

## **SOFT LIFE VS SURVIVAL MODE: COMPETING DISCOURSES OF ASPIRATION AMONG GEN Z STUDENTS IN GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY, ENUGU STATE.**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the competing discourses of “soft life” and “survival mode” among Generation Z students in Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State, with a focus on how these discourses shape aspirational language. Anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis, the study adopts a quantitative survey design using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Form to 100 and 200 level students in the Faculty of Arts. Data collected from 32 respondents were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings reveal that “soft life” is a dominant aspirational discourse associated with comfort, ease, and financial stability, while “survival mode” reflects the lived realities of academic pressure, financial constraints, and continuous struggle. The study further establishes that socio economic status significantly influences how students construct and express their aspirations, shaping their expectations and life goals. The coexistence of these discourses indicates that students navigate between idealized lifestyles and structural limitations. The study concludes that aspirational language among Gen Z is not merely expressive but ideologically loaded, reflecting broader socio economic conditions. It recommends the integration of discourse awareness into educational practices and the strengthening of institutional support systems to address student realities.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, soft life, survival mode, socio economic status, aspirational discourse

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian university space is increasingly characterized by a tension between aspiration and lived reality, particularly among Generation Z students whose linguistic practices reflect evolving value systems and socio-economic pressures. Within this context, two dominant and competing discourses: “soft life” and “survival mode” have emerged as symbolic frameworks through which students articulate their desires, struggles, and imagined futures. The “soft life” ideology emphasizes comfort, ease, and financial stability, often rejecting excessive

labor and hardship, while “survival mode” reflects resilience within conditions of scarcity and institutional limitation. These expressions are not merely informal slang but sociolinguistic constructs that encode deeper cultural meanings and ideological positions. Expressions such as “soft life” capture aspirations for status, mobility, and self-fulfillment within Nigerian youth culture (Chukwuma et al., 2025). Language, therefore, becomes a crucial site for examining how students negotiate identity and ambition. This study interrogates how these

competing discourses shape aspirational thinking among students in Nigerian universities.

Aspiration, in itself, is a constructed concept influenced by individual ambition, social pressures, and the structures of institutions. Many students begin their college lives with great expectations of rising in the ranks, achieving career success, and improving their living standards. Nevertheless, the disconnect between these hopes and the actual situations that unfold in the Nigerian universities continues to create gaps and a sense of disappointment and resetting of expectations. The students have to face the infrastructural deficiency, the lack of opportunities, and systemic inefficiency, which put their initial hopes to the test (Maigida et al., 2025). This dissonance leads to the development of other discourses like the survival mode which is a mark of adaptation to the harsh reality. Meanwhile, the ideology of a soft life continues as a dreamy counter-narrative that does not want to struggle and wants to find comfortable situations at once. The overlapping of these contradictory discourses reflects the complexity of the student experiences. Aspiration is therefore always negotiated and not predetermined.

These discourses should also be interpreted in the context of the wider transformation of Nigerian higher education and socioeconomic context. The universities are under growing pressure to deliver globally competitive graduates amidst structural and resource constraints that have remained to be persistent. Such pressure transforms the way students think about education to make it not an intellectual endeavor but an economic investment. Students, therefore, consider courses and career opportunities in terms of how they see them paying back and being relevant in the market. The peculiarities of the

functioning of the institutions tend to produce the gap between the educational expectations and the real results (Okai et al., 2025). Besides that, the increasing pragmatic and utilitarian views of learning are strengthened by the increasing focus on employability (Olaniyan, 2025). These material facts increase the conflict of aspiration and achievement and the language of soft life and survival mode becomes more pertinent. In this regard, discourse turns out to be a mirror of systemic states.

Intimately connected with these conflicting ideologies, there is the emergence of the hustle culture that advocates hard work, efficiency, and effort as the way to success. Hustle culture is consistent with the logic of survival mode, which makes struggle and survival in problematic environments a norm. Nonetheless, it is also contradictory to the ideology of a soft life that criticizes the sustainability of continuous work and promotes leisure and harmony. This is a paradoxical case where the students desire to be at ease yet indulge in hard productive activities. Young people are driven by competitive environments to engage in productivity in order to achieve some social validation (Arar et al., 2025). Consequently, students tend to swing between frustration and dreams as a consequence of the contradictions of their socio-economic situation. This is negotiated and expressed in language. The interaction of these discourses shows that there is a greater ideological conflict in the life of a student.

