

ACADEMIC OPTIMISM, STUDENTS' ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SETTING

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Abstract

This is a survey research designed to determine the state of academic optimism, students' academic motivation and emotional competence in an inclusive School in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. Sixty-one (61) students of the Junior and Senior Secondary School sections of the school (35 regular (normal) and 26 special needs (challenged) students) constituted the population and sample of the study. The sample was purposively drawn. Four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the conduct of the research. Three instruments were utilized for data collection. They included School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) developed by Hoy (2005), Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) developed by Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Brière, Sénécal, & Vallières, (1992) and Emotional Competence Scale (ECS) developed by Bharadwaj and Sharma (1995). Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions; while t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the null hypotheses. Results got after data analysis indicated among others that the inclusive school was rated high in academic optimism; high levels of academic motivation and emotional competence were found among the students (regular and special needs alike); the difference in academic motivation and emotional competence among regular and special needs students was statistically significant; nature of challenge was a significant factor in academic motivation and emotional competence among special needs students. Based on these results, it was recommended that inclusive schooling should be encouraged by the federal and state governments in Nigeria; since it promotes academic optimism, students academic motivation and emotional competence; special needs learners require more attention, encouragement and support from the entire inclusive school community

including regular students for more positive perception of the academic optimism status of the school, enhanced academic motivation and emotional competence.

Keywords: Inclusive School, Academic Optimism, Academic Motivation, Emotional Competence, Regular and Special Needs Students

Introduction

Education is the right of every child. It is treated as a fundamental human right in the Nigerian constitution. It is free at the Universal Basic Education level (Primary 1 to JS3) which is a 9 years period, with emphasis on equity in access to education for all children. Emphasis at every stage of education is on the achievement of academic excellence by the learners.

Available literature has indicated that several factors are linked to students' performance and success in educational settings. Coleman in McGuigan and Hoy (2006) and Agbesha (2012) posited that students' success and ability to do well in academic endeavours are often linked to their family background, socio-economic status, the students' living environment and parenting styles. However, recent findings have shown that irrespective of students' socio-economic background, parenting styles, or the living conditions of the students, they can improve in their academic endeavours if the school's atmosphere is conducive and the goal of the school geared towards academic excellence (Shahid, 2013). This implies that the school's mission and goal can change the students' perception and greatly influence their commitment to their studies and ultimately lead to their success in academic endeavours. In effect, students' success and academic performance can be linked to the school's organizational goal and climate which is expected to ensure that students receive the best form of education and training in all aspects of life and perform optimally at various stages and levels of their educational endeavours.

The inclusive school environment is one which provides opportunity for both the regular (normal) and special needs (challenged) students to learn together in the same school and classroom environments. Some of these learners may include the hearing impaired; visually impaired, learning disabled, physically and health impaired, the gifted and talented; mild mentally retarded, pastorials and nomadic learners, etc. The inclusive school arrangement aims at promoting equal access to education for both regular and special needs learners; and requires that special arrangement is made including modification of curricular and instructional strategies, provision of relevant teaching and learning facilities and materials to cater for the needs of all learners and provide necessary/special support, especially for special needs learners, so that all learners gain optimally from their academic

endeavours. This inclusive school environment provides a combination of specially trained teachers, specialists/professionals for every individual student with varied special needs, paraprofessionals and regular teachers, non-academic staff and regular students, all working for attainment of the goals of the school. The school management and staff are expected to have a philosophy of building mutual trust, emphasizing academic excellent and building collective staff commitment to ensure that students within the school have positive social relationship, work collectively, and become focused on achieving excellence in their academic pursuit.

Inclusive schooling by its nature therefore requires a collective effort that every member of the school is expected to be aware of and to value differences that exist within the community. With the help of trained personnel the students with special needs are encouraged to work harder and perform at their optimal level. This has to do with developing their potentials, motivating them and building their self-esteem and teaching them coping skills as tools that they need to be the best in their academic endeavours. This collective effort by the entire school community including the school management, the school staff and parent towards ensuring that students learn well and achieve academic excellence revolves around the concept of academic optimism.

