PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT AS PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG FIRST YEAR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION OJU, BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

If someone had serious adjustment problems when entering into college, he or she might do extreme things while on the programme (suicide, aggression, inferiority, autism). Thus, problems of adjustment will do harm to students' quality of daily life and mental health. Although student enrollment at college of Education, Oju has significantly increased from 2022 upward; students' retention and graduation rates remain low, while students' dropout rates are high especially among historically disadvantaged students. One reason for the low students' academic success is poor academic performance which is, in part influenced by a variety of psychological constructs. This calls for the research on psychological adjustment as a predictor of academic performance among year one educational psychology students of College of Education, Oju. The study adopts a cross sectional design, data were collected using theStudent Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) and Academic Performance Questionnaire developed by McGregory (2015) were used. Participants were 280, made up of 154 (55%) males and 126 (45%) females.Findings indicated that the overall psychological adjustment positively and significantly predicted academic performance (β = .276, $P<.01$). On the individual dimensions of psychological adjustment, self-esteem (β = .265,$P<.01$) andsocial support from family (β = .391,$P<.01$) were statistically positive and significant on academic performance.While there was no significant influence of perceived stress (β = .056,$P>.05$), test-anxiety (β = -.084, $P>.05$), self-efficacy (β = .067, $P>.05$) support from friends (β = .125,$P>.05$) on academic performance. Results furthershowed that there was no gender difference on academic performance among year one educational psychology students, College of Education Oju((Mean= 21.62, SD= 2.68) and females (Mean= 20.93, SD= 3.40), t (277) = 1.90, P>.05. The study recommends amongst others that there is a dire need for the school management to employ the services of psychologists to counsel students on psychological adjustment problems in areas of test

anxiety, self-esteem, self-efficacy and perceived social support from family and friends. More so, there is no need for the consideration of psychological adjustment on the basis of male and female. If this is done, there will be a higher academic performance among year one educational psychology students College of Education, Oju.

Keywords: psychological adjustment, academic performance, educational psychology, students.

Introduction

Records from the department of educational psychology, College of Education, Oju indicated that student enrolment has been increasing steadily at college. However, the academic performance and graduating rate of students has been less successful as compared to the number of entrants. This is worrisome and there is a need for psychological adjustment among students so that academic performance would be achieved maximally. A high number of students drop out of the college and many never enter postgraduate studies in furtherance of their career. The rather poor academic success rates of historically disadvantaged students makes the goal of developing high-level human capital rather problematic and very challenging; especially as "Benue State is not producing enough graduates necessary for the higher education system and the labor market compared to other states", and in addition the present academic employees are ageing (Rhodes , 2013; Sultana, 2019). One reason for student dropout, poor retention and low graduation rates is poor academic performance (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002-2003; Dibia& Nicholas, 2018). In order to be academically successful, students have to adjust psychologically to the college expectations as well as the norms and standards. It is therefore of vital importance to address and identify the psychological adjustment as predictor of academic performance at the College of Education, Oju.

Throughout this research the term "historically disadvantaged students" is used to refer to a particular group of students. A historically disadvantaged student is usually defined as coming from a rural environment, having attended a public rural high school and being economically disadvantaged (Jones, Coetzee, Bailey, & Wickham, 2008; Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007).

Although a multitude of factors influence students at the college of education, the present study focuses on students" psychological adjustment and academic performance. Specifically, the present study aims to ascertain how, to what extend and in what way certain psychological variables are able to predict students" adjustment and academic performance at the college of education. This information is considered as essential in order to help, assist and support students to better adjust to college of education and perform better academically. It also serves to inform current and future development, enhancement or refinement of students" support and development programs.

Graduation rate, in contrast, refers to the number of students that have successfully completed their studies at the college of

education. This rate is often separately calculated for the number of students that have successfully completed their studies in the regular time (i.e., 3 years for a 3-year NCE program); and for students that need additional years to complete their NCE program (5 years for a 3-year NCE programme). Often, the rate for students who complete their studies in the regular amount of time is considerably lower than for students who remain at college of education for additional years to complete their NCE programme (Luckerson, 2013).

Research has indicated that the students most likely to drop out of university in South Africa originate from low-income and less educated families from historically disadvantaged groups (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; University World News, 2007; Kumar & Kamala, 2022). Findings revealed that 50% of undergraduate students enrolled in higher education institutions in South Africa drop out, with about 30% dropping out in their first year (Department of Education, 2005).Additionally, Macfarlane (2006) reported that nearly 50% of undergraduate students continue to drop out of university, even when taking the movement of students across universities into consideration.

