driven students often achieve higher GPAs and experience improved retention rates. The proactive approach of conscientious students thus contributes to their resilience, as they are better equipped to handle academic challenges and navigate the demands of university life effectively.

The theme of *self-organization* further explains the correlation between conscientiousness and social integration. Conscientious students are highly disciplined, employing structured schedules to balance academic commitments and social engagements. This organization not only improves their academic performance but also enables them to allocate time for social interactions, enhancing their sense of belonging within the university environment. Previous studies support this finding, with research indicating that well-organized students tend to maintain higher GPAs and are less likely to experience stress related to academic responsibilities (Ishitani, 2016; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Moreover, their self-organizational skills contribute to positive perceptions among peers and faculty, further reinforcing their social integration and enhancing their overall university experience.

A *proactive attitude* emerged as another defining attribute of conscientious students. This trait, often expressed through initiative and engagement in academic activities, strengthens both their academic and social ties. Conscientious students actively seek academic resources, volunteer for group responsibilities, and engage in meaningful interactions with lecturers, actions that not only enhance their academic performance but also build their social networks. This finding aligns with

previous studies suggesting that students who proactively engage with academic content and take ownership of their learning process are more resilient and more likely to persist in their studies (Chapa, 2016; Eshun et al., 2023). Proactivity also contributes to the development of a supportive academic community, as conscientious students encourage their peers to engage and collaborate, fostering a positive and cohesive learning environment.

However, while social integration generally supports persistence, the literature suggests that excessive involvement in non-academic social activities can hinder academic performance. For instance, research by Loes et al. (2024) and Trolan and Parker III (2023) cautions that highly socialized students risk lower GPAs if their interactions are primarily non-academic. This study's findings reveal that conscientious students, by virtue of their disciplined and goal-oriented nature, tend to engage in academically oriented interactions that support their academic and social integration, effectively balancing social commitments with their academic responsibilities. This aligns with Wildman (2009), who highlights the importance of balance in promoting academic resilience and persistence.

The themes identified in the qualitative analysis—hard work, self-organization, and proactive attitude—not only reinforce the quantitative findings but also provide a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which conscientiousness and social integration contribute to academic persistence. By integrating both academic and social dimensions, conscientious students foster a strong sense of belonging and commitment to their academic goals, which promotes retention and progression in higher education (Tinto, 1993).

### **The influence of Conscientiousness on Persistence**

This study highlights the significant role of conscientiousness in predicting academic success, particularly in academic persistence and CGPA. Conscientiousness, a trait within the Big Five personality framework, is characterized by goal-directed behaviour, organization, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility. Findings indicate that

conscientious students tend to exhibit higher levels of academic engagement and resilience, attributes that contribute to their persistence in higher education. The results align with prior studies by Meyer et al. (2024) and Shaninah and Mohd Noor (2024), who found that conscientious students engage more actively in academic tasks, maintain consistent attendance and adhere to deadlines, all of which are critical behaviours for academic success.

It was hypothesized that higher levels of conscientiousness among students are positively associated with increased academic persistence. Consistent with the hypothesis, the quantitative results revealed a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and academic persistence ( $r = .261, p < .001$ ), affirming that students who score higher in conscientiousness are more likely to persevere in their university studies. This correlation underscores the findings of numerous studies which have established conscientiousness as a strong predictor of academic outcomes (Dumfart & Neubauer, 2016; Meyer et al., 2024; Quito-Calle & Cosentino, 2024). Conscientious students' resilience is often grounded in their goal-oriented behaviour, time management skills, and intrinsic motivation to succeed. These findings support previous research, such as the work of Duckworth et al. (2012), which associates conscientiousness with grit, perseverance, and sustained effort toward long-term goals. By remaining disciplined and organized, conscientious students can withstand academic challenges, enhancing their likelihood of persisting through to graduation.

Qualitative data provided further insight into the mechanisms underlying this relationship, with themes of commitment and supportive friendships emerging as influential factors. Narratives from conscientious students emphasized their high levels of personal accountability and determination to succeed. For instance, one participant articulated a strong sense of responsibility to both self and family, highlighting how this commitment motivated consistent effort, even in the face of adversity. This finding resonates with Hakimi et al. (2011) and González-Brignardello et al. (2024), who suggest that conscientious individuals tend to set high

standards and maintain rigorous schedules, allowing them to overcome obstacles that might otherwise derail their academic progress. Thus, conscientiousness does not only predict persistence but also provides a framework for students to approach their studies with resilience, discipline, and a clear sense of purpose.

### **Social Integration, CGPA and Persistence**

It was suggested that higher levels of social integration correlate positively with elevated cumulative grade point averages (CGPA) and enhanced student persistence in university. The examination of social integration's impact on academic persistence emphasizes the vital importance of students' connections within their educational environment. Drawing on Tinto's (1975) model of institutional integration, social integration refers to how well students adapt to the university's academic and social settings, cultivating a sense of belonging that is crucial for their persistence. The findings of this study are consistent with a robust body of literature that shows students who are socially well-integrated tend to remain engaged and are more likely to complete their degrees (Booker, 2016; Dukhie, 2023; Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2023). The observed significant positive correlation between social integration and persistence ( $r = .394^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ) reinforces the notion that positive interactions with peers, faculty, and academic communities bolster students' commitment to their educational journeys, fostering resilience and ongoing academic involvement.