Reeves (2010) defined Academic Optimism as a collective set of beliefs concerning the strengths and capabilities within a school for achievement. It embodies strong principal leadership; high expectations; an emphasis on basic skills; an orderly environment and frequent and systematic students' assessment (Hoy, Hoy, and Tarter, 2006 and Edmonds, 1979); which generates shared belief among stakeholders that a school's faculty can work with students to succeed academically (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Academic optimism is made up of three components: academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust collectively working together to gear, motivate and ensure achievement of all students in the school.

Academic emphasis centres on the schools goal towards ensuring that the teachers teach well and the learners' work very hard towards achieving academic success. Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) defined academic emphasis as a general perspective of the importance of academics in a school held by administrators, teachers, and students themselves. Hoy and Tarter (1992) conceptually defined academic emphasis as the extent to which the school is driven by a quest for excellence. Academic emphasis is a shared belief among the school community as a cardinal goal for everyone (school administrators, teachers and students). Bevel (2010) regarded academic emphasis as a quest for academic excellence which includes high goals, an orderly achievement environment, motivated students, and an appreciation for student's achievement. In fact, it is more than a quest for excellence. It is

the placement of academics as the primary focus of the administration, teachers, students, and parents.

Another important component of academic optimism is collective efficacy which means everyone member of the school community is committed to the goal of academic success and everyone is determined to achieve academic excellence. Collective efficacy is defined as the perceptions of teachers in a specific school that the faculty as a whole can execute courses of action required to positively affect students achievement (Hoy,smith &Sweetland, 2002).

In the same vein faculty trust is necessary to bring about success in every arm of the school organizational goal. Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland(2002) defined trust as an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open. At the end, everyone member of the school community is able to work collectively together for achievement of schools goals. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2000) stated that faculty trust as applied to schools is tied to seven similarities or facets. These include vulnerability; confidence; benevolence; reliability; competence; honesty and openness. Faculty trust is crucial to efficiency and effectiveness of work and achievement of the school, for everyone to be able to relate well and work together to achieve the optimism belief of the school geared towards academic success and achievement.

For a student to achieve academic excellence, he must have a desire, a compelling force, a willingness, commitment and zeal/passion to succeed. The student must be motivated to achieve academic goals. Agbesha (2012) posited that motivation is a psychological process that arouses, directs, and sustains a person's behaviour; that is, an internal or external force that is acting on or within a person that directs him/her to engage in a goal-oriented behaviour and maintains that behaviour. According to Pintrich and Zusho (2002), academic motivation refers to 'internal processes that instigate and sustain activities aimed at achieving specific academic goals'. In effect, academic motivation means the internal process in an individual which spurs him to set an academic goal, plan towards achieving the goal and strive with passion towards actualization of the academic goal. Self-determination theorists posit that academic motivation is multidimensional in nature, and is comprised of three global types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Intrinsic motivation is when an individual derives joy and satisfaction in his actions or behaviours toward a desire or goal not because of any external rewards or reinforcement. This implies that intrinsic motivation is a self-motivated or self determined form of academic motivation. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is a desire towards academic achievement borne from the desire for reward that

the student stands to receive or gain. This implies that extrinsic motivation is a self-reward form of academic motivation. Amotivation is regarded as lack of motivation on the part of the student to achieve academic goals. It is important to note that beside amotivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are geared towards academic success or achievement of the student.

