Task Persistence and Students' Academic Engagement as Predictors of Students' Academic Achievement in Economics in Okigwe Education Zone 1 of Imo State

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Abstract
This study was conducted on task persistence and students' academic engagement as predictors of secondary school students` academic achievement in Economics. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. The study was carried out in Okigwe Education Zone 1 of Imo State. A correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 1445 senior secondary school II Economics students for 2022/2023 academic session, with sample of 232 Economics students from 6 secondary schools in three local government area; this was drawn using multi-stage sampling technique. The study adopted three instruments for data collection; task persistence questionnaire (TPQ), Students' engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) and Economics Achievement Test (EAT). The internal consistency reliability indices of TPQ and SEQ were determined to be 0.83 and 0.81 using Cronbach alpha while the internal consistency reliability of (EAT) was 0.85 using KR-20. Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis were adopted to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result shows that task persistence and students' engagement significantly predict students' academic achievement in Economics. From these findings, it was recommended among others that, teachers should make sure that students are actively involved in teaching and learning process by so doing, the academic achievement of the students will be improved.

Key Words: *Task Persistence, Academic Engagement, Academic Achievement, Economics*

Introduction

The problems of poor academic achievement in Economics have drawn researchers' interest, making researchers to look for solution to the poor academic achievement in Economics. According to Deshpande and Kabeer (2024), Economics is a social science subject that deals with understanding, selecting, measuring as well as making choices in order to make adequate use of the available scarce resources. Economics deals with production distributions and consumptions of goods and services. Chapelow (2019) stipulated that the main objective of establishing Economics in senior secondary school is to enable students to attain knowledge concerning the various changes, adjustments and reforms which are common in the Economic system of the country, to create room for students to make choice particularly when they are faced with limited resources. To help in building objectivity among students and other individuals as well as to make students rational thinkers (Oparaji and Ugwu, 2019). For these objectives to be actualized there is need for students to do well in their internal and external examination which will improve the students' academic achievement in Economics. Džinović, Đević and Đerić (2023) asserted that academic achievement is the grades used by teachers, schools and examination bodies to explain the level of students' learning outcomes based on the outlined objectives. Academic achievement is the yardstick in determining whether effective teaching and learning has taken place or not.

Depressingly, students' academic achievement in Economics in recent year has been very poor in Nigeria. Particularly, in Okigwe Educational Zone one of Imo State. This is evidence in West African Examinations Council Chief Examiner's Reports of 2020, 2021 and 2022. With the percentage failure rate of 64.9%, 78.5% and 67.3% respectively. The proportion of students that obtained a pass mark in each of this years has never been up to 45%. As a result of this poor academic achievement in Economics in Okigwe Education Zone of Imo state. Government established more schools, renovations where carried out in the old school and new sets of administrators were employed yet academic achievement of students remains poor. In line with the poor academic achievement of students in Economic, Okoro, Nwagbo, Ugwuanyi and Ugwu (2022) found that factors that could influence students' academic achievement are motivation, self-control, and self-efficacy, location, students' engagement and task persistence. Ezugwu and Oguguo (2022) defined task persistence as a conscientiousness, which explains the ability of a student to focus on tasks and making adequate effort to overcome challenges that requires critical thinking and suitable decision making. Task persistence could be seen as the ability and the capability to hold or continues carrying a task until the purposes of the task are successfully accomplished. According to Adene, Offordille, Ojonugwa and Ugbo (2021) who worked on parental task persistence as correlate of school adjustment and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Physics, the result indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between parental task persistence and school adjustment of senior secondary school students in physics. Again, there is relationship existing between task persistence and academic achievement of students in physics. Hence, the level of persistence among parents affects the students' academic achievements as well as academic performance of students. Ezugwu and Oguguo (2022), in their study pointed out that task persistence predicts academic achievement and other life outcomes. The findings of the above studies need to be re-examined to ascertain the consistency and reliability of their results. This is because tasks persistence may vary among students from various zone, state, countries and schools. A student who is task persistence in nature

is likely to participate actively during teaching and learning which could be called students engagement. According to Delfino (2019), students' engagement is a psychological energy enthused towards learning in order to understand and at the same time have a mastery of skills and knowledge. Students` engagement is the interest that students' demonstrate while teaching and learning is going on. Delfino (2019) conducted an investigation on student engagement and academic performance of students in Partido State University in Kenya. The result shows that there is a positive significant relationship between students' engagement and academic performance. In addition, Lei and Cui (2018) carried out a study on the relationship between students' engagement and academic achievement based on meta-analysis. The result shows that there is a positive relationship between students' engagement and academic achievement. Delfino (2019), who stated a positive significant relationship between students' engagement and academic performance among others, further buttressed that students' achievement is extremely poor because the students refuse to concentrate when teaching and learning is going on and do not follow the teacher instructions or study after class. Considering the findings of these authors and poor academic achievement of the students alongside lack of literature on task persistence and students engagement in Okigwe Education Zone of Imo State, the researchers deemed it necessary to investigate more on Task persistence and students' academic engagement as predictors of students' academic achievement in Economics in Okiwe Education Zone of Imo State.

