

## HELP-SEEKING AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AS A PREDICTOR OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY IN EKITI STATE

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### Abstract

*This study investigated help-seeking and academic motivation as a predictor of secondary school students' academic self-efficacy in Ekiti State. It also examined the relationship between the two psycho-social factors (help-seeking and academic motivation) and students' academic self - efficacy. The study employed the descriptive research design of the survey type. The population consisted of all students from the public secondary schools in Ekiti central senatorial district of Ekiti State. The sample for this study was 200 students which were selected from four secondary schools using Multistage sampling technique. A self-structured questionnaire tagged "Psychosocial Factors and Students' Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (PFSASEQ)" was used to collect relevant data for the study. The face and content validity of the instrument was determined by experts of Test and Measurements and Guidance and Counseling. The hypotheses postulated were subjected to inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that there was significant relationship between help-seeking and academic motivation, and students' academic self – efficacy. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that parents, teachers and the school should create an enabling environment at home, in class and in the school where students can be encouraged to seek help as at when needed. Also, academic motivation of students can be enhanced by providing mentoring classes where they can practice assertiveness skills which will in turn boost their confidence to perform all academic tasks successfully.*

**Keywords:** Help-seeking, Academic motivation, Academic self-efficacy, Adolescents

### Introduction

The frightening increase of low academic self-efficacy and eventual low achievement creates a great concern to parents, teachers, examination bodies, counsellors and psychologists. This represents a colossal loss on the parts of students, parents and the government. Students' beliefs in their capabilities to achieve academic tasks have been worrisome. They attend schools, seemingly settle down to study but their efforts yields little or no positive results. Students with high-sense of academic self-efficacy are more likely to exert effort in attempting to accomplish academic task and persist when faced with difficulty but many with low academic self-efficacy put in less efforts and they give up easily when they encounter obstacles and difficulties, the resultant effect is poor academic achievement.

The proportion of young people who successfully complete and pass to the next level constitute a meagre percentage in Nigeria. Performances in examinations have been consistently abysmal in the past three decades with the annual percentage pass in West African School Certificate Examination hovering around, 30 percent, this moved down to 13 percent in 2008 with just a little improvement between 2009 and 2015. This poor outcome which has been of great concern to all and sundry should be investigated. Danesty and Okediran (2002)

Many variables affect students' academic self-efficacy and their eventual academic achievement. Baker (2003) noted that it is possible to perceive the totality of human as being guided and ruled by psychological and social variables. Odinko and Adeyemo (1999) also observed that the modern man as a person has his educational aspiration and accomplishments projected by the psycho-social variables in the environment, the positions of these two sets of variables are unique and important and may be appreciated when it is realized that the variables are necessary for the understanding of human beings, their overt and covert behaviours, potentialities and performances in the three areas of educational domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor). The need for this study can, therefore, not be overemphasized.

The concept of self-efficacy is the focal point of Bandura's social cognitive theory. Individuals exercise control over their thoughts, feelings and actions. Bandura (1986) stated that people will be more inclined to take on a task they believe they can succeed in. People generally avoid tasks where their self-efficacy is low but will engage in task where their self-efficacy is high. A strong sense of academic self-efficacy enhances students' academic accomplishment, quality of functioning and personal well-being (Adeyemo, 2008). Bandura (1997) observed that a sense of self-efficacy is an important contributor to the attainment of further competences and successes.

Research on self-efficacy beliefs in academic setting is on the increase, but the general problem is that students are sometimes known to do poorly in specific subject areas while performing up to standard in others. The reason for this, no doubt, reflects the multivariate nature of school learning. There is the need to take into account the idiosyncratic nature of diverse learners and their capabilities; learners do not perform up to their potential, despite positive environmental conditions. Performance of students in school is a major concern though many believe that students with great intellectual potential will often succeed at a higher level than students with lower ability, it is not always the case, because cognitive potential does not always translate into attained success. Just as there are intellectually gifted who do not perform well, there exists many lower ability students who perform at above average or grade expectation.

