



ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AS PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT OF FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The transition from secondary school to university is a significant life event marked by academic and social challenges. This study investigated the impact of academic self-efficacy and social support on school adjustment of first-year University students in Nigeria. This study adopted an ex post facto research design. The study population comprised all 2503 first-year university students at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria. Simple random sampling was used to select 250 respondents for the study. Three hypotheses guided the study. Data was collected using the Questionnaire on First-Year University Students School Adjustment (QUF-YUSSA) designed by the researchers. The face and content validity of the instrument was achieved by vetting and contribution from experts while the split-half method was used to achieve the reliability with a reliability coefficient of 0.76. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation, inter-correlation matrix, simple regression analysis and multiple regression analysis. Results showed a high positive correlation between academic self-efficacy and school adjustment as well as between social support and school adjustment. It was also found that there was a significant joint effect of academic self-efficacy and social support ($F\text{-ratio}_{(2, 247)} = 183.230$) on school adjustment of first-year University students with an $R\text{-value}$ of .773. It was also found that social support ($t = 3.988$, $\beta = .488$; $p < .000$) and academic self-efficacy ($t = 3.012$, $\beta = .388$; $p < .003$) had significant relative effects on school adjustment of first-year University students. Based on the results of the findings, it was recommended that Universities should focus on enhancing the academic self-efficacy and social support of their students and should create a positive learning environment that fosters social interaction and provides opportunities for students to develop their social skills and networks. It was also recommended that academic advisors and counsellors should work closely with students to identify their individual needs and provide personalized support and guidance.

Keywords: academic self-efficacy, school adjustment, social support, university students

Introduction

Transition from secondary school to university is a significant life event marked by academic challenges, social upheaval, and newfound independence (Kaur & Beri, 2020). First-year students navigate a demanding academic environment with increased workloads, unfamiliar teaching styles and more complex learning material. This period of adjustment is critical for establishing a foundation for academic success and overall well-being in the University. Two of the key factors that significantly impact a student's ability to adjust to this new environment are academic self-efficacy and social support. Academic self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in their capabilities to succeed academically (Bandura, 1998). As Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020), observed, students with high academic self-efficacy are confident in their ability to master challenging coursework, manage their time effectively, and overcome



academic setbacks. On the other hand, students who lack confidence in their academic abilities may experience academic difficulties, anxiety, and low motivation.

Social support is another important factor influencing first-year University students' adjustment. Social support refers to the resources, emotional support, and advice that individuals receive from their social network (Tinajero, Martínez-López, Rodríguez, & Páramo, 2020). In the words of Salami, Lawson and Metzger (2021), social supports are the resources provided by friends, family, peers, and faculty which may be emotional, practical, and informational. A strong support network can act as a buffer against stress, offer guidance during difficult times, and foster a sense of belonging within the University community. First-year University students who have a strong social support network are more likely to feel connected to their peers and to the University community, which can have a positive impact on their academic performance and overall well-being (Tinajero et al., 2020).

Given the importance of academic self-efficacy (ASE) and social support for the adjustment of first-year University students, several studies have investigated the relationship between these variables and various outcomes, such as academic achievement, retention, and mental health (Metcalf & Konrad-Wiener, 2018). However, few studies have examined the joint contributions of ASE and social support to school adjustment in this population (Kaur & Beri, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the unique and combined effects of ASE and social support on school adjustment in first-year University students. Understanding the factors that contribute to school adjustment in this population will assist education stakeholders in developing interventions to support the transition to university and promote academic success and well-being.

Literature Review

Students' academic achievement has been linked to self-efficacy (Waseem & Asim, 2020) while research has also established a reciprocal relationship between the two variables (Talsma, Schüza, Schwarzer, & Norrissa, 2018) asserted that students with high academic self-efficacy are more likely to approach academic challenges with a positive and proactive attitude. They are more likely to set ambitious goals, engage actively in learning activities, and persist through difficulties. Research suggests that a strong belief in one's academic abilities is linked to better academic performance, increased motivation, and a greater sense of satisfaction with the learning process (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). Conversely, students with low academic self-efficacy can become easily discouraged by academic setbacks, experience higher levels of stress, and be less likely to seek help when needed.

According to Rodriguez, Tinajero and Páramo (2017), academic achievement is predicted by several factors including perceived family support, and mediated by pre-university grades and University adjustment. A strong social support network provides students with a sense of belonging, emotional validation, and practical assistance. Friends, family, and peers can offer encouragement during challenging times, share study strategies, and provide a sense of community within the larger University environment. Faculty support can also be a significant factor, as positive relationships with professors can enhance students' sense of self-efficacy and provide valuable academic guidance (Serbic, Schüza, Schwarzer & Norrissa, 2021). Studies have shown that students with strong social support networks tend to experience lower levels of stress, higher levels of satisfaction with university life, and greater academic success (Kaur & Beri, 2020).



