

PREDICTING FACTORS OF SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IBADAN, OYO STATE

Solomon Adekunle ODEDOKUN, Ph.D

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate some predicting factors on school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State. Two hundred and ninety-six students were randomly selected as sample for the study. The independent and dependent variables were measured with relevant standardised instruments. The instruments used were "Perceived School Climate Scale" ($r = .68$), "The Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale" ($r = .77$), "Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale" ($r = .85$) and "School Connectedness Scale" ($r = .88$). Data obtained were analysed, using multiple regression statistical method. Three research questions were answered in the study. The result showed that there was significant relationship between the three independent variables (school climate, academic self-efficacy and peer bullying/victimisation) on the student connectedness and that the independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction of school connectedness among the participants. On the strength of these findings, the study recommended that school supports should be encouraged within the school setting.

Keywords: School Connectedness, School Climate, Academic Self-Efficacy, Bullying/Victimisation

Introduction

Adolescents spend larger part of their time in schools than in any other environment. This is because schooling is a period of laying solid foundation for their future endeavours. While many of them might not necessarily use their certificates to secure white collar job, the learning process serves as a means of integrating them into the society and making them effective citizens. Research suggests that feeling connected to one's school during adolescence promotes concurrent and long-term positive youth development (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris and Jones, 1997). The construct of the psychological sense of school membership or school

connectedness was first investigated as a critical factor in school retention or dropout (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez, 1989). The construct is referred to with many other terms, such as school engagement, school bonding, and school attachment, which have many similarities but some differences (Libbey, 2004). This construct is argued to be particularly important for adolescents as they rely less on the family as part of the individuation process and rely more on extra familial relationships such as those found in schools, with friends, and others (Goodenow, 1993). It is not an overstatement to say that many adolescents in public secondary schools in Nigeria are disconnected from their schools.

This disconnectedness could be seen in various dimensions of their activities and behaviours. These, among others, include lateness to school, lack of motivation and commitment to their studies, loitering about during the school hour, examination malpractices, poor academic performance and failure in doing their home works/class assignments. The consequences of these are enormous and dangerous to the development of an individual and society at large. When students are disconnected from their schools, inappropriate and dangerous behaviour is inevitable and this puts them at risk for maladaptive development, like thuggery, examination malpractices, school violence, school dropout, sexual harassment, smoking and other negative vices. Consequently, there is strong need for preventive interventions that increase levels of school connectedness in our public secondary schools, thus promoting long-term positive development which includes academic exploits and career success. This study, therefore, investigated the predicting factors of academic self-efficacy, school climate and bullying/school victimisation on school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state.

School climate refers to factors that contribute to the performance of students in schools, and the attitudes of staff and students toward their schools. Positive school climate is associated with well-managed classrooms and common areas, high and clearly stated expectations concerning individual responsibility, feeling safe at school, teachers and staff that consistently acknowledge all students and fairly address their behaviour. School climate is related to school connectedness because without a positive and welcoming school climate, students are unlikely to experience connectedness. Researchers like

Abbott, O'Donnell, Hawkin, Hill, Kostermann and Catalano (1998) found out that the most powerful predictors of school connectedness are related to school climate. Climate can be thought of as assets external to students that indicate or promote connectedness, whereas connectedness can be thought of as internal assets (students' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs).

According to Klem and Connell, (2004), there is a strong association between the level of school climate, the level of connectedness and academic achievement. Connectedness is enhanced by a healthy and safe school environment and a supportive psychosocial climate. A clean and pleasant physical environment raises expectations for safety and sets the stage for positive and respectful relationships. The psychosocial climate at school is influenced by factors such as policies related to discipline, opportunities for meaningful student participation and teachers' classroom management practices. Research indicates that in schools with a harsh and punitive discipline climate, student connectedness is lower (Blum, McNeely and Rinehart, 2002). Blum, *et.al* (2002) also discovered that schools with a higher average sense-of-community score (i.e. composite of students' perception of caring and supportive interpersonal relationships and their ability to be autonomous) had significantly lower average student drug use and delinquency.

Teachers who promote mutual respect in the classroom foster a sense of safety and connectedness by reducing the threat of being embarrassed or teased. School activity involvement has been demonstrated to have positive effects for adolescent wellbeing (Eccles and Barber, 1999). In a study of the effect of participation in school activities upon adolescent well-being, Eccles *et.al* (1999) examined the potential benefits of

participation, including better GPA, lower rates of school absenteeism which is an aspect of school connectedness and lowering of potential risks, including delinquent behaviour. Evidence was found to indicate that participation in school activities was a protective factor in relation to academic performance and involvement in risk behaviours and effects were maintained even after controlling for social class, gender and academic ability, Eccles *et al.* (1999). McNeely *et al.* (2002) also investigated the relationship between student participation and school connectedness, with results to indicate that those who participated in school activities experienced higher overall school connectedness. Thus, it is evident that school climate could be a strong predictor of school connectedness among public secondary school students.