In summary, comparing historically disadvantaged students to white students indicates that the overall graduation rate for white students is almost 40% higher than that for historically disadvantaged students and that the dropout rate for historically disadvantaged students exceeds that of white students (Balintulo, 2001; CHE, 2012; Cloete et al., 2004; Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Letseka, Breier, &Viseer, 2009) The overall graduation rate for 2010 was 16% for black students and 22% for white students (CHE, 2012).

A variety of factors would explain why the goal of equity in graduation has not yet been successful or attained towards a broader student population (i.e., why the dropout rate is so high and the graduation rate so low for historically disadvantaged students). The widening participation for previously disadvantaged groups had provided access for students with lower educational qualifications (Senior Certificate Examination) and lower levels of academic literacy. McGivney (2001) cautioned early on that this might lead to a decrease in academic performance and that students will find it even more difficult to adjust psychologically to college of education when they are struggling academically. Also, the majority of students entering the historically advanced colleges today have a different background, not only educationally but also culturally, to the students who traditionally attended these institutions and therefore they do not fit into the college of education environment as easily or without difficulty (Jones, Coetzee, Bailey, & Wickham, 2008).

Mandew (2003) went one step further by arguing that the majority of historically disadvantaged students entering college of education perceived their college environment to be hostile and unwelcoming. Naturally, the perception of a hostile and unfriendly or difficult environment makes the academic and psychologically adjustment to college even more difficult than normal and makes it more difficult to perform well academically.

Another point to emphasize is that numerous students were and are under-prepared for the academic demands placed upon them by the college (Du Prè, 2003). Holder, Jones, Robinson and Krass (1999) stated that students often lack the literacy abilities required for academic success. This is often attributed to the poor high school education students received, characterized by insufficient teaching and learning methods to efficiently prepare students for college. There is thus often a gap between what students have learned and the way they have been taught at high school, and the knowledge and learning methods required performing well academically at the college. This may manifest itself in a lack of English language level proficiency or English comprehension (Naidoo, 2008), inadequate learning methods or in a lack of time management.

In summary, the goal of equity in graduation has not been reached. Colleges of education are concerned with how to increase the graduation rate and throughput rate of its students and to lower the overall high dropout rate. In order to achieve this task and be successful colleges of education have to ensure that students adjust psychologically well to the college life and climate and at the same time ensure that their academic performance increases. There is thus a necessity to identify additional factors (psychological) that determine the adjustment and academic performance of historically disadvantaged students at college beyond the traditional support already provided (financial aid, academic support programs, academic development programs, improving high school education).

Students at the college of education are expected to perform well academically, to pass all their courses and to graduate – all in a minimum (regular) amount of time. In addition, students are expected to adjust psychologically to college life and college culture rapidly and to fit into the academic lifestyle; and to become part of and identify themselves with the institution. Similarly, colleges of education are expected to produce high quality graduates in a timely manner, to have high retention and graduation rates for its students, while at the same time low dropout rates.

Predicting the academic success and adjustment of historically disadvantaged first-year students" to university is of upmost importance to improve and enhance the academic performance of students (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Pascarella&Terenzini, 2005; Petersen, Louw, Dumont, &Malope, 2010).

With the foregoing, it could be seen that psychological adjustment plays important roles in academic performance among year one educational psychology students of college of education. However, there is still need to examine the specific roles of these variables, especially in College of Education, Oju where, to the best of my knowledge, no prior empirical study has been done to explore these relationships. It is due to this that the present study seeks to examine psychological adjustment as predictor of academic performance among year one educational psychology students in college of education, Oju.

Psychological Adjustment and Academic Performance

Many scholars examined different forms of psychological adjustment in relation to academic performance. There appears to be a general agreement that stress, test anxiety, self-efficacy and social support predict academic performance among college students. Blaze (2019) examined social support, self-efficacy and academic performance among undergraduates of University of Adelaide, Australia and findings revealed a strong positive results of social support and self-efficacy influencing academic performance among undergraduates.

Similarly, Dibia and Nicholas (2018) researched on psychological adjustment as correlates of academic performance of adolescents in secondary schools in Umuahia North Education Zone, Abia. using 276 students. Finding revealed that the adolescents who had proper adjustment and academic interest aroused from home did better in school and were more adjusted. More so,, Zajacova, Lynch and Espenshade (2005) research on self-efficacy, stress and academic success in College also revealed that self-efficacy and stress predicted academic success of college students.