Gendered patterns of communication also make the expression of these aspirational discourses more difficult. The ideology of the soft life is commonly articulated differently across gender boundaries, whereby the difference in the focus on emotional well-being, financial security, and social status

occurs. Likewise, the discourses of survival and hustle can also be gendered in terms of resilience, responsibility, and success. Students also perceive and use these discourses based on cultural norms and family expectations especially in a society where education is associated with group progress. Family and cultural factors continue to play a major role in determining the learning experience of students and their goals (Ojikutu, 2024). These forces are in play with the current digital cultures to create a hybrid kind of expression that is characteristic of Generation Z. Aspirational language is therefore an individual construction and a mediated social construction. To comprehend these dynamics, we should focus on the combination of language and culture, and identity. Finally, the competing rhetoric of soft life, survival mode, and hustle culture demonstrates how the concept of success is complexly theorized by Generation Z students of Nigerian universities, and how they deal with uncertainty. These discourses are so entrenched in larger socio-economic and institutional issues that define the lived experiences of the students. The constrained nature of the Nigerian system of universities still affects the way aspirations are constructed, maintained, or discarded (Ochonu, 2025). In turn, students use language in a creative way in an attempt to make sense of their realities and express their desires. The current paper takes a discourse-analytic method of understanding the construction and negotiation of these competing ideologies of student communication. In its emphasis on aspirational language, it helps to gain a more profound insight into the sociolinguistic dynamics that form the Generation Z of modern higher education. It also emphasizes the influence of

language as a manifestation of as well as a reaction to systemic circumstances.

### **Research Objectives**

The research is guided by the following objectives:

1. to examine the prevalence of “soft life” discourse among Gen Z students;
2. to determine the extent of “survival mode” orientation among Gen Z students, and
3. to assess the influence of socio economic status on aspirational language among Gen Z students.

### **Research Questions**

To achieve the above objectives, the work is further guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of “soft life” discourse among Gen Z students?
2. What is the extent of “survival mode” orientation among Gen Z students?
3. How does socio economic status influence aspirational language among Gen Z students?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is rooted in the tradition of critical theory and critical linguistics, with its most systematic formulation attributed to Norman Fairclough. Emerging in the late twentieth century, CDA developed as a response to formalist approaches to language that treated discourse as neutral and autonomous. It draws intellectual influence from earlier thinkers such as Michel Foucault, who conceptualized discourse as a site of power and knowledge production. In contrast, Teun A. van Dijk, a contemporary of Fairclough, contributed significantly by linking discourse to ideology and social cognition. Fairclough advanced CDA as a transdisciplinary approach that integrates linguistic analysis with social theory, positioning it within

broader critical social analysis (Fairclough, 2023). His three-dimensional model—text, discursive practice, and social practice—offers a systematic way of studying the functioning of language in society. Since its application in education, politics, and media studies, CDA has been extensively used to interrogate the ideological role of language. Its development reflects a shift from mere description to critical analysis, with a strong emphasis on discourse as a means of sustaining or challenging social inequalities. In its most fundamental form, Critical Discourse Analysis is premised on the idea that language is both socially constitutive and socially conditioned. It argues that discourse shapes identities, social relations, and knowledge systems, while also being shaped by institutional and socio-economic structures. Fairclough (2023) notes that discourse is a social practice through which power relations are enacted and reproduced. This perspective enables the analyst to uncover how certain meanings become dominant and are presented as natural or commonsensical. CDA is particularly concerned with ideology, examining how language encodes beliefs, values, and power relations that may not be immediately visible. It adopts a critical stance by not only describing linguistic patterns but also exposing underlying inequalities and questioning whose interests are being served. As demonstrated in practical applications such as policy and institutional analysis, discourse can function to justify inclusion or exclusion within social systems (Lu et al., 2025). Thus, CDA provides both a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding language as a site of power and struggle.

Within the context of this study, Critical Discourse Analysis serves as an appropriate framework for

interrogating the competing discourses of “soft life” and “survival mode” among Generation Z students in Nigerian higher institutions. These expressions function as ideological constructs shaped by socio-economic realities, institutional constraints, and cultural expectations. Through CDA, “soft life” can be understood as a discourse of comfort, ease, and resistance to excessive labor, while “survival mode” reflects adaptation to structural hardship and limited opportunities. The framework allows for an examination of how these discourses are constructed, circulated, and normalized in everyday communication, and how they reinforce or challenge existing power relations. It also facilitates an understanding of how aspirational language reflects the tension between ambition and lived reality within the Nigerian educational context. By situating these expressions within their broader social context, CDA reveals the ideological meanings embedded in everyday language. Consequently, it provides a robust analytical lens for understanding how language both shapes and reflects the aspirations and experiences of Generation Z in this study.