Many variables interact to produce this phenomenon; self-efficacy is one of them. Merely, possessing knowledge and skills does not mean that one will use them effectively under difficult condition (Bandura, 1986). Only those who are more self-efficacious about being able to effectively manage and cope with these circumstances are expected to have probability of succeeding even if others have the same inherent ability or skill level. There is sufficient evidence documenting significant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and achievement in academic settings (Bandura, 1997).

Parents' involvement has been identified as a factor that improves students' academic self-efficacy. When parents are involved, the academic self-efficacy of students is enhanced. The child's first place of contact with the world is the family. As a result, he acquires initial education and socialization from parents and other significant persons in the family. The parents are the child's first teachers (Adeyemo, 2008; and Odinko and Adeyemo, 1999). The family provides the primary education environment and there is the need to look at how the home and school interrelates to help in the students' academic self-efficacy and achievement. Students with parental involvement in their education tend to have better academic performance and are not likely to drop out of school (Adeyemo, 2008).

The present study examined the influence and predictability of the psychosocial factors such as help-seeking and academic motivation on secondary school students' academic self-efficacy. Help-seeking is conceptualized as an achievement behaviour involving the search for and employment of a strategy to obtain success. In this context, help-seeking is considered a proactive problem-solving strategy employed by persons who desire to achieve some goals. In order for students to effectively seek help, they first have to identify the problem they

need assistance with (Newman, 2002), opined that they need help with a particular problem, and believe that going for help will be beneficial. Numerous students may require psychological or academic assistance to help them with interpersonal, social, academic or career related problems. As such, knowing where to go for help, knowing what type of help services are available in school, and to utilize the available help services is of utmost importance to students.

One theoretical approach that has been widely used to explain the relationship between students' motivation and their academic self-efficacy is Deci and Ryan's (1991) self-determination theory. According to their theory, students' academic behaviour is either intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation may be defined as "the drive to pursue an activity simply for the pleasure derived from it (Fairchild, Horst, Finney, & Barron, 2005). Reading additional books not prescribed for a particular subject out of interest to learn more because a student is enjoying the subject, or attending extra-curriculum lesson because students find them interesting or stimulating are examples of academic intrinsic motivated behaviour. Extrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is directed outwards. Here the motivation is not internal or for self-determination goals but a means to an end.

The goal of education as one of the most important components of human development and the engine of national development, even as a ladder leading to a better and higher social status, can only be realized when students have the confidence to achieve the very best; then they can deliver what the nation expects from them for national development. Baker (2003) noted that academic self-efficacy and achievement leave much to be desired, therefore, there is every need for researchers to continue to explore this frontier of knowledge. This is why the study investigated psycho social factors predicting secondary school students' academic self-efficacy in Ekiti State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The alarming rate of low academic self-efficacy and eventual low achievement constitutes a great concern to parents, teachers, examination bodies, counsellors and psychologists. Indeed, it represents a great wastage on the parts of students, parents and the government. Students' beliefs in their capabilities to achieve in academic tasks have been worrisome.

Only a small proportion of secondary school products are qualified to proceed to the university in Nigeria. The proportion of young people who successfully complete and pass to the next level constitute a meager percentage. There are students who due to the failures of the past, have lost confidence in themselves and their academics, this has resulted in poor performance in their studies.

Many factors have been studied as affecting students' academic self-efficacy, they have been examined independently and their influences on performance have been reported based on the influence of each factor. The psychological factors affecting academic self-efficacy and achievement are considered in this study. Based on the background information and literature, little have been researched into on the combined effect of help-seeking and academic motivation on academic self-efficacy, hence this study.

### Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated for the study.

- i. There is no significant relationship between help – seeking and students' academic self – efficacy.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between academic motivation and students' academic self – efficacy.

The purpose of this study is to investigate psychosocial factors predicting secondary school students' academic self-efficacy in Ekiti State. It will further examine the relationship between help-seeking, academic motivation and students' academic self-efficacy.

