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Research Article

Academic Engagement and Learning Strategies as Predictors of Secondary School Economics Students' Academic Achievement in Owerri Education Zone 2 Of Imo State

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Abstract: This study investigatedstudents' academic engagement and learning strategies 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 Owerri Education Zone 2 of Imo State. A correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 5,368 senior secondary school II Economics students for 2020/2021 academic session, with sample of 375 SS IIEconomics students. The study adopted three instruments for data collection; Students' engagement Questionnaire (SEQ), learning strategies questionnaire (LSQ) and Economics Achievement Test (EAT). The internal consistency reliability indices of SEQ and LSQ were determined to be 0.76 and .84 using Cronbach alpha while the internal consistency reliability of (EAT) was .81 using KR-20. Simple linear regression was adopted to answer the research questions 1-2, while research question 3 was answered using multiple regression. However, regression t-test was used to test hypotheses 1-2 while hypothesis 3 was tested using regression ANOVA. All the hypotheses were testedat 0.05 level of significance. The result shows that students' engagement and learning strategies significantly predicted students' academic achievement in Economics. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that, Economics teachers should encourage learners centered method in the process of teaching so that students will be feel free to be involved in teaching and learning.
Keyword: Academic Engagement, Learning Strategies,Economics,Academic Achievement.

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1. Introduction

The diminishing nature of students' academic achievement has attracted researcher's interest which made researchers to seek for solution to the bottleneck and difficulties confronting secondary school students in Economics. According to (Ezeudu, Jolaosho, Yahaya, OparaBabalulu, 2023) Economics is a fundamental course of study that gives details about set of rules as well as concepts and relationship which provides the foundation of many other courses like finance, business management, marketing among others. Chappelow (2019) defined Economics as a social science subject which is concerned with the consumption, production and distribution of materials, goods and services. Operationally, Economics is a subject that deals with the ownership, exchange and the use of scarce resources. The objectives of the secondary school Economics curriculum includes to equip students with the knowledge about the numerous reforms and changes in economic system, to help develop objectivity in an individual, enable students become critical thinkers and aid students in choice making considering the limited available resources (Oparaji&Ugwu, 2019). For these objectives to be attained,students need to understand the subject in order to achieve high in their examination. To ensure students understand Economics very well and achieve a great height, government provided teaching facilities, yet student's academic achievement persists.

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Despite the effort made by the government by providing teaching facilities, students' academic achievement in Nigeria remains poor. This is evidenced in WAEC Chief Examiner's report 2018, 2019 and 2020 as reported by Idika, Onuoha, Nji and Eze(2022). This situation is observed in most education zones in Imo State including Owerri education zone 2 of Imo State (Oparaji&Ugwu, 2019; Okere, 2023). Considering the poor academic achievement of students in Economics and the need for students to achieve the above mentioned objectives, the federal government provided teaching facilities. Yet students' academic achievement in Economics remained the same in Owerri Education Zone 2 (Oparaji&Ugwu, 2019). As a result of the persisted poor academic achievement of students' inEconomics, researchers like Idika, Onuoha, Nji and Eze, (2018) among others tries to proffer solution to the poor academic achievement yet academic achievement of students in Economics remain the same.

However, there are many factors that can be attributed to the poor academic achievement of students in Economics. Factors that could be responsible for the poor academic achievement of students in Economics includes; interest, attitudes, socio-economic status, gender and perception (Bobz, 2010; Szell, 2013, Al-Zoubi&Younes (2015), pointed out the factors that could lead to poor academic achievement in Economics which include, school location, family background, school climate, attitude towards learning, learning strategies and students engagement.Students' engagement is the interest which students show while teaching and learning is going on. Students' academic engagement is the level of attention, optimism, and passion which students display when teaching and learning is going on (Ohamobi&Ezeaku, 2013). Schreiber and Yu (2014) stated that students' engagement is important elements that propel academic success, persistence and retention. Conceptually, students' engagement energy moved towards learning in order to comprehend and have a mastery of knowledge as well as skills.