Purpose of the study.

1. To determine the strength of relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in Economics and task persistence.
2. To determine the strength of relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in Economics and students' academic engagement
3. To determine the amount of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to task persistence and students' academic engagement.

Research questions

1. What is the strength of relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in Economics and task persistence?
2. What is the strength of relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in Economics and students' academic engagement?
3. What is the amount of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to task persistence and academic engagement?

Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between task persistence and students' academic achievement in Economics.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between students' engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics.

Ho_3: Task persistence and students' academic engagement are not significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.

Methodology

Design of the study; correlation research design was adopted in this study. A design which permit a researcher to establish relationship between two or more variables (Nworgu, 2015). This design is appropriate for the study because the study sought to establish the relationship that exists between task persistence, students' academic engagement and academic achievement of Secondary School Students in Economics in Okigwe Education zone of Imo State.

Population of the Study; The population of this study comprised of 1445, from Onuimo L.GA; 225 students in 5 schools, Isiala Mbano L.G.A; 804 students in 15 schools, Okigwe L.G.A; 416 students in 10 schools making total of 1445 Economics students in 30 public secondary schools in Okigwe Educational zone 1 of Imo State. (Source: Secondary Education Management Board Okigwe, 2020).

Sample and Sampling Technique; The sample size of 232 was used for the study. This was selected using multistage sampling technique. At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select all the three (3) Local Government Areas; Onuimo L.GA, Isiala Mbano L.G.A and Okigwe L.G.A. At the second stage, base on the differences in number of schools in these three local government areas, Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to sample three schools (Isiala Mbano L.G.A. proportion is 3 schools, Okigwe L.G.A proportion 2 schools while Onuimo L.GA. proportion is 1 school. Thereafter, simple random sampling was use to sample 3, 2 and 1 school among secondary schools in Isiala Mbano L.G.A, Okigwe L.G.A. and Onuimo L.G.A, respectively.

Instruments for Data Collection; Three instruments task persistence Questionnaire (TPQ), Students Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) and Economics Achievement Test (EAT). SEQ and TPQ were developed by the researcher. The instruments contain, 20 items each related on a four-point scale. 4-Strongly Agree, 3 -Agree, 2 -Disagree and 1 – Strongly Disagree. (SAEQ), was used to measure students' task persistence and academic engagement. Economics Achievement Test (EAT) contains 20 items and was constructed by the researchers using test blueprint. EAT contains instruction and options letter A-D with one as the right option. EAT was developed from 4 topics in SS2 Economics scheme of work. The topics were selected because to the researchers, they are the core topics in Economics among others that appeared in SS2 scheme of work and these topics were pointed out as the areas where students always have failure in senior school certificate examination conducted by the West African Examination Council in Economics according to chief examiner's report. Each correct item in EAT was scored 1 marks. The instrument was used to measure the students' achievement in Economics.

Reliability of the Instruments; pilot testing was conducted to estimate the reliability of the instruments. This was done by administering the instruments on 20 SS2 Economics students in 1 school in Okigwe L.G.A of Imo State which are not part of the schools sampled. This school was used because the school is close to the sampled schools and may have same characteristics with the sampled schools. The internal consistency reliability of the instrument (TPQ) and (SEQ) were established using Cronbach-alpha. The Cronbach-alpha method was used because the instruments were polytomously scored; meaning instruments with no right or wrong answer. The reliability

co-efficient of 0.84 and 0.86 was obtained for (SAEQ) and (LSQ) respectively. In addition, internal consistency reliability of EAT was established using Kudder-Richardson 20 (KR-20). This method was used because it is appropriate for estimating internal consistency of instrument which is dichotomously scored hence, reliability co-efficient of 0.82 was obtained.

Method of Data Collection; The researcher, haven created good relationship with the teachers and the management after submitting a letter of permission to carry out research in those schools. Requested assistance by Economics teachers in each of the schools sampled. This request was granted by all the sampled schools. Therefore, research assistants were briefed on the modalities for data administration and collections thereafter, the research assistants and the researchers applied face-to-face method of data collection and administered the instruments to the respondents. This method was used in order to ensure maximum return of the instrument as well as to enable the researchers attend to participants' questions as they are responding to the research instruments. However, the research assistants helped the researchers in scoring the instrument immediately the subjects finished responding to the instruments. The instrument task persistence and academic engagement questionnaire were scored as follows 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree but Economics achievement test was scored 0 for any wrong answer and 2 for each correct answer Hence, Minimum score obtainable is 0 while the maximum score is 80.