The construct of self-efficacy has become a major element of educational research, particularly, with regard to its influence on many domains of adolescent development and success (Urdu and Midgley, 2003; Schunk and Meece, 2005; Usher and Pajares, 2008). The concept is defined as the belief in one's ability to organise and execute courses of action that are necessary to accomplish a particular task (Bandura, 1977; 1986), self-efficacy differs from other self-beliefs, such as self-concept or self-esteem, as it pertains to a subjective perception of one's capabilities rather than actual skills to attain a goal.

Simply knowing what it takes to meet a specific goal and possessing the necessary skills to succeed are not enough. One may still not get very far if one lacks the belief in one's ability to carry out a course of action. Furthermore, individuals' self-efficacy beliefs can vary widely based on specific domains of functioning, Bandura, (1986). For example, a student may have high self-

efficacy for writing a term paper but at the same time have low self-efficacy for communicating the same information in a public presentation.

In the context of school, academic self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to manage one's own educational experiences through academic mastery and self-regulated learning strategies (Bandura *et al.*, 2001). Throughout the literature, academic self-efficacy has been identified as an important predictor of many indices of school functioning, including academic achievement, aspirations, (e.g. Bandura, and Martinez-Pons, 1992; Schunk, 2001; Zimmerman Pajares, 2008.), and school retention (Caprara *et al.*, 2008). Students with higher academic self-efficacy have been known to work harder (Bandura *et al.*, 2001), demonstrate more persistence with challenging tasks (Pajares, 2008), and develop better goal-setting and time-monitoring strategies than other students (Zimmerman, 2000). Adolescents with a strong sense of efficacy for learning are also more resilient to setbacks and are better able to resist the adverse influences of low-achieving peers than are those with a weak sense of efficacy (Bandura *et al.*, 1999). Maintenance of high academic self-efficacy also has positive influence on youth career trajectories and continuing academic performance throughout college (Bandura, 1997; Bandura *et al.*, 2001). While the role of academic self-efficacy may seem most relevant to the scope of educational outcomes, researchers have found this factor to be significantly related to social-emotional health as well. Students with a strong belief in their capacity to manage their educational experiences may engage in coping strategies that decrease their level of distress (Bandura *et al.*, 1996) and increase their pro-social

behaviour (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, and Pastorelli, 2003).

Evidence from literature base on school connectedness and academic self-efficacy has revealed that these protective constructs are independently and positively related to numerous indices of healthy adjustment, including academic performance, school retention and reduced depressive symptoms (Roeser *et al.*, 1996). Furthermore, research and theory have revealed that these constructs are cultivated by similar conditions and social sources of information from the school environment (Karcher, 2003; 2004; Schunk and Meece, 2005; Usher and Pajares, 2008; Whitlock, 2006). Such findings would suggest that school connectedness and academic self-efficacy are significantly linked to adolescent development. However, few studies have actually examined the nature of the relationship between these self-mechanisms of motivation (Roeser *et al.*, 1996; Cunningham *et al.*, 2004; Vieno, Santinello, Pastore and Perkins, 2007; Uwah, *et al.*, 2008). Some researchers proposed that relationships between components of school connectedness and academic self-efficacy may be reciprocal (Uwah *et al.*, 2008). As students' sense of connectedness and engagement with school increases, they may participate in activities and observations that build their efficacy for managing their own learning and academic performance. Likewise, as students feel more efficacious and successful in accomplishing their goals, school connectedness has a great tendency to be increased. Few studies that have examined academic self-efficacy and school connectedness revealed some findings.

Lastly, Eccles and Roeser (2011) were of the opinion that protective school contextual factors (including teacher support, clear rules, and opportunities for involvement) had

a significant and positive impact on school connectedness. This finding suggested that students with more positive perceptions of the school environment may experience a greater sense of connection to school than others with less perception; they also participate in experiences that enhance belief in their own ability to manage their learning process (Ryan and Patrick, 2001; Whitlock, 2006; Usher and Pajares, 2008). This study, therefore, sought to know the predicting influence of self-efficacy on school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state.

