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Academic Adjustment among Undergraduates: The Role of Self-esteem and Self-efficacy in a Nigerian University

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Abstract

Social cognitive theory and self-determination theory assumed that self-esteem and self-efficacy may explain academic adjustment. In the present study, the assumption is tested among 226 undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Ages of the participants were 18-40 years (M = 21.66, SD = 3.10). Three scales were used to collect data for the study: Academic adjustment scale (AAS), Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (R-SES) and General self-efficacy scale (G-SES). The study adopted correlation design and the hypothesis was tested with multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that self-esteem significantly predicted academic adjustment while self efficacy did not. The outcome of the study suggested for a framework for understanding the role of self-esteem on academic adjustment. It was recommended that self-esteem and self-efficacy should be encouraged and included in the University's programs as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences and orientation of new students.

Keywords: Academic adjustment, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Introduction

Academic adjustment has been conceptualized from the historical point of view to mean the methods for assessing students' abilities and providing them with appropriate instruction. This has led to the development of special education programs in the early 20th century. By implication, many students now view the transition from primary to secondary education as a challenging time for their academic and emotional adjustment in school. Such challenges cut across multiple facets, ranging from meeting academic responsibilities, the school environment, new friends, teachers, parental and personal expectations (Haktanir et al., 2018).

The term "adjustment" refers to the way one manages tension, conflict, stress, and meets their individual needs. Academic adjustment in like manner, involves skills, attitudes, and behaviors that one must have to succeed in an academic setting. These skills may include students improving their academic adjustment through so many ways by changing their study skills, managing their time in appropriate ways such as setting goals, deadlines, breaking down tasks into smaller steps and scheduling study time. Academic adjustment also entails students' stable functioning in different areas such as school engagement, achievement, burnout, and teacher-student conflict (Engels et al., 2019).

In order for a student's academic adjustment to be high, he or she needs to have a high level of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-esteem is an individual's personal value which can

affect his or her behaviour, decisions, and emotions, or overall sense of self-worth. Self-esteem is a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of himself (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of self-esteem tend to have better academic performance than those with lower levels because they engage in positive behaviors such as studying, attending class, and participating in extracurricular activities (Gonzalez & Lopez, 2018).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed in a particular task or situation. It is also an important factor in academic adjustment because it affects how students take their studies and how they respond to challenges. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of difficulty, take on more challenging tasks, and have higher academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy also influences how students perceive their academic environment and how they interact with peers and teachers (Gonzalez, 2013).

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are two necessary psychological constructs that have been studied extensively in the field of psychology. These constructs have also been linked to a variety of positive outcomes, such as academic achievement, academic adjustment, mental health and overall well-being. In other words, the gap that this work intends to fill is in the area of academic adjustment difficulties students face in their studies; ranging from their area of reading coverage in preparation for their exams, credit load of courses they are expected to pass in a semester and other crowded activities militating against their academic pursuit and programs in school, as the current researchers intends to find out whether self- esteem and self- efficacy are actual predictors for all these, which may not have reflected in the findings of previous researchers in this same area.

Theoretical Framework

Two of the three traditional theories of academic adjustment: Social cognitive and Self-determination theories formed the theoretical framework that guided this study hypothesis. Social cognitive theory states that individuals' behaviour and performance are influenced by their beliefs about their own abilities, known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Academic adjustment can be explained thus, using this theory; individuals with high self-efficacy are those who have had positive mastery experiences, have observed successful role models, have received encouraging feedback, and are in a positive emotional and physiological state. Therefore, it can be deduced that self-efficacy can assist to play a crucial role in shaping individuals' academic adjustment by impacting their motivation, persistence, and performance.

Conversely, Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) holds that individuals have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that satisfaction of these needs leads to greater motivation, engagement, and well-being. This is also known as self-esteem. Empirically, cross-sectional studies supported the above theories by revealing that there is overall provision of evidence on the positive relationship between self-esteem and academic adjustment.

Moreover, Lee and Kim's (2020) study of 1,157 college students revealed that self-esteem predicted subsequent levels of academic adjustment, suggesting that students who believe in their ability to succeed academically are more likely to adapt to the demands of college life.

