

Academic Stress, Resilience, Peer Relation, and Teacher Support as Predictors of Undergraduates' Academic Confidence

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Abstract

Globally, finding the predictors for undergraduates' mental health through academic success is critical for fostering youth to become productive citizens as adults. The study therefore addresses the predictive power of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, teacher support, and parental involvement on academic confidence among undergraduates in at Babcock University Ilishan, Ogun State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of an ex-post facto type. Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data were collected using five standardized instruments. Research questionnaires were administered to three hundred (300) undergraduates at Babcock University. Data was analysed using Multiple Regression statistical methods. The findings of this study indicated that academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support are significant predictors of undergraduates' academic confidence ($R = .545$; $R^2 = .297$; Adj. $R^2 = .291$; $F_{(1, 296)} = 33.459$; $p < .05$). Also, resilience ($\beta = .110$; $t\text{-value} = 2.170$), academic stress ($\beta = .107$; $t\text{-value} = 1.817$), peer relation ($\beta = .083$; $t\text{-value} = 1.737$), and teacher support ($\beta = .100$; $t\text{-value} = 1.808$) are potent factor to the prediction of undergraduates' academic confidence. However, the most potent predictor is resilience. It was therefore concluded that an increase in undergraduates' wellbeing through adequate teacher support, positive peer relation and academic stress may lead to enhanced academic resilience, which may also promote a meaningful and fulfilled life academically. It was recommended that since an increase in undergraduates' wellbeing through adequate teacher support, positive peer relation and academic stress may lead to enhanced academic resilience, which may also promote a meaningful and fulfilled life academically.

Keywords: Academic stress, resilience, peer relation, teacher support, parental involvement, academic confidence, undergraduates

Introduction

Success at the university level may be expressed in a variety of ways depending upon the individual's self-perception. However, commonly held descriptions of academic success may include attainment of a degree, acceptable grade point average, and low retention of career and life skill sets necessary for employability and professional development. A student's success at the collegiate level demonstrates their ability to gather information and skills necessary to increase their chances of meeting long term personal and career goals (Eunhee, Newton, Downey, & Benton, 2010). According to Kuncel, Crede, and Thomas (2005), academic achievement is an important predictor of performance in other areas of one's life such as job performance, job outcomes, and salary. The connection between academic performance and positive life/job skills and its rewards are evident. Maintaining an acceptable grade point average and completing courses designed for their career goal demonstrates that the student is meeting the expectations set by the college or university. Universities in turn have a vested interest in assuring the success of their students. The students' academic success demonstrates the institution's ability to prepare and educate its student body for life after college (Eunhee, *et. al.*, 2010).

Academic confidence is one of the key factors that influence academic success/achievement. Numerous studies have reported the importance of this relationship upon students' success at the collegiate level (Friedlnder, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Additionally, recent research has shed light upon the significance of mindfulness as an aid in reducing stress, improving emotion regulation, and developing greater awareness.

Academic confidence is an imperative part of preparation and performance. It involves a generative capability in which component cognitive, social and behavioural skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes. Adeyemi and Agokei (2010) describe the construct as belief about one's ability to perform successfully in a given course. Fakeye (2010) also views self-efficacy as learners' beliefs about their own ability to accomplish a task. Klassen, Kwawchuk and Rajani (2008) as quoted in Koura and Al-Hebaishi (2014) opine that self-efficacy is a good predictor of human behaviour and actions. It is a constantly metamorphosing phenomenon. It is rather a general capacity that develops through time and experience. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy can be categorized as high and low. Ofole and Okopi (2012) opine that students with low self-efficacy are academically at risk.

On the other hand, a student characterized with high self-confidence braces up and meets the academic rigour and excels in school essay writing because he or she perceives himself or herself as being capable of doing well in school. Conversely, a learner noted for having low academic self-efficacy inhibits good academic performance because of the tendency to see himself or herself as being unable to cope with the academic

challenge. Koura and Al-Hebaishi (2014) submit that high or low self-efficacy is all about thoughts that the students hold about themselves which affect their academic performance directly or otherwise. These thoughtful feelings either aid or hinder their academic progress. Adelodun and Asiru (2015) citing Zeinivand (2006) reports on the relationship between self-confidence and students' achievement in schools found out that there is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance however, there is a gender significant difference between boys and girls—self-efficacy is documented to be higher in boys than girls (Adeyemo, 2007).