School bullying and peer victimisation are major social problems affecting children and adolescents in all parts of the world, Nigeria inclusive. The consequences of bullying and peer victimisation have generated considerable amount of attention from the media, the public, educators, school officials, researchers, practitioners, and law-makers in recent years (Phillips, 2007). Concerns over 'bullycide' (suicide attributed to peer victimisation) and school violence have led to an examination of risk factors associated with bullying and its impact on students (Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). Previous studies have investigated the association between bullying behaviour and individual characteristics (age, gender, and psychosocial problems), as well as direct relations (family and peer) and the school environment (Espelage and Horne, 2008).

Bullying has detrimental effects on victims' well-being. There is an association between school bullying, victims' physical/psychological well-being and academic maladjustment, (Egan and Perry, 1998 and Troop-Gordon and Ladd, 2005). For example, victims of school bullying are more likely to suffer psychological maladjustment, including sadness, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem,

(Egan *et al.*, 1998; Graham, Bellmore and Juvonen, 2003 and Troop-Gordon *et al.* 2005) . In addition, a significant association is found between peer victimization and extreme emotional responses such as suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, (Hawker and Boulton, 2000 and Troop-Gordon, *et al.*, 2005). This article, therefore, examined the relationship between school climate, academic self -efficacy and peer bullying/victimization on school connectedness among secondary school students in public schools in Ibadan, Oyo state.

Research Questions

- (i) What is the relationship between the independent variables (school climate, academic self-efficacy and peer bullying/victimization) and school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state?
- (ii) What is the joint contribution of the independent variables (school climate, academic self-efficacy and peer bullying/victimisation) to school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state?
- (iii) What is the relative contribution of each of the independent variables (school climate, academic self-efficacy and peer bullying/victimization) to school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state?

Methodology

Research design

The descriptive research design of correlational type was adopted for the study. A total number of two hundred and ninety six public secondary school students (Males =185, 62.5%, Females = 111, 37.5%) were

randomly selected from ten public secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo state. The age of the respondents ranges between 11 and 21 years, with a mean age of 15.4 and SD of 3.7. Academic Self-Efficacy was measured using the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale comprised 10 items. The 10 items were scored as follows: 1 = Not at all true 2 = Hardly true 3 = Moderately true 4 = Exactly true. The points scored on all items were summed up to give participants' scores on the scale. The items were coded because there are both negative and positive statements which should be reversed. Scores on the scale ranged between 10 and 40. The test-retest reliability coefficient was 0.77. In order to measure the school climate, teacher support, peer support, student's autonomy and clarity as well as consistency in school rules were examined. These four dimensions were assessed through subscales of the "Perceived School Climate Scale" (1993) developed by the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) (Felter *et al.* 1997). The internal consistency of the scale was re-established by this study and it returned a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.78. "Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale" (MPVS) developed and validated by Mynard and Joseph (2000), was used to measure the extent to which students were victimised by their peers. The original 16 items by the authors were adapted and validated. The items covered four aspects of peer victimisation, namely, physical victimisation, verbal victimisation, social manipulation and attack on property. The students were required to indicate how often they were victimised over a range of 0-2, (0= Not at all, 1= Once, 2= More than once).The items were found to possess satisfactory internal reliability with values of 0.85, 0.78, 0.77 and 0.73 for physical, verbal, social

victimization and attack on property subscales respectively; Mynard and Joseph (2000). Scores of each of the respondents on the total scale have a possible range of 0-40 and possible range of 0-10 on each of the four subscales. Scores between 0-18 indicate a low level of victimisation, 19-26 indicate moderate level of victimisation, while scores between 27-40 show a high level of victimisation.

School Connectedness was measured with the “School Connectedness Survey” by Edens, (2006). The School Connectedness Survey assesses the degree to which students agree that in their school, they feel close to people, happy, a part of the school, safe, and treated fairly. These are feelings and experiences that are likely to motivate students to attend and try hard in school. The scale serves as a measure of the level of student connectedness. The scale has 25 items to be responded to on a 5 – point structure response format. The response format ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to

Strongly Agree (5). The internal consistency of the scale was established by this study and it returned a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.88. Examples of the items include: ‘The teachers at this school treat students fairly’; ‘I feel my contributions to this school are valued’ and ‘I feel safe in this school’. The questionnaires were administered on the participants in their various schools following the approval of the school authorities. The administration of the instruments took three weeks. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression analysis to examine the predictive effects of school climate, academic self-efficacy and peer bullying/victimisation on school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State at 0.05 level of significance.

Results.