### **Empirical Review**

Tiamiyu (2025) examined the role of fear and bad past experiences in influencing the intentions of discontinuance in peer-to-peer accommodation. The researcher uses a quantitative approach and targets Gen Z and Millennials working in the hospitality industry in Nigeria. The results demonstrate that emotional memory, especially fear and distrust, has a great influence on decision-making and subsequent decisions. The present research is related to this one because it also targets Generation Z and internalized perceptions, as a factor in behavior formation. Nevertheless, its scope is different because it is

located in consumer behavior and not in the linguistic construction of aspiration in the universities.

Nwoke (2025) investigated youths who build empowerment by means of the hustling ideology. The research aimed to challenge the language of empowerment and how the spirit of hustling defines youth ambitions. The research is a qualitative methodology undertaken in Southeast Nigeria among the youth apprentices. The results indicate that hustle is not only an economic phenomenon, but an ideological phenomenon associated with the need to survive, endure, and form an identity. The given study is closely connected to the current one because it directly interacts with the hustle culture and the desire to be young. Nonetheless, it varies in circumstances, where apprenticeship systems are used instead of students in formal university settings.

Akinpelu (2024) in his work entitled *Instapoetry: Cultivating Inward, Ideological Activism, Revitalizing African Orality and Re-defining the Art of Poetry* considers how the digital poetic visuals serve as a means of discourse in the Nigerian youth. The analysis aimed to discuss Instapoetry as a method of expression of ideological standpoints and youth desires. The research takes up the textual and discourse analysis, which is concerned with online poetic works created by Generation Z. The results demonstrate that digital poetry is a medium of personal expression of hardships, socio-political agendas, and hope for a positive change. Similar to the present research, this study is based on discourse and the manifestation of aspiration among the Gen Z. Nonetheless, it is also unlike in that it focuses on literary texts and electronic texts instead of on ordinary student language and rival ideologies on university campuses.

Ogbuagu (2025) explored how Nigerian women form identity and aspiration when in diaspora. The study's objective was to examine the subject of identity, belonging, and aspirations in life among Nigerian women in foreign countries. The research method used is qualitative and the research is conducted with the communities of diaspora in Canada. The results have shown that aspirations are influenced by cultural bargaining, internationalization, and the aspiration to live a better life. Similar to this present study is its focus on aspiration and identity construction. It is however very different in geographical and demographic focus because it looks at the diaspora experiences and not students in Nigerian universities. Eze (2025) examined the process of constructing youth aspiration in regard to wealth by the media. The study examined the influence of discourses of wealth and primarily the ones that are associated with the rituals to understand how youth ambition is perceived. The study takes a discourse-analytic qualitative approach in the Nigerian media arena. According to the findings, the youth's ambitions have for the most part been projected in a way that casts the ambition as morally dubious to the extent that it is linked to sudden wealth hence bringing about conflict between the ambition and the moral upholding. This paper is comparable to the current study because of its interest in discourse and the creation of aspiration. Nevertheless, it is different in that it focuses on media reports and not on student-created conversations in learning institutions.

In *Locating China in the Future of the African University: Notes from Ghana and Nigeria*, Oshodi (2025) studies the changing hopes of the African university in a globalized setting. The study investigated the effects of the external factors on

institutional objectives and educational relevance. This study uses a conceptual and analytical approach and concentrates on the systems of higher education in Nigeria and Ghana. The results point out that the world has become highly competitive in universities, and developmental goals. This paper is close to the current one due to its interest in aspiration in the university. But it is not similar in terms of institutional orientation since it is not concerned with student discourse or generational language practices.

Ozigi (2024) explored the impact of entrepreneurial characteristics on the desires of university students. The study tested the correlation between the entrepreneurial orientation and intention in relation to the female undergraduates. The research takes the quantitative survey approach and is carried out in federal universities in Nigeria. The results indicate that entrepreneurial aspirations are largely influenced by competitiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking. The present research is analogous to this one because of its student focus, aspiration, and gender. It is however different in its economic and behavioral approach since it does not analyze the linguistic or discursive construction of aspiration.

