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EDITOR'S COMMENT

The 2010 edition of *Contemporary Humanities* comes with a difference. It comprises two volumes with a brilliant array of empirical studies which explores, investigates and interrogates viable research issues in education, literature, history, communication, information research management, gender issues, philosophy and religion.

The increase in the number of articles attests to the wide coverage and positive reception of the journal in various higher institutions nationally.

In line with our vision of publishing a world class journal of research activities and our tradition of vigorous scrutiny, the articles in this edition have been critiqued, revised and updated. We believe that this edition, in a greater measure will contribute significantly to the knowledge revolution in education and humanistic studies.

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Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa (Ph.D)
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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR ABILITY TO MASTER ACADEMIC TASKS AS CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS AMONG SECRETARIAL STUDIES STUDENTS OF FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC ILARO.

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Abstract

One hundred and six Secretarial Studies Students responded to questionnaire designed to determine the students' perception to master academic task. Four hypotheses guided the conduct of the study. Statistical mean, standard deviation and t-test significant of .05 level were used to analyzed the hypotheses. Analysis of the results revealed significant differences in the students' perception of their ability to master academic task based on their perception, level of study, choice of study and interest; while no significant differential was experienced based on mode of study, gender and age. It is therefore concluded that academic success among higher institutions students are significantly correlated with satisfaction with course of study, academic environment and learners' characteristics

Keywords: students' academic task, academic success, secretarial studies, ability and academic self-efficiency

Introduction

Human behaviour is directed towards achieving one goal or the others. Thus, it intuitively clear that all of us share a need to achieve to some degree. The indolent and lazy ones among us presumably have less of it than the active, striving and energetic members of our society; but each and everyone has at least enough need for achievement to do the slightest minimal work a day. According to Ibeh {1985} in Ayodele {2003} emphasized that for some people, intellectual and educational attainment may represent the pinnacle of achievement, while for others making money, building houses/factory, marrying women, riding expensive cars or eating one square meal a day, may seem the only thing worth striving for.

In specific terms, students' academic success is enriched in the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, manipulative, communicative skills and life skills that goes beyond just certification. However, students perception of their own ability to master academic task could be seen as the personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action that required to successfully accomplish designated types of academic task. This is related to the academic self-efficiency as postulated by Bandura {1997}, Zimmerman, Bandura and Mart inez-pons, 1992. These judgment influence how students think, motivate themselves to act {Bandura, 1995}. Students' belief in their capabilities to master academic activities affects their aspiration, level of interest, intellectual pursuits and their academic achievement {Alfassi, 2004}.

Furthermore, student with high perception of his/her ability to master academic tasks is motivated to persist when faced with setback and willing to exert effort to overcome difficulties. Multon, Brown and Lent {1991} confirmed that students who believe they are

capable of performing academic task use more cognitive strategies, persist longer and undertake difficult and more challenging assignments than students who doubt their capabilities. Researches have shown that academic self-sufficiency beliefs are correlated with academic performances such as semester and final year grades, in-class seatwork and homework, exams, essays and reports. These findings also suggested that students' perception of their ability to master academic tasks may predict more accurately their motivation and academic achievement than other psychological constructs (Alfassi, 2004, Pajares, 1996, Schunk, 1989)

Ayeduso (1997), who assessed the causes of poor performances in typing and shorthand among business education students in Federal College of Education, Kontagora, observed that over the years, the overall performance of the students in typing and shorthand has been generally poor. And the inadequate entry behaviour of the students has been identified as the causes of this poor performance.

Studies have revealed that students' personal judgement of their capabilities to succeed is an ingredient that influences how they think, act and motivates themselves (Bandura, 1995, Alfassi, 2004). Also, academic failure experienced by students is inherent in some affective factors and not just on students' mental ability alone, Agbi (2006) identifies learners' characteristics that affect academic success as study behaviours, interest, motivation and child's readiness (age). Empirically, studies have shown that age, gender, class size, school (Murdock, 2001), anxiety, tension stress, nervousness (Egbuke, 2001), family size, maternal education, poverty, home environment, family size, maternal education, poverty, home environment, family unit and gender (McAdon, 1994), affects academic success, thus student's belief influence emotional states such as stress, anxiety and depression which can intrude on and impair intellectual functioning (Zimmerman, 1995).

