

Relationship Between Socio-emotional Skill and Academic Adjustment Among Adolescents is Mediated by Resilience

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the mediating role of resilience on the relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment among 343 newly admitted first year students in selected secondary schools in Awka, Anambra State Nigeria. Gender of the participants consists of boys (172, 50.1%) and girls (171, 49.9%). Their ages range from 11-14 years ($M=12.7$ years, $S.D$ 0.82). Correlational research design was adopted and mediated multiple regression technique available in the Conditional process analysis was used to analyze the data. The correlation results show significant positive relationship among the variables. The mediation results further show that resilience significantly and positively mediated relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment. Based on the findings and the importance of socio-emotional skills, the researchers recommended that parents and guardians should start equipping socio-emotional skills training from home at infancy stage of human development.

Keywords: Academic adjustment, Mediation, Relationship, Resilience, Socio-emotional skill.

1. Introduction

Academic adjustment is an important protective factor that adds value to students' viability and gives the essence to attending and completing school (Beri & Kaur, 2020; Eccles, et al., 1991; Garcia, & Guerra, 2004). Academic Adjustment refers to the ability of students to adapt to the new challenges emanating from the transitions from one level of studying to another, social expectation and classroom requirements (Friedman, 2014; Lakhani, et al, 2017). It consists of school engagement, teacher-student conflict, academic achievement and burnout (Lakhani, et al., 2017). It may be a critical factor in continuing education and academic performance at all level of schooling.

However, in sub-Saharan Africa, issues such as economic and social stressors may have forced many prospective students out of school; these issues reduce their level of academic engagement and general percentage of academic performance (Ugwu, et al., 2020). UNICEF (2019) reported that 10.5 million children whose ages ranged from 5-14 years are out of school.

Regrettably, UNESCO (2023) projected number of out-of-school children in Nigeria to be 20.2 million. Noteworthy, there have been multi-dimensional approaches to remedy the situation. In addition to the general efforts by government agencies, non-governmental organization and families to increase the level of academic engagement and performance (Federal Education Quality Assurance, 2013); individual factors such as socio-emotional skill and resilience may play some critical roles in determining the propensity to engage in academics and academic performance.

There are many factors that can be related to academic adjustment: including self-efficacy, school environment, secure attachment style and parenting styles (Chi, et al., 2018). However, socio-emotional skill seems to stand out among these factors. Socio-emotional skill refers to knowledge and attitudes that enable students navigate through life successfully, which include, self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship issues and ability to make responsible decision. In Nigeria, the Federal Education Quality Assurance (2013) policy has incorporated social emotional skill assessment as part of the requirement for school assessment reports alongside academic performance for each pupil at primary and secondary school grades. This innovation is in tandem with empirical findings by different scholars (Beri & Kaur, 2020; Dow, 2014; Mageliskaite, et al., 2014), which showed that socio-emotional skill is an important variable for learning, interpersonal relationship and academic outcomes for students (Duru & Balkis, 2014; UNICEF, 2019). Meanwhile, one of the missing links in understanding the relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment may be the mechanisms through which socio-emotional skill relates to academic adjustment. Such mediating factor could be resilience

Rationally, it is expected that consistent training in social emotional skill could boost and maintain the innate ability to strive and navigate the environment. This assumption is in line with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002), which posited that behavioural manifestation (e.g. academic adjustment) could be a reciprocal outcome from the activities of some innate mechanisms (e.g. resilience & socio-emotional skill). Obviously, positive innate ability helps to develop inner stamina and resistant that allows individuals to forge ahead in difficult situations (Jaweed, et al., 2020; Tamannaefar & Shahmirzaei, 2019). This ability may be referred to as resilience. Different scholars have explored the potentials of resilience as

independent and mediating factor when it comes to building the capacity to resist difficult times, to plan, and to recover from negative experiences. These characteristics are likely to be useful to individuals for developing and sustaining academic adjustment (Engels, et al., 2019; Sarrionandia, et al., 2018). While this position is important, what remains to be assessed is the role of resilience in the relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment.

