

**ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC
OPTIMISM AS CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC
ENGAGEMENT AMONG POSTGRADUATE
STUDENTS IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNVERSITY
(NAU), AWKA**

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Abstract

Academic engagement is a pre requisite for academic success among students at all levels of education. This study sought to determine the relationship that achievement motivation, academic self-efficacy and optimism have with academic engagement of postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised of 1633 Postgraduate students of 2018/2019 academic session in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A sample of 280 postgraduate students were randomly drawn from the 14 Faculties in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for the study. The instruments used for data collection were three, namely: Academic Achievement Questionnaire (AAC), Academic Optimism Questionnaire (OQ) and Academic Engagement

Questionnaire (AEQ). Both validity and reliability of the instruments were determined. Validity of the instruments was determined by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha and alpha coefficient of 0.72 was obtained for AAC, 0.75 for ASEQ, 0.70 for OQ and 0.72 for AEQ. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation for answering research questions and t-test of significance of r for testing the hypotheses. Findings of the study revealed that the independent variables (achievement motivation and academic optimism) have a moderate and positive relationship ($r = 0.508$; and $r = 0.582$ respectively) with the dependent variable (academic engagement). Based on the findings, it was recommended that the University should re-strategize by employing more motivational packages for the postgraduate students to arouse them into active academic engagement required of their academic pursuit.

Key words: achievement motivation, academic optimism, academic engagement, postgraduate students.

Introduction

Education is the hallmark for the growth and development of any nation. Education in general and university education in particular, is fundamental to the construction of the knowledge based economy and society. Various nations of the world including Nigeria have been making planned efforts towards harnessing this important sector for their optimal development. The Nigerian government in its National Policy on Education of 2013 made the provision for educational opportunities for the citizenry, irrespective of creed or physical status (Anierobi, 2016). The policy is to ensure that the desire that Nigeria should be a land full of opportunities for all its citizens, able to generate a great and dynamic economy and growing into a united,

strong and self-reliant nation is achieved. University education started in Nigeria in 1948 with the establishment of a campus of the University of London in Ibadan, presently known as University of Ibadan. Subsequently, other universities were established through Federal and State governments as well as private enterprise efforts.

The Universities were established with the intents to providing manpower essential for the emerging public service towards the economic growth of the nation. Accordingly, one of the fundamental aims of University education in Nigeria is the creation of elites and production of skillful human resources as an arsenal for the development of the nation's development and economic boost (Jegade, 2017). This education is expected to impart knowledge, skills and competencies to the graduates. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU, Awka) as one of the federal universities in Nigeria keyed into this with a focus to producing graduates who are disciplined, self-reliant and excellent in their professions.

The structure of the postgraduate programmes calls for constant interaction between the student and his academic supervisors for guidance on their numerous academic tasks required of the programme (Ahmed, Umrani, Pahi & Shah, 2017). Aside constant interactions with one's academic supervisor, the student is equally required to attend to course/class works, academic conferences and possibly write, present and publish meaningful articles in various academic journals relevant to their field of study. Obviously, postgraduate students should be trained to develop necessary skills for independent study and research prowess with the needed savvy for attracting of grants towards advancing the frontiers of knowledge (Aigbedion, Iyakwari & Gyang, 2017). No wonder it was posited that postgraduate education must motivate students to serious work to avoid hindrances to the accomplishment of their academic programme (Munyengabe, Haiyan,

Liangyan & Yiyi, 2017) which calls for active engagement of students in their academic activities.

Academic engagement refers to the extent to which students identify with and all their efforts, commitment and participation in academic and non-academic activities. Mohammad, Hossein and Abbas (2018) saw it as efforts devoted by students to academic activities. Contextually, academic engagement refers to students' active participation and commitment to academic related activities for self-improvement. Academic engagement is a multidimensional construct. For instance, while some school of thought presented a model that consists of three interrelated dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement, another presented three dimensions of engagement consisting of absorption, vigor and dedication, which is the focus of this study (Alrashidi, Phan & Ngu, 2016). According to Truta, Varz and Topala (2018), vigor, dedication and absorption are dimensions of Schaufelli's 2002 model of academic engagement.