Arar et al. (2025) studied the ways in which institutional and familial setups influence the aspirations of young people. The research examined the impact of various social agents in the process of Gen Z pathways formation. The paper utilized a qualitative methodology in the Turkish schooling environment. The results indicate that ambitions are formed in competitive and orderly contexts whereby opportunities are disproportionate. The work is close to the current one by dealing with Generation Z and aspirational dynamics. But, it is geographically

different and does not in particular interrelate with discourse or language.

Chukwuma et al (2025), studies the linguistic patterns of Nigerian Gen Z in universities. The research aimed to examine the language deviation and its socio-cultural implications. The approach taken in the study is a qualitative lexico-semantic analysis of the discourse of the Nigerian youth. The results of the findings indicate that terms like soft life encode the desires of comfort, status, and identity formation. The research is very comparable to the current study since it involves direct interactions with Gen Z language and meaning-making. Nevertheless, it is different because it does not critically examine competing ideological discourses and place them in university settings.

In Navigating the dissonance between aspiration and attainment: A conceptual analysis of challenges facing students in higher education institutions in Nigeria, Maigida et al. (2025) focus on the issue of dissonance between students' expectations and realities in institutions. The study was aimed at examining the problems that impede the fulfillment of student aspirations. The research takes a conceptual standpoint on higher education in Nigeria. These results show that there is a continued gap between wishing and achieving because of the systemic limitations. This paper is akin to the current one in terms of being centered on aspiration in universities. Nevertheless, it is different as it does not examine the linguistic construction of such aspirations.

The article Management of Nigerian universities in the 21st century for effective goal attainment by Okai et al. (2025) looks at the impact of the management of a university on education. The research was aimed at examining the institutional effectiveness

improvement strategies. The research paper takes an analytical approach with attention to the Nigerian universities. The results demonstrate that there are structural inefficiencies that translate to the achievement of the educational objectives. This research is comparable in its interest in the university system. It is however different because it does not involve the discourse or aspirational language of students.

In *Apprenticeship by Another Name? Media Discourses and the Vocational Turn in Nigerian Higher Education*, Olaniyan(2025) examined how media discourse has reshaped prevailing conceptions of education in Nigeria. The study specifically focused on the growing emphasis on vocational and economically driven models of education, analyzing how media narratives frame higher education as a pathway to productivity and employability. Adopting a discourse analytical approach, the research situated these representations within the broader context of Nigerian higher education. The findings revealed a dominant tendency to construct education primarily as an instrument for economic advancement rather than holistic intellectual development. This study is closely related to the present research in its focus on discourse and higher education as sites of meaning-making. However, it differs significantly in scope and perspective. While Olaniyan (2025) concentrates on media-generated discourses, the present study shifts attention to student-generated discourses, particularly how Generation Z students construct and negotiate meanings around “soft life” and “survival mode” within their lived educational experiences. This distinction allows the current study to foreground the voices and realities of students rather than institutional or media representations.

In *Interrogating the postcolonial Nigerian university: Pitfalls and pathways*, Ochonu (2025) explores structural problems in the Nigerian university system. The object of the research was to criticize the drawbacks of postcolonial higher education. The work will take the critical analysis approach in Nigeria. The results suggest that institutional performance and student aspirations are determined by systemic limitations. This paper is comparable in that it has concentrated on structural factors in aspiration. Nevertheless, the difference is that it is not dedicated to the discourse or Gen Z language.

In the article *Navigating culture and family in post-secondary education as Nigerian American college student*, Ojikutu (2024) discusses the influence of cultural and familial backgrounds on the experiences of students. The study was meant to examine identity and aspiration in the case of Nigerian students in diaspora. The United States is the target of the study that takes a qualitative approach. The results demonstrate the presence of significant effects of family expectations and cultural values on aspirations. This work resembles the one in terms of aspiration and identity. It is however quite different in its diasporic context and non-focus on discourse.

Overall, these empirical studies demonstrate that aspiration among Generation Z is shaped by socio-economic realities, cultural expectations, and institutional structures. However, there remains a gap in examining how competing discourses such as “soft life” and “survival mode” are constructed and negotiated within Nigerian university environments. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the discursive construction of aspiration among students in Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The choice of a questionnaire is informed by its effectiveness in gathering structured responses from a defined group of participants, particularly in examining patterns of language use, attitudes, and aspirational orientations among Generation Z students. The questionnaire is designed to elicit responses on students' understanding and usage of expressions such as "soft life," "survival mode," and hustle culture, as well as how these expressions reflect their aspirations and lived experiences. The instrument consists of both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to allow for measurable and comparable responses.