The individual's emotions are very crucial in his disposition to work with people around him. When he is in a stable and happy state, he relates well with others, is better disposed to work effectively as an individual and with a group. Having the competence to relate well with others is necessary for an individual to cope or deal with his emotions (state of being happy, or moody or isolated or happy) and still functions well in the environment where he finds himself. Holeyannavar (2009) posited that emotional competence is the ability of an individual to express and control emotions as well as to cope with problem emotions and thus encourage positive emotions in an effective manner. This implies that irrespective of the difficulties or challenges or special needs that may be confronting an individual, being high in emotional competence requires living a stable life, controlling one's emotions, relating well with others and maintaining a positive attitude to situations in life which applies to academic achievement. Emotional competence requires a skill or training that helps the individual to achieve his academic goals. The skill is concerned with accurate or effective perception, comprehension, regulation and utilization of affect and affective information (Giardini and Frese, 2002). In other words Emotional competence will enable an individual to surmount challenges in academic endeavours and attain academic excellence. It will help the individual to sustain academic motivation, learn, study hard, work with others in groups and spare time to read, master all learning materials required for assessment, discipline self against procrastination, playing, etc and be able to excel in academic endeavour.

The discussion above on issues relating to academic optimism, academic motivation and emotional competence, shows that the three concepts are vital and needed for academic excellence. Inclusive schools which are specially established to promote academic excellence among regular and special needs learners alike, has a responsibility to ensure that academic optimism, students academic motivation and emotional competence are sustained for students' optimal academic performance. In reality however, it is not certain if inclusive schools are living up to this expectation. The state of academic optimism, students' academic motivation and emotional competence in the inclusive school under study was not certain. In order to unravel this uncertainty, the researchers embarked on the conduct of this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the state of academic optimism, students' academic motivation and emotional competence in an inclusive school setting. Specifically, the study was also designed to

1. determine if regular and special needs students will differ in their ratings of the school on academic optimism.
2. ascertain whether regular and special needs students of the inclusive school will differ in their levels of academic motivation and emotional competence.
3. find out if the special needs students in the inclusive school will differ in academic motivation and emotional competence due to the nature of their challenges.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. How is the inclusive school rated on academic optimism, students' academic motivation and emotional competence?
2. How do regular and special needs students differ in their ratings of the inclusive school on academic optimism?
3. What is the difference in academic motivation and emotional competence between the regular and special needs students in the inclusive school?
4. How do special needs students differ in their academic motivation and emotional competence due to the nature of their challenges?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level to facilitate decision making on the issues raised in the study.

1. There is no significant difference in regular and special needs students' mean ratings of the inclusive school on academic optimism.
2. Regular and special needs students of the inclusive school do not differ significantly in their academic motivation and emotional competence.
3. Special needs students do not differ significantly in their academic motivation due to the nature of their challenges.
4. Special needs students do not differ significantly in emotional competence due to the nature of their challenges.

Method

The survey research design was adopted in carrying out this research. It was conducted in an inclusive school in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. Four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the

conduct of the research. Sixty-one (61) students of the Junior and Senior Secondary School sections of the school (35 regular and 26 special needs students) constituted the population and sample of the study. The sample was purposively drawn. The researchers sought the permission of the school authority and also got the consent of the students to participate in the study. Three instruments were utilized for data collection. They included School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) adapted to the scale developed by Hoy (2005), Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) adapted to the scale developed by Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Brière, Sénécal, & Vallières, (1992), and Emotional Competence Scale (ECS) developed by Bharadwaj and Sharma (1995). The SAOS had 30 items and was responded to on a five point likert type scale. The total score to obtain was 150 and the minimum was 30. A calculated mean score of 90 was adopted as the criterion for decision making. For the AMS, there were 28 items, responded to on a five point likert type scale. Total score to obtain was 140 while 28 was the minimum. 84 was adopted as the criterion mean score. In the case of the ECS, there were 30 items, responded to on a four point scale, with 120 as the total score and 30 as minimum score obtainable. A calculated mean score of 80 was the criterion. The two adapted instruments SAOS and AMS were validated by two specialists in Educational Psychology and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation. Their reliability co-efficients were determined using the test-retest method which produced reliability co-efficients of 0.73 and 0.87 for the SAOS and the AMS respectively. To avoid boredom, the instruments were administered on alternate days with the assistance of one special teacher and one regular teacher. Mean (x) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions; while t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the null hypotheses. Students' status (Regular/Special Needs) and nature of challenges among Special Needs Students were the independent variables of the study; while Academic Optimism, Academic Motivation and Emotional Competence were the dependent variables of this study.

