PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF HIGH ABILITY LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH-WEST OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of four psycho-emotional variables (academic self-efficacy, academic self-concept, emotional intelligence, and locus of control) as predictors of academic adjustment among high ability learners in secondary schools in the South-west of Nigeria. A total of 165 respondents were selected from private and public secondary schools using a multistage sampling technique. Six instruments for data collection included: Slosson Intelligence Test, Academic Adjustment Scale, Academic Self-efficacy Scale, Academic Self-concept Scale, Emotional Intelligence Scale, and the Locus of Control Scale. Backward regression was used to identify the variables that contribute most to academic adjustment. The results revealed that there was a positive and significant correlation between the independent variables and academic adjustment of high ability learners. Academic self-efficacy has the highest contribution to academic adjustment ($R = 0.538$, $p < 0.001$). Academic self-efficacy was also identified as the most useful variable for predicting adjustment and it accounted for 29% of the variance in academic adjustment. Therefore, high ability learners should be encouraged to put in more effort to improve rather than rely on their innate ability alone as ability without effort can impede their maximum academic adjustment.

Keywords: High ability learners; Academic adjustment; Academic self-efficacy, Academic self-concept, Emotional intelligence,

Introduction

Every student is expected to perform one academic task or the other within or outside the school environment. In the course of trying to meet up with these requirements, students are faced with different challenges that they have to deal with so as to attain the objective of enrolling into school for an academic degree. As a result of this, there is a need for them to adjust to academic tasks, and this could be done by a change in student's behaviour or attitude towards academic activities through participation in class and other tasks. Therefore, academic adjustment is the ability of a student to make some effective changes in order to meet up with academic needs and goals.

According to Lakhani and Chandel (2017), academic adjustment is very important in the life of every student. This includes those learners with great cognitive potential as it is the bedrock for the sustenance of their progress in school. However, poor academic adjustment over time could degenerate into a serious

academic maladjustment or even dropping out from school and can be the source of stress, anxiety and worry for the individual, parents/guardian, and significant others. The inability to effectively adjust academically by a high ability or gifted learner can be a great source of worry for some of these students, and this could be as a result of a character trait (perfectionism) among this population of learners. Some students, including the high ability learners, may find academic adjustment much easier than others, and there are certain factors that may ameliorate or worsen their ability to effectively adjust and optimally achieve academically.

Academic achievement and social adjustment have been largely examined among the general population of secondary school students. However, academic adjustment in relation to its predictive influence, especially on psycho-emotional factors, has received far less research attention among high-ability learners in all levels of education in Nigeria. Therefore, there arises the need to investigate some psycho-emotional factors in order to identify the ones that could predict academic adjustment among this understudied population of learners.

Literature Review

Despite the challenges encountered by the high ability learners, qualitative education is paramount to the actualisation of their potentials which enhance their confidence and self-efficacy level. The high ability learners are believed to have the potential and capabilities to successfully accomplish courses of actions which are required to achieve specific aims and objectives. This is related to self-efficacy which is a high ability learner's sense of competence or ability in general or specific domain. It can also mean a student's convictions about their own capabilities for successfully executing a course of action that leads to a desired outcome. Sources of self-efficacy include the ability to interpret, evaluate or judge one's ability in achieving specific types of performance. This is reflected in students' academic achievement, a finding supported by Ogunmakin and Akomolafe (2013) who concluded that efficacious learners work harder and are more persistent when confronted with difficulties and have a higher achievement level. Academic self-efficacy is believed by Turki and Al-Qaisy (2012) to affect academic adjustment. Students make a cognitive evaluation of the mastery of a present situation in view of past experiences, and then move on to execute required behaviours to accomplish the current task.

Related to a student's academic self-efficacy is academic self-concept, this is the personal belief developed by a student about their academic abilities and skills compared to others around them. Alternatively, it refers to beliefs about the ability to meet school demands involving cognitive elements (McInerney et al. 2012). Academic self-concept is a set of perceptions and attitudes held by a learner about his or her performance and skills in academics. It encompasses the global belief of self-worth in relation to one's view of academic competence. This means that the motivation for performance and future aspirations in academics may be influenced by a student's self-concept (Hosova and Duchovicova, 2019). This is supported in a study by Chukwu and Ekechuwku (2018) who investigated self-concept as a predictor of school adjustment among junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Findings showed that academic self-concept predicted academic adjustment among participants.

Academic self-concept is believed by some to start developing in children between the ages of 3-5 years, while others contend that it does not develop until the ages of 7-8years when

children begin to evaluate their academic abilities based on feedbacks gotten from parents, teachers and peers. Some others, at the age of 10 or 11, begin to view their academic self-concept by comparing themselves with others. Similarly, Hosova and Duchovicova (2019) noted that self-concept during school age is flexible and that it changes quickly. Hence the need for schools to develop support programmes aimed at preventing problems in social relations among students. Self-concept does not develop in an ascending straight line or order; it has many peaks and valleys. This means that students' self-concept likely diminishes from primary to junior secondary school, improves during adolescence and decreases again after graduation from university up till middle age, after which a subsequent increase and final slow decrease after middle age. Wouters et al. (2011) study showed that academic self-concept correlated positively and strongly with academic adjustment among final year students in high school. This shows that academic self-concept enhances school overall performance.