The area of the study is Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on students in the Faculty of Arts. The population of the study comprises 100 level and 200 level undergraduate students within the faculty. The sample size includes all available students in these levels, totaling thirty-two (32) participants, made up of twelve (12) students from 100 level and twenty (20) students from 200 level. A purposive sampling technique is employed, as the participants are selected based on their accessibility and relevance to the study,

## **RESULTS**

### **Research Question 1**

What is the prevalence of "soft life" discourse among Gen Z students?

particularly their engagement with contemporary youth discourse.

Data are collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire link is shared through the official Faculty of Arts WhatsApp groups for both 100 level and 200 level students to ensure easy access and prompt responses. This method allows participants to respond at their convenience while also facilitating efficient data collection and management. The responses obtained are automatically compiled within the Google Forms system, enabling easy organization and preliminary analysis of the data.

The method of data analysis involves descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentage distributions, to identify patterns in students' responses. The analysis focuses on how frequently certain expressions are used, the meanings attributed to them, and the extent to which they reflect students' aspirations. The findings are presented in tables and discussed in relation to the study's objectives. Ethical considerations are also observed, as participation is voluntary, responses are anonymous, and all data are treated with confidentiality. This methodological approach ensures a systematic and reliable investigation of aspirational discourse among Generation Z students in the selected context.

**Table 1: Prevalence of “Soft Life” Discourse**

S/N	ITEM	N	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	I frequently use the term “soft life” in conversations	32	2.81	0.66	Accept
2	“Soft life” reflects my personal aspirations	32	2.74	0.71	Accept
3	I associate “soft life” with financial comfort	32	2.88	0.63	Accept
4	“Soft life” means avoiding stress	32	2.79	0.69	Accept
5	Social media influences my idea of “soft life”	32	2.76	0.72	Accept
6	I prefer a lifestyle that prioritizes comfort	32	2.69	0.75	Accept
7	“Soft life” is unrealistic for students	32	2.43	0.84	Disagree
8	I do not relate to the idea of “soft life”	32	2.31	0.88	Disagree

In Table 1, items 1 to 6 were accepted, indicating that “soft life” is a dominant discourse among students, associated with comfort, ease, and financial stability. Items 7 and 8 were rated “Disagree,” suggesting that

students generally perceive the concept as relatable and meaningful.

**Research Question 2**

What is the extent of “survival mode” orientation among Gen Z students?

**Table 2: Extent of “Survival Mode” Orientation**

S/N	ITEM	N	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	I feel I am in “survival mode” as a student	32	2.83	0.65	Accept
2	Academic pressure requires constant effort	32	2.90	0.61	Accept
3	Financial challenges affect my studies	32	2.78	0.70	Accept
4	Success requires continuous struggle	32	2.72	0.73	Accept
5	I combine study with income activities	32	2.69	0.76	Accept
6	I feel exhausted from academic demands	32	2.75	0.72	Accept
7	Student life is stress free	32	2.38	0.86	Disagree
8	Hard work is not necessary for success	32	2.29	0.89	Disagree

The results in Table 2 show that items 1 to 6 were accepted, indicating that “survival mode” is a prevalent experience among students, marked by pressure, effort, and exhaustion. Items 7 and 8 were rated “Disagree,” suggesting that students do not perceive academic life as easy or effortless.

**Research Question 3**

How does socio economic status influence aspirational language among Gen Z students?

**Table 3: Influence of Socio Economic Status on Aspirational Language**

S/N	ITEM	N	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	My financial background shapes my life goals	32	2.86	0.64	Accept
2	I think about money when I discuss my future	32	2.82	0.67	Accept
3	My background affects my view of “soft life”	32	2.78	0.70	Accept
4	Limited resources influence my aspirations	32	2.74	0.72	Accept
5	I choose goals based on financial realities	32	2.69	0.75	Accept
6	I adjust my expectations based on my situation	32	2.66	0.77	Accept
7	My background does not affect my aspirations	32	2.41	0.85	Disagree
8	Financial status has no impact on life goals	32	2.35	0.88	Disagree

The findings in Table 3 indicate that items 1 to 6 were accepted, showing that socio economic status significantly influences how students construct and express their aspirations. Items 7 and 8 were rated “Disagree,” suggesting that students acknowledge the strong role of financial background in shaping their language and future expectations.

