

# PSYCHO-SOCIAL VARIABLES AS CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AMONG UNDERACHIEVING SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

AMUWA, Olukemi Abosede, Ph.D

Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

## ABSTRACT

*In recent times, it has been observed that many of the rated intelligent students have lost their intelligence to academic rigours and challenges associated with education. This has culminated in the decline of students' academic performance even among intelligent students. The eventful situation created interest in the examination of psycho-social variables (academic locus of control, academic self-efficacy and parental influence) as correlates of academic resilience of under-achieving Senior Secondary School (SSS) students in Southwest, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design of the correlational type. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting twelve Local Government Areas (LGA) out of one hundred and thirty seven LGAs that made up the six states in Southwest, while sixty public secondary schools were selected from the twelve LGAs. Students' Cumulative Academic Performance Record (JSS3 and SS1) scores were employed in identifying and recruiting three thousand, two hundred and ninety students (males = 1726,  $\bar{x}$  = 14.72, SD = 5.33; females: 1564,  $\bar{x}$  = 14.95, SD = 2.37). Four outcome measures were used for data collection: Academic Resilience Scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.80); Locus of Control Scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.75); Self-efficacy Scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.69); Parental Influence Scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.86). Pearson product moment correlation was used for data analysis. Self-efficacy, locus of control and parental influence were potent correlates of academic resilience among under-achieving senior secondary students. Therefore, these variables should be taken into cognizance by counselling psychologists, teachers, school administrators and parents in improving students' academic achievement.*

**Key words:** Self-efficacy, Locus of control, Parental influence, Academic resilience, Underachieving students.

## Introduction

The prevalent rates of adjustment, struggles and perseverance that students are forced to make owing to different social, economic, psychological and environmental challenges they are exposed to and which pose as hindrances to their academic achievements point to the likely existence of academic resilience. This academic resilience is the internal motivation that allows them look beyond their immediate

challenges and focus on techniques of coping in order to enjoy a much more fulfilling life. Thus, academic resilience is the motivating factor or push that drives an individual to desire success when factors surrounding him/her are not favourable (Christiansen & Christiansen, 1997).

Skinner and Pitzer (2012) refer to academic resilience as the ability to cope actively and positively to life conditions,

stress, and trauma. Also, academic resilience is the ability to overcome high load of stressful events such as trauma, death, economic loss, disaster, political upheaval and cultural changes; and maintain psychological vitality and mental health (Wilson, 2004; Cavazos, Johnson & Sparrow, 2010). In all the given definitions of academic resilience, two key elements are significant: exposure to adverse or traumatic circumstances and successful adaptation following exposure (Luthar, 2006). These key elements might have influenced why academic resilience is gradually becoming a major focus of research among scholars (Walsh, 2002; Martin, 2002; Oxford & Morpeth, 2003).

Academic resilience among underachieving students is perceived in their willingness and desire to improve their poor academic achievement regardless of the surrounding negative odds. Underachieving students are students who consistently perform below the specified pass-mark as set by the school. That is, students whose academic achievements fall below average in the school. In so doing, they put in extra study hours; ask for assistance from teachers and peers in the school or in the immediate environment while also engaging in other activities that would improve learning and retention.

Observation shows that there is high level of academic resilience among Nigerian secondary schools students. However, daily environmental factors affect academic achievement among many secondary schools students. This could be because most students experience inadequate financial and social supports both at home, among peers and in the schools. Most parents cannot afford needed learning materials for students and they are expected to make do with inadequate libraries within the Nigerian

school communities. In view of this, such students are denied teaching and learning at the same pace with classmates who have all the available resource materials. Moreover, some of these students are expected to trade before coming to school and after leaving school, leading to no time or inadequate study period to go over what has been taught. This, however, makes them underachievers, because their ability to do well is eventually suppressed by the situation they are placed into. However, academic resilience in students may not guarantee academic success, if the students lose focus and resolve to apportion blames when faced with unfavourable academic conditions at school leading to truancy and finally dropping out of school. Thus, the role of psycho-social variables as correlates of academic resilience among underachieving secondary school students cannot be over-emphasized.