Table 1. Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation among the variables

	Mean	Standard. Deviation	N	School Connected ness	School Climate	Academic Self- Efficacy	Peer Bullying / Victimization
School Connectedness	92.6918	16.0633	296	1.000	.173	.368	.607
School Climate	50.8562	5.9338	296	.173	1.000	.029	.303
Academic Self – Efficacy	28.8322	5.8058	296	.368	.029	1.000	.347
Peer Bullying / Victimization	65.1267	9.6841	296	.607	.303	.347	1.000

Table 2. Joint contribution of the independent variables to academic achievement of the students

R = .630 Multiple R = .397 Multiple R ² adjusted = .391 Standard Error Estimate = 12.5379 Analysis of variance					
Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	P
Regression	2913.112	3	9937.704	63.218	.000
Residual	45273.148	292	157.198		
Total	75086.260	295			

Table 3. Relative contribution of the independent variables to academic achievement of the students

Variables	Unstandardised Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients (beta)	T	Sig.
(Constant)	19.176	7.524	-	2.549	.011
School climate	.644	.130	.003	4.341	.002
Academic self- efficacy	.496	.135	.179	3.658	.000
Peer bullying/ victimization	.903	0.85	.544	10.598	.000

Table 3 shows that each independent variable, the unstandardised regression weight (β), the standard error of estimate ($SE\beta$), the standardized coefficient, the t-ratio and level at which the T-ratio is significant. Peer bullying made the highest contribution to the criterion variable, ($\beta = .544$, $t = 10.598$, $P < 0.05$). This is followed by academic self-efficacy ($\beta = .179$, $t = 3.66$, $P < .05$) and lastly, school climate ($\beta = .003$, $t = .065$, $P < .05$).

Discussion

The contribution of peer bullying/victimisation to the prediction of the school connectedness was not a surprise. This is because consequences of bullying and peer victimisation are detrimental to

students well-being which if not checked could lead to academic disengagement which invariably leads to school disconnectedness. This assertion was corroborated by Egan, and Perry, (1998); Nansel, *et al.* (2001). This is because students' sense of connectedness and engagement could increase if the school environment is conducive for learning and free from peer victimisation. The school authority should, therefore, work towards eradicating the menace of bullying and victimisation in the school system. Academic self-efficacy was also found to have predicted school connectedness. As students feel more efficacious and successful in accomplishing their goals, school connectedness has a great tendency to be increased. Again, self-efficacy beliefs

determine an individual's resiliency to adversity and vulnerability to stress and depression, Bandura, *et.al.* (2003). This could translate to the fact that when students experience higher academic self-efficacy, to be strongly connected to school would not be a problem, otherwise, disconnection from school is inevitable. Also, as students' sense of connectedness and engagement with school increases, they may participate in activities and observations that build their academic efficacy for managing their own learning and academic performance. Likewise, as students feel more efficacious and successful in accomplishing their goals, school connectedness also has a great tendency to be increased. This assertion was corroborated by McMahon, Parnes, Keys, and Viola, (2008) when they opined that academic self-efficacy significantly predicted school connectedness and feelings of depression. When a student possesses a strong academic self-efficacy, even when there are genuine reasons to be disconnected from school, his strong efficacy will push him to forge ahead and stay connected. The finding that school climate also predicted school connectedness was in agreement with researchers like Abbott *et al.* (1998) and Klem and Connell, (2004). This is because a warm, loving, caring, positive and welcoming school climate is a prerequisite to student connectedness while in a harsh and punitive climate, student connectedness is lower. When students experience bullying/victimisation, it affects their physical/psychological well-being and this could lead to both academic and psychological maladjustment like sadness, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem which if not properly handled, could lead to students being disconnected from the school system. Efforts should, therefore, be made by significant others in the school system to

guide against bullying or victimisation among the students. It can then be deduced that school climate is a *sine qua non* to school connectedness.

Recommendations

The study has shown that there is a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy, peer bullying and victimisation and school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state. Akin to this is the fact that the independent variables examined in this study have proven, beyond reasonable doubts to be determinants of school connectedness among public secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo state. In view of this, it is hereby recommended that school supports like caring and loving attitude that address the cognitive, social and emotional needs of the young scholars should be encouraged within the school setting. Also, morale and academic self-efficacy of the students should be worked upon by all stake holders in the school setting. This is because students with self confidence tend to persist and make extra efforts even when faced with difficult challenges, unlike the low self-efficacy individuals, who give up more easily even when they possess the required skills or knowledge, which invariably would lead to being disconnected from the school. Lastly, peer bullying/victimisation should be discouraged among the students in order to forestall its negative effects on academic, emotional, social development and psychological well-being of the students. Unrelenting campaign against bullying/victimisation should be the concern of the school administrators, school counsellors, social workers and other stakeholders in the school setting. Perpetrators of bullying/victimisation school

also be disciplined according to the laid down principles.

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