However, despite the growing body of literature on academic confidence, no studies in Africa have explored the undergraduates' academic confidence, stress, resilience, peer relation, teacher support, and parental involvement as a composite study. Also, little is known about the psycho-socio predictors of academic confidence of undergraduates in Nigeria. In view of this gap, the current study therefore addresses the predictive power of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, teacher support, and parental involvement on academic confidence among undergraduates in at Babcock University Ilishan, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Academic Stress

Research into academic stress in adolescence has revealed a range of stressors which students are most likely to experience such as time management, tests and exams, fear of failure, and parental expectations (Ang & Huan, 2006). Studies have indicated that several stressors documented among adolescent students are related to school and school has emerged as an important source of stressors when adolescents spend most of their time engaging in the school environment. School related stressors most frequently reported by students across the world are academic challenges such as tests, exams, and assignment; peer interaction, teacher–student relations, school regulation and time management (Ang, et al., 2009; Conner, et al., 2009; Putwain, 2007). For example, Burnett and Fanshawe (1997) identified nine common school-related stressors: instructional methods, relationships between teachers and students, academic workload, school environment, vulnerable feelings, personal organization, achieving independence, anxiety about the future, and relationships with parents.

Studies from Australia, Korea, Japan, and China have shown examinations to be a major source of academic stress (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2005). The association between tests and exam and academic stress has been well documented in several countries such as Japan, Korea, China, and Nigeria, where students have to take extremely competitive examinations (Ogunye, 2012; Kaplan, et al., 2005; Liu & Lu, 2011). In order to prepare for exams, students may have to practice more exercises, do regular tests and exams, and attend private cram classes (private tutoring), and spend most of their free time studying (Ogunye, 2012, Lee & Larson, 2000; Tan & Yates, 2011).

How students experience academic stress depends on individual and cultural factors and some academic stressors are the result of particular cultural perspectives. Academic stressors such as examinations, excessive homework, peer competition and time management are common in all cultures (Ogunye, 2012; Millar & Gallagher, 1996). Moreover, stressors such as self-expectations and expectations from others including parents and teachers have been mentioned as key elements of academic stress by several researchers (Ang, et al., 2009; Tan & Yates, 2011). Experiencing academic stress has been found to correlate with contextual factors. For example, high-achieving students were more likely to experience academic stress than their counterparts in basic schools (Suldo, et al., 2009). In fact, high achievers generally experienced heavier academic curricula, more competitive academic environments and more time demands than those in basic schools (Mates & Allison, 1992).

Academic stress has been reported to have a detrimental impact on students' emotional states during their daily activities, and to create a variety of somatic symptoms (Verma & Gupta, 1990). For example, authors of studies from some Asian countries such as Korea, Japan and China refer to academic stress diagnosis as “examination hell” or “entrance examination symptoms” with a variety of physical and psychological symptoms such as stomach-ache, headache, sleeplessness and allergy disorders (Bossy, 2000; Lee & Larson, 2000). Korean high school students were found to have a higher level of reported depression and physical problems in comparison with their counterparts in the United States (Lee & Larson, 2000). This finding is very similar to a study conducted in Japan which found that school students had very high rates of depression, behavioural problems, and suicidal ideation (Bossy, 2000).

Academic stress has also been found to relate to study performance. For example, Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000) revealed that a higher level of academic stress was associated with lower level of achievement among Canadian undergraduate students. Kaplan, et al. (2005) reported similar findings where the experience of higher academic stress was still negatively affecting academic performance three years later.

Academic Resilience

Resilience not only plays a part in the physical and emotional well-being of individuals, but also in students' learning outcomes, educational goals, and motivation (Zhang, 2011). A longitudinal study conducted in Quebec examined high school students who were at risk for dropping out. Of the 140 at-risk students who participated in

the study, 80 of those students ultimately dropped out. The 60 students who remained in school and graduated were then classified as resilient students. All of these students were, at one point in time, at risk for failing to graduate from high school. However, despite the challenges they faced, the resilient students were able to adapt, persevere, and graduate (Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin & Marcotte, 2014).