Perceived Stress

According to Putwain (2007), there are two distinct ways to defining the term stress. Stress may either refer to the characteristics, stimuli or factors which are responsible for causing stress; or it may refer to the subjective, personal experience felt by persons, which usually includes feelings of anxiety, worry or guilt. Students at the college may experience stress because of intense and demanding academic requirements (preparing and studying for upcoming exams or assignments, meeting deadlines, managing a high course load by attending lectures and tutorials, adjusting to a new college environment). Academic factors aside, students at the college may also experience stress due to financial problems, relationship difficulties or because of pressure and expectations from parents and family members to perform well at the college. Previous research indicates that students experience the most amount of academic stress shortly before and during exams time, when they may realize that there is still a lot of academic work left to do in a relatively short amount of time (Abouserie, 1994). Research also showed that students are likely to react differently to different stimuli – that is what may be stressful for one student (an upcoming final exam) may not be stressful for another (Omura, 2007).

Test-Anxiety

Test anxiety, as defined by Suinn (1968), refers to the inability to think or remember, a feeling of tension, and difficulty in reading and comprehending simple sentences or directions on an examination. Similarly, Zeidner (1998) defined test-anxiety as a set of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioural responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation. Students who experience test-anxiety during an examination have been reported to feel tense and to worry about a possible negative outcome (Gierl& Rogers, 1996). Feeling slightly nervous and tense, and experiencing

low to moderate levels of stress about an upcoming examination is considered to be normal. Elevated levels of test-anxiety, however, may have adverse consequences for student's academic success at the college.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a concept that has been extensively studied in the psychological literature and may be defined as "the individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality" (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach & Rosenberg, 1995). Harter (1993) defined self-esteem slightly differently by referring to it as "the level of global regards that one has for the self as a person. Self-esteem is related to a number of variables that may lead to better adjustment and academic performance of students. For example, happiness (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006), life-satisfaction Baumeister, Campbell), self-efficacy (Pajares & Miller, 1994), a deep learning approach (Phan, 2010) and low levels of stress (Abouserie, 1994) have all been found to be related to a students' level of self-esteem. Students who have less non-persistence decisions have been reported to display a higher level of self-esteem and to feel more positive about completing academic tasks (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, &Willson, 1999).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy may be defined as people's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 395). In the context of higher education, self-efficacy refers to an individual's ability to independently and efficiently accomplish academic tasks (Schunk, 1991). Students with sufficient levels of self-efficacy may believe in their abilities to perform and carry out tasks at the college. They are likely to perceive difficulties and demanding tasks as a challenge and not as a threat. Students with identical skills levels may perform differently academically because of different levels of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Students with high levels of self-efficacy at the college have been found to a) experience less stress and to cope better with academic difficulties (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005); b) receive more social support and to be better integrated academically (Gore, Leuwerke, & Turley, 2005-2006); c) be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, especially towards academic tasks (Chowdhury & Shahabuddin, 2007; Prat-Sala& Redford, 2012; Reynolds &Weigand, 2010); and d) be more likely to complete their degree and to be satisfied with their academic progress (Ojeda, Flores, & Navarro, 2011). Self-efficacy beliefs as possible predictors of academic performance and adjustment have been explored in numerous studies in the psychological and educational literature, showing a consistent and positive relationship between the variables (Chowdhury & Shahabuddin, 2007; Crede & Niehorster, 2012; DeWitz& Walsh, 2002; Elias & Loomis, 2000; Finn &Frone, 2004; Hoover, 2003; Klomegah, 2007; Lane & Lane, 2001; Lane, Lane, & Cockerton, 2003; ; Richardson et al., 2012;). There is, however, no local research available on students" self-efficacy beliefs and their relationship to academic performance and adjustment at the college.

Perceived Social Support

Social support is commonly defined as "information from other people that one is loved or cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a network of communication and mutual obligation" (Taylor, 1999). Perceived social support refers to the belief that assistance, help and support is available from parents, family members, friends and significant others when required. Adequate social support for students is instrumental in helping and supporting them in their transition from high school to college, as well as adjusting to the new demands, tasks, responsibilities and requirements of college life. Students entering the college for the first time are also likely to redefine or establish new social support networks. While many students form new supportive networks, students with difficulties in establishing new ties and friendships may lack the support from friends and significant others they need. This may initiate feelings of isolation and alienation at the college, which in turn can lead to poor adjustment and academic performance at the college. Previous research indicates for example, that students with higher levels of perceived social support are less lonely (Halamandaris & Power, 1999; Jackson, Fritch, Nagasaka, & Gunderson, 2002; Nicpon, Huser, Blanks, Sollenberger, Befort, & Robinson Kurpius, 2006-2007).

