

PREDICTION OF ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL AND ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY ON ACADEMIC ASPIRATION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SUBURBAN AREAS OF OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of attitude to school and academic self-efficacy on academic aspiration among secondary school students in suburban areas in Oyo state, Nigeria. A causal comparative design was adopted for the study. Two hundred and ninety-two secondary school students participated in the study. Three research instruments: Academic Aspiration Scale ($\alpha = .73$); Academic Behaviour Confidence Scale ($\alpha = .76$); and Attitude to School ($\alpha = .81$) were used for data collection. Multiple regression model was employed for data analysis. The results of the study showed that attitude to school and academic self-efficacy jointly accounted for about 20% of the total variance in academic aspiration ($F_{(2, 291)} = 36.075$). Further, between these two, self-efficacy ($\beta = 3.16$; $t = 5.72$; $P < .01$) is more potent than attitude to school ($\beta = 2.33$; $t = 4.22$; $P < .01$) to the prediction of academic aspiration. The outcomes of the study were discussed and it was recommended that counselling and educational psychologists should focus on boosting the academic self-efficacy and positive attitude to school towards enhancing academic aspiration among school adolescents in suburban area.

Keywords: *Academic aspiration; Attitude to school; Self-efficacy; Adolescent; Secondary school; Suburban area.*

Introduction

Education could be regarded as a major tool in shaping the psychological, social and economic wellbeing of an individual. This is because the level of respect accorded to an individual in the society through social stratification is largely dependent upon the level of education the individual has attained. This is corroborated by Strawinski (2011) that the better-educated people are the wider perspective and the better material and social position. Additionally, higher levels of education are greatly related to better earnings, a more admired career, lower risk of unemployment and improved wellbeing (Strawinski, 2011). It, therefore, follows that if education must be pursued, it needs to be followed to higher levels. Unfortunately, in spite of the Nigerian government's efforts to get all educated at least through the basic education programme, not every adolescent aspires to go beyond the secondary educational level. Hence the educational attainment of Nigerians is pyramidal in nature with the multitude settling within the lowest level of education. Since education is believed to be a means through which human beings could be relevant in society, it is essential to heighten the academic aspiration of Nigerian youths. This could be better achieved when the antecedents of academic aspirations are well understood.

The concept of academic aspiration has been defined in various ways by researchers based on the individuals' field of study. However, some of these definitions are needed to give this research a focus. Quaglia and Casey (1996) defined aspirations as a person's ability to identify and set a goal for the future while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals. Also, MacBrayne (1987) viewed aspiration as an individual's yearning to obtain a status object or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education. Connecting the concept to education, Khoo and Aimsley (2005) defined academic aspiration as a cognitive state that motivates or drives young people to strive for academic success. Relatedly, Sewell et. al (1969), cited in Patmalniece (2011), conceptualised academic aspiration as the level of education one would like to attain such as whether the individual wishes to continue higher education after high school, finish vocational school or attains college or university degree. For measurement, the current study is hinged on the definition by Sewell and associates.

Two major types of aspirations have been identified by Gottfredson (1981) which include realistic and idealistic aspirations. While realistic aspiration is moderated by the recognition of obstacles and opportunities, idealistic aspiration connotes an individual's anticipated end and ideal education and occupation (Patmalniece, 2011). Diverse views have been suggested about sources of aspirations. For instance, Gutman & Akerman (2008) see aspiration as emanating within a social

setting and as such, people extract their aspiration from others around them. In addition to this, Quaglia (1989) sees academic aspiration as a function of amalgamation of educational goals, vocational and career exertions and people's sense of self as it associates with what they believe are crucial components of success in the lifestyles of their choosing.

Academic aspirations may in no doubt have a significant influence on achievement and subsequent future academic attainment. This is because expectation always determines realisation. Although some researchers have hypothesised that high level of educational aspiration may not necessarily result into higher academic attainment (Empson-Warne & Kahrn 1992; Conroy, 1997), Portes, Aparicio, Haller and Vickstrom (2010) on the other hand debunked that one who does not have great aspiration also cannot possess high result. Therefore, possessing high ambition is necessary for attaining high goals. In support of this, Abiola (2014) viewed academic aspiration as a powerful predictor of academic achievement. Also, Hooda and Devi (2018) found that educational aspiration significantly had effect on academic achievement of secondary school students. In addition to this, Krahn and Taylor (2005) noted that academic aspirations are potent to influence future educational attainment, to represent self-awareness, influence attitude to school, and if not fulfilled they can lead to frustration and association.