Furthermore, Zhao and Zhang (2021) study on the relationship between academic self-efficacy, academic adjustment, and academic achievement in 413 sample of Chinese college students revealed that academic self-efficacy had a significant positive relationship with academic adjustment and academic achievement, suggesting that students whose belief and behaviour influences their abilities to succeed academically are more likely to adapt to the demands of college life and achieve academic success.

Similarly, Nasasrah (2009) explored self-efficacy correlation with test anxiety in light of demographical variables among high school students, and he identified the differences in the gender and educational level. The participants were (678) male and female students. The author utilized perceived self-efficacy and anxiety tests. A negative significant correlation between the perceived self-efficacy and test anxiety was found. No significant statistical differences between averages were found on self-efficacy attributed to the gender and the educational level.

Therefore, this work tested the following hypotheses:

i. Self-esteem will not significantly predict academic adjustment among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
ii. Self-efficacy will not significantly predict academic adjustment among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and twenty-six (226) participants were purposively selected across the faculties of social sciences, Arts, and Engineering for the study. The participants comprised 118 females and 108 males (with demographics of intelligent, average and dull). Age ranged from eighteen to forty (18- 40) years (M = 21.66, SD = 3.10). Only regular students were sampled for the study.

Instruments

Three instruments were used for the study; Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) developed by Bierman et al. (2016) with psychometric properties of three hypothesized subscales: academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation; factor analyses, evidence of validity (convergent, discriminant, criterion, known-groups, and face validities); and evidence of reliability (internal consistency: test-retest reliability), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (R-SES) developed by Rosenberg (1965) with psychometric properties of the scale generally having high reliability: test-retest correlations which are typically in the range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach alpha for various samples are in the range of 0.77 to 0.88 and General Self-Efficacy Scale (G-SES) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) with psychometric properties of internal consistency, Cronbach alpha in the range of 0.83, convergent and discriminant validity and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis.

Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS)

Bierman, et al. (2016) developed and validated AAS to measure how well a student is adapting to academic demands of university. AAS is an eighteen-item scale scored on a five-

point Likert format. The first item in AAS was scored (1 – Never True), the second item was scored (2 – Seldom True), while the last three items were scored (3 – Sometimes True, 4 – Usually True, 5 – Always True). Higher scores indicate low academic adjustment and lower scores indicate high academic adjustment. AAS was equally tested for internal consistency and Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.80 was obtained.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (R-SES)

Rosenberg (1965) developed and validated R-SES to measure individual self-esteem as a widely used self-report instrument. R-SES is a ten item scale scored on four Likert format (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree), Item – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 were scored. The internal consistency of R-SES was reported as follows: 0.77, minimum coefficient reproducibility was at 0.90 and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.88.

General Self-Efficacy Scale (G-SES)

Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) developed and validated G-SES to measure an individual's belief in their ability to cope with a variety of challenging situations. G-SES is a ten item scale scored on four Likert format (1 – not at all to 4 – exactly true), Item – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 were scored. The instrument reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.76 and has been found to have good reliability and validity across a range of populations, including adolescents, adults, and older adults.

Procedure

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Thereafter, informed consent and assent were obtained from the school authorities. The researchers randomly selected the participants before the administration of the measuring instrument (questionnaires). The researchers were present to address the questions raised by the participants before they completed the items on the questionnaires. The 226 participants completed their questionnaires accurately, which were used for the final analysis. The three instruments; the Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (R-SES) and General Self-Efficacy Scale (G-SES) were administered to the consented participants at their lecture halls and were retrieved after about 30 minutes.

Design and Statistics

The study used survey research. Its design was a correlation design, which allowed the use of multiple linear regression statistics for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: Zero order Correlation Matric using Raw Data

		1	2	3
1	Academic Adjustment	1		
2	Self Esteem	.269	1	
3	Self- Efficacy	.063	.372*	1

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

The findings in Table 1 above showed that there is zero-order correlation coefficient of the studied variables. In other words, there was a positive correlation between Academic Adjustment and Self Esteem at r=.269, P< .05, and the relationship between Academic Adjustment and Self-Efficacy was significant and positive at r = .063, P> .05.