### Discussion of Findings

Table 1 results show that the discourse of soft life is dominant and internalized among Gen Z students as seen through the response to the acceptance of items that refer to comfort, financial stability, and stress avoidance. It is congruent with Chukwuma et al. (2025), who show that phrases like soft life are encoded dreams of comfort, prestige, and identity creation among youth in Nigeria. Equally, Akinpelu (2024) demonstrates that Gen Z implements expressive tools, such as digital discourse, to express personal wants and ideological beliefs, most of which focus on better living conditions. Nevertheless, whereas Akinpelu (2024) places these utterances in digital poetic environments, the current research builds upon this interpretation by demonstrating that such utterances are so much a part of the daily student

speech and incorporate lived desires as opposed to the expression of passion in art.

In Table 2 the findings suggest that, the more common one is a survival mode, which entails academic pressure, financial strain, and constant effort. This observation is in full agreement with Nwoke (2025) who confirms that the spirit of hustling serves as an economic need and ideology that shapes the identity and resilience of young people. Similarly, Maigida et al. (2025) stress the gap between aspiration and achievement in Nigerian universities and how these issues are systemic in nature and force students to develop survival-oriented approaches. The current research paper supports these stands by showing that not only do students suffer but also linguistically create their worlds in terms of expressions that make struggle a normal means of achieving success. Nevertheless, in contrast to these studies, which pay attention to the structural and experiential aspects, the present research presupposes the discursive aspect of framing such experiences.

The Table 3 results indicate that socioeconomic status is a key determinant of aspirational language because the goals, expectations, and explanations of the soft life of the students are dependent on their financial

status. This is supported by the fact that Ozigi (2024) highlights financial capability and economic orientation as the main predictors of student aspiration, especially in the promotion of future-oriented choices. In the same manner, as it is shown by Ogbuagu (2025), aspirations are frequently bargained pitting the socio-cultural and economic reality, which supports the notion that the background conditions shape the perceptions of a better life in individuals. Moreover, Eze (2025) discloses that the societal discourses of wealth and prosperity influence the way young people think and pursue their goals and aspirations, which is likely to cause a clash between desire and righteousness. The current study is an extension of these observations as it demonstrates that socioeconomic realities not only construct aspirations but also define the linguistic expressions of how such aspirations are expressed.

Generally, the results affirm that the Gen Z students are working between competing discourses of soft life and survival mode, both of them grounded firmly in the socio-economic circumstances and institutional facts. This is consistent with Tiamiyu (2025), who proves that internalized experiences impact on decision-making among young people in Nigeria, and with Olaniyan (2025), who reveals that the current discourse tends to view life options in an economic way. Nevertheless, the current research is one of the rare ones that considers how these opposing ideologies are built, negotiated, and normalized using everyday student language in the university setting.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has proven that the aspiration among Generation Z students in Godfrey Okoye University socially constructs around two discourses, namely, soft life and survival mode, which are dominant and

opposing. The soft life discourse is the discourse of the wish to feel comfortable, easy and to have enough money and the discourse of survival mode is the discourse of lived realities, of struggle, pressure, and effort. These discourses do not exclude each other but co-exist as students juggle between idealized futures and current restrictions.

The research also confirms that socioeconomic background is very crucial in determining the manner in which these wishes are realized. The construction and meaning of aspirational language by students with various financial backgrounds are different, which shows that discourse is profoundly anchored in material realities. In sum, the study indicates that language is not only an instrument of communication but a place where an ideology, identity, and lived experience intertwine.

### **Recommendations**

- Curriculum Integration:** University curricula should incorporate discourse-based approaches that allow students to critically examine concepts such as “soft life” and “survival mode,” thereby fostering reflective and conscious engagement with their aspirations.
- Student Support Systems:** Institutions should strengthen financial and psychological support systems to reduce the dominance of “survival mode” experiences among students.
- Language Awareness Programs:** Workshops and seminars should be organized to help students understand how language shapes perception, identity, and life choices.
- Policy Intervention:** University management should develop policies that

address socio economic inequalities affecting students' academic and personal development.

#### 5. Further Research:

Future studies should explore longitudinal changes in

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