Statement Of The Problem

In the increasingly competitive markets for high quality students entering higher institutions, there is need to identify and evaluate the effects of students' perception of their ability to master academic tasks and being able to succeed academically. Be that as it may, Bandura (1977, 1997) stated that performance accomplishment are the most influential source of efficacy formation. And since the students are in a unique position to provide an assessment of their academic self-efficacy, educational expectations and academic success; a survey of such students is in order.

Research Questions

The central questions addressed in this study are:

- i. Is there any influence exerted on academic success by students' perception of their ability to master academic tasks?
- ii. Would students' perception of their ability to master academic tasks be influenced by:
 - a. Level of education,
 - b. Mode of study and
 - c. Learners' variables such as gender, interest, age, initial choice of study and entry qualification?

Research Hypotheses

To achieve the goals and objectives of this study, four hypotheses were raised.

1. There is no significant difference between the students who have positive perception of their ability to master academic task and those who do not
2. There is no significant difference between OND and HND students' perception of their ability to master academic task.
3. There is no significant difference between full-time and part-time students in their perception of their ability to master academic task.
4. Learners' variables have no significant influence on students' ability to master academic tasks.

Methodology

Design: The design used in this study is the descriptive survey research design. This method will enable the researcher to carefully analyze the sampled population with a view in inferring the reasons for students' academic success based on their perception to master academic task.

Sample: One hundred and six (106) secretarial studies students randomly selected from Federal Polytechnic Ilaro participated in the study. The respondents were selected in the following order: 53 HND and OND students respectively; 53 full-time and 53 part-time; 33 male and 73 female; while 39 respondents picked secretarial studies as their first choice at the point of entry and 67 respondents picked it for second choice.

Instrumentation: A self- developed questionnaire tagged: "Students' Perception to Master Academic Tasks (SPMAT) constituted the main research instrument. The instrument has two sections (A and B). Section A gathered information on the students' sex, age, mode of entry, level of study, choice of course at the point entry, interest in the course etc., while section B contained twenty items on students' perception to master academic tasks. The questionnaire was structured along likert four-point scale, which ranges from not at all true (1) to exactly true (4).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument: The questionnaire was subjected to face validity and content validity by the assistance of two (2) experts in research methods. Some corrections were thereafter made. The reliability was ascertained through test-retest method within two weeks intervals. The validity co-efficient index of 0.73 and a test-retest reliability of 0.81 were obtained. This means that the instrument was reliable and valid for use.

Method of Data Analysis: Analyses was carried out using the t-test statistics using SPSS computer packages with significant level fixed at an alpha of 5%.

Results

Table 1: *Difference between students who positively and negatively perceived their ability to perform academic task.*

Variable	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remarks
Positive Perception	61	19.36	4.37	104	3.03	1.98	S*
Negative Perception	45	15.41	3.74				

S* = Significant

This result shows that the hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between the students who have positive perception of their ability to master academic task and those who do not was rejected. The mean for the positive perception was 19.36 with the standard deviation of 4.37 while that of negative perception were 15.41 and 3.75 respectively. The calculated t-value was 3.03 as against the critical value of 1.98 at .05 level of significance. The implication of this result is that students who have positive perception of their ability to master academic task will always do well academically.

Table 2: Difference in students perception based on Level of study

Variable	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remarks
H.N.D.	53	18.77	4.04	104	2.17	1.98	S*
O.N.D.	53	15.53	3.86				

S* = Significant

The subjects' mean scores were analyzed ($x=18.77$ and 15.53) with a standard deviation of 4.04 and 3.86 respectively. The calculated t-value was 2.17 as against the table value of 1.98 at .05 level of significant. This showed that there is a significant difference between HND and OND students' perception of their ability to master academic task. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This showed that higher diploma students (HND) perception of their ability to master academic task is higher (18.77) than the ordinary diploma students (15.53).