Results

Results got after data analysis were presented in the tables below.

Table 1: Mean (x) and Standard Deviation (SD) ratings on the state of Academic Optimism, Students' Academic Motivation and Emotional Competence in the Inclusive School.

Variables	N	X	SD
Academic Optimism	61	121.93	29.30
Students' Academic Motivation	61	110.38	17.55
Students' Emotional Competence	61	102.12	21.28

Data in Table 1 showed that the inclusive school had Academic Optimism Mean (x) score of 121.93; Student' Academic Motivation mean

(x) score of 110.38 and Students Emotional Competence mean (x) score of 102.12 respectively. These individual mean (x) scores which are higher than their respective criterion mean (x) scores, SAOS (90), AMS (84) and ECS (80), showed that the school was rated high in academic optimism, while the students also rated high in academic motivation and emotional competence.

Table 2: Mean (x) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Difference in Regular and Special Needs Students' ratings of the School on Academic Optimism

Variable	Subjects	N	X	SD
Academic Optimism	Regular students	36	131.37	26.12
	Special needs students	25	109.23	28.99

Table 2 showed that regular students Academic optimism rating of the school produced a mean (x) score of 131.37 while special needs students rating of the school on Academic Optimism produced a mean (x) score of 109.23. This showed that both regular and special needs students rated the school high on academic optimism as the calculated means scores are higher than the criterion mean score for Academic Optimism (90). However, the regular students rated the school higher in academic optimism than their Special Needs Students counterparts.

Table 3: Mean (x) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Academic Motivation and Emotional Competence of regular and special needs students in the Inclusive School.

Variable	Subjects	N	X	SD
Academic Motivation	Regular students	36	115.91	13.48
	Special student	25	102.92	19.78
Emotional Competence	Regular students	36	112.37	20.92
	Special student	25	88.31	12.08

In Table 3, regular and Special Needs Students had mean (x) scores of 115.91 and 102.92 respectively in Academic Motivation. This implied that both regular and special needs students rated high in Academic Motivation as their mean (x) scores were higher than the criteria (84). However, the regular students proved more academically motivated. In the same vein, regular and special needs students had mean (x) scores of 112.37 and 88.31 respectively in Emotional Competence. This implied that both regular and special needs students rated high in emotional competence; as their mean (x) scores were higher than the criterion mean scores for EC (80); although the regular students were higher in emotional competence.

Table 4: Mean (x) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Academic Motivation and Emotional Competence of special needs students due to nature of their challenges.

Variable	Subjects	N	X	SD
Academic Motivation	Hearing Impaired	15	96.20	14.37
	Visually Impaired	5	131.00	5.55
	Mobility Impaired	6	89.40	10.16
Emotional Competence	Hearing Impaired	15	84.73	6.14
	Visually Impaired	6	102.33	17.64
	Mobility Impaired	5	82.31	12.08

In Table 4 mean (x) scores of hearing impaired, visually impaired and mobility impaired students were 96.20, 131.00 and 89.40 respectively in Academic motivation. These mean (x) values indicated that the Special Needs Students of different challenges rated high in academic motivation. However, the visually impaired students were the most academically motivated, followed by the hearing and mobility impaired students respectively. Also, the mean (x) scores of hearing impaired, visually impaired and mobility impaired students in emotional competence were 84.73, 102.33 and 82.31 respectively. This showed that the special needs students rated high in Emotional Competence, however, visually impaired students emerged the most emotionally competent, followed by the hearing impaired and mobility impaired students respectively.