Antecedents of academic aspirations have been broadly grouped into three, namely: Background, personnel factors and environmental factors (Strawinski, 2011). Hence, previous research on academic aspiration has focused on the influence of family support (Sanders, 2001, Roper, 2008); parents' educational attainment (De Coulon, Meschi, & Vignoles, (2008), Geckova, Tavel, Dijk, Abel & Reijneveld (2010). Socio-economic background (Marjoribanks & Mboya (2000), Teacher (Van Auken & Stephens, 2006), gender difference (Danziger & Eden, 2007, Gupta, Turban & Bhawe, 2008), Ethnicity (Modood, 2003; Strand 2007), Peer influence (Goldstein, Davis-Keen & Eccles, 2005), School atmosphere (Geckova, et al, 2010), Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and Personality trait (MacBrayner, 1987) to mention just a few. Despite these, most of these research endeavours are foreign. The focus on the determinants of educational aspiration among Nigerian youths is scarce. Apart from this, there is meager research and evidence on the association of attitude and academic aspiration. This study, therefore, investigates two psychological variables (attitude to school and self-efficacy) as they predict academic aspiration.

Also, disparity has been expressed concerning academic aspiration among youths in urban and rural areas. Specifically, McCracken and Barnicas (1991) found that rural youths are less likely to plan to attend colleges and are more likely to plan for vocational training than their colleagues in the urban area. Earlier, Cobb, McIntire and Pratt (1985) found that rural students have lower educational aspirations than their peers in suburban and rural areas and that when they express ambition for post-secondary education their expectation for the level of educational attainment is lower. MacBrayne (1987) equally noted that more rural students than urban are expected to enter the workforce immediately following high school and rural students' aspirations for specific careers or professions were at lower levels. Strawinski (2011) traced this disparity in educational aspiration among rural and urban youths to differences in accessibility to education which is very evident between rural and urban areas. According to Strawinski, and as it happens in Nigeria, numerous educational institutions are located in the urban centers compared to rural areas where few ones are located at distant apart. This poor accessibility and inadequate awareness of a higher level of educational opportunity might explain the low academic aspirations among rural adolescents. However, when there have been, at least some studies on students from rural areas there are scanty studies on the academic aspirations of students in suburban areas who could neither be called rural nor urban students. This study is therefore meant to bridge this gap.

Attitude is defined by Hogg and Vaughan (2005) as a comparatively permanent composition of beliefs feelings, and behavioural inclinations towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols. In relation to school, attitude towards schools is conceptualized as consisting of the students' self-reported interest in and affect towards education (McCoach & Siegle, 2003). Students with a positive attitude toward school have been noted to demonstrate beliefs that academic achievement and learning is relevant to their lives and or to their success as adult (Stern, 2012). Although there is limited research on the association between attitude to school and academic aspiration, few available ones showed a positive relationship. For example, Gutman and Akerman (2008) hypothesized that individuals who develop a positive attitude towards schooling, such as believing in their attitude to succeed and attributing their success to hard work have higher aspirations than their associates who are not. Besides, Mau and Bikos (2000) as well as Geckova, et al (2010)

equally found a significant association between attitude to school and academic aspirations. The current study equally aimed at examining whether the same association would occur among students of suburban areas in Nigeria.

Perceived self-efficacy is broadly defined by Bandura (1994) as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Specifically, Bandura (1997) defined academic self-efficacy as an individual's conviction that he/she can successfully achieve at a designated level of an academic task or attain a specific academic goal. Zimmerman (1995) viewed the concept as personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain a designated type of educational performance. Explaining the role of self-efficacy in determining human achievement and welfare, Bandura (1994) asserted that a strong self-efficacy affects individuals in diverse ways. This is because individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy handle difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered instead of threats to be avoided. They set themselves challenging goals and maintain a strong commitment to them. Also, an efficacious attitude promotes intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. Corroborating this, Downey, Eccles and Chatman (2005) suggested that having high self-efficacy when attempting difficult tasks creates feelings of calmness or serenity while low-self-efficacy may result in a student's perceiving a task as more difficult than reality, which in turn, may create anxiety stress and a narrower idea on how best to approach the solving of a problem of activity.