Vigor refers to the students' ability to exhibit a high level of mental energy while studying, their willingness to exert and invest effort and persist in the face of obstacles while maintaining a positive attitude to learning. Dedication is characterized by students' sense of enthusiasm and commitment in their studies. Absorption refers to students' sense of being profoundly occupied and completely concerted in their studies. Academic engagement is by this considered the hallmark for academic success among students. According to However, the challenges faced by teachers to draw learner's attention to educational contents and to help with their learning through academic engagement (Oriol, Amutio, Mendoza, Da Costa & Miranda, 2016) cut across all level of education.

The researcher observed that many postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University are bored, unmotivated, and uninvolved as demanded by the exigencies of their academic programmes. This has posed a great challenge

to their teachers and supervisors alike. No wonder, Ahmed, Umrani, Pahi and Shah (2017) decried that students are not bringing that needed energy, vigor, and absorption in their studies. Similarly, Almarghani and Mijatovic (2017) rightly pointed out, that the passive role of students in their learning and education and the absence of engagement are quite common in many higher education institutions in developing countries including Nigeria. Academically engaged students fully concentrates in their studies, are enthusiastic in academic learning, and persist when encountering obstacles and challenges (Alrashidi, Phan & Ngu, 2016). This implies that lack of academic engagement can lead to unfavourable outcomes such as poor academic achievement, and increases the risk of academic failure and attrition. In order to be academically engaged, students should be motivated to achieve success in their study.

Academic achievement motivation is defined as a self-propelling drive and determination that students exhibit in their quest for academic success. Adegboyega (2018) simply defined it as one's determination to succeed in academic activities. Achievement motivation is the need for success or the attainment of academic excellence and it is one of the three components that make up McClelland's human motivation theory. David McClelland and his associates in their theory of motivation coined the term n-Ach which denotes need for achievement (Unachukwu; Ebenebe & Nwosu, 2019). This theory states that people will do what they have been rewarded for doing under appropriate conditions. By implication, all students are influenced by a need to achieve to a certain degree. In some students, the need to achieve could be high, while it may be low in others.

Achievement motivation has been consistently linked to positive academic outcome. According to Wigfield, Tonks and Klauda (2016), achievement motivation propels behaviour towards achievement. By implication, one could assert that achievement motivation is paramount for

success. For instance, Adegboyega (2018) found that achievement motivation is positively related to undergraduates' attitude towards examination. In his study, Ajay (2016) found no significant relationship between academic anxiety and achievement motivation among students. Similarly, Sivapakiam and Nalinilatha (2017) found that students with high achievement motivation tend to be less involved in examination malpractice and are disposed for the realization of educational goals. No wonder, Gang, Han, Fah and Bansa (2018) asserted that students who exhibit high achievement motivation display more determination in tackling difficult homework and completing their schoolwork successfully. In their study with secondary school students in Tiruvanamalai District of Tamil Nadu State, Santhi and Suthanthiradevi (2019) found a positive correlation between achievement motivation and academic performance of the students. Obiero (2018) also found a positive relation between achievement motivation and academic performance in mathematics. On the other hand, Gizdarska (2017) found in his study that achievement motivation was not able to predict students' performance. Nevertheless, when students have the desire to achieve maximally, they will likely be disposed to activate their desire and quest for active engagement in the academic activities. Bearing this mind, teachers therefore, mostly deploy motivation strategies towards arousing the students' desire for academic engagement which precedes success. This implies that lack motivation could hinder academic engagement. Lack of motivation seems to account for lack of desired engagement with a negative ripple effect such as the obvious procrastination and delay in carrying out academic tasks by students. Motivation to achieve is profitable when a student is optimistic about accomplishing their academic pursuit with success.