### Concept of Academic Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is generally regarded as a multidimensional construct differentiated across multiple domains of functioning. In Education, self-efficacy is a key contributing factor to learners' success; because self-efficacy influences the choices learners make and the courses of action they pursue (Pajares, 2002). Academic self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief (conviction) that they can successfully achieve a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002; Elias and Loomis, 2002; Linenbrink and Pintrich, 2002a; Schunk and Pajares, 2002).

Academic self-efficacy is grounded in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). According to self-efficacy theory, self-efficacy is an "individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task" (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002, p. 110). Self-efficacy theory suggests that academic self-efficacy may vary in strength as a function of task difficulty—some individuals may believe they are most efficacious on difficult tasks, while others on easier tasks. Furthermore, self-efficacy is believed to be situational in nature rather than being viewed as a stable trait (Linenbrink and Pintrich, 2002a). Students make reliable differentiations between their self-efficacy judgments across different academic domains which, collectively, form a loose hierarchical multidimensional structure. Self-efficacy is different from self-esteem or self-concept as it is a task-specific evaluation whereas self-esteem and self-concept reflect more general

affective evaluations of self (Linenbrink and Pintrich, 2002a).

Research conducted by Linenbrink and Pintrich (2002b) have shown that academic self-efficacy is significantly associated with students' learning, cognitive engagement, analytical thinking, academic commitment, strategy use, persistence, susceptibility to negative emotions and achievement. In the academic context, children's beliefs in their personal efficacy to control their own educational processes and outcomes and to become proficient in challenging subject matter, likely has a great impact on their scholastic impetus, interest and educational performance. Students who are confident in their capability to organize, execute, and regulate their problem-solving or task performance at a designated level of competence are demonstrating high self-efficacy.

### Help – Seeking and Students' Academic Self – Efficacy

Research has found that informal student-department interactions, student-department contact, and the utilization of available support services and programs on campus are associated with better socialization at school (Tinto, 1999) as well as having a positive influence on students adjustment and academic performance (Boulter, 2002; DeStefano, Mellott & Petersen, 2001).

Previous research indicates that students in need of assistance often do not utilize the help that is available in school (e.g., Deci, 1985; Russell, Thomson, & Rosenthal, 2008). For example, Deci (1985) in a study of 248 students found that only 30% of students in need of psychological assistance seek for counselling services. Additionally, Raunic and Xenos (2008) in their review of students' utilization rates of counselling services reported that only between 2% to 4% of students seek help from counselling services in school. The low rate of students seeking help from counselling services should be of particular concern to school authorities, as the majority of students seek help for academic and educational problems.

However, despite the importance of student help-seeking behaviour at school, only a small amount of research has investigated the relationship between help-seeking and adjustment and academic performance. The meta-analysis by Russel et al. (2008), for example, only identified eight independent correlations out of 241 data where help-seeking was used to predict students' academic self-efficacy at schools. Results of their study revealed that help-seeking has a positive mean effect size with academic performance, suggesting that help-seeking leads to higher academic performance. An example is the study of 240 Belgian students by Van (1999), who reported a significant relationship between help-seeking and academic self – efficacy. Another example was provided by Karabenick and Knapp (1998). Their

study of 612 students assessed the relationship between perceived academic performance and help-seeking tendencies. They found that students who expected very high marks as well as students who expected very low marks were less likely to ask for help. Instead, students that expected marks “between a B- and a C+” (Karabenick & Knapp, 1998) were most likely to seek out help for academic problems.

Based on previous research it is assumed that help-seeking is positively related to academic self-efficacy. A positive relationship between help-seeking and adjustment is tentatively hypothesised.

### **Academic Motivation and Students’ Academic Self – Efficacy**

One theoretical approach that has been widely used to explain the relationship between students’ motivation and their academic performance is Ryan and Deci’s (1991) self-determination theory. According to self-determination theory, there are four types of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). External regulation refers to behaviour as described under extrinsic motivation. Introjected regulation is defined as the process whereby an external demand becomes an internal representation which the person uses to approve or disapprove of his or her own actions (Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 2000). For example, a student studies for an exam in order to impress their parents or family members. Identified regulation, on the other hand, has been defined as attributing personal value to behaviour while still being externally motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Here, a student may not be interested in a particular course and finds the contents irrelevant for his or her field of study, but studies for it in order to pass examinations and to achieve the overall goal of attaining a degree.