Previous research outcomes showed that academic self-efficacy influences academic aspiration such that the more the perceived self-efficacy, the greater the aspirations that would be demonstrated (Locke & Latham, 1990, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Bandura & Locke, 2003). Specifically, Bandura et al. (2001) found academic self-efficacy to influence the types of occupational activities for which individuals judge themselves to be efficacious both directly and through their academic aspiration. Besides, Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons (1992) found that personal goals and aspirations play a significant role in academic aspiration, the higher the self-efficacy the higher the aspirations students set for themselves.

Gutman and Akerman (2008) also hypothesised that young people who believe they have the ability to achieve and who attribute their success to hard work rather than luck or fate have aspirations than their counterparts without such belief. Brown and Lent (2006), also noted that individuals with high self-beliefs perform better and based on better outcomes have higher future academic and career expectations. The stronger the students' belief in their efficacy, the more career options they consider possible, the more the interest they show in them, the better they groom themselves academically for diverse occupational choices and the greater their perseverance and accomplishment in their academic coursework (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996).

The current study is therefore undergone to increase the volume of literature on the relationship between academic self-efficacy, attitude to school and academic aspirations especially the way it happens in Nigeria setting.

Research Questions

The following research questions are answered in this study:

- (i) What is the combined contribution of attitude to school and academic self-efficacy on academic aspiration among students in suburban areas in Nigeria?
- (ii) What is the relative contribution of the independent variables (altitude to school and academic self-efficacy) to the prediction of academic aspiration of secondary school students in suburban areas in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a causal comparative research design to finding the effect of the predictor variables on the dependents measure. The approach is found useful as it is capable of gathering data without necessarily manipulating the independent variables.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Using a simple random sampling method, two hundred and ninety-two senior secondary school students were selected voluntarily to participate in the study. A description of the participants'

biodata information showed that 172 (58.9%) were male while 120 (41.1%) were female students. In addition, 93 (31.8%) and 199 (68.2%) were from private and public school respectively. Based on age grade, 108 (37%) and 184 (63%) of the respondents aged 14 years and below and 15 years and above in that order. Their mean age is 15.6 (SD=2.48)

Measures

Three major instruments were used to elicit responses from the participants. They are: **Academic Behaviour Confidence Scale:** The scale is a 24-item questionnaire designed to measure the level of academic confidence of students. It was developed by Sander and Sanders (2003). The participants were asked how confident they are in performing some academic works. The response format is five-point format ranging from very confident (5) to not confident (1) the higher the score the higher the level of self-efficacy. The internal consistency of the scale was measured for the present study using Cronbach alpha and it yielded $\alpha = .76$.

Attitude to School: The measure of attitude to school developed by Gray (1983) was used for the study. It is a 14-item scale developed to measure the attitude of students towards going to school. A typical item includes "I wish I didn't have to go to school at all. The response system varies from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5). Items 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12 and 14 were scored in reversed order. The internal consistency of the test using Cronbach alpha read $\alpha=0.81$.

Academic Aspiration Scale: Academic aspirations of the participants were measured through an 8-items scale developed by the researcher. The items were based on the aspiration of the students to go beyond secondary school education. A typical item is "I wish to attend university education after my secondary school". The respondents were expected to react to each of the items through a five-point reaction format ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). High scores indicate high academic aspirations. The scale was validated by a team of experts in the field of measurement and evaluation and educational psychology. The eight items were selected after the necessary corrections have been effected. The reliability coefficient of the scale using Cronbach alpha is $\alpha .73$.

Method of Data Collection

The scales were administered by the researchers through the counseling units of the participated schools. These counselors have been trained on the administration of the instruments. The participants were given the consent form to their parents for voluntary participation, only students who consented to participation partook in the exercise. The research assistants explained and interpreted the contents of the instruments where an explanation is warranted. It took each participant an average of 25 minutes to complete the response to the instrument.