Sheikholeslami (2009), in his research into the relationship between resilience and self-esteem among female and male students, shows that there is a positive relationship between both variables. Harnish (2005), in similar research, concludes that training resilience can help to recover students' educational function. The research of Mousavi et al. (2010) carried out among 276 male and female students of Shiraz University, shows that there is a significant relationship between both variables. Also, the resilience of girls is shown to be higher than boys.

In a study led by Shirazi (2010), the results show that there is a significant relationship between the self-regulation of learning and resilience. Momeni and Karimi (2010), in research carried out on 317 students from Razi University and they do find a significant relationship between the resilience of successful students and unsuccessful students, with the degree of resilience among successful students higher than unsuccessful ones.

Additionally, based on Fasek's studies (1992, cited in Abolmaali & Mahmudi, 2013) entitled 'The cute schools, a background is provided for obtaining the academic achievement and success levels for students with high resilience traits in this regard. Levitt, Guacci-Franco and Levitt (1993), in their study, found that educational success can be predicted based on the number of the grades and types of supportive systems of the resilience for the adolescents. The two variables of perception of the class environment and resilience are the subject of educational psychology and there is not any detailed literature in this regard, particularly 'in the countryside'; however, the determination of their relationship to students' academic achievement can provide suitable results in this case. It seems that the determination of resilience and elements affecting perception of the classroom environment can in turn help to determine the effective factors for academic achievement.

Reynolds and Weigand (2010) examined resilience, academic motivation, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward the college environment, and their influence on 164 first-year students' responses to demands and challenges. The researchers found that college self-efficacy as measured with Solberg and colleagues (1993 cited in Baier, 2014) College Self-Efficacy Inventory, was significantly related to resilience as measured by academic and social engagement at the university. Their findings also showed that intrinsic motivation was significantly related to self-efficacy and that those who were more intrinsically motivated had a greater ability to cope with stressful and adverse experiences (Reynolds & Weigand, 2010). Academic and social engagement both rely on feedback from others.

Teacher Support Characteristics

The role of teachers on students' academic motivation and engagement can be seen through perceived level of teacher support in the classroom. This support differs from the social-emotional support but mainly derived from teacher characteristics and teaching practices (Klem & Connell, 2004; Siegle, Rubenstein, & Mitchell, 2014). Siegle, Rubenstein, and Mitchell (2014) studied the influence of teachers on student motivation from the perspective of recent high school graduates.

In their study, Siegle et al. (2014) conducted focus group discussions with 28 honors undergraduate freshman to determine the role of teachers on their high school experience.

Specifically, the researchers focused on obtaining their perceptions on the influence of teachers to their academic interest and motivation. In doing so, students identified specific teacher characteristics that lead to increased motivation in school and a desire to perform well. Students explained when teachers appeared respectful, relatable, and accessible they were more interested and motivated in school. Additionally, if teachers seemed knowledgeable and competent in the subject and if they were able to apply content to the outside world, students were more academically motivated. Not only was it important for teachers to appear knowledgeable, but students found passionate teachers very inspiring and motivating.

Additionally, when teachers appeared hard working (i.e. committed and focused) students were more likely to put forth effort in learning (Siegle et al., 2014). In order to foster motivation, it was also essential for students to develop task value to subject material. Students also identified task value as motivators for learning. When teachers provided challenging and meaningful material; they were more likely to engage in their school work.

Students appreciated teachers that made content relevant to them, which essentially motivated them to want to learn more about subject matter. Additionally, how teachers delivered the material was important to students. Students shared differing opinions about what type of instructional method worked best, but all students emphasized the importance of variety in teacher's delivery methods (i.e. lecture, interactive, discussion) as this positively impacted motivation (Siegle et al., 2014). Klem and Connell (2004) further investigated teacher support by focusing more on developing a link between support and student engagement, versus teacher support and motivation.

Klem and Connell (2004) collected data from students and their teachers in elementary and middle schools

in an urban school district. They identified that teacher support consisted of classroom structure and autonomy support. Classroom structure consisted of clear, focused expectations and autonomy support included independent decision making opportunities.

Overall, the results demonstrated that when middle school students believe teachers provide organized classroom structure, a caring environment, and clear expectations, students are more likely to report engagement in school. Also, this study demonstrated a link between high levels of engagement and higher attendance rates and test scores. There was also an indirect link between student experience of support and performance through student engagement, which essentially demonstrates the mediating role of being engaged in school.