The present study, therefore examined first the relationship between socio-emotional skill and resilience. This is in line with assumption of running mediation analysis that the independent factor and the mediator must correlate significantly. Second, the study assessed the relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment. Theoretical model (Social cognitive theory) and empirical findings (Tamannaefar, & Shahmirzaei, 2019; Sarrionan, et al., 2018) supports that there should a significant positive relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment. Importantly, this study examined equally whether resilience could be a mechanism through socio-emotional skill influences academic adjustment.

2. Methods

Participants: Three hundred and forty three (343) first year junior secondary school students were selected with multistage sampling technique from five public secondary schools in Awka metropolis, Anambra state Nigeria. They comprised of boys (172, 50.1%) and girls (171, 49.9%). Their ages range from 11-14 years ($M= 12.7$ years, $S.D 0.82$). These participants were from middle socio-economic class and can all understand English language.

2.1 Research Instruments

School Adjustment-Child Report

This scale was developed by Bierman, et al., (2016). It has twenty items that is scored in five point likert response pattern 1 = Never True, 2 = Seldom True, 3= Sometimes True, 4 = Usually True, 5 = Always True. The developers of the scale reported cronbach alpha coefficient of $\alpha .88$. In this study the researchers found cronbach alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .80$.

Social-Emotional Competency Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by Zhou and Ee (2012). The scale has twenty five items with five dimensions. The response pattern is six point Likert format 1 = Not at all true of me, 6 = Very true of me. The developers of the scale reported Cronbach alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .95$. However, the researchers found Cronbach alpha coefficient $\alpha = .92$ and divergent validity of $r = -.09$ when correlated with suicidal ideation scale.

UNIZIK Resilience Scale

The scale was developed by Nwafor (2020). The scale has twenty two items with nine of it scored in reverse format. It has five likert response patterns ranging from: Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Undecided = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5. Psychometric properties of the scale was reported, Cronbach alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .89$ and concurrent validity with motivational persistence $r = .80$, general self efficacy $r = .79$ and hope for future $r = .88$.

Procedure/ethics: This study was approved by the Department of Psychology. A copy of the approval and letter of introduction were presented to the principals of the five selected secondary schools in Awka. The information concerning the aims, objectives, and relevance of the study were explained to the principals and consent forms were issued to the selected students to fill before the administration of the questionnaires. Sixty nine participants (69) were selected from each of the five participated secondary schools. The selected students were addressed in the classrooms and a total of three hundred and forty five (345) copies of questionnaires were administered but three hundred and forty three were properly filled and returned, hence were used for the analysis.

Design and Statistics: The design of the study was correlational research design. Pearson moment correlation and moderated regression statistics was used to analyze the data.

3. Results

Table 3.1

Descriptive values and correlation of Academic adjustment, socio-emotional skills and resilience

S/NO	Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SK</i>	<i>K</i>	3	4	5
1	Age	12.49	.82	.35	-.83			
2	Gender	1.49	.50	.50	-2.0			
3	Academic Adj	69.51	8.85	8.85	-.39	1		
4	Soc-Emo	73.38	9.19	9.19	.07	21**	1	
5	Resilience	113.03	19.85	19.85	-.69	23**	45**	1

Source: Analyses of primary data collected by the researchers

M = mean, SD = standard Deviation, SK = skewness, K = kurtosis M =mean, SD = standard deviation, SK =skewness, K = kurtosis. Pearson Moment correlation coefficient showed significant relationship among the variables academic adjustment $r = 21^{**}$, $P = .001$, socio-emotional skill $r = 23^{**}$, $P = .001$ and resilience $r = 45^{**}$ $P = .001$.

Table 3.2

Resilience mediating relationship between academic adjustment and socio-emotional skills.

Outcome	<i>R</i> ²	<i>Df1(df2)</i>	<i>F</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Model 1	.20	1(341)	86.96					
Model 2	.07	2(340)		.45	.48	9.33	.36	.55
Soc-Emo				.16	.59	2.8	.05	.28
Resilience				.14	.59	2.3	.02	.25
Soc-Emo→Resilience				.74	.029		.02	.13

Source: Analyses of primary data collected by the researchers.

The model 1, the adjusted r squared is .20 and this is significant at $F(1, 341) = 86.96$, $P < .05$. A unit increase in socio-emotional skills positively increased resilience (mediator) by .45 and the values of llci and ullci are .36 and .55 respectively.

Model 2 showed that social emotional skills and resilience predicted academic adjustment. The adjusted r squared .07, $F(2, 340) = .16$, P less than .05. Specifically, social emotional skills and resilience predicted positively academic adjustment at $B .16$ and $.14$ $P < .05$.

Similarly, the indirect impact of resilience on the relationship between socio-emotional skills and academic adjustment was significant such that a unit increase in resilience increase the likelihood of that social emotional skills will increase academic adjustment by $B = .74$.

3.1 Discussion

The study examined the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment. The results of the mediated multiple regression showed that socio-emotional skill predicted positively and significantly academic adjustment among participants. This finding is in agreement with the results of the previous studies such as (CASEL, 2008; OECD, 2020), which found that socio-emotional skill is related to academic adjustment. As expected, the result is in tandem with the proposition of the triadic reciprocal model of (Bandura, 2002). Socio-emotional skill is a positive innate mechanism, which enhances the ability to learn, associate with the social environment and the needed self confidence required to thrive in any giving situation (Al-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2014; Beri & Kaur, 2020; Chi, et al., 2020; Dow, 2015; Dunn, 2016; Magelinskaite, et al., 2014).). Thus, it is not surprising that it positively predicted academic adjustment.

Similarly, resilience mediated the relationship socio-emotional skill and academic adjustment. Resilience is a positive innate ability, which has been presented as an important protective factor that enhances the ability to adapt and navigate various conditions/situations that confront an individual daily (Sarrionandia, et al., 2018; Tamannaefar, & Shahmirzaei, 2019). As a mediator, it has a positive relationship with socio-emotional skill (Amrei, et al., 2020; Haktanir et. al., 2018; Rodriguez-Fernandez, et al., 2018; Sadoughi, 2018; Wilks & Spirey, 2010; Zhang, et al., 2019; Zuill, 2016) and positive relation with academic adjustment. Importantly, it increases significantly the ability of socio-emotional skills to influence academic adjustment. This outcome was posited in the social cognitive theory (triadic reciprocal model) that innate factors can increase the ability of other factors (social environmental and other innate factors) to influence the outcome in this case academic adjustment.

3.2 Implication of the Study

The study has theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it strengthens the assumptions of social cognitive theory that behavioral outcomes could be predicted from innate/physiological/personality factors. This further enlarges the ability to explore other moderating and mediating innate factors and their contributions in understanding academic adjustment. Practically, it encourages the implementation of socio-emotional skill as part of assessment of school academic activities. Additionally, it presents a new dimension to understanding how social-emotional skill functions. In other words, programs that increase resilience could as well increase socio-emotional skill. Thus, researchers and policy makers could gain from this insight and develop models that can help in building resilience among the students. Such programs could be added as formal or informal activities in the school curriculum.

4 Recommendations

Given the importance of socio-emotional skills in academic adjustment, we recommended that parents and guardians should start equipping socio-emotional skills training from home at infancy.

To mitigate out of school children menace in Nigeria, we recommend socio-emotional skills training to be instituted from nursery school classes.

It is essential to include socio-emotional skills training in educational curriculum from nursery to tertiary education help people cope effectively with academic activities and other age-graded demands. Challenges in other areas of human live emanate in-day-to-day engagements and such may be prevented by socio-emotional skills.

Also, given the high impact of resilience on socio-emotional skills and academic adjustment, we recommend for inculcation of resilience on school pupils.

Incorporation of the two positive psychological constructs (socio-emotional skills and resilience) will improve not only academic adjustment, but high academic performance, interpersonal relationship, teacher-students conflict etc.

5 Conclusions

Resilience is an important mediating variable, which explained the mechanism through which socio-emotional skill predicts academic adjustment. Given the importance of academic adjustment in predicting other positive school outcomes, the study suggests that more variables (especially risk factors) should be explored to see how they relate with the independent and mediating factor to influence academic adjustment

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