Social integration emerges as a comprehensive adaptation process, where students develop meaningful academic and social relationships, reinforcing their sense of belonging and increasing their likelihood to persist. The qualitative themes identified in this study, sense of belonging and academic collaboration further illuminate the mechanisms through which social integration influences academic persistence. This is consistent with findings by Karp et al. (2008) and Schotthofer (2024), which suggest that students who establish close connections within their institutions are less likely to drop out. Socially integrated students often report feeling accepted and supported, creating a foundation for academic persistence. This aligns

with Booker's (2016) description of belonging, which encompasses feeling valued, included, and supported, and which is essential to enhancing academic performance and well-being.

The role of a *Sense of Belonging* as a pathway to academic persistence is strongly emphasized in the narratives gathered. Students shared that their efforts to build connections with peers and faculty contributed to a sense of belonging, which in turn motivated them to persevere. For instance, one participant's narrative (Q3a-R-F) illustrates how building relationships through study groups reduced stress and bolstered academic performance, while another respondent (Q3a-R-J) highlighted how friendships and support from lecturers contributed to their commitment to persist. These narratives support the notion that students' social experiences within the university community can mitigate feelings of isolation, thereby fostering the resilience needed to navigate academic challenges. This sense of belonging promotes persistence not only by providing emotional support but also by enhancing students' academic engagement, which is consistent with findings by Oxendine and Taub (2021) and Atobatele et al. (2024).

The second theme, *Academic Collaboration*, further underscores how social integration fosters persistence through cooperative learning experiences. Narratives from participants indicated that engaging in collaborative activities—such as group studies, projects, and discussions—contributed to their academic success and commitment to their studies. For example, one participant (Q3a-R-G) emphasized how working with peers in group studies fostered a supportive environment that deepened their understanding of academic material, while another participant (Q3a-R-I) highlighted how collaborative projects facilitated a collective learning experience, enhancing both their academic performance and persistence. These findings support research by Cox (2013) and Guzzardo et al. (2021), which suggests that positive social interactions and academic collaboration increase motivation and academic resilience, thereby promoting student retention.

Furthermore, these results reflect the influence of high-quality interactions with both peers and faculty



on students' academic persistence, as documented in studies by Braxton et al. (1997, 2000) and Lane (2016). Students who engage constructively in their academic communities—through formal and informal interactions—are more likely to remain committed to their studies and achieve higher academic outcomes (Altman, 2017; Huang et al., 2024). These positive interactions not only enhance academic performance but also contribute to a reinforced sense of value within the academic community (Norwani et al., 2009). Such experiences of social integration serve as a protective factor against dropout, as they satisfy students' need for social support and intellectual engagement, thereby motivating persistence even in the face of academic or personal challenges.

The quantitative correlation between social integration and CGPA ( $r = .143^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ) further indicates that social integration not only influences persistence but also positively impacts academic performance. This may be attributed to the supportive and collaborative environments that socially integrated students experience, which facilitate better comprehension and mastery of course materials. As suggested by Loes et al. (2024), social interactions that promote collaborative learning are likely to enhance academic achievement by creating opportunities for shared knowledge and skills development.

This study's findings support existing literature on the role of social integration as a predictor of academic persistence and performance. The positive correlation between social integration and persistence reflects how meaningful engagement within academic communities bolsters students' resilience and motivation. The themes of belonging and academic collaboration provide insights into how social integration shapes persistence, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive and collaborative environments within higher education institutions. These results suggest that universities aiming to improve retention rates should prioritize initiatives that promote social integration, such as mentorship programs, study groups, and accessible faculty-student interactions, to create an inclusive academic community that supports both academic success and long-term commitment.

### **Partial Mediation Analysis: Conscientiousness and Academic Persistence via Social Integration**

It was posited that conscientiousness has a significant indirect effect on academic persistence through social integration. It was posited that conscientiousness has a significant indirect effect on academic persistence through social integration. Consistent with this hypothesis, the findings revealed that social integration is an important mediator in the relationship between conscientiousness and academic persistence. Consistent with the hypothesis, the findings revealed that social integration is a significant mediator in the relationship between conscientiousness and academic persistence. Conscientiousness directly impacts persistence through disciplined behaviours and goal orientation, which align well with long-term academic success (Yu et al., 2021, 2024). However, the mediation analysis indicates that conscientious students are likely to persist and achieve their academic goals due to their intrinsic motivation and self-discipline and their propensity to engage socially within the university environment. This engagement, or social integration, further reinforces their academic commitment and motivation, supporting Tinto's (1993) interactionist theory, which emphasizes the role of individual characteristics interacting with social contexts in determining persistence.