Emotional intelligence is a psychological construct which deals with one's ability to control impulse, and delay gratification, to adjust one's mood, and prevent distress from engulfing the ability to empathise, hope and think, (Duygulu et al. 2011; Slaff 2011). Emotional intelligence is an individual's self-awareness of their emotional strengths and weaknesses, personality traits and behavioural disposition which impact their competence to successfully cope with academic requirements and pressures. Persons with high emotional intelligence are able to identify and control their personality traits and other emotions effectively.

Students with high emotional intelligence present more positive social functioning in their relationships with others and are viewed by peers as pro-social and less antagonistic, this enhances their social ability and a quality relationship could help improve their cognitive and intellectual acceleration, leading to better academic adjustment and achievement. This buttresses the findings that a positive relationship exists between academic success and emotional intelligence of learners (Amalu 2018; Swanepoel and Britz 2017). Amalu found that emotional intelligence facilitates cognitive and intellectual development that leads to a better academic performance among students. Emotional intelligence is the ability of a person to perceive, understand and manage one's feelings in relation to those of others positively. Emotional intelligence demands psychological adjustment in order to relate well with others to aid a peaceful atmosphere. Emotional intelligence is an important determinant of success and for the psychological wellbeing of learners. A learner with high emotional intelligence will be stable psychologically and this will be felt in other endeavours of the learner. The person will be able to maintain stability in life and will have less negative experiences in life (Omoniyi and Adelowo, 2014).

The belief that an individual records success or failure from an activity is as a result of inputted effort or luck, this can influence the preparation, adjustment and hard work put into subsequent activities. What students attribute their success or failures to is important in the school setting. In a study carried out by Akintunde and Olujide (2018), findings establish that a student's understanding of self in terms of strengths and weaknesses and their understanding of what brings about academic outcome, achievement and success (locus of control) can contribute greatly to a student's academic success. Hence, they asserted that locus of control is a psychological concept used to describe how strongly people believe they

have control of situations and experiences in their lives. It necessarily describes how students perceive the causes of academic success or failures in school.

Factors responsible for the ability to adjust effectively may include among others, positive changes in the individual's knowledge, attitude, and emotions about his or her environment. These changes promote the feelings of satisfaction, feeling more at home in the new environment, improved academic achievement, and increased interaction with persons in the environment. Students who adjust well have a sense of belonging, feel more comfortable, secured and relaxed, not fearful, anxious or upset. Unlike others, students who possess the ability to adjust well have their achievements and personalities developed in school (Sekar and Lawrence, 2016). These individuals also adhere to instructions, relate better with others, share and take turns, are able to cope with day-to-day conflicts and activities, and are able to manage their feelings and emotions effectively.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design of the correlational type. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 165 SS2 student respondents who are high ability learners from private and public secondary schools in the South-west of Nigeria. Firstly, there was a simple random selection of two local government areas (LGA) in each state. Secondly, two secondary schools (public and private inclusive) were randomly selected from the LGAs selected. The third stage was a purposive selection of SS2 high-ability learners from the selected schools. The purposive selection was based on the peculiarity and characteristics of the participants and the objective of the study.

The instruments used in the study for data collection included Slosson's Intelligence Test, English Language and Mathematics Achievement Tests, Academic Adjustment Scale, Academic Self-efficacy Scale, Academic Self-concept Scale, Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Locus of Control Scale. In sum, twelve local government areas, twelve public and private secondary schools (six each), were used for the study. A total of 165 participants were used in the study.

The relationship between the four psycho-emotional variables and academic adjustment was assessed using correlation analysis by means of the Pearson correlation coefficient. The influence of the variables on academic adjustment was evaluated using multiple regression analysis. A backward regression was used to select the independent variable(s) with the highest influence on academic adjustment. Data were analysed using SPSS version 20.

Results and Discussion

Relationship between academic adjustment and psycho-emotional factors

Table 2 below shows the nature of the relationship between each independent variable (academic self-efficacy, academic self-concept, emotional intelligence and locus of control) with the dependent variable (academic adjustment). There was a positive and significant correlation between academic self-efficacy and academic adjustment ($R = 0.538$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that there is a relatively strong and positive association between these two variables. This is in line with the work of Turki and Al-Qaisy (2012) who worked on the relationship between adjustment problems and self-efficacy among 80 gifted students studying at Salt Pioneer Center. The findings showed significant correlation

between adjustment and self-efficacy among gifted students.