Method of Data Analysis; Pearson product moment correlation was used to answer research question 1 and 2 while research question 3 was answered using multiple regression whereas Pearson and Regression ANOVA were used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level. A Accepting (Nworgu, 2015) assertions, a correlation co-efficient of 0.00 to 0.20 was considered very low, 0.2 to 0.40 considered low, 0.4 to 0.60 moderate, 0.60 to 0.80 was considered high but 0.80 and above was considered very high.

Result

Research question one

What is the strength of relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in Economics and task persistence?

Table 1; Summary of Pearson product moment correlation between Economics students' academic achievement and task persistence

Variables	Task persistence	Academic Achievement
Task Persistence score		
Pearson Correlation	1	0.185
Significant (2-Tailed)		0.005
N	232	232

Academic Achievement		
Pearson Correlation	0.185	1
Significant (2-Tailed)	0.005	
N	232	232

Correlation is significant $p<0.05$

Table 1 shows a very low but positive relationship between task persistence and students' academic achievement in Economics, although the result is significant. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the hypothesis which asserted that there is no significant relationship between task persistence and students' academic achievement was rejected. Hence, the researchers conclude that there is a significant relationship between task persistence and students' academic achievement in Economics.

Research Question two

What is the strength of relationship that exists between students' academic achievement in Economics and students' academic engagement?

Table 2; Summary of Pearson product moment correlation between Economics students' academic achievement and academic engagement

Variables	Academic engagement	Academic Achievement
Academic engagement		
Pearson Correlation	1	0.212
Significant (2-Tailed)		0.001
N	232	232
Academic Achievement		
Pearson Correlation	0.212	1
Significant (2-Tailed)	0.001	
N	232	232

Correlation is significant $p<0.05$

Table 2 shows a low but positive relationship between students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics though the result is significant. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a low but positive relationship between students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the hypothesis which asserted that there is no significant relationship between academic engagement and students' academic achievement was rejected. Hence, the researchers conclude that there is a significant

relationship between students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics.

Research Question three

What is the amount of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to task persistence and students' academic engagement?

Table 3: Output regression analysis for the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to task persistence and students' academic engagement

Model		N	R	R^2
Task persistence and Students Engagement	**Academic Achievement**	232	.232[a]	.052

Result in Table 3 shows the regression analysis of the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to task persistence and students' academic engagement. The result shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.23. This implies a positive low relationship between task persistence, students' academic engagement and students` academic achievement in Economics. The coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of it was 0.05. This implies that 5% variation in students` academic achievement in Economics is attributed to task persistence and students' academic engagement. The result indicates that 95% of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics is attributed to other factors order than task persistence and students' academic engagement.

Table 4: Regression ANOVA result of task persistence and students' academic engagement learning strategies predicting academic achievement in Economics

Source	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Sum of Square	F	Sig
Regression	4568.328	2	2284.164	6.541	.002[b]
Residual	79973.396	229	349.229		
Total	84541.724	231			

a. Dependent Variable: Economics_Achievement
b. Predictors: (Constant), engagement, task

Result in Table 4 shows ($F(1,231) = 6.541$, $p = 0.002$) for prediction of task persistence and students' academic engagement on academic achievement in Economics. Since the probability value of 0.02 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the researchers conclude that task persistence and students' academic engagement are significant predictors of students' academic achievement in Economics.

Discussion

The findings of this study reviewed that there is a low positive significant relationship between task persistence, students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics. The findings of this study is in agreement with the findings of Adene, Offordille, Ojonugwa and Ugbo (2021) who addressed that Parental task persistence has a positive significant relationship with students academic achievement in physics. This study is also in line with the study conducted by Ezugwu and Oguguo (2022) which states that task persistence predicts academic achievement and other life outcomes. The above study is also in line with the findings of Delfino (2019) that there is a positive significant relationship between students' engagement and academic performance. Furthermore, the study is also in consonant with the findings of Lei and Cui (2018) that there is a significant relationship between students' engagement and academic achievement.

Conclusion

The study shows that there is a significant positive relationship between task persistence and students' academic achievement in Economics, the study also shows that there is a significant positive relationship between students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics. Furthermore, the study also shows that there is a significant positive relationship between task persistence, students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics. Therefore, one can conclude that if students are task persistence and are willing to participate actively in Economics classes, those students' academic achievement will improve.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should make sure that students are actively involved in teaching and learning process by so doing, the academic achievement of the students will improve.
2. Parents should monitor their children to understand if their children copy notes on Economics, do their assignment and obtain good marks when they come back from school. This will make the students to develop the interest of engagement, and by so doing the students' academic achievement will improve.
3. State Ministry, education stakeholders as well as federal government should ensure that free conferences and workshops are organized for students and teachers on students' academic engagement.
4. Government should provide adequate learning materials or instructional materials should be made available to school teachers and the students because instructional material creates room for students to engage actively.
5. Guidance and counselling services should be made functional in schools for all students to access. This will bring an ample opportunity for students to understand the importance of engagement during learning as they are always advised by their teachers and parents at home. And when they implement the advice they will attain high academically.

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