Academic engagement could be related to students' achievement. However, researchers like Iroegbu and Agboola (2019) Conducted a study to investigate the relationship between Student engagement variables and first year undergraduate retention rate in University of Uyo, AkwaIbom State, Nigeria, Wara, Aloka and Odomgo (2018) Relationship between emotional engagement and academic achievement. Again, Ohamobi and Ezeaku (2013) carried out a study on Students' engagement variables as correlates of academic achievement in Economics in senior secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Finaly, Delfino (2019), on Student engagement and academic performance of students. These authors' findings indicate that students' engagement has a relationship with students' academic achievement. This implies that when students are actively engaged in teaching and learning, it will enable the students to develop different strategies in learning which could be refers to as learning strategies.

Learning strategies is a designed step, actions and plans for learning. According to Freeman (2020) learning strategies are those academic skills that enable an individual or a student to have a mastery of concepts or content. Learning strategies should be encouraged among students to attain a reasonable degree of learning outcome and experience which is the reason for learner. Tmar and Jindal (2014) defined learning strategies as those activities which learners use to bring home learning. Tmar and Jindal, also pointed out that learning Strategies are those actions students employ to complete learning tasks. Meanwhile learning tasks are the tools that students on their own can use to accomplish a task.

This task can appear inform of academic performance or academic achievement. Consequently, a study was conducted by Nabizadeh, Hajian, Sheikhan and Rafiei (2019) on Prediction of academic achievement based on learning strategies and outcome expectations among medical students and another study was conducted by Uwameiye (2016), to find the relationship between Co-operative Learning Strategy and Students' Academic Achievement in Home Economics. Furthermore, Kafadar and Tay (2014) also conducted a study on Learning strategies and learning styles used by students in social studies. Furthermore, an essential study was conducted by Ghiasvand (2010) on the relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement; based on information processing approach. Finally, Nmonwu, Chimezie, Ahukwu, and Obinna-Akakuru(2018) carried out a study on the variable peer learning strategies and academic achievement in Economics in Imo State. These studies pointed out that there is a significant relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement.

Academic achievement is the degree at which an institution has attained the goals of education. According to Onukwufor and Ugwu (2017), academic achievement is the indicator showing the degree at which learning have been attain and if learning has taken place or not According to Ezeudu, Jolaosho, Yahaya, OparaBabalulu (2023), academic achievement is the degree at which students attain the education goal and objective through class tasks like assignment, examination, courses, research project in academic programmes based on a sufficiently exposed content. The present study defined academic achievement as the outcome of intellectual attainment of students in secondary school or the score obtained by Economics students in secondary school. The academic achievement of students' has been extremely poor particularly in Owerri Education Zone of Imo State. Hence, researchers and government tries to address this issue yet the academic achievement of students' in Economics remains poor. Considering the lack of literatures on students engagement and learning strategies in Owerri Education Zone 2 of Imo state and the level of poor academic achievement as well as authors view of the concept students engagement and learning strategies, the researchers deemed it necessary to investigate more on students' engagement and learning strategies as predictors of secondary school students academic achievement in Economics in OwerriEduaction Zone 2 of Imo State.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate students` engagement and learning strategies as predictors of secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics. Specifically, the study sought to determine the**;**

1. amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' engagement;
2. amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' learning strategies;
3. amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is jointly attributed to students' academic engagement and learning strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' engagement?
2. What is the amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' learning strategies?

3. What is the amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is jointly attributed to students' academic engagement and learning strategies?

Research

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significant.

1. Students' engagement is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.
2. Learning strategies is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.
3. Students' academic engagement and learning strategies are not significant predictors of students' academic achievement in Economics.

2. Methodology

Design of the Study: A correlation research design was used in this study. Correlation research design is a design which helps a researcher to establish the relationship between two or more variables (Nworgu, 2015). This design was deemed appropriate for the study becausethe study tried to establish the relationship that exists between students' academic engagement, learning strategies and academic achievement of secondary school students in Economics in Owerri Education zone 2 of Imo State.

Population of the Study: The population of this study comprised of 5368 Senior Secondary School II (SSS2) Economics students in the 48 public secondary schools in Owerri Education zone 2 of Imo State (Source: Secondary Education Management Board AbohMbaise, 2020).

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample size of 375 SSS 2 Economics students was used for the study. The sample was obtained through multistage sampling procedure that involved simple random sampling and proportionate stratified random sampling techniques.

Instruments for Data Collection: Three instruments were used for data collection in this study, they include; Students Academic Engagement Questionnaire (SAEQ), Learning Strategies Questionnaire and Economics Achievement Test (EAT). These instruments were developed by the researchers.