Many students may also experience threats to their self-esteem or their beliefs about their own academic abilities during their first year at the college. A supportive social network of family and friends where experiences are shared or discussed may protect or buffer students against negative effects or psychological distress (e.g., Constantine,

Wilton, & Caldwell, 2003; Dean & Lin, 1977; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, &Pancer, 2000). Research has shown that students are unlikely to experience or suffer from depression or anxiety if they receive sufficient social support from their families and friends (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, &Vannatta, 1986; Eldeleklioglu, 2006). Lidy and Kahn (2006) in their research on students" adjustment to university stated that social support "facilitates the mobilization of interpersonal resources to help students cope with the stress of adjusting to college".

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the present study is to investigate the psychological adjustment as predictor of academic performance among year one educational psychology students of Ccollege of Education, Oju. Specifically, the study has the following objectives:

i. To examine howpsychological adjustment variables of perceived stress, test-anxiety, self-esteem, self-efficacy and perceived social support from friends and family members predict academic performance among year one educational psychology students.

ii. To ascertain sexdifference (male and female) on academic performance among year one educational psychology students.

Hypotheses

i. There will be a significant influence of psychological adjustment (perceived stress, test-anxiety, self-esteem, self-efficacy and perceived social support from friends and family) on academic performance among year one

educational psychology students.

ii. There will be a significant sex difference on academic performance among year one educational psychology students.

Method

Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey method to investigate psychological adjustment as predictors of academic performance among year one Educational psychology students of College of Education Oju. The cross-sectional survey method is the most suitable for the study because it allows a researcher to investigate a cross-section of participants from a large population at once in a point of time for inferences to be made.

Participants

Two hundred and eighty (280) year one educational psychology students of college of education, oju participated in this cross-sectional survey. Participants for the study were selected using convenience sampling technique which cut across all gender, marital status, and age. Inclusion criteria were: at least 17 years of age, Respondents' demographic characteristics showed that Males were 154 (55%) and Females were 126 (45%). Marital status of respondents showed that Single were 164(58.6%) and Married 116(41.4%). In terms of Age, 17-19 had 36(13.5), 42(14.9%) had age range of20-25, 128(45.4%) had age range of 26-30, and 74 (26.2%) had age range of 31 and above respectively.

Procedure

The Researcher sought permission from the Head, Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, Oju to administer copies of the questionnaires for the study. After approval was given, informed consent, confidentiality of information and briefing were done to respondents before carryout the admiration of the copies of questionnaire. Three research assistants were trained and used for the study. Two weeks were used as duration for the administration of copies of the questionnaire and retrieval process. Copies of questionnaire were administered to consenting participants, using purposive sampling technique, who met the inclusion criteria for participation in the study. Three hundred and ten (310) copies of questionnaire were administered out of which 280 questionnaires were returned with usable data, representing 88% return rate.

Instruments

Psychological adjustment scale (Baker and Siryk, (1989) and Academic performance Questionnaire (McGregory, 2015) were used as instruments for data collection. A standardized instrument called The *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire* (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) was used to measure the psychological adjustment. While Academic performance questionnaire (McGregory, 2015) was used to measure academic performance among year one educational psychology students, College of Education , Oju. The scale has 8-items that uses Likert scale of measurement starting from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The scale has a reliability coefficient at alpha level of

.89 Participants were asked to indicate how closely each statement applies or does not apply to them on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (doesn't apply to me at all) to 9 (applies very closely to me). Higher scores indicate success in adjustment to college.

Baker and Siryk (1989) reported alpha coefficients for the full versions of the sub-scales to range from .81 to .90 for academic adjustment, from .83 to .91 for social adjustment, from .77 to .86 for personal-emotional adjustment and from .85 to .91 for institutional attachment. Similar reliability coefficients for the sub-scales of the SACQ were reported by Petersen et al. (2009). In their study with South African undergraduate students at the University of Cape Town, the sub-scales of academic and social adjustment showed an alpha coefficient of .84; the sub-scale of personal-emotional adjustment reaching an internal consistency of .78 and the sub-scale of institutional attachment revealed an internal consistency of .86. An example of items included in the academic adjustment scale is, "I have been keeping up to date with my academic work". An example of items included in the social adjustment scale is, "I feel that I fit in well as part of the university environment". For personal-emotional adjustment an example is, "I have been feeling tense or nervous lately"; and for institutional attachment an example is, "I am pleased now about my decision to attend this university in particular".

Results

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant influence of psychological adjustment on academic performance among year one educational psychology students.

