

PERSISTENCE AND LEARNING ORIENTATION AS CORRELATE OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NASARAWA STATE

Lucy Ungie Ada Ugbe, PhD

Department Of Educational Foundations
Nasarawa State University, Keffi,

Dr. Justina Ingiaga Reamen

Department Of Science Education,
Federal University, Wukari

Dr. Tunde Dayo Oke

Department Of Science Education,
Federal University, Wukari

Abstract

The study examined persistence and learning orientation as correlate of students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted correlation research design. The population comprised 38,433 students in two public universities in Nasarawa State. The sample was made up of 367 who were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection were two set of questionnaire titled "Persistence and Learning Orientation Scale (PLOSS)" and "Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ)" with reliability coefficients of 0.77 and 0.89 respectively. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions and linear regression to test hypothesis. The findings of the study were revealed that persistence and learning orientation have a positive significant correlation with academic adjustment of students in Benue State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Students should be persistent with their academic programmes and university management should be organizing periodic learning orientation workshops for students.

Keywords: Persistence and Learning Orientation and Students' Academic Adjustment

Introduction

When students who encounter these difficulties fail to improve on them, the reoccurrence of these challenges could lead them to exhibit an inferiority complex that might make them to drop out of their programmes. These challenges include the entry qualification, intellectual ability where students face the problem of meeting the academic standard of the institutions, socio-economic background which involves the financial standing of the students whether high or low remains a problem (Koko, 2017). Other challenges could be frustration from school and home, preferential attentions between the academic materials and fashion, procrastination, social side attraction of attending parties and night clubs as well as the web of academic freedom which are all embedded in the academic challenges of the students in the university environment.

Invariably, academic adjustment could consider being the way forward for students to overcome their challenges. Academic adjustment is a psychological concept that refers to the behaviour which permits people to fit into the demands of the situation. Weiten and Lioyd (2003) defines adjustment as a psychological process through which people manage to cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Students in the university require academic adjustment behaviours to overcome their challenges that they might encounter throughout their period of study. Maha (2004) states that students' academic adjustment is the principal construct in awakening the students' educational values when preparing for their further careers.

Agbakwuru and Agbakwuru (2012) also posit that students' academic adjustment is a process of bringing students' behaviours in conformity with the norms of the school setting. It is a continuous process that is geared towards the adaptation of the students to school life and culture which stand the desiring values in task accomplishment. Students academic adjustment seem not to be easy as not every student can easily change or adjust as adjustment requires a certain level of one's abilities and one's abilities come from his or her personnel appraisals which are his or her core self evaluation of self-efficacy among other variables like interest, maturity, sex, age, that are not included in this study. There are various forms of adjustment students' experience. Some of them include social adjustment, psychological adjustment among others. Academic adjustment might become increasingly recognized as vital to overall success of the students. University students therefore requires adjustment behaviours based on their self-efficacy in areas such as time management, effective study habits, capacity to be determined as well as the ability to see adjustment as a normative shift and not crisis (Birnie- lefco- vitch, 2000).

It is a situation where a student needs to give up little of his/her demand and accept what is present. It is also an extremely important criterion that relates to the students task accomplishment or success in their programmes (Friedlander, Reid, Shupack & Cribbie, 2007). Bufallo (2008) asserts that academic adjustment is a behavioural change or adaptation in school environment that enables students to suit effectively into school programme and become comfortable, interested and successful till the end. It is a dynamic process of maintaining a harmonious relationship between the students' behaviour and their academic environment.

Students deal with academic problems differently some deal with it constructively while others feel overwhelmed and fail to adjust. For instance, some students are not satisfied with their chosen course of study and therefore, lack interest, abilities and skills to

continue to the end. If given a second chance, they would opt for a different course. It is rather unfortunate that such students carry the dissatisfaction throughout their period of stay at the university without adequate adjustment. Another instance is that students over use the academic freedom operating at the university to the extent that they cannot explain what they are actually doing until time elapses. This is due to their inability to adjust to the challenges of the programme. Others engage in procrastination in every activity of their academic programme which also reflects devastating effect that affects their adjustment.