Adjustment is the individual's ability to accept his psychological needs and self-acceptance and enjoy life without any conflicts to accept social responsibility and participate in social activities (Zhang, Su & Geng, 2023). School adjustment is used broadly to describe the process by which students adapt to the social, behavioural, and academic expectations of the school. It encompasses a wide range of factors that influence a student's success in school, including their academic performance, social skills, behaviour, and overall well-being (Husaini & Shukor, 2023). The children's abilities, skills, adjustment characteristics, and interpersonal environment underlie their school adjustment process. The concept of school adjustment is associated with other aspects of children's education processes including children's perceptions of the school environment, school experiences, school engagement, school readiness, and school performance. Researchers have found that school adjustment is a critical factor in determining a student's academic success and overall well-being (Husaini, & Shukor, 2023). Students who struggle to adjust to the demands of school are more likely to experience academic difficulties, social isolation, and emotional distress. On the other hand, students who can successfully adjust to school are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

One influential theory on which this study is based is the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) propounded by Bandura (1998). SCT emphasizes the interplay between a person's beliefs about his capabilities (self-efficacy), their expectations, and their environment (social support) in influencing their behaviour and overall well-being (school adjustment). In the context of first-year University students, SCT can be pertinent as students with high academic self-efficacy believe in their ability to succeed academically. This belief motivates them to put in their effort, persist through challenges and ultimately adjust better to the demands of university life (Bandura, 1998).

The presence of social support networks of family, friends or peers can provide students with emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. This can buffer stress, boost confidence and help students navigate the social and academic complexities of University (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The combined effect of high academic self-efficacy and social support is expected to contribute positively to a student's overall school adjustment, encompassing both academic performance and social integration. The presence of social support networks of family, friends or peers can provide students with emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. This can buffer stress, boost confidence and help students navigate the social and academic complexities of University (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The combined effect of high academic self-efficacy and social support is expected to contribute positively to a student's overall school adjustment, encompassing both academic performance and social integration.

Statement of the Problem

First-year Nigerian university students face numerous challenges as they transition from secondary school to a more demanding academic environment. Academically, the shift from rote learning to critical thinking and independent study can be overwhelming. Unfamiliarity with complex course materials, demanding professors, and a heavier workload can lead to feelings of inadequacy and decreased motivation. Additionally, the university environment itself presents difficulties. Students must navigate a large, unfamiliar campus, cope with limited resources like library access or outdated facilities, and potentially experience disruptions due to strikes or power outages. Socially, first-year students often grapple with homesickness, loneliness, and the pressure to fit in. The shift to a new social circle with diverse backgrounds and personalities can be daunting, and some students may struggle to make friends

or feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, Academic self-efficacy, which is a student's belief in their ability to succeed academically, can be a powerful tool in overcoming these challenges. Students with high academic self-efficacy are more likely to persevere through difficult coursework, seek help when needed, and maintain a positive attitude towards learning. They are more confident in their ability to understand complex concepts, manage their time effectively, and perform well on exams. Social support networks, formed with friends, family, or mentors, can also play a crucial role. A strong support system provides a sense of belonging, reduces feelings of isolation, and offers encouragement during difficult times. Knowing they have people to rely on for help, advice, or simply a listening ear can significantly improve a student's well-being and overall academic experience.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the independent variables (academic self-efficacy and social support) and school adjustment

Ho₂: There is no significant joint effect relationship between academic self-efficacy and social support on the social adjustment of first-year university students

Ho₃: There is no significant relative effect relationship between academic self-efficacy and social support on social adjustment of first-year university students

Methodology

This study adopted an ex post facto research design to examine the adjustment of first-year students at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology in Ogbomosho. The study population comprises all 2,503 first-year students and 250 respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The number of students at the university was used as a stratum. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire called Questionnaire on First-Year University Students School Adjustment (QUF-YUSSA), which had four major sections. Section A focused on the socio-demographic data of the students, section B covered the academic self-efficacy of the respondents. Section C tapped into the social support of the respondents, and section D elicited responses concerning school adjustment. The instrument uses a 4-likert scale and has a total of 15 items. The instrument was validated by experts and its reliability was assessed using the split-half method with a reliability coefficient of 0.76. Data analysis included frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation, inter-correlation matrix, simple regression analysis, and multiple regression analysis.



Results

Table 1: *Socio-demographic Information of the Respondents*

| Variable | N | % | Mean | SD |
|------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 113 | 45.2 | 1.87 | .741 |
| Female | 137 | 54.8 | | |
| Total | 250 | 100.0 | | |
| Age (Years) | | | | |
| 17-21 | 87 | 34.8 | 1.55 | .499 |
| 18-26 | 109 | 43.6 | | |
| 27 & above | 54 | 21.6 | | |
| Total | 250 | 100.0 | | |
| Course of study | | | | |
| Arts | 73 | 29.2 | 2.25 | 1.011 |
| Engineering | 31 | 12.2 | | |
| Humanities | 73 | 29.2 | | |
| Sciences | 73 | 29.2 | | |
| Total | 250 | 100.0 | | |

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic information of the respondents. It indicates that 54.8% of the respondents were female, while 45.2% were male, with a mean of 1.87. In terms of age distribution, 43.6% of the respondents were aged 18-26, 34.8% were aged 17-21, and 21.6% were 27 years and above, with a mean of 1.55. The percentage of students in Arts, Humanities, and Sciences was 29.2% each, while those in Engineering accounted for 12.2%, with a mean of 2.25. Overall, the table illustrates a slightly skewed distribution of the respondents across gender, age, and course of study.