Optimism refers to expectations that good and positive things will take place in the future (Datu, King & Valdez, 2018). In other words, it could be explained as making a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the

future. Academic optimism refers to the ability of students to think positively and believe that things will work out successfully in their academic pursuit. In learning therefore, optimistic students are those who think positively, who plan and work for the best outcomes in any given academic endeavour. Thus, students who have an optimistic orientation towards their academic life should have positive expectations regarding their academic outcomes. According to Horner, Jordan and Brown (2019), high academic optimism suggests that academic achievement is valued by the students. Similarly, Mulawarna, Nugroho, Susilawati, Afriwilida and Kunwijaya (2019) found that optimism relates positively with self-esteem. This implies that lack of optimism can lead to negative expectations making a student to strive less, become passive and give up more easily on their goal. Validating the assertion on the implication of lack of optimism, Piper (2019) averred that pessimistic individuals are less satisfied with life.

Optimism has been identified with positive academic outcomes. For instance, Tetzner & Becker (2017) found a positive relationship between optimism and academic performance while Azfandak & Abdolahir (2019) associated it with academic self-efficacy. Similarly, Jafri (2017) noted that people with high level of optimism have positive outlook, and expectations of positive outcome enhances their willingness to put more efforts in academic activities. In his study, Cankaya (2016) found that optimism can support better academic functioning to some extent. In other words, optimistic students have positive expectations of their capability, efforts and success and these expectations should keep them engaged in the academic activities. Thus, optimistic individuals having these self-beliefs will no doubt, expect success when they are presented with a challenge. In their study, Mollnero, Zayas, Gonzales and Gull (2018) found that optimism predicted resilience noting that students who have good expectations about their future will show greater adaptation to academic stressors. By implication optimistic students are more

disposed to overcome academic challenges because they believe that with persistence and motivation, they will always overcome difficult academic circumstance they may face. This implies that the inclination to overcome difficult academic circumstances will increase optimistic students' motivation to engage actively in their studies.

Statement of Problem

Postgraduate students are generally looked upon as scholars. They are seen as intellectuals who are capable of running their academic programmes through individual study and active engagement in all academic activities provided by their higher institutions of learning. Unfortunately, contemporary postgraduate students in Nigeria especially in Nnamdi Azikiwe University seem to still lag behind in their engagements in academic activities. Achievement motivation and optimism have been identified in literature as necessary factors that promote academic engagement among all categories of students. It is out of this concern that the present researcher felt a need to look at how achievement motivation and optimism relate to academic engagement among postgraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses:

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. What is the relationship between optimism and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
2. There is no significant relationship between optimism and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Method

This study adopted the correlational research design. This design was adopted by this study because it sought to determine the relationship between the independent variables (achievement motivation and optimism) have with the dependent variable (academic engagement) of postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The population of the study comprised of all the postgraduate students admitted in 2018/2019 academic session in NAU numbering 1633 (School of Postgraduate Studies, NAU, February, 2020). Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 20 postgraduate students from each of the 14 Faculties in the university. A total number of 280 postgraduate students representing 17.15% were selected and this formed the sample size for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

Three sets of instrument were used in collecting data for the study. Academic Engagement Scale (AES) used was adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student Version by Schaufeli, and Bakker (2003). Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student Version was a 17-item instrument with six, five, and six items assessing Vigor, Dedication and Absorption subscales. It was originally developed on a seven-point Likert scale anchored by the response options from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). In adapting the instrument, item no 13 “When studying, I am very resilient, mentally” was removed,

leaving the AES with 16 items for this study. The instrument was then placed on a four-point Likert scale response of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The scale measures academic engagement on three domains (vigor, dedication, absorption). An average of all the three subscales provides a score for general academic engagement. Higher scores indicate active academic engagement while low scores indicate passive academic engagement.