In some other instances, the competing interest of fashion and academic materials are being dragged about, which such students end up with lots of carryovers due to lack of study materials but with lots of fashionable clothes, shoes, wigs and a host of other materials to parade about. Such a situation also serves as an obstacle to their programme of study. Other students engage in the habit of attending lectures lately or leaving the lecture hall early before the lecture terminates, which they feel is normal. Some students also concentrate on operating their phones as the lectures go on, which have devastating effects on their programme of study that call for adjustment. Some students extend their leisure time so much that it affect their academic activities without being mindful of what they may lose from the studies, such students go on weekends, visit friends, relations or fiancée, some are more committed to some religious activities or community meetings so much that they have little or no time for their academic work.

By implication, when students encounter these challenges, difficulties or setbacks and could not expand their efforts enough to accomplish, they consider such challenges, difficulties or setbacks as threats to be avoided and write them off as impossible. This eventually leads them to drop out of the institution. These challenges, difficulties or setbacks that the students are saddled with for adjustment require them of their self-efficacy because it is the picture of the individual as it appears to him or her or the way the individual looks at himself that determines their adjustment (Tor-Anyiim, 2008).

Persistence is perseverance in spite of obstacles or challenges. It is a relentless, enduring effort which student's exhibit regardless of difficulties or challenges in their academic programmes. Wikipedia (2014) describes persistence as personal traits measured in terms of temperaments and character and that is measured in terms of eagerness of efforts, determination and commitment. Ziskin, Gross and Hossler (2006) Student persistence is often viewed through a lens that emphasizes the evolving theoretical understanding of the processes affecting students' decisions. Ziskin, Gross and Hossler also found that students' persistence has significant influence on academic adjustment and also showed that students have high proportion of respondents expressing the intent to persistence. Supporting the above view, Pavilina (2005) states that persistence and determination help to promote students' ability to cope with difficulties, challenges or setbacks effectively by developing study habits, timely attendance to lectures and avoiding procrastination of completing class work and assignments as well as effective management of resources in the school environment. It allows one to keep on with a task to an end even when there are compelling efforts for personal modification.

James (2000) states that personal experience help determine how much efforts a student will put on to cope with a task and how long they will preserve with obstacles or challenges that will prove their persistence abilities in the face of difficulties. The author added that the higher the efforts, persistence and resilient, the greater the sense of efficacy. It entails that the greater sense of efficacy, greater students' ability to design a study time table for personal studies and develop a strong inspiring spirit to wake up at night to read

with the demand of the course of study in the university environment as a means to academic adjustment.

A perseverance enables the students to concentrate and intensify their efforts to the course unit they perform poorly in the assignment or test, which inspires their concerns to sit up to their studies by suspending their pleasurable activities like going for weekends, visiting friends, relations, fiancées. They may also suspend going to parties, communities and religious activities in order to intensify their efforts with the zeal to improve on their lapses in their grades. Schuck (2000) observes that students' perseverance could be instill when they copy from significant models around them which influence the direction of behaviours to build upon. Students who attend lectures regularly, take down notes, write and submit assignments without procrastination prove a high standard to which other students copy with the belief that, they can succeed too.

Uncertainty orientation refers to individual differences in how students handle uncertainty. Such behaviour could be described on a continuum with endpoints of uncertainty oriented and certainty oriented. Students who are uncertainty oriented are characterized by direct responses to uncertainty, for example, obtaining information that resolves the uncertainty. In contrast, students who are certainty oriented are characterized by indirect responses to uncertainty, for example, relying on the opinions of others to resolve uncertainty. Moreover, the normative expectations for uncertainty orientation may vary across universities. In university, an uncertainty-oriented style of coping may be the norm, whereas in others, a certainty-oriented style may be the norm (Sorrentino, Nezlek, Yasunaga, Kouhara, Otsubo & Shuper, 2008). It was also significantly and negatively associated with teacher rated learning problems and loneliness. Learning orientation is an individual's dispositional ability to approach, manage and achieve modification in learning. It identifies an individual's strong desire to learn as an underlying foundation for successful learning. Learning orientation is the learner's ability and readiness to learn effectively. It is the primary cognitive perspective that describes how learners think or prefer to process information such as learning strategies and learning styles for a successful learning habit for task accomplishment.

Learning orientation describes an individual's dispositional abilities to approach, manage and achieve modification in learning. The construct identifies an individuals' strong zeal to learn as an underlying foundation for a successful learning. According to Matinez (2005), learning orientation is learner's ability and readiness to learn effectively. It is the primary cognitive perspective that describes how learners think or prefer to process information such as learning strategies and learning styles for a successful learning environment.