The parents are equally considered as another factor in academic resilience. These adults, especially, the parents are the students' first teachers and agent of socialisation (Olaogun, 2005; Adeyemo, 2007). They provide the primary socialisation environment for the students and it is highly important in determining students' academic achievement. Their socio-economic state and willingness to provide both emotional and financial support for their children academically determines the students' accessibility to teaching and learning resources. This may be the reason some researchers (Raty & Kasanen, 2010) concluded that poor parents' financial state may encourage child-labour. Students from poverty-stricken-environments are more likely to be under-achievers since they are exposed to stressful life events. Moreover, parents who do not value the importance of education or have negative experience about

schooling could transfer this attitude to their children and weaken their ability to develop academic resilience and strife for academic success.

Locus of control is the inherent belief that everything that happens to an individual is either governed by internal or external factors. Underachievers with internal academic locus of control believe that they are responsible for academic challenges encountered in their educational lives while students with external academic locus of control perceive others as being responsible. For instance, a student who perceives his/her poor academic performance as a result of inadequate studying on his/her part has an internal academic locus of control. Aside this, these students utilise their good-nature when interacting with their peers and other adults. They receive positive feedback which helps to reinforce the appropriate communication skills when interacting with others. Studies reveal that academic resilient students with internal locus of control usually have strong sense of self, challenge themselves by being exposed to the academic curriculum and take more challenging classes (Condly, 2006; Demirkasimoglu, Aydin, Erodogan & Akin, 2012). The student who sees his/her failure as something determined by the teacher has an external academic locus of control.

In the light of this, underachieving students with internal academic locus of control are likely to possess a strong sense of academic self-efficacy which could enhance their academic achievements, quality of functioning and personal well-being (Adeyemo, 2007; Diseth, 2011). Underachievers with high academic self-efficacy set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them; they heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure and when they fail, quickly

recover their sense of self-efficacy (Onabamiro, 2009). However, low academic self-efficacy could influence students to become underachievers. Underachieving students with low academic self-efficacy do not have the belief that they can actually study to achieve academic success. This in itself affects their self-worth and belief about their capabilities. To this end, they are likely to perceive other students as being superior to them which results in further decline in the long run. This means that self-efficacy is on two sides, especially, for underachieving students; those who perceive failure as something they cannot overcome and those who develop academic resilience to combat their present negative academic condition. Ofole and Okopi (2012) reported that students with low academic self-efficacy and low poor academic performance are likely going to drop out of school because they may not have the resilience required for success.

From the foregoing, there appears to be inconsistency in literature on the predictors of academic resilience. This created a need to consider parental influence, self efficacy and locus of control as regressors of academic resilience among secondary school students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study sought to investigate psychosocial variables (academic locus of control, self efficacy and parental influence) as correlates of academic resilience among underachieving secondary schools students in South-west, Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level of significance

- I. There is no significant relationship between locus of control and

academic resilience among underachieving students.

II. There is no significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience among underachieving students.

III. There is no significant relationship between parental influence and academic resilience among underachieving students.

## Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design of the correlational type. This design was appropriate for the study since the variables of interest investigated in the study were not manipulated by the researcher.

The target population for this study was all Senior Secondary Schools Two students (SS 2) in South-west, Nigeria which consists of six states: Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ekiti and Ondo. The students were identifiable and reported to be academically underachieving in the schools. This means that students' selection for participation in this research was based on cumulative test and examination scores which fall below the selected schools specified pass mark.

The multistage sampling technique was used in selecting the participants for this study from secondary schools in South-west, Nigeria. Five secondary schools were randomly selected from each of the twelve local government areas already selected, totaling sixty schools. Fifty five students (55) were randomly selected from each of the schools; bringing the total to 3300 students. But only 3290 (1726 males; 1564 females) students responded properly to the instruments and thus constituted the participants for the study.