Table 1:Multiple Linear Regression Results showing the Influence of Psychological Adjustment on Academic Performance among Year One Educational Psychology Students

Variables	R	R^2	df	F	β	t	Sig
Constant	.546	.298	6 273	9.530		5.050	.000
Perceived Stress					.056	.890	.374
Test-Anxiety					-.084	-1.085	.279
Self-Esteem					.265	3.269	.001
Self-Efficacy					.067	.965	.335
Support(family)					.391.	5.027	.001
Support(friends)					125	1.745	.082

The result from table 1 above revealed that psychological adjustment positively and significantly predicted academic performance among year one educational students of psychology, College of Education Oju [F (6, 273) =9.530; P<.01]. This result implies that psychological adjustment influences academic performance. Furthermore, finding from above revealed that psychological adjustment contributed 29.8 % variability in explaining academic performance among year one educational psychology students. On the individual dimensions of psychological adjustment, the

result of the multiple regression analysis shows that self-esteem (β = .265, *P<.0*) and social support from family (β = .391, *P<.01*) were statistically positive and significant. While perceived stress (β = .056, *P>.05*); test anxiety (β = -.084, *P>.05*); self-efficacy (β = .067, *P>.05*) and support from friends (β = .125, *P>.05*) did not statistically predict academic performance. Based on the findings, this hypothesis was partially supported.

Hypotheses 2: There will be a significant difference between male and female on academic performance among year one educational psychology students.

Table 2 : Independent t-test summary scores between male and female on academic performance

Variables	Sex	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	sig
Academic Performance	Male	154	21.62	2.68	277	1.90	.058
	Female	126	20.93	3.40			

In order to test if males and females differed in terms of gender, an independent t-test was tested and the result revealed that there was no significant sex difference on academic performance among year one educational psychology students. More so, results of the t-test indicated that male had a mean of (*Mean*= 21.62, *SD*= 2.68) while female counterparts had a mean of (*Mean*= 20.93, *SD*= 3.40),*t*(277) = 1.90;P>.05). Based on the result therefore, hypothesis two was not supported.

Discussion

This study supports previous research which showed that a number of psychological variables are associated with students" adjustment and academic performance at the college. Furthermore, this study demonstrated and added further empirical support to the theoretical assumption that psychological adjustment variables such as perceived stress, test anxiety, self-esteem, self-efficacy, perceived social support from family and friends function as predictors for students" academic performance at the college. . The psychological variables of self-esteem and support from family predicted positively on students adjustment to college; while the level of perceived stress, test-anxiety, self-efficacy and support from friends did not predict students' academic performance at the college. Similarly, students feeling stressed about academic demands and requirements and daily life routines; as well as constantly worrying about academic tasks and fear of failing academically, leads to being less adjusted towards college activities. These results are in line with the Petersen et al. (2009); Dibia and Nicholas (2018); Blaze (2019) and Sultana (2019) who in their separate studies discovered discovered that self-esteem and social support relate with academic performance of college students. More so, Petersen et al. (2009) found support for identified regulation (positively) and academic overload (negatively) influencing student adjustment to university.

Even though self-esteem was a significant predictor of students" academic performance

in the present study, it also did predict their adjustment to college, as in the study conducted by Petersen et al. (2009). This may suggest that self-esteemand support from family are more salient predictors and directly related with students' academic performance. In addition, the result of this study is in line with previous studies (Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003; Coetzee, 2011; Fenollar et al., 2007; Petersen et al., 2009; Talib & Sansgiry, 2011; Zajacova et al., 2005) who affirmed that social support, self-esteem, self-efficacy relates with academic performance among undergraduates.

This finding is however at variance with Baker (2004) and Richardson et al. meta-analysis (2012) who indicated no significant influence on academic performance.

On the issue of sex difference, this result is at variance with the study done by Barker and Siryk (1999); Luckerson (2003) who affirmed that gender differences exist between male and female on academic performance among college students.

In summary, the present study made the subsequent contributions to the understanding of students' psychological adjustment and academic performance at the college of education Oju.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

I. Psychological adjustment significantly predicts academic performance and correlate positively with academic performance. This shows that psychological adjustment relates

positively with academic performance.

ii. There was no significant sex difference on academic performance and also did not correlate with academic performance. Sex is not a factor in influencing academic performance among year one educational psychology students, College of Education Oju.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

i. There is need for the school management to employ the services of psychologists to counsel students on adjustment problems bothering on test anxiety, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perceived social support from family and friends. This will lead to higher academic performance among year one educational psychology students ,College of Education Oju.

ii. There is absolutely no need for consideration of academic performance on the basis of sex. Both male and female do not account for any significant difference in terms of academic performance among year one educational psychology students , College of Education , Oju.

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