Yeo and Neal (2006) provide measures to assess how learners approach learning environment within the context of a more comprehensive set of three psychological domains which include: Committed strategic planning and learning effort domain, cognitive/affective learning focus domain and learning independence domain. Students who are successful learners place great importance to strive or commit to focus on efforts to accomplish in their academics. They also set high principles and hard working efforts to learn. Thus, adjustment, while less successful learners generally lack insight that set strategic planning and committed efforts in contributing to accomplishment in their academics.

Cognitive and affective learning focus refers to the individual desire or striving efforts to learn. It enables the students to be more committed by overcoming challenges, stress,

taking risk, passion for improving, transforming and setting goals regardless of environment, content, resources, course of study and emotions. It also inspires successful learners to apply greater efforts in their academic activities like causes, topics, lecture time table and situations for successful adjustment.

Learning independence is the self-confidence of the individuals and their desire and abilities to take on task, control, manage and improve their own self-efficacy in the attainment of learning and personal goals. As individuals gain different experiences, they gradually develop unique control to monitor experiences that improve subsequent learning. The construct describe students' ability to learn successfully as an elevated attitude and willingness to learning that support their adjustment in their programmes.

Statement of the Problem

Difficulties or challenges are inevitable part of life in a school setting. Students in universities in Benue State may also be entangled with these difficulties, challenges or setbacks which could range from entry qualification, meeting the academic standard of the university. Others could be social side attractions and the web of academic freedom. These challenges or difficulties can predispose a student to experience sadness, procrastination, frustration, stress and school dropout. Such mal-adjustment is capable of Jeopardizing the aims and objectives of education and the value for university education.

Moreover, the researcher personal observation showed that students in public universities in Nasarawa State are often given admission to courses they never applied. Therefore, they may be lacking in abilities to continue with the given courses. Other instances may be that some students may lack the ability to be consistent with their lectures, show commitment to their studies, complete assignment on time as they might prefer to move about the university campus aimlessly which can result in lots of carryovers, stress and possibly drop out. Others could be financial involvement which also poses lots of challenges or difficulties.

The problem is that students seem to be maladjusted academically. This is likely because they lack appropriate measured such as persistence and learning orientation. It is against this background that this study wants to investigate persistence and learning orientation as correlate of students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to examine the persistence and learning orientation as a correlate of students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State. The study sought to:

1. examine the correlation between persistence and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.
2. ascertain the correlation between learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the correlation between persistence and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State?

2. What is the correlation between learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State?

Hypothesis

There is no significant correlation between persistence and learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State

Research Method

This study adopted correlation research design. Correlation research design is one which investigates one or more characteristics of a group to discover the extent to which the characteristics vary together. It examines variables in their natural environments and do not include researcher-imposed treatments (Marilyn & Jim, 2011). The population comprised 38,433 students in two public universities in Nasarawa State. A sample of 367 students was selected from the population of 38,433 using Glenn (2012) formula for determining sample size. Multi stage sampling procedure was applied for the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire titled: Persistence and Learning Orientation Scale (PLOS) and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AA) with reliability coefficient of 0.77 and 0.89 respectively. The questionnaire was structured on respond mode of Strongly Agree (SA)=4, Agree (A)=3, Disagree (D)=2 and Strongly Disagree (SD)=1 respectively. Face and content validation of instrument was done by two experts in Department of Educational Foundations and General Studies in University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The instrument was validated by three experts in Department of Educational Foundations, Nasarawa State. The researcher visited each of the sampled universities with two research assistants who were recruited from the institution under study. Data collected were subjected to Pearson Product Correlation Moment to answer the research questions and liner regression was used to test hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the correlation between persistence and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State?

Table 1:
Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on Persistence and Students' Academic Adjustment in Public Universities in Nasarawa State

Variables	N	M	Std	R
Academic Adjustment	367	3.19	0.832	0.598
Persistence	367	3.55	0.889	

Table 1 indicates correlation coefficient between persistence and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State $r=.598^{**}$. This means that there is a positive correlation between persistence and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.

Research Question 2: What is the correlation between learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State?