However, eligibility for participation was based on poor students' cumulative

academic performance in the school records and from the school counsellors' reports. This cumulative score was measured through student's academic achievement record in the Junior Secondary School Examination, their cumulative performance in SS1 and examination grades in their SS2, class.

## Instruments

Four instruments were used for the study and each instrument has two sections, that is, A and B. The section A consists of demographic information -age, sex, class, school while section B is made up of the subject matters. All the instruments were subjected to pilot testing before using them in this study and they were all found valid and reliable.

The Academic Resilience Scale was adapted from Neil and Dias (2001). The scale is a 22-items scale for assessing the perseverance of students in academic rigour. It has various options that students can select from to answer the given sentence on the scale. The pilot study recorded a reliability of 0.80.

The Locus of Control Scale for this study was modified from Trice (1985) Locus of Control Scale. The original scale has a reliability score of 0.76. Considering the population for the study, the items on the scale were reduced to 18 from the original 28. Participants were expected to pick from the Likert scale of 1 – 5 choice response for each statement. The pilot study recorded a reliability of 0.75.

Academic Self-efficacy Scale for this study was adapted from Downs (2005). It measures the levels of the students' confidence in their ability to perform academic task. The scale is a 15-item Likert with options from '1-completely false to 4-completely true'. The pilot study recorded a reliability of 0.73.

The parental involvement scale was adapted from Hicks (2006). It was designed to measure parents' participation in students learning at school. It has a 10 item on a four point response scale with options from 1- strongly disagree to 4-strongly agree. The pilot study recorded a reliability of 0.82.

## Procedure

A letter of introduction was collected from the Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. This was done to obtain ethical approval from the various school managements in-order to gain access to the students and their cumulative

records. To ease the administration of the questionnaires, six research assistants were trained to this effect.

The researcher was introduced to the participants by the school management and they were informed on the need to cooperate with the researcher. They were also assured of confidentiality of their responses. The administration of questionnaires lasted over three weeks. Only questionnaires that were well-filled were used for the data analysis.

## Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) in testing the three hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Table 1:** Correlation matrix showing the relationships among independent variables (Locus of Control, Self-efficacy, and Parental Influence) on Academic Resilience among underachieving Students

| Variable             | N    | Mean  | St.Dev | Df   | R       | Sig  | P     |
|----------------------|------|-------|--------|------|---------|------|-------|
| Academic Resilience  | 3290 | 71.88 | 13.50  | 3288 | 1.00    |      |       |
| Locus of control     | 3290 | 16.10 | 2.04   | 3288 | -.039** | .000 | <0.01 |
| Self efficacy        | 3290 | 51.36 | 10.85  | 3288 | .454**  | .000 | <0.01 |
| Parental involvement | 3290 | 15.69 | 3.16   | 3288 | .227*   | .000 | <0.01 |

\*\* Sig. at  $P < .01$  level, \* Sig. at  $P < .05$  level

The results on Table 1 show the means, standard deviations and inter-correlation matrix of the independent variables (locus of control, self-efficacy, and parental influence) and dependent variable (Academic Resilience) among underachieving secondary school students. The results show positive significant relationships between academic resilience and self-efficacy ( $r = .454$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), Parental influence ( $r = .227$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and locus of control ( $r = -.039$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). By implication, an increase in parental influence, self efficacy and locus of control will increase students' academic resilience.