The partial mediation observed in this study suggests that conscientiousness enhances social integration ( $b = .42$ ,  $p < .01$ ), which in turn positively influences persistence ( $b = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This pathway indicates that conscientious students are inclined to seek out and establish meaningful social connections, which helps foster a sense of belonging within the academic community. Literature supports this finding, as conscientious students often exhibit behaviours conducive to academic engagement, such as participating in group activities, joining academic clubs, and maintaining regular interactions with faculty and peers (Erbe et al., 2024; Gregorio, 2024). These behaviours facilitate their social integration, further reinforcing their commitment to persisting in their studies.

The role of social integration as a mediator aligns with the literature that highlights the importance of a

supportive academic community in promoting persistence. Studies have consistently shown that students who feel a sense of belonging and connection within their academic environment exhibit higher levels of academic resilience and well-being, which are critical for sustained engagement (Booker, 2016; Dukhie, 2023; Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2023). Social integration fosters a supportive environment where students can share their experiences, seek academic support, and develop a network that provides both emotional and academic encouragement (Paolini, 2024; Schotthofer, 2024). These social interactions act as a reinforcement mechanism for conscientious students, further motivating them to achieve their academic goals and persevere despite challenges.

The indirect effect of conscientiousness on persistence through social integration ( $b = .15, p < .01$ ) underscores the multifaceted role that social contexts play in enhancing the resilience of conscientious students. Conscientious individuals, known for their diligence, organization, and commitment to goals, benefit from social integration, which serves to augment their already strong motivation. This interaction creates a feedback loop where social connections not only reinforce commitment but also provide additional support that bolsters the students' sense of belonging and engagement (Oxendine & Taub, 2021; Fernandes, 2024). Such findings highlight that while conscientious students are predisposed to persist in their studies due to their inherent traits, the added element of social integration amplifies this effect, making them even more likely to succeed and graduate.

Moreover, the results indicate that the direct effect of conscientiousness on persistence remains significant even when accounting for social integration ( $b = .24, p < .01$ ). This finding suggests that while social integration enhances the persistence of conscientious students, these students retain a degree of resilience and commitment independent of their social experiences. This direct effect aligns with research indicating that conscientious students generally possess strong self-regulatory abilities, goal-setting behaviours, and perseverance, which are sufficient on their own to drive persistence (Yu

et al., 2024; Lane, 2016). Therefore, conscientiousness is a robust predictor of academic persistence, but social integration serves to further enhance its impact by providing a supportive context in which conscientious students can thrive.

In summary, the partial mediation analysis highlights the complex interplay between personality traits and social contexts in fostering academic resilience. The mediation pathway supports the idea that conscientious students benefit from environments that encourage social engagement, as these contexts provide additional motivation and resources necessary for long-term persistence. This insight provides actionable implications for higher education institutions, suggesting that initiatives to promote social integration, such as facilitating study groups, fostering inclusive classroom environments, and encouraging faculty-student interactions, can be particularly beneficial for conscientious students. By creating spaces where conscientiousness and social integration intersect, universities can more effectively support academic persistence and success, ultimately leading to improved retention rates and a more engaged student body.

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore how conscientiousness and social integration influence academic persistence and performance among undergraduate students. The findings demonstrate that conscientiousness, with its associated traits of diligence, organization, and responsibility, significantly impacts academic persistence by fostering effective time management, goal commitment, and consistent effort toward achieving high academic outcomes. Similarly, social integration plays a pivotal role in enhancing persistence by fostering a sense of belonging, emotional support, and meaningful peer interactions, all of which are essential for academic success. The study highlights that while individual characteristics such as conscientiousness are vital for academic persistence, social connections within the university environment serve as critical mediating factors. Students who are well-integrated into the university community are more likely to persevere through challenges and achieve their academic goals.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the interconnectedness of personal and institutional factors in shaping academic outcomes, emphasizing the need for universities to adopt a holistic approach to student support.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings of our study, pertinent literature, and the discussions that ensued, we propose the following recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Future Research.

Members of the faculty at Makerere University and related institutions should actively encourage and reward qualities such as self-discipline, responsibility, and determination among students. Initiatives can include recognizing students who demonstrate these traits through awards, certificates, or public acknowledgement in academic and extracurricular settings. Besides, faculty members and lecturers should incorporate essential life skills, such as time management and goal setting, into their teaching practices. This approach can be embedded in coursework, seminars, or orientation programs to foster conscientious behaviours among Makerere's diverse student population.

Makerere University and other higher institutions should establish tailored initiatives like peer mentorship programs, group study sessions, and extracurricular activities to foster connections among students, especially conscientious ones. These efforts can help reinforce persistence by enhancing students' sense of belonging within the university community. In addition, Makerere University should implement policies promoting inclusivity and social engagement. For example, reducing structural and cultural barriers to participation in campus activities can create a supportive and diverse learning environment. This aligns with the principles of Tinto's student retention theory and can enhance student persistence.

Future research conducted within Makerere university should adopt longitudinal designs to track students' academic journeys. Investigating how conscientiousness and social integration influence persistence over time can yield actionable insights to improve institutional strategies. In addition,

Makerere University researchers, beyond conscientiousness, should explore the influence of traits such as openness and emotional stability on academic persistence. This broader understanding of personality influences can guide the development of comprehensive support systems catering to the diverse needs of the student population.

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