Sands (2011) found valuable behaviours of teachers who entice positive relationships with students in an effort to create environments for effective learning and mutual respect. The research indicated that this process could be interrupted at any time by outside barriers that blocked or deteriorated the likelihood of positive teacher-student relationships.

Toste (2010), a postdoctoral research fellow at Vanderbilt University, submerged into the research of the teacher-student relationship and the student with disabilities and reported that the relationship made a significant contribution to student academic success. The mutual trust, bonding, like, and respect was part of the Classroom Working Alliance research of Toste, Heath, & Dallaire, (2010).

Students who had positive and collaborative teacher-student relationship experiences, had different outcomes in school (Cooke, 2011). Teacher-student relationships were sometimes not discussed due to the tainting of the relationship from negative news media of unfortunate instances between teachers and students in some situations (Pickens, 2010). The overall impact of a wholesome positive relationship between teacher and student allowed a humanistic insight into issues that may have arisen in student life (Pickens, 2010). This type of relationship fostered an environment of cooperation and learning. This relationship also encouraged closer monitoring of student behaviour and provided a common ground for the teacher to guide and direct students (Pickens, 2010). The research linked the overall wholesome positive relationship to the thread of trust between the teacher and student in the classroom relationship (Pickens, 2010).

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant combined influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence.
2. There is no significant relative influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence.

Methodology

Research Design: This work adopted the descriptive design of the Ex-post Facto type. The *ex-post facto* research design was adopted because the researcher did not manipulate any of the variables of the study, rather the researcher observed and described the extent of the contributions of already existing independent variables.

Population: The population for the study consisted of all undergraduate students studying at Babcock University.

Sample and Sampling procedure: The sample for the study were undergraduate students randomly selected from 5 out of 9 schools at Babcock University, Ilishan-remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. The sample was made up of 300 students who have already spent more than 2 semesters in the university. Stratified sampling technique was used to group students into their respective levels (200 level to 400 level) in each school. Furthermore, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 20 students from 200L to 400L making 60 participants from each school and 300 in all.

Instrumentation: Eight major instruments were used for this study. These are:

1. **Academic Stress Scale** (Sun and colleagues, 2011): It comprises 16 questions using a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating greater stress. The scale covers five dimensions of educational stress including pressure from study (4 items), worry about grades (3 items), despondency (3 items), self-expectation (3 items), and workload (3 items). The ESSA has good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of .81 for the general scale.
2. **The Connor-Davidson Resiliency Scale** (CD-RSC; Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a 25-item self-report scale. Participants are to rate these experiences from not true at all (0), to rarely true (1), sometimes true (2), often true (3) and to true nearly all the time (4). For this study the Cronbach's alpha was .78.
3. **Peer Group Influence Scale** (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). It assesses adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimension of relationships with parents and close friends -- particularly how well these figures serve as sources of psychological security. The items are scored on a five-point scale ranging from almost never (1) to almost always (5). The reliability coefficient for the 25-item peer influence sub-scale was .81. A re-validation of the peer influence scale was done and yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.85.

4. **Teacher Support Questionnaire (TSQ)** (da-laz (2015)). There are eight total questions involved in the survey. One question related to the kind of relationship students maintain with their teachers; three questions were in regard to how supportive, caring, and motivating they feel their teachers are. There are also three questions that dealt with the communicative language approach and the cooperative learning. A re-validation of the peer influence scale was done and yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.80.
5. **Academic Confidence (Beliefs in Educational Success Test - BEST; Majer, 2006)**: The BEST questionnaire reflects a range of tasks commonly associated with higher education, but does not specify any particular field of study or academic subject area. Responses to these questions range from 0 (Not at all confident) to 100 (Very Confident). The Cronbach's alphas was .86

Procedure for data collection: The researcher and four research assistants were involved in the administration of the instruments to each of the sample respondents chosen for the study. The research assistants were the postgraduate students of Babcock University trained for the purpose of this study.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected were analysed descriptively (frequency counts, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation scores) and inferentially (multiple regression) set at the .05 significant level.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Model Summary of the Regression Analysis on the combined influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	Change Statistics				
					R ² Change	F Change	d f 1	d f 2	Sig. F Change
Predictor Variables	.545	.297	.291	.834	.291	33.459	3	296	.007

- a. Predictions: (Constant), academic stress, resilience, peer relation, teacher support
- b. Dependent Variable: undergraduates' academic confidence

The results presented in Table 1 indicated that academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support are significant predictors of undergraduates' academic confidence ($R = .545$; $R^2 = .297$; $Adj. R^2 = .291$; $F_{(1, 296)} = 33.459$; $p < .05$). This showed that academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support accounted for 29.1% of the variance in the undergraduates' academic confidence. The null hypothesis which stated that "There is no significant combined influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence" was rejected by this finding while the alternate hypothesis was retained.