## Discussion

The result of the study reveals that there is consistency no significant relationship between locus of control and academic resilience of underachieving students in South-West, Nigeria. Finding in hypothesis one reveals that there is no significant relationship between academic resilience and locus of control of underachieving students. What this portends is that personal and external perceptions have little influence in determining academic resilience among underachieving students in Nigeria. Academic resilience is a situation of striving to overcome perceived challenges against all odds and this means that a student who allows personal and external perception to dictate his/her level of academic performance may fail to develop the necessary academic resilience in Nigeria. This is because the level of financial challenges faced in individual homes and the educational sector, coupled with the prevalent rate of joblessness among young Nigerian graduates are enough overwhelming force to hinder academic achievement. Thus, the inherent ability to move beyond one's level of locus of control

is significant for a student to have the needed academic resilience to succeed in school.

This result, therefore, negates the claims of MacDonald (2005) that academic locus of control is an attitudinal and motivational variable that determines academic achievement and Miller, Fitch, and Marshall, (2003) that locus of control in academic resilience is significant. However, it is in line with Lynch, Hurford and Cole (2002) views that human behaviours are determined by the perceived likelihood of an event or outcome to occur contingent upon the behaviours in question, and the value placed on that event or outcome.

There is no significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience of underachieving students in South-West, Nigeria. This hypothesis was rejected as there was significant relationship between academic resilience and academic self-efficacy of underachieving students in South-West, Nigeria. Just as it has been pointed out earlier, the Nigeria educational sector is faced with the challenges of inadequate school infrastructures, professional teachers, teaching and learning aids to facilitate quality teaching and learning. Aside this, most students come from homes, relying more on government support in order for their children and wards to be in school and enjoy educational benefits.

This expectation creates huge imbalance and leads to underachievement among some students as what is available for teaching and learning cannot adequately sustain and enhance academic achievement among the students. This is in line with Bandura's (1999) supposition that self-efficacy has impact on everything from psychological states of behaviour to motivation and is the foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal

accomplishment. In addition, it supports Diseth's (2011) opinion that self-efficacy perception helps to determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have. Other researchers who have supported this argument are Bernard (2004), Regier (2007) and Trent and Slade (2008). In addition, Alfassi, 2003; Grantham, 2004 stated that self-esteem, self-efficacy and cognitive skills are important to a student's ability to overcome stressful academic situations and positively influence their academic achievement. Despite this, there are some students who have learnt to cope with all these societal, financial and educational challenges and strive for success academically. Those ones have been able to achieve this because they believe in themselves and the likely capability they possess to be successful academically. Thus, the result of this study has proven that there is a significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience.

There is no significant relationship between parental influence and academic resilience of underachieving students in South-West, Nigeria. There was a significant relationship found in this study between academic resilience and parental influence of underachieving students in South-West Nigeria. The result of this hypothesis shows strong agreement to the age long assumption that the home and especially parental influence is a significant factor in a child's life. It could either determine the success or failure of a child academically and in other areas of his/her life. Thus, this research supports Amato and Fowler's (2002) arguments that positive or negative early educational experiences provided by parents can impact the academic future of their children. To buttress this claim, Gutman et al, (2002) stated that consistent discipline

and high parental involvement have positive effects on a child's academic achievement. Active involvement in acts of required helpfulness (Werner, 2006) fosters resilience.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated psycho-social correlates of academic resilience among underachievers in secondary schools. Positive significant relationships were discovered between self-efficacy, parental influence, locus of control and academic resilience. This, however, indicates that an increase in parental influence, self-efficacy and locus of control will increase students' academic resilience in secondary school.

## **Recommendations**

It was discovered that the home and societal challenges that students are faced with negatively impact their academic resilience. Therefore, it is recommended that parents should not put their children through unnecessary stress as a result of their opinions concerning academic achievement or financial state. Once students do not face unnecessary challenges and stress at home, they will be motivated to develop the right academic resilience to improve their academic performance in the school.

School managements and teachers are enjoined to assist students by installing various mechanisms (modern instructional materials) in teaching and learning to encourage and motivate students to strive for academic success.

Educational pre-planning committee and policy makers should reconsider their budget system to pursue attractive projects that will make public schools interesting and stress-free for teachers and students.

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