Table 5: t-test analysis of difference in Regular and Special needs students mean (x) ratings of the inclusive school on Academic Optimism

Variables		N	X	SD	Df	Cal. t	Crit.t	Remark
Academic Optimism	Regular	35	131.37	26.12	59	3.12	2.04	S
	Special	26	109.23	28.99				

Data in Table 5 indicated that the t-test analysis of regular and special needs students mean (x) ratings of the inclusive school on academic optimism gave a t-calculated value of 3.12 which is greater than the critical t-value of 2.04 at 0.05 level of significance and df of 59. The null one was therefore rejected. This implied that there was significant difference in regular and special needs students’ mean (x) ratings of the inclusive school on academic optimism, in favour of the regular students.

Table 6: t-test analysis of difference in regular and special needs students academic motivation and emotional competence ratings.

Variables		N	X	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit.t	Remark
Academic Motivation	Regular	35	115.91	13.48	59	3.05	2.04	S
	Special	26	102.92	19.78				
Emotional Competence	Regular	35	112.37	20.92	59	5.25	2.04	S
	Special	26	88.31	12.08				

Result in Table 6 showed that t-test analysis of regular and special needs students academic motivation gave a t-calculated value of 3.05 which

is greater than the critical t-value of 2.04 at 0.05 level of significance and df of 59. The null hypothesis 2 in respect of academic motivation was rejected. This implied that there is significant difference in regular and special needs students rating on academic motivation, in favour of regular students. Further observation of Table 6 indicated that the t-test analysis of regular and special needs students' emotional competence gave a t-calculated value of 5.25 which is greater the critical t-value of 2.04 at 0.05 level of significance and df of 59. The null hypothesis 2 in respect of emotional competence was rejected. This implied that there was significant difference in regular and special needs students' ratings on emotional competence, in favour of regular students.

Table 7: One-Way ANOVA of special needs students' academic motivation due to the nature of their challenges

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Crit.F	Remark
Between Groups	6322.246	2	3161.123	21.016	2.25	S
Within Groups	3459.600	23	150.417			
Total	9781.846	25				

Data in Table 7 showed that the calculated F-value of 21.016 is greater than the F-critical value of 2.25 at 0.05 alpha level and dfs of 2 and 25. The null hypothesis 3 was therefore rejected. This implied that there was significant difference in academic motivation of special needs students in the inclusive school due to the nature of their challenges.

Table 8: Scheffe's Post Hoc Pair Wise comparison of Mean (x) Difference in academic motivation of special needs students due to the nature of their challenges

Subjects	Means (x)	Mean (x) Difference	Sig.
Visually Impaired	102.33	-17.600*	.003
Mobility Impaired	82.20	2.533	.877
Hearing Impaired	84.73	17.600*	.003
Mobility Impaired	82.20	20.133*	.008
Hearing Impaired	84.73	-2.533	.570
Visually Impaired	102.33	-20.133*	.008

*. The mean difference is significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 9: One-Way Anova of difference in special needs students' emotional competence due to the nature of their challenges

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Crit.F	Remark
Between Groups	1558.472	2	779.236	8.579	2.25	S
Within Groups	2089.067	23	90.829			
Total	3647.538	25				

From Table 9 above, it was observed that the F-calculated value of 8.579 is greater than F-critical value of 2.25 at 0.05 alpha level and dfs of 2 and 25. The null hypothesis 4 was therefore rejected. This implied that there

was significant difference in emotional competence of special needs students due to the nature of their challenges.