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Table 2:

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on Learning Orientation and Students' Academic Adjustment in Public Universities in Nasarawa State

Variables	N	M	Std	R
Academic Adjustment	367	3.19	0.832	0.317
Learning Orientation	367	3.45	0.657	

Table 2 indicates correlation coefficient between learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State $r=0.317^{**}$. This indicates that learning orientation has a positive correlation with students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant correlation between persistence and learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.

Table 3:

Linear Regression on Correlation between Persistence and Learning Orientation and Students' Academic Adjustment in Public Universities in Nasarawa State

Variables	R	R²	F	df	SS	β	t	P
Constants	903	815	415.96	4	215.07	9.237	23.75	.000
Persistence	-.230	.580	211.487	1	94.323	.245	-6.484	.000
Learning Orientation	-.835	.579	42.339	1	26.446	-.659	-19.568	.000

Table 3 reveals that the predictor variables in the model; the beta values and the significant t-values corresponding to each of the variables against the criterion variable (academic adjustment). Out of two independent (predictor variables) persistence ($\beta = -.245$; $t = -6.484$; $P < .05$) and learning orientation was the next potent predictor of ($\beta = -.659$; $t = -19.568$; $P < .05$). All the variables contribute a percentage of 58% and since P. values are less than 0.05 the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between persistence and learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State.

Discussion

The discussion of the major findings of the research is organized around the research questions for ease of reading and comprehension.

First finding revealed that there is significant positive relationship between students' persistence and students' academic adjustment in public universities in Nasarawa State. This finding supports the finding of Schuck, (2000) who conducted a similar study and reports that student's perseverance can instill when they copy from significant models around them which influences the direction of behaviours to build upon. Students' who attend lectures regularly, take down notes, write and submit assignments without procrastination prove a high standard to which other students copy with the belief that they too can succeed. The finding of this study also support the finding of Pavina (2005) who reports that students' persistence get heighten when student keep taking persuasive information from people around them that will encourage their actions and improve their efficacy. This persuasive information ranges from parents advice, encouragement from lecturers, counsellors, workshops, seminars friends and books which give the efficacious students the motivation to heightened their efforts in search of skills, knowledge and strategies to fit into their academics. They also go into browsing the internet to acquire knowledge, information about their study for task succession and completion. The implication is that persistent abilities enable students to tackle problems more correctly than those with low self-efficacy. Students' with a clear vision exhibits a sense of persistence as a strategy for adjusting no matter the advisories that might try to push them away. The finding also agrees with findings of Ziskin, Gross and Hossler (2006) who investigated students' persistence and academic adjustment and report that students' persistence had significant influence on academic adjustment and that students have high proportion of respondents expressing the intent to persistence. However, this study is centrally to that of Zajacova, Lynch and Espenshade (2005) who report that self-efficacy does not have a significant effect on students' persistence in the second year. This result suggests that students may drop out for reasons unrelated to their beliefs about being able to handle academic demands.

The second finding indicated that there is a positive relationship between learning orientation and students' academic adjustment in public universities students in Nasarawa State. The finding of this study agrees with findings of Shkullaku (2013) found that there is a significant relationship was found between the students' self-efficacy and academic performance. The authors further reported that there is a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance. It is very essential for the universities to improve their self-efficacy, and by doing so, they can improve the academic performance of their students. Davidson, Feldman and Margalit (2012) reported that lecturers that they need to identify ways through which the self-efficacy of both male and female students can be improved to enhance academic performance. Students are expected to excel with task if they observe someone similar to themselves achieve with the same task. Also when students see others failing, their efficacy decreases. This is because depression is cognitively generated by dejecting ruminative thoughts that affect their learning especially with students of poor intellectual ability. This is because the uncertainty of learning orientation is significantly and positively associated with academic achievement, teacher-rated school competence and self-perceptions of competence and was also significantly and negatively associated with teacher rated learning problems and loneliness.

Conclusion

When students believe in their capabilities to take on challenging tasks to reach goals, it strengthens them to avoid procrastination in order to show commitments to their studies. Based on the research findings its worth concluding that when students' belief in their abilities they will continue to preserve with their rigours academic challenges. And organising workshops for students learning orientation at the university can encourage them to show readiness to learn effectively which will reduce their academic difficulties.

Recommendations

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

1. Students should be persistent with their academic programmes. This will help them to improve in their academic performance and also adjust to university environment.
2. University management through directorate of counselling should be organising periodic learning orientation workshops for students. This will help new intake in university to get along with their counterparts and will help them perform well.

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