Table 2: Standardized Beta Coefficient Result for Independent Effects of Self Esteem and Self- Efficacy on Academic Adjustment.

Predictor variable	**R^2**	**Adjusted R^2**	**$Df^i(df^2)$**	**F**	**B**	**Sig**
Model 1 Academic Adjustment	**.140**	.132	1(223)	18.10		
a. Self-Esteem					.382*	.000
a. Self-Efficacy					.040	.541

*p<.05

The findings in Table 2 above revealed that the two models were analyzed independently using multiple regression enter method. Therefore, the following outcomes were obtained. Model 1 (hypothesis one) in Table 2 also showed that when enter method was applied to Academic Adjustment for independent predictors of Self Esteem, the adjusted R^2 was .140. This revealed that the model contributed 1.4% to understanding Academic Adjustment. The ANOVA summary (f-ratio) showed that the adjusted R^2 value was not significant at f (2,223) = 18.10, p>.05. Specifically, the unstandardized beta value for peer relation was (β=.382*, P < .05), and Self-Efficacy was not significant at (β=.040, P >.05).

Discussion

Fundamentally, the main objective of this study was to investigate whether self esteem and self efficacy will not significantly predict academic adjustment among undergraduates. The

findings revealed that self esteem significantly predicted academic adjustment, while self efficacy did not predict academic adjustment among undergraduates.

Self-esteem significantly predicted academic adjustment among undergraduates showed that when self-esteem is increasing, academic adjustment will also be increasing and vice versa. This finding supported the findings of Deci and Ryan (1985) which holds that individuals have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the satisfaction of these needs leads to greater motivation, engagement and well-being.

Furthermore, the study showed self-efficacy did not significantly predict academic adjustment among undergraduates which indicates that when self-efficacy is decreasing, academic adjustment will be decreasing and vice versa. This finding is also in a relationship with the finding of Nasasrah (2009) who examined self-efficacy correlation with test anxiety in light of demographical variables among high school students and found no significant statistical differences between averages on self-efficacy attributed to gender and educational level. This finding also showed that self-efficacy may not contribute much on academic adjustment among undergraduates. In other words, self-esteem serves as a booster of students' innate psychological needs to adjust himself well, academically, whereas, self-efficacy in this context, can be challenged with students' erroneous beliefs in their abilities to adjust well when they are not doing well academically, which may fail them because they lack the proper adjustment techniques to do so. Therefore, self-esteem is a good predictor of academic adjustment, while self-efficacy a predictor of academic adjustment in a reverse direction.

Implications of the study

The implications of the study revealed that self-esteem beta weight is highest in this study. This equally shows that self-esteem contributes more to academic adjustment than self-efficacy. The result revealed also that self-esteem should be encouraged to improve academic adjustment among students. The findings of the present study will provide some important information for students on some of the likely factors that will improve academic adjustment such as: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Again, the findings highlighted that self-esteem should be encouraged among students as this will increase their level of motivation, engagement and well-being, thereby, leading to proper academic adjustment. This will also help in developing and channeling students' innate psychological needs in the right direction where they will become more useful and encourage them to crave for more skills that will harmonize their self-esteem, giving rise to peace building among undergraduates and ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of the study is that as survey research, participants may not have responded according to how they felt when administering the questionnaires. Moreover, data collected were only on few undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU) who were willing to participate in the study, who were not the total representative of the

general population of Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates Awka campus. Lack of finance and time equally restricted the researcher only to undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka campus.

Suggestions for further study

The study should be viewed as a stepping stone to further research, and should not be restricted to Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka (NAU), alone. Efforts to examine self-esteem and self-efficacy among married couples and paramilitary personnel may be of great value to our understanding of self-esteem and self-efficacy as predictors of academic adjustment.

Recommendations

The researcher recommended that self-esteem and self-efficacy as it affects academic adjustment should be included in the university's programs as part of general studies, routine seminars, conferences, and orientations of new students.

The researcher also recommended that self-esteem and self-efficacy should be encouraged both in higher institutions of learning and among ethnic groups for peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The present study examined whether self-esteem and self-efficacy will not significantly predict academic adjustment among undergraduates. Evidence from the findings revealed that self-esteem significantly predicted academic adjustment while self-efficacy did not.

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