We found that academic self-concept correlated positively and significantly with academic adjustment (R = 0.208, p = .007). The correlation between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment was also positive and statistically significant (R = 0.329, p < 0.001). However, locus of control did not correlate significantly with academic adjustment.. The present study corroborates the findings of Al-Onizat (2012) who also observed emotional intelligence to be significantly correlated to academic adjustment among both gifted and non-gifted students. Also, the findings of Yadak (2017) revealed that emotional intelligence was not significant in relation to academic adjustment, which is in contrast with the results of the present study. However, it is noteworthy that Yadak's (2017) results were based on female students who are not high ability learners. This also confirms the findings of previous studies (Fakolade and Oyedokun 2016; Onyekuru and Zuru 2017) that considered several psychosocial variables as predictors of school adjustment of 40 gifted students with learning disabilities in junior secondary school in Ikenne Local Government Council Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Findings from the study showed that both emotional intelligence and self-concept were potent factors that could predict school adjustment of gifted students with learning disabilities

Table 2: Results of correlation analysis between psycho-emotional factors and academic adjustment of high ability learners in secondary schools in the South-West of Nigeria

	R	P value
Academic self-efficacy	0.538**	<0.001
Academic self-concept	0.208**	0.007
Emotional intelligence	0.329**	<0.001
Locus of control	0.064	0.411

In the present study, the relationship between academic adjustment and academic self-concept implies that high ability learners with more positive self-concept of their academic standing have the propensity to better adjust to school requirements. This is in line with the research work of Wouters et al. (2011) who found a significant relationship with a similar correlation value of 0.230 between these two variables. The relationship between academic adjustment and emotional intelligence was significant and relatively high (r = 0.329). One of the implications of this finding is that high ability learners with high levels of emotional intelligence may be more able to cope better with the challenges in school and make necessary and successful academic adjustment. This corroborated the results of Kar, Saha and Mondal (2016) who also found a significant relationship with a correlation value between academic adjustment and emotional intelligence among higher secondary school students in India. However, participants in their study were not high ability learners. Also the correlation between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment was positive and statistically significant. The implication of these findings is that self-efficacy plays a prominent role in the extent to which high ability learners can adjust academically.

Contributions of psycho-emotional factors to academic adjustment

Table 3 summarises the efficacy of the four models based on the psycho-emotional factors of interest in predicting academic adjustment among the high ability learners in this study. The adjusted R^2 of the candidate models increased with a decrease in the number of predictor variables entered. The first model which had all four psycho-emotional variables (self-efficacy, self-concept, emotional intelligence, and locus of control) as predictors had the lowest adjusted R^2. On the other hand, the fourth model, with academic self-efficacy as the sole predictor, had improved statistics (R^2 = 0.29, adjusted R^2 = 0.29). This implies that about 29% of the variance in academic adjustment of high ability learners could be explained by this variable. The contribution of academic self-efficacy to the prediction of academic adjustment was statistically significant ($F_{(1, 164)}$ = 66.43, p <0.001).

Table 3: Summary of backward regression analysis showing the predictive performance of models using four psycho-emotional variables

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.54	0.29	0.28	0.30
2	0.54	0.29	0.28	0.29
3	0.54	0.29	0.28	0.29
4	0.54	0.29	0.29	0.29

Model 1: self-concept, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and locus of control
Model 2: self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and locus of control
Model 3: self-efficacy, emotional intelligence
Model 4: self-efficacy

This study revealed that self-efficacy was the most important variable in the prediction of academic adjustment. We found that 29% of the variance in academic adjustment of high ability learners could be explained solely by this variable. The addition of other variables, namely self-concept, emotional intelligence, and locus of control did not improve the predictive ability of the regression models. Although there is no strong basis for comparing these results with those of Fakolade and Oyedokun (2016) whose participants were gifted students with disabilities, the following parallels can be drawn. Firstly, there is an agreement in both studies that self-concept contributes to the prediction of academic adjustment of high ability learners. Secondly, the adjusted coefficient of determination reported by Fakolade and Oyedokun (2016) in a regression model encompassing emotional intelligence and self-concept in addition to socioeconomic status was 0.401, meaning that about 40 % of the variance was captured by the independent variables. A higher value (42%) was reported by Chukwu and Ekechukwu (2018) among junior secondary school students who are not high ability learners,

while Onyekuru and Zuru (2017) found a much higher percentage of 69.9%, based on a general population of SS2 students in Bayelsa State who are not high ability learners. All these results taken in the context of high ability learners support the notion that most of the variables of interest, especially academic self-efficacy, in the present study can stand as good proxy measures for academic adjustment among high ability learners in the South-west of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study aimed to predict academic adjustment among high ability learners in selected secondary schools using some psycho-emotional factors. In the study, 'Psycho-emotional factors as predictors of academic adjustment of high ability learners in secondary schools in the South-west of Nigeria', four psycho-emotional variables were considered and they include: academic self-efficacy, academic self-concept, emotional intelligence, and locus of control. All the variables had a significant relationship with academic adjustment among high ability learners except for locus of control. However, it was only academic self-efficacy that was a strong predictor of academic adjustment among the studied population. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. General and special education teachers should be enlightened on how to enhance the self-efficacy of high ability learners. This can be achieved by regularly organising seminars and talk shows to sensitise high ability learners on the benefits of synchronising their innate abilities with adequate efforts for maximum self-efficacy.
2. There should be an emphasis on the need to promote activities that will bolster the emotional intelligence of high ability learners
3. Considering the fact that the brain or intelligence is malleable, high ability learners should be encouraged to put in more effort to improve rather than relying on their innate ability alone, as ability without effort can impede their maximum adjustment.

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