Table 3: Difference in students' perception based on mode of study

Variable	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remarks
Full - time	53	16.18	3.77	104	1.93	1.98	NS
Part time	53	15.77	3.18				

NS = Not Significant

This hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between full-time and part-time students' in their perception of their ability to master academic task. From the table, results revealed the critical value of 1.98 to be higher than the calculated t-value of 1.93 at .05 level of significance. This shows that the hypothesis was retained.

Table 4: Difference in perception based on learners variables

Variable		N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remarks
Gender	Male	33	19.98	3.51	104	-1.44	1.98	NS
	Female	73	18.86	3.11				
Choice of Study	First Choice	39	18.72	4.08	104	3.68	1.98	S*
	Second Choice	67	15.01	3.45				
Age	16-19 years	59	18.12	3.51	104	1.60	1.98	NS
	20 years above	47	19.36	3.10				
Interest	Yes	74	15.41	4.75	104	2.07	1.98	S*
	No	32	13.83	4.38				

S* = Significant

NS = Not Significant

The results in Table 4 above revealed that gender and age are not significant enough to influence students' ability to master academic task. On the other hand, a significant difference was observed in the students' perception of their ability to master academic tasks based on interest and their choice of course of study. The implication of the outcome of this finding is that ability to master academic task is not only inherent in the learners alone but associated with other factors.

Discussion Of Findings

The results of the first hypothesis revealed that there was ~~no~~ significant difference between the students who have positive perception of their ability to master academic tasks and those who do not. The outcome of the findings do not spark much surprise since earlier works have demonstrated that students' beliefs in their capabilities to master academic activities affects their aspirations, level of interest, intellectual pursuits and academic achievements (Alfassi, 2004, Bandura, 1995). The manifestation of very low GPA among some students in secretarial studies in Federal Polytechnic Ilaro is an indication that such students had failed to master academic tasks. This implies that mastering of academic task plays a facilitative role in fostering school engagement and academic success.

Another significant difference was found between HND and OND students' perception of their ability to master academic task. This could be explained that the difference experienced between the two categories of the students is based on the fact that HND students opt for secretarial studies based on their foundation at OND or work at hand, while those OND students' academic success/failure may be due to the fact that most students feel they are trapped into accepting and offering the course. The findings lend credence to the issue of inadequate entry behaviour of the students, which have been identified as one of the major causes of poor performance in secretarial studies (Ayeduso, 1997, Okhawere, 2006).

Hypothesis three indicates a non-significant difference between full-time and part-time students in the perception of their ability to perform academic task. The implication of this finding is that students' mode of entry have little or nothing to do with students academic success. Thus, this finding is in tune with Pintrich & De Groot (1990) conception of academic

success that students need to have both the "will" and "skill".

Finally, the statistical analysis of hypothesis four revealed that gender and age are not significant enough to influence students' ability to master academic task. The report contradicts the findings of McAdoo (1994) and Murdoch (2001) that age and gender affects academic success. Further revelation on this hypothesis shows significant differences in the students' perception of their ability to master academic tasks based on interest and choice of course of study. This finding corroborates previous researches that causes of poor performance and academic success among students are inadequate entry behaviour (Ayeduso, 1997) and lack of interest (Agbi, 2006).

Conclusion

The most important finding in this study is the effect of students' perception of their ability to master academic task and achieve academic success among secretarial studies students. It crystal clears that students' academic success is positively related to students' self-perceptions and interest. It is also evident from the statistical analyses of the hypotheses that age, gender, and mode of entry into higher institutions are not significant enough to influence academic success.

However, academic success and achievement are not independent factors; they significant correlated with satisfaction with course of study, academic environment and learners' characteristics as identified by Agbi (2006) to be study behaviour, interest, motivation and readiness of the child.

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