Data Analysis

Multiple regression statistical approach was used to analyze the data gathered for the study.

RESULTS

The first research question asked: what is the combined contribution of attitude to school and self-efficacy on the academic aspiration of secondary school students? The answer to the question is in Table 1.

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis showing the Joint effects of Predictor variables on Academic Aspiration

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Sig.
Regression	699.240	2	349.620	36.075	.447	.200	.194	.000
Residual	2800.815	289	9.691					
Total	3500.055	291						

A linear regression was computed to predict the effect of predicted variables (Attitude to School and Self-Efficacy) on Academic aspiration as shown in Table 1. The two variables explained a significant amount of the variance in academic aspiration This is because the multiple regression yielded ($F_{(2,291)} = 36.075$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .20$; R^2 adjusted = .19) which was significant at 0.05. The result also showed further that the two independent variables jointly accounted for a variance of about 20% of the total variance in academic aspiration. Other variables outside the limit of this study might

explain the rest 80% description in the measures of antecedents of academic aspiration. Therefore the relatively large percentage of the variance recorded in this study could not have been due to the occurrences of chances

Research Question 2: What is the individual influence of the two independent variables (attitude to school and academic self-efficacy) on academic aspiration? The answer is contained in Table 2:

Table 2 Regression Analysis Summary for the Contribution of Each Predictor Variable on Academic Aspiration

Model	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	14.905	1.394		10.695	.000
Self-Efficacy	.084	.015	.316	5.718	.000
Attitude to School	.071	.017	.233	4.216	.000

Indication from Table 2 above is that the contribution of each of the independent variables: attitude to school ($\beta = 2.33$; $t = 4.22$, $P < .001$) and academic self-efficacy ($\beta = 3.16$; $t = 5.72$; $P < .001$) are significant at 0.05. The result also showed a positive regression co-efficient of the two independent variables on academic aspirations. This showed that the higher and the more positive the attitude to school and academic self-efficacy are, the higher the academic aspirations of the participants.

DISCUSSION

Based on research question 1, it was found that attitude to school and self-efficacy jointly contributed significantly to the prediction of academic aspiration among senior secondary school students as 20% of the total variance in academic performance is accounted for by these two variables. Hence the significant result could not have been due to chance. It could, therefore, be said that these two psychological variables are good predictors of academic aspiration of students.

The outcomes of this study also revealed that attitude to school positively predicted the academic aspiration of students. The findings support the earlier study of Geckova et al (2010) who found a significant association between attitude to school and academic aspirations. The finding is not amazing. This is due to the fact that students who develop a positive attitude to school have a greater interest in academic activities and would like to aspire higher in academic endeavours. Hence, students with a positive attitude are more likely to sustain their efforts and have the desire to be involved in learning activities.

Academic self-efficacy was also found to significantly predict academic aspiration. The finding indicated that higher academic self-efficacy suggests higher academic aspiration. The result is in line with the study of Bandura et al (2001), Bandura (1997; 1995); Locke & Latham (1990) who found that self-efficacy strengthens academic aspirations and the strength of commitment to the aspirations in such a way that as self-efficacy increases, the adopted aspiration also becomes high. The reason that could be adduced to this outcome of the study could be linked to the fact that individuals will exert their efforts mainly on things they believe they can. Hence, students' aspirations will be high on academic activities when they have belief in themselves that they can succeed in academic activities. Those who have low-self efficacy in academics are often drop out or stop their academic activities on the mandatory basic education.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was to examine the influence of attitude to school and academic self-efficacy on academic aspirations of senior secondary school students. The study revealed that the combined effect of the two independent variables on academic aspiration is moderate and significant. It also showed that the predictive capacity of each of the independent variables on academic aspirations is positive and significant.

The outcomes of the study, therefore, imply that for academic aspirations to be enhanced, students need to develop a positive attitude to school and build up their self-beliefs. It is, therefore, recommended that counselling and educational psychologists should direct their attention on making better the academic self-efficacy and positive attitude to school towards increasing academic aspirations among school adolescents in suburban area.

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