Table 2: *Inter-correlation Matrix showing the Relationship among the Variables*

| Variable | Academic Self-Efficacy | Social Support | School Adjustment |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Academic Self-efficacy | 1 | .501 | .556 |
| Social Support | 1 | .791 | |
| School Adjustment | 1 | | |

Source: Field data, 2024

Table 2 shows that each of the independent variables significantly correlated with school adjustment. It shows that high positive relationship existed between academic self-efficacy and school adjustment ($r=.556$) as well as between social support and school adjustment ($r=.791$). It also reveals that high positive correlation exist between academic self-efficacy and social support ($r=.501$).

Table 3: Joint Effect of Academic Self-efficacy and Social Support on Social Adjustment of Respondents

| Model Summary | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | | |
| 1 | .773 ^a | .597 | .594 | 9.886 | | |
| Model | Sum of Squares | | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 35812.200 | 2 | 17906.100 | 183.230 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 24137.944 | 247 | 97.724 | | |
| | Total | 59950.144 | 249 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: School Adjustment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Support, Academic Self-efficacy

Table 3 above shows the joint effect of academic self-efficacy and social support on school adjustment of the respondents. The table shows that F-ratio at $df = 2, 247$ is significant ($F\text{-ratio}_{(2, 247)} = 183.230$). The R value of .773 is also significant as it implies that the respondents' school adjustment prediction is determined by over 77.3% of the contribution of the two independent variables.

Table 4: Relative Effect of Academic Self-Efficacy and Social Support on Social Adjustment of Respondents

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | -90.331 | 10.694 | | -8.447 | .000 |
| | Academic Self-efficacy | .944 | .313 | .338 | 3.012 | .003 |
| | Social Support | 1.149 | .288 | .448 | 3.988 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: School Adjustment

Discussion

The study found a high positive correlation between academic self-efficacy and school adjustment as well as a high positive correlation between social support and school adjustment of university students. This finding is consistent with Alyami, Melyani, Al-Johani, Ullah, Alyami, Sundram, *et al.* (2017) who found that a positive association exists between academic self-efficacy and school adjustment of adolescents. It also corresponds with the findings of Waseem and Asim (2020) that a high positive relationship exists between self-efficacy and social support of high school students and Nasir and Iqbal (2019) who found a significant and positive correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement and found that overestimation of one's self-efficacy may negatively affect academic achievement.

This finding however negates Alyami *et al.* (2017) that a low, yet significant, correlation between self-efficacy and academic performance among psychology students who completed a self-efficacy scale online. This study corroborates Salami, Lawson and Metzger (2021) that found a high positive correlation between academic social support and school adjustment, indicating that students who have a strong belief in their academic abilities are more likely to adjust to the demands of university life. Social support has been linked to academic achievement (Husaini, & Shukor, 2023; Talsma, Schüza, Schwarzer, & Norrisa, 2018).

It was also found that self-efficacy and social support have significant predictive effects on the school adjustment of university students. Tinajero *et al.* (2020) established a similar finding that social support

predicted academic adjustment of first-year University students while Frazier. Gabriel, Merians and Lust (2019) established that self-efficacy and social support have significant predictive effects on the school adjustment of university students. These findings also support Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020), who observed that students with high academic self-efficacy are confident in their ability to master concepts. A strong support is strength against stress, provides guidance at difficult times, and promote a sense of belonging within the University community.

It was found that academic self-efficacy and social support had a significant joint effect on school adjustment of university students. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020) who revealed that self-efficacy and social support have composite effects on academic performance by increasing positive effects of mastery and performance approach goals while reducing the negative effects of avoidance goals. This finding supports the position of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) that a combination of academic self-efficacy and social support can contribute positively to a student's overall school adjustment, leading to better outcome both academic performance and social integration. Nasir and Iqbal (2019) also showed that self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the influence of social support on school adjustment of university students. Tinajero *et al.* (2020) also found that students with a strong social support network are more likely to feel connected to their peers and to the University environment, and that this can have a positive impact on the academic performance and overall well-being of such students.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that academic self-efficacy and social support play crucial roles in the school adjustment of university students. The study reveals that these two factors have significant predictive effects on students' school adjustment, and when they work together, they have a powerful joint effect on school adjustment. Therefore, it is important for universities to provide adequate support and resources to enhance students' academic self-efficacy and social support, which may ultimately lead to better school adjustment and academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Universities should focus on enhancing the academic self-efficacy and social support of their students. This can be achieved through various methods such as providing students with academic resources, counselling services, mentorship programmes, and support groups.
2. Nigerian Universities should create a positive learning environment that fosters social interaction and provides opportunities for students to develop their social skills and networks. This can be achieved through extracurricular activities, student clubs, and events that promote socialization and community building.
3. Academic advisors and counsellors should work closely with students to identify their individual needs and provide personalized support and guidance. This can help students develop their academic self-efficacy and social support, which in turn can improve their school adjustment and academic success.



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