Reliability of the Instruments: To determine the reliability of the instruments, trial test was conducted to estimate the internal consistency of the instruments. This was done by administering the instruments to 20 SS2 Economics students in one of the schools in NgorOkpala Local Government Area in Owerri Education Zone 2 of Imo State which was not part of the schools sampled but shared similar characteristics with those in the sampled schools. The internal consistency reliability of SAEQ and LSQ was established using Cronbach-alpha method. The Cronbach-alpha was used because the instruments were polytomousely scored. The reliability coefficient of 0.75 and 0.84 were obtained for SAEQ and LSQ respectively.In addition, internal consistency reliability of EAT was established using Kudder-Richardson 20 (KR-20). This method was employed because it is suitable for estimating internal consistency of instrument that is dichotomously scored (instruments with right/wrong answer), hence, reliability co-efficient of 0.80 was obtained.

Method of Data Collection: The researchers through the help of Economics teachers in the sampled schools who served as research assistants administered the instruments to the students. The SAEQ and LSQ were administered to the students once, while EAT was administered to the students the next day.

Method of Data Analysis: Simple linear regression was used to answer research questions 1-2, while research question 3 was answered using multiple regression.Regression t-test was used to test hypotheses 1-2 while regression ANOVA was used to test hypothesis 3. All the formulated hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level. Going by Nworgu(2015), the following decision benchmark was used; a correlation co-efficient of 0.00 to 0.20 was considered very low, 0.2 to 0.40 was considered low, 0.4 to 0.60 moderate or medium, 0.60 to 0.80 was considered high while 0.80 and above was considered very high.

3. Results

Research Question One

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

Table 1: Linear regression analysis of the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' engagement

Model	N	R	R^2
School Engagementand Academic Achievement	375	.222	.049

Result in Table 1 shows the linear regression analysis for the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' academic engagement. The result shows a correlation coefficient (r) of .222, which indicates a positive low relationship between students' academic engagement and students` achievement in Economics. The coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of .222 was .049. This implies that 4.9% of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics is attributed to academic engagement. The result indicates that, 95.1% of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics is attributed to other factors order than academic engagement.

Hypothesis One

Students' academic engagement is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.

Table 2: Regression t-test analysis of students' academic engagement predicting academic achievement in Economics

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	13.584	8.512		1.596	.111
	Engagement	.588	.134	.222	4.392	.000

The result in Table 2 shows that t-value of 4.392 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value of 0.000 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that students' academic engagement is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics was rejected. The researchers therefore, conclude

that students' academic engagement is a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.

Research Question Two

What is the amount of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to learning strategies?

Table 3: Output Analysis of regression analysis for the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed learning strategies

Model	N	R	R^2
Learning Strategies and Academic Achievement	375	.208	.043

Result in Table 3 shows the linear regression analysis of the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to learning strategies. The result revealed a correlation coefficient (r) of .210. This implies a positive low relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement in Economics. The coefficient of determination, (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of .208 was .043. This implies that 4.3% variation in students` academic achievement in Economics is attributed to learning strategies. The result indicates that 95.7% of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics is attributed to other factors order than students' learning strategies.

Hypothesis Two

Learning strategies is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.

Table 4: Regression t-test of learning strategies predicting students' academic achievement in Economics

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	15.132	8.715		1.736	.083
	Learning Strategies	.596	.145	.208	4.109	.000

The result in Table 4 shows that t-value of 4.109 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value of 0.000 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that learning strategies is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics was rejected. The researchers therefore, conclude that learning strategies is a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics.

Research Question Three

What is the amount of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics that is jointly attributed to students' academic engagement and learning strategies?

Table 5: Multiple regression of the amount of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics that is jointly attributed to students' academic engagement and learning strategies

Model	N	R	R^2

Academic Engagement, Learning Strategies and Academic Achievement	375	.249	.062

Result in Table 5 above shows the multiple regression analysis of the amount of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' academic engagement and learning strategies. The result shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.24, which implies a positive low relationship between students' academic engagement, learning strategies and students` academic achievement in Economics. The coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of it was 0.062. This implies that 6% of variation in students` academic achievement in Economics is attributed to academic engagement and learning strategies. The result indicates that, 94% of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics is attributed to other factors order than academic engagement and learning strategies.