Therefore, there is a significant combined influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence". The implication of this finding is that undergraduates' academic confidence is significantly associated with academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support which in turn will help with the mental wellbeing of the students and also enhance school success. As noted by Friedlnder, Reid, Shupak, and Cribbie, (2007); Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) academic confidence is one of the key factors that influence academic success/achievement. Additionally, recent researches of Koura and Al-Hebaishi (2014), Adeyemi and Agokei (2010), and Fakeye (2010) have revealed the significance of mindfulness as an aid in reducing stress, improving emotion regulation, and developing greater awareness.

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of relative influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	5.102	.555		9.199	.000
1 Academic stress	.240	.126	.107	1.817	.009
Resilience	.596	.275	.110	2.170	.000
Peer relation	.188	.099	.083	1.737	.030
Teacher support	.197	.120	.100	1.808	.004

The relative contribution of each predictor variable (academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support) to the variance observed in the undergraduates' academic confidence revealed that resilience has a beta value of .110 and t-value of 2.170 significant at less than .05 alpha level, academic stress has a beta value of .107 and t-value of 1.817; teacher support has a beta value of .100 and t-value of 1.808; and peer relation has a beta value of .083 and t-value of 1.737 all significant at less than .05 alpha levels. Therefore, all the predictor variables (academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support) are potent factor to the prediction of undergraduates' academic confidence. However, the most potent predictor is resilience followed by academic

stress, teacher support, and peer relation.

The implication of this study is that academic resilience do not only play the role in the physical and emotional well-being of individual but also serve as motivational tool in enhancing learning outcomes. This is supported by the findings of Zhang (2011). Also the results is in line with Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin and Marcotte (2014) that despite the academic challenges faced the students who participated in their study, the resilient students were able to adapt, persevere, and graduate. The outcome of this findings equally lend credence to the studies of Ogunye (2012), Tan and Yates (2011), and Suldo, et al., (2009) that high-achieving students with high academic confidence were more likely to experience academic stress than their counterparts

Conclusion and Implication for Social Workers

This study provides empirical evidence with regards to the need for psychosocial re-orientation on undergraduates' academic confidence. Specifically, the findings revealed a linear relationship among the variables (academic stress, resilience, peer relation, teacher support, and academic confidence). The totality of this result depicts the extent at which the variables will enhance the undergraduates' psychological and social functioning that will promote academic confidence. In general, the findings suggest a significant combined and relative influence of academic stress, resilience, peer relation, and teacher support on undergraduates' academic confidence, while resilience is the most potent factor.

Despite important contributions, the results should be interpreted with the following cautions in mind. First, the findings were obtained from university undergraduates in one university out of many universities within a State. Thus, the extent to which the findings could be generalized to a large population is unknown. Second, the sample included a diverse ethnic mix of undergraduates, with a large representation of Yorubas. Nevertheless, it will be useful to evaluate potential ethnic and cultural differences in greater detail in future studies, particularly on adolescents' adjustment in relation to social and psychological functioning.

It is therefore concluded that an increase in undergraduates' wellbeing through adequate teacher support, positive peer relation and academic stress may lead to enhanced academic resilience, which may also promote a meaningful and fulfilled life academically.

Since an increase in undergraduates' wellbeing through adequate teacher support, positive peer relation and academic stress may lead to enhanced academic resilience, which may also promote a meaningful and fulfilled life academically. Adequate knowledge and understanding on this area could help many parties, such as educators, counselors, social workers, and psychologists to design and develop proper intervention program to reduce psycho-sociological isolation among students. This study could be of great benefit to the students themselves by bringing about adequate self-acceptance, objective self-evaluation, social competence, and improved psychological well-being.

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