Optimism is an 8-item instrument on a 4 point Likert response, adopted from academic emphasis cluster in School Academic Optimism Survey of Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy (2006). The original academic optimism scale measures and combines the three school-level elements: academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in parents and students. The scale includes 30 total items: 8 items on academic emphasis, 12 items on collective efficacy, and 10 items on faculty trust. Responses to collective efficacy and faculty trust items consisted of a 6 point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree coded as 1 to Strongly Agree coded as 6, and responses from the academic emphasis portion consisted of a 4 point Likert scale ranging from Rarely coded as 1 to Very Often coded as 4. The items were directly scored such that higher scores indicate higher academic optimism while lower scores indicate lower academic optimism.

Achievement Motivation was measured using Achievement Motivation instrument adapted from Elias, Noordin and Mahyuddin (2010). The instrument contains nine items on a four point Likert response of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The maximum score for the instrument is 36 while the minimum score is 9. A score of 18 and above was considered high achievement motivation while a score of below 18 was considered low achievement motivation.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The validity of the four instruments was established by three experts in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. One of the experts is in the Department of Educational Foundations, the other in the Department of Psychology, all in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach alpha method in determining the internal consistency of the instrument. An alpha coefficient of 0.72; 0.70 and 0.71 were obtained for achievement motivation, optimism and academic engagement respectively, which was considered high and showed that the instrument was reliable for use.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected by the researcher with the services of a research assistant who was already trained on data collection exercise.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed with appropriate statistical methods. Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient while the use t-test of significance of r was employed for testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule was that if the calculated value of t is greater than or equal to the table or critical value of t , the null hypothesis will not be accepted. Otherwise, the null hypothesis will be accepted.

Results

Table 1

1. What is the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

2. There is no significant relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Table 1 showing the relationship and test of relationship for Achievement Motivation and Academic Engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (N= 280)

| Variables | x | SD | r | t-cal | t-crit | df (2) |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Academic Engagement | 3.71 | 0.21 | | | | |
| | | | 0.508 | 9.88 | 2.92 | |
| 278 | | | | | | Sig |
| Achievement Motivation | 3.26 | 0.14 | | | | |

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.508 ($r = 0.508$) for the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement. This reveals that the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement is moderate and positive among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Table 1 also shows the test of significance of r for the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement. It reveals that the calculated value of t (9.88) is greater than the critical value of t (2.92) at the alpha level of 0.05 and df (2). Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement of postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Table 2

1. What is the relationship between optimism and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. There is no significant relationship between optimism and academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Table 2 showing the relationship and t-test of relationship for optimism and Academic Engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (N= 280)

| Variables | x | SD | r | t-cal | t-crit | df(2) |
|---------------------|------|------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Academic Engagement | 3.71 | 0.21 | | | | |
| | | | 0.582 | 11.90 | 2.92 | 278 |
| Sig. | | | | | | |
| Optimism | 3.05 | 0.13 | | | | |

Table 2 above shows a correlation coefficient of 0.582 ($r = 0.582$) for the relationship between optimism and academic engagement. This reveals that the relationship between academic optimism and academic engagement is moderate and positive among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Table 3 also shows the test of significance of r for the relationship between optimism and academic engagement. It reveals that the calculated value of $t(11.90)$ is greater than the critical value of $t(2.92)$ at the alpha level of 0.05 and $df(2)$. Thus, the null hypothesis is not accepted.

Therefore, there is a significant relationship between optimism and academic engagement of postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study were made as follows:

The study determined achievement motivation and academic optimism as correlates of academic engagement among postgraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka. Research question one and hypothesis one determined the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement. The analysis of research question one revealed that achievement motivation has a moderate and positive relationship with academic engagement of postgraduate students in NAU. The result of hypothesis one revealed a significant relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement of postgraduate students in NAU. The above findings prove that achievement motivation is very vital in academic engagement of students in tertiary institutions. This implies that students participate actively in academic activities and do better in class work when they have the zeal to achieve maximally in their academic pursuit.