Table 10: Scheffe's Post-Hoc Pair Wise comparison of mean (x) Differences in emotional competence of special needs students due to the nature of their challenges

Subjects	Means (x)	Mean (x) Difference	Sig.
Visually Impaired	131.00	-34.800*	.000
Mobility Impaired	89.40	6.80000	.570
Hearing Impaired	96.20	34.800*	.000
Mobility Impaired	89.40	41.600*	.000
Hearing Impaired	96.20	-6.800	.570
Visually Impaired	131.00	-41.600*	.000

*. The mean difference is significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Summary of Findings

From the findings of this study, it was concluded that:

- The inclusive school was rated high in academic optimism and high levels of academic motivation and emotional competence were found among the students.
- Regular students rated the inclusive school higher in academic optimism than the special needs students. The difference in their ratings was statistically significant.
- Regular students rated higher than special needs students in academic motivation and emotional competence and the difference that existed between them on these two issues was statistically significant in favour of the regular students.
- Special needs students with different challenges (hearing, visual and mobility impairments) rated high in academic motivation and emotional competence, though the visually impaired students rated higher in the two cases than the hearing and mobility impaired ones respectively.
- The differences in academic motivation and emotional competence of the special needs students' due to nature of challenges were statistically significant, in favour of the visually impaired students.

Discussion

School Academic optimism, students' academic motivation and emotional competence in an inclusive school were investigated in this study. Findings indicated that the inclusive school was rated high in academic optimism. The high academic optimism rating of the inclusive school by students could be an indication that the school has done well in providing a conducive learning environment, with both human and material resources and support provided; thus making the students see the school as one that promotes academic excellence. Findings also indicated that regular students

rated the inclusive school higher in academic optimism than the special needs students. The difference in their ratings was statistically significant. It is possible that regular students were more satisfied with the provisions made by the school for learning and so were not too critical in assessing the school on academic optimism. Another reason may be that they do not have challenges that would have compelled them to be more critical in assessing the school, hence their high rating of the school on Academic Optimism. Naturally, the special needs learners in an inclusive school setting will make greater demands on the school concerning situations or conditions that will promote learning amongst them. It is therefore possible that the special needs learners still considered that relevant facilities, personal and professional support are not adequate to effectively promote learning among them, compared to their regular students' counterparts; hence, their lower rating of the school on Academic Optimism.

High levels of academic motivation and emotional competence were found among the students. That the students (regular and challenged alike) rated high in Academic motivation and Emotional Competence is not surprising; since they rated their school high in Academic Optimism. Secondly, it could be attributed to the influence of inclusive schooling on regular and special needs students. Students in inclusive schools are opportuned to enjoy good learning environment and attention from the school administration, teachers, other school staff. They also enjoy social interaction among themselves. More importantly, inclusion provides students opportunity to enjoy Individual Education Plan (IEP) which is core to the functioning of inclusive education (Oladayo, 2012 and Winter & O'Raw, 2010).

However, the regular students rated higher than special needs students in academic motivation and emotional competence and the difference that existed between them on these two issues was statistically significant in favour of the regular students. That regular students rated higher than the special needs learners is understandable. Regular students have fewer challenges and therefore will be more academically motivated and emotionally stable. This could be the reason why they perform better than the special needs learners in inclusive classrooms (Ekeh & Oladayo, 2013).

Special needs students with different challenges (hearing, visual and mobility impairments) rated high on academic motivation and emotional competence, though the visually and hearing impaired respectively rated higher in the two cases than the mobility impaired ones. The differences in academic motivation and emotional competence of the special needs students' due to nature of challenges were statistically significant. It could be that impaired mobility exerted greater stress on the students compared to

visual and hearing impairment. It is also possible that the visually and hearing impaired students' upper hand in academic motivation and emotional competence over their mobility impaired counterparts could be a function of variation in people's psychological dispositions towards academic activities and people around them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. Inclusive schooling should be encouraged by the federal and state governments in Nigeria; since the conditions for its operations in terms of provision of requisite human and material resources and support, make it an academically optimistic arrangement for academic excellence, enhanced academic motivation and emotional competence among learners.
2. The special needs learners require more attention, encouragement and support from the entire inclusive school community for more positive perception of the academic optimism status of the school, enhanced academic motivation and emotional competence.
3. Regular students should be encouraged to maintain closer ties with special needs students in order to help remove inferiority complex and foster cooperative learning for improved academic motivation and emotional competence.

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