Integrated regulation occurs when identified regulations have been fully assimilated to the self through self-examination and bringing new regulations into congruence with one’s other values and needs (Ryan & Deci, 1991). In contrast, academic motivated students may be characterized by lacking both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Academic motivated students do not value the activity or believe they can attain a favourable result (Coakley & White, 1992). That is, academic motivation occurs when students believe that their actions are not going to make a difference; in that events or circumstances are caused by factors they cannot control (Cokley, Bernard, Cunningham, & Motoike, 2001). Students with high levels of academic motivation may find it hard to explain why they are at university in the first place.

Research indicates that high intrinsic motivation is related to a deeper approach to learning (Ames & Archer, 1998), higher self-esteem (Deci & Ryan,

1991) and lower self-perceived stress (Baker, 2004). Students which are intrinsically motivated are less likely to procrastinate, are confident and in control of their academic tasks, use self-initiated exploratory strategies and are likely to display autonomy (Seifert & O’Keefe, 2001). Intrinsic motivation and the more self-determined type of extrinsic motivation (identified regulation) have also been found to be related to lower dropout and higher retention of students; while academic motivation and extrinsic motivation (external regulation and introjected regulation) were either found to have no or a negative relationship to dropout or retention of students.

Previous research indicated that motivation significantly predicts students’ adjustment and academic performance at university (Allen & Robbins, 2010; Baker, 2004; Conti, 2000; Davy, Smith, & Rosenberg, 2009). Similarly to findings of dropout and retention, intrinsic motivation has mostly been found to be positively associated with adjustment and academic performance; while extrinsic motivation and academic motivation are predominantly reported to exhibit a negative or no association with adjustment and academic performance. For example, Allen and Robbins (2010) in their model to predict academic performance and timely degree attainment showed that motivation is predictive of students’ academic performance. Among 3 072 students studying for a bachelor degree at a four year institution and 788 students studying for a certificate at a two year institution, motivation significantly predicted academic performance (Allen & Robbins, 2010).

Furthermore, the meta-analysis by Allen & Robbins (2010) as well as the study by Allen & Robbins (2006) found a significant positive relationship between motivation and academic performance, even after controlling for prior academic performance and socio-demographic factors. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Richardson et al. (2012), including 22 independent associations for intrinsic motivation and 10 independent correlations for extrinsic motivation, reported a mean effect size for the relationship between intrinsic motivation and academic self-efficacy but almost no mean effect size for the relationship between extrinsic motivation and academic self-efficacy.

The final example mentioned here is a study conducted by Baker (2004) which assessed psychological well-being and adjustment to university of 92 second year undergraduate psychology students. The results showed a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and adjustment, a negative relationship between academic motivation and adjustment, and no relationship between extrinsic motivation and adjustment; indicating that higher intrinsic motivation was associated with better adjustment at university, while higher academic motivation was

associated with poorer adjustment to university (Baker, 2004). There was, however, no relationship between the various motivation variables and academic performance.

In the present study it is assumed that motivation variables could have indirect effects on academic self – efficacy via adjustment, a premise tested by Petersen (2009). Based on previous research findings it is supposed that intrinsic motivation is positively related to adjustment and academic performance. Extrinsic motivations and academic motivation are hypothesized to have a negative relationship with adjustment and academic performance

## Methodology

### Research Design

The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted in this study. It is specifically a correlation study to investigate the relationship between psychosocial variables and students' academic self-efficacy.