This finding agrees with the findings of Santhi and Suthanthiradevi (2019) and also of Obiero (2018) that achievement motivation is positively correlated with academic performance of students. This could be explained that when students are propelled to achieve maximally, there is a high tendency that their zeal will make them to be actively engaged in their academic activities cum studies which facilitate success. Similarly, the finding aligns itself with the finding of Gizdarska (2018) that achievement motivation predicts students' performance. This is true because students' level of achievement motivation will predict his level of achievement. A student with a high achievement motivation is more disposed to actively engage in academic activities that will birth maximal performance and success than the

student with a low motivation to achieve. The finding also corroborates the finding of Adegboyega (2018) that achievement motivation has a positive relationship with students' attitude towards examination. One attitude towards examination whether positive or negative, could result from one's level of preparedness towards examinations. One cannot be properly prepared for an examination without engaging in active study and participation in other required academic activities. Thus, it could be said that students who have positive attitude towards examination are most likely are students who actively engaged in their studies and required academic activities.

The finding of this study disagrees with the assertion of Ahmed, Umrani, Pahi and Shah (2017) that students are not bringing the needed energy, vigor and absorption in their studies. This assertion seems not to hold for postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka as their motivation to achieve maximally propels them to engage in academic activities.

Research question two and hypothesis two determined the relationship between academic optimism and academic engagement. The analysis of research question two revealed that academic optimism has a moderate and positive relationship with academic engagement of postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The result of hypothesis two revealed a significant relationship between academic optimism and academic engagement of postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The above findings prove that optimism promotes academic engagement of students in tertiary institutions. This implies that students participate actively in academic activities and do better in class work when they have positive expectation about succeeding now and in the future. Their expectation of good and positive academic outcome will propel them to engage in their studies.

This finding of this study agrees with the finding of Ekeh and Oludayo (2015) that optimism has a positive relationship with academic performance

of students. This could be explained because when students have positive expectations that they will succeed in their academic endeavour for the betterment of their lives, they will likely engage actively in academic activities to ensure the actualization of the anticipated success. The finding also agrees with Azfandak and Abdolahur (2019) that optimism has a positive relation with academic self-efficacy. Having a positive expectation about the outcome of a thing will no doubt build the person's confidence. Thus, students who have expectations of good and positive academic outcome will likewise, build confidence in their academic ability which will in turn boost their academic engagement. Finally, the finding also aligns with that of Mollner, Zayas, Gonzales and Gull (2018) who found a positive relationship between optimism and resilience among university students. It is also true that optimism could trigger and sustain resilience. Students who are optimistic about their academic pursuit are already disposed to develop resilience which keep them engaged in academic activities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded therefore, that achievement motivation and academic optimism have a moderate and positive relationship with academic engagement among postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Any increase in achievement motivation, and or optimism will reflect positively on academic engagement of the postgraduate students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

1. The postgraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University should build up their zeal for academic success. This will propel them to engage actively in their academic programmes.

2. The University should re-strategize by employing more motivational packages for the postgraduate students to arouse them into active academic engagement required of their academic pursuit.
3. Academic programmes should be made to be enriching and inclusive to enable the postgraduate students work together with course lecturers and supervisors without hitches as partners for maximum engagement of the students.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the fact that the study was carried out with only postgraduate students in NAU, the researcher recommends for further studies as follows:

1. That a similar study be carried out using undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka to see whether the findings obtained for postgraduate will also be obtained for undergraduate students.
2. A replication of the study should be carried out using all the higher institutions in Nigeria for better generalization of the result in the nation.
3. A comparative study will be necessary for federal, state owned and private universities to find out which of their postgraduate students are more academically engaged.
4. The study can also be replicated using secondary school students.
5. A similar but a comparative study should be made among Postgraduate Diploma, Masters and Doctoral Students in the same Institution

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