

Academic Locus of Control and Social Support as Predictors of Research Help-Seeking Behaviour Among Nigerian Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study was designed to determine the influence of academic locus of control and social support on research help-seeking behaviour among undergraduates in South-west Nigeria. Also, it established the level of research help-seeking behaviour among undergraduates, either satisfactory or not. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of an ex-post facto type. Three research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data was collected using a four standardized instruments. Research instruments were administered to one thousand eight hundred (1800) undergraduate students that were randomly selected from six universities in south-west Nigeria. Data was analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 alpha levels. The results showed that research help-seeking behaviour among undergraduates was not satisfactory (24.515; 32.69%); positive significant relationship was observed between academic locus of control and research help-seeking behaviour ($r = .517$) and social support ($r = .388$). Academic locus of control and social support predicted research help-seeking attitude significantly with 35.7% of variance explanation percentage. Also, there was statistically significant difference in undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour based on gender ($t = 1.666$, $P < 0.05$) but not on field of study ($t = 7.009$, $P < 0.05$). The study concluded that academic locus of control and social support was found to exert influence on undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour.

Keywords

Academic Locus of Control, Social Support, Help-Seeking Behaviour, Undergraduates, Research Writing

Received: April 6, 2015 / Accepted: April 19, 2015 / Published online: May 11, 2015

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1. Introduction

Education is also seen as the tool that facilitates economic, social, political and technological advancement and diversification in all human societies. Therefore, people and nations are what they are because of the nature and types of education they have been exposed to (Adegbesan, 2011, Adepoju, 1999). Education today must have the effect of making it possible for a country to have a steady supply of highly creative citizens who help to keep improving the living conditions of the general citizenry, and to solve the existential problems that are thrown up from time to time

(Adegbesan, 2011).

All over the world today, one of the major pre-requisites of completing any higher education is the writing of project/thesis/dissertation. Therefore, university education requires students to engage actively in academic writing practices. Students are expected not only to satisfy the degree completion requirements by writing course assignments and a dissertation, but they are also expected to practice in their contribution to their discipline by writing professional and publishable products (Kamler & Thomson, 2006).

A student may be expected to carry a simple project in his undergraduate programme. No matter how simple it is, he is

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expected to show more initiative, originality and creativity in conducting a research project successfully. