

Social Skills as Predictors of Academic Self-Concept among Secondary School Students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

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Abstract

This paper investigated the predictive power of selected social skills (emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity and emotional control) on academic self-concept of secondary school students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. Correlation design was used in the study. A sample of 357 senior secondary two students drawn by multi-stage sampling technique through non-proportionate stratified random sampling method in all the three stages involved. Data for the study were gathered with two instruments constructed by the researchers. They are: Students' Social Skill Inventory (SSSI) and Students' Academic Self-Concept Assessment Scale (SASAS). The instruments were face validated and a reliability coefficient value of 0.74 and 0.77 respectively were obtained and hence considered adequate for the test of reliability. Multiple regression statistics was used to analyse obtained data. The result indicated that emotional control was a key predictor of academic self-concept. Emotional expressivity had a partial prediction of academic self-concept, but sensitivity did not. In view of the finding, it was recommended that students should be encouraged to develop good social skills such as emotional control in order to evolve proper academic self-concept.

Keywords: social skills, academic, self-concept and students

Introduction

High and excellent performance in educational pursuit is the desire of every learner, parents, teachers and government. Certain social skills are prerequisite for greater academic achievement and successful career in life. Hence individuals are expected to develop basic social skills. It is also very essential to evolve high and positive self-concept. This is because self-concept is one of the master keys to achievement. Self-concept is the sum of all interrelated systems of learned beliefs and feelings an individual hold about himself or herself (Azizi & Jamaludin, 2009) ^[2]. Manning (2007) ^[8] stated that self-concept is the feeling of having the ability to excel in academic and non-academic related activities.

Macmillan, Singh and Simoinetta (2001) ^[9] asserted that students' achievement is partly dependent on their self-concept

To support the above Azizi and Jamaludin (2009) ^[2] asserted that positive high self-concept can promote high level of academic achievement among students. In spite of all the characteristics of people with high self-concept, it was still observed that some persons have high self-concepts while some others have low self-concepts. To support this, Frank (2013) ^[6] asserted that sense of self can be positive, negative, high or low according to one's experiences in life and assessment of oneself. In addition, such life experience can distort self-perception. Considering all these, one may say that there are variations in the levels of self-concept students possessed. To this end, it will be good for counsellors, psychologists, researchers and teachers to find out if the variation in the students' self-concepts level may be traced from their social skills. This is because Huitt (2011) ^[7] stated that self-concept is not an inherited factor but a construct that is learned and build by individuals as a result of their interactions with the environment.

On the other hand, social skills are the set of abilities individual used to interact and communicate with one another (Feltosa, Del Prette & Del Prette, 2012) ^[5]. They are also the collection of abilities which are used by individuals to relate positively with one another. That means social skills are the complex abilities that individuals need to keep them on in group participating like group discussion, to adequately adjust in their academics and adapt very well in their environments mostly the strange ones (Stedly, Schwarz, Levin and Luke, 2008) ^[12].

To this end, social skills are the abilities that motivate individuals to cooperate with others by providing them with common meaning and identity. Good social skills promote successful functioning in life. This is because they help one to know the right thing to say, when and how to say it, they help to guide one in choice making and directs one on how to behave in various places and situations. Most of the life activities like academic performance, inter and intra family relationship, involvement in social gathering, curricular and extracurricular activities (National Association of school psychologist NASP 2002) ^[10] depend on one's social skills.

Based on this the researchers suspect that social skills may predict self-concept. This is because Azizi and Jamaludin (2009) ^[2] stated that good academic performance depends on the level of acquisition of the subject matter, which does not come by mere memorization of work but sometimes on the individual's self-concept and the ability to effectively interact with the environment. Again, currently in the school system, much attention is paid on the abilities of students to interact with the world around them hence Azizi and Jamaludin (2006) ^[3] stated that it is necessary and very important for students to possess high social skills. Social skills help students to have good interpersonal communication and also brainstorm with their teachers and classmates.

On the other hand, students with poor social skills will not only have problems when communicating but also during the learning process as discussion forms the very important basis of today’s teaching and learning process. Azizi and Jamaludin (2006) [3], supported this and stated that inadequate social and communication skills will indirectly reduce the level of students’ confidence and self-concept which will, in turn, hamper their academic performance.

There are different models of social skills but the one used in this study is Riggio (1986) [11]. Riggio (1986) [11] viewed social skills as a set of verbal and non-verbal communication skills that represent the social and emotional forms of the skills. Each of the forms had the expressivity, sensitivity and control dimensions of the skills giving a total of six elements of the social skills. This study, however, focused on the first three dimensions which include: the emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity and emotional control.

Emotional expressivity involves the process by which an individual reveals his or her attitude, affection and the status not by words of mouth. People who are skilful in emotional expressivity are very confident in themselves, are not easily tensed, very honest and are socially sound and bold. Individuals with this skill are not intimidated by the experience of ugly situations like failure (Riggio in Bedwell and Moore 2010) [4].

Emotional sensitivity is the skill that people use to understand non-verbal signals of other people. That is to say that those individuals with high emotional sensitivity easily read up emotional problems from other people. Emotional sensitive individuals are warm and honest, they dislike secrecy.

Emotionally controlled individuals always check and regulate their emotional and non-verbal communication. They like to be reserved and do things in secret. They have confidence in themselves and see themselves as always right in whatever they do. They like to portray themselves positively before others (Bedwell & Moore 2010) [4].

Ateabadi, Yusefi and Moradi (2013) [1] revealed that students differ in their measures of social skills. These variations manifest in the various ways students react when trying to ask for help from their parents or peers such as asking for permission, apologizing etc. On the whole it could be deduced that these variations in social skills among students may contribute to different levels of self-concept among them. This is because Azizi and Jamaludin (2009) [2] reported that students’ confidence and abilities to interact comfortably in the classroom are closely linked to their self-concepts. It is against the above backdrop that the researchers sought to determine the extent to which selected social skills could predict academic self-concept in students.

The conduct of this study was guided by the following research questions.

1. To what extent does emotional expressivity independently predict the variations in academic self-concepts among students?
2. To what extent does emotional sensitivity independently predict the variations in academic self-concept among students?
3. To what extent does emotional control independently predict the variations in academic self-concept among students?

The conduct of the study was further guided by the following hypotheses stated in null form and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

The following corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance were used to guide the study in terms of taking statistical decisions.

1. Emotional expressivity does not independently predict significantly to the variations in self-concept among students.
2. Emotional sensitivity does not independently predict significantly to the variations in self-concept among students.
3. Emotional control does not independently predict significantly to the variations in self-concept among students.

Method

Non-proportionate stratified random sampling was used to constitute a sample of 357 senior secondary two students in Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State. Data for the study were gathered with two instruments constructed by the researchers. They are: Students’ Social Skill Inventory (SSSI) and Students’ Academic Self-Concept Assessment Scale (SASAS). The instruments were face validated and a reliability coefficient value of 0.74 and 0.77 respectively were obtained and hence considered adequate for the test of reliability. Research questions were answered using the standardized partial regression, which manifests as the partial regression coefficient (beta) associated with the multiple regression. On the other hand, their corresponding null hypotheses were all tested using t-test values associated with the multiple regression.

Results and Discussion

Research Question

To what extent do emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity, and emotional control independently predict the variations in students’ academic self-concept?

Hypothesis: Emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity, and emotional control independently do not significantly predict the variations in students’ academic self-concept.

Table 4: Relative predictive power of the three social skills’ dimensions on students’ academic self-concept.

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient	T	Sig.
	B	Std Error	Beta		
Constant	28.57	6.056		4.718	0.000
Emotional expressivity	0.178	0.110	0.082	1.616	0.107
Emotional sensitivity	-0.378	0.123	-0.156	-3.072	0.002
Emotional control	0.305	0.098	0.158	3.119	0.02

Dependent variable: academic self-concept

In the table above it is revealed that the partial regression coefficient obtained when only emotional expressivity predicted academic self-concept of students (where other variables were kept constant) is 0.082. The associated t-value obtained for emotional expressivity 1.616 is significant at 0.107 level which is greater than 0.05, the chosen level of probability ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, emotional expressivity did not significantly make independent prediction on the variations in students' academic self-concept when other variables are held constant. On this basis hypothesis 1 is accepted.

The independent prediction of academic self-concept among students using emotional sensitivity when other variables are kept constant yielded a partial regression coefficient (beta) of -0.156. The corresponding t-value associated with the multiple regression obtained is -3.072 was significant at 0.002 level, which is lower than 0.05, the chosen level of probability ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, emotional sensitivity significantly made an independent prediction for the variations in students' academic self-concepts when other factors/variables are kept constant. So, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Furthermore, it is revealed that the independent prediction of the variation in the academic self-concept among students using emotional control when other factors are kept constant yielded a partial regression coefficient (beta) of 0.158. The corresponding t-value associated with multiple regression obtained, 3.119 is significant at 0.002 ($P < 0.05$) level which is lower than 0.05, the chosen level of probability. Therefore, emotional control independently made a significant prediction for the variations in students' academic self-concept. Hence null hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Predicting academic self-concept using emotional expressivity

The result revealed that emotional expressivity had a partial regression coefficient (beta value) of 0.082 which was insignificant at 0.05 level of probability. However, having a positive beta value indicated, that its Prediction was direct, which means that as the scores of students' emotional expressivity increases, their score or level in academic self-concept also increases but insignificantly.

This finding is not expected because the researchers based on the characteristics of emotional expressive individuals which include socially bold, driven and expedient felt that it would have significantly influenced the prediction of students' academic self-concept. That means one who is expedient is expected to map out the quick and effective ways of dealing with a problem, but in this finding, the reverse is the case. At the same time, a student who is socially bold is also expected to have confidence in what he/she can do without fear hence leading to high academic self-concept.

Prediction of academic self-concept on emotional sensitivity

It was found that emotional sensitivity had an inverse significant prediction on academic self-concept among students. This is based on the negative beta value that was obtained. This means that as the level of students in emotional sensitivity increased their level in academic self-concept decreased and vice versa.

This result is expected and not surprising because one of the

characteristics of an individual high in emotional sensitivity is taking time to make decisions which may hinder high academic self-concept which is manifested in the person as being bold and confident in what one can do. So due to that characteristic of not taking decision easily among high emotional sensitive individuals, they may lack confidence within themselves, thereby having low academic self-concept (Cham, 2013).

Prediction of academic self-concept on emotional control

The result revealed that emotional control had a significant positive prediction for academic self-concept due to the positive beta value. It indicated that as the students' levels in emotional control increased their levels in academic self-concept also increased significantly and vice versa. This result is very much expected and not surprising following the characteristics of individuals high in emotional control which includes high social competence. High social competence cannot be attained without a reasonable level of academic self-concept.

Implications of the Findings

The study revealed that emotional sensitivity independently had a significant and negative prediction for academic self-concept among students. This implies that emotional sensitivity significantly inhibits academic self-concept among students.

The study also revealed that emotional expressivity did not independently significantly to the variations in students' academic self-concept. This implies that emotional expressivity does not promote academic self-concept. Finally, it was revealed that emotional control had the highest beta value; this implies that it is the key predictor of academic self-concept among other social skills.

Based on the implications of the findings the researchers recommended students should be motivated to have academic self-concept inducing social skills like emotional control. This can be done through effective social skills training intervention.

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