The population consisted of all students from the public secondary schools in Ekiti central senatorial district of Ekiti State. The sample for this study consisted of 200 students which were selected from four secondary schools using Multistage Sampling technique. The first stage involved the random selection of two local government areas from the five local government areas in Ekiti Central senatorial district. The second stage was selection of two public secondary schools from each of the two local governments earlier selected making four public secondary schools using simple random sampling technique. The third stage was the selection of 50 students from each of the four schools using stratified random sampling technique. The 50 students from each of the schools were male and female.

A self-structured questionnaire tagged "Psychosocial Factors and Students' Academic Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (PFSASEQ)" was used to collect relevant data for the study. *Section A* of the instrument sought for comprehensive bio-data of the respondents. *Section B* consisted of 10 items which sought for information on Academic self-efficacy scale. The scales used were modified versions of the original scale, Academic Self-efficacy Scales by Brown (2005). *Section C* consisted of 10 items which sought for information on variables such as self-esteem and test anxiety as it predicts students' academic self-efficacy in secondary schools. The instrument was prepared using Likert type scale which was used as follows: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The data collected was analyzed using inferential statistics. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment

Correlation (PPMC). All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between help – seeking and students' academic self – efficacy. The result is presented in table 1.

**Table 1:** Correlation between help – seeking and students' academic self – efficacy

Variables	N	Mean	Stand Dev	r-cal	r-tab	Remark
Help seeking	200	2.71	0.98			
Students' Academic Self – efficacy	200	2.91	1.04	0.501	0.195	Significant*

\*P<0.05

Table 1 showed that r-cal is positive and moderate. The r-cal (0.501) is greater than r-table (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was significant relationship between help – seeking and students' academic self – efficacy. Hence, help – seeking have impact on students' academic self – efficacy.

### Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between academic motivation and students' academic self-efficacy. The result is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:** Correlation between academic motivation and students' academic self – efficacy

Variables	N	Mean	Stand Dev	r-cal	r-tab	Remark
Academic Motivation	200	2.85	0.91			
Students' Academic Self – efficacy	200	2.91	1.04	0.711	0.195	Significant*

\*P<0.05

Table 2 showed that r-cal is positive and high. The r-cal (0.711) is greater than r-table (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was significant relationship between academic motivation and students' academic self – efficacy.

## Discussion Recommendations and Conclusion

This result is very important because it explains the positions of the examined independent variables (Help-Seeking and Academic motivation) on students' academic self-efficacy. The result of the study as indicated in hypothesis one shows that there was significant relationship between help – seeking and students' academic self – efficacy. Hence, help – seeking have impact on students' academic self – efficacy. This findings is in correlation with Russel et al. (2008), their study revealed that help-seeking has a positive mean effect size with academic performance, suggesting

that help-seeking leads to higher academic performance. Karabenick and Knapp (1998) also found that students who expected very high marks as well as students who expected very low marks were less likely to ask for help. Instead, students that expected marks “between a B- and a C+” were most likely to seek out help for academic problems.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that there was significant relationship between academic motivation and students’ academic self – efficacy. This finding is in line with Allen and Robbins (2010), in their model to predict academic performance and timely degree attainment showed that motivation is predictive of students’ academic performance.

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were proffered: The independent variables contributed jointly to the students’ academic self-efficacy and relatively too. It is recommended that students should be encouraged by their teachers and parents to seek help by creating an enabling environment for mentoring where they can practice assertiveness skills which will in turn increase their level of academic motivation thereby boosting their confidence to perform all academic tasks successfully. Specifically for teachers, certain teaching techniques such as cooperative learning, praising students, and using icebreakers in the classroom increase the likelihood a student will connect to school and enhance academic performance. Ultimately, increasing interactions with positive adults and establishing an environment that is warm and responsive to students needs. Government should provide enabling study environment for students and adequately fund academic institutions.

In conclusion, help-seeking and academic motivation exerts dominance not only on students’ academic self-efficacy but on their achievements and other aspects of life. The study has revealed that a student may have reasons for poor academic self-efficacy and eventual academic failure. Students needs to be encouraged to seek help while parents also needs to show support and care which will in turn motivate students thereby leading to high self-efficacy and eventual high achievement in academics.

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