Hypothesis Three

Students' academic engagement and learning strategies is not a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics

Table 6: Regression ANOVA result of students' academic engagement and learning strategies jointly predicting academic achievement in Economics

	Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P-value
1	Regression	9065.571	1	4532.786	12.333	.000[b]
	Residual	136725.746	373	367.542		
	Total	145791.317	374			

The result in Table 6 shows that F-ratio of 12.333 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value of 0.00 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of students' engagement and learning strategies on students' academic achievement in Economics was rejected. The researchers therefore, conclude that students' engagement and learning strategies is a significant predictor of students' academic achievement in Economics

4. Discussion of Findings

Amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' engagement

The findings of the study revealed that students' academic engagement significantly predicts students` academic achievement in Economics. This means that there is a significant relationship between students' engagement and students' academic achievement in Economics. The finding is not quite surprising because when students participate actively in teaching and learning process the ability to understand the concepts will increase the and students' academic achievement will improve but if the students do not participate actively their achievement will remain poor.

The result is in agreement with the findings of Ohamobi and Ezeaku (2013) that stated there is a significant relationship between students' academic engagement and students' academic achievement. The finding agrees withIroegbu and Agboola (2019) that

students' engagement significantly predicts first year undergraduate retention rate. The finding is also in consonant with Wara, Aloka and Odomgo (2018) result which stated a significant positive correlation between students' academic engagement and academic achievement among the students. The finding is also consistent with that of Delfino (2019) that there is a positive significant relationship between students' engagement and academic performance of the students. As a result of the essential nature of student engagement no findings from the studies reviewed contradicted the finding of this study that there is a significant relationship between students' academic engagement and academic achievement.

Amount of variation in secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics that is attributed to students' learning strategies

The finding of the study revealed that 4% of variation in students' academic achievement in Economics is attributed to learning strategies. This result implies that learning strategies of the students has a relationship with students' academic achievement in Economics. Further analysis revealed that learning strategies significantly predicts students' academic achievement in Economics. This result could be as a result of the fact that learning strategies enables the students to have a clearer understanding of a particular concept very well hence makes learning very easy for students. And when learners apply their individual strategies in learning, the ability to acquire more knowledge is assured.

The finding of this study tarries with the findings of Nmonwu, Chimezie, Ahukwu, and Obinna-Akakuru (2018) that peer learning strategy improved students achievement in Economics. This implies that there is a significant relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement in Economics and learning strategies predicts academic achievement in Economics. The finding is also in agreement with the finding of Ghiasvand (2010) that there is a significant relationship between meta-cognitive strategies and academic achievement. This finding is also consistent with the finding of Uwameiye (2016) that there is a significant relationship between co-operative learning strategies and students' achievement on home Economics. The finding is equally in consonant with Nabizadeh, Hajian, Sheikhan and Rafiei (2019) the finding which indicates that meta-cognitive, cognitive learning strategies and motivational strategies are predictors of academic achievement of students. The finding also fit in with the findings of Kafadar and Tay (2014) that there is a significant relationship between learning strategies and academic achievement of students in social studies. On the contrary, the finding is not in agreement with the other finding of Ghiasvand (2010) that there no significant different between students' learning strategies skill and students school grade. This disagreement could be as a result of the students' school grade and learning strategies skill applied.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that secondary school students' academic achievement in Economics is strongly influenced by their level of academic engagement and the learning strategies they employ. This implies that beyond content delivery, fostering active participation in learning activities and equipping students with effective study strategies are essential for improving academic outcomes. Educational stakeholders, particularly teachers and school administrators should therefore prioritize interventions that cultivate students' motivation, self-regulation, and active learning habits, as these factors are instrumental in driving academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. The staff and management of schools should ensure they create a favorable environment for learners to participate actively as this will help improve students' academic achievement.
2. State Ministry, education stakeholders as well as federal government should ensure that there is a standard curriculum that captured different learning strategies as this will enable the learners to see the importance of those strategies and apply them to enhance their academic achievement.
3. Economics teachers should emphasize learners centered method while teaching and not the conventional lecture method so that students will be free to be involved in teaching and learning.
4. Government should provide adequate learning materials and instructional materials should be made available to teachers and the students because instructional material creates room for students to engage actively.
5. Guidance and counseling 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 learning strategies and students' 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.
6. Different learning strategies should be taught in schools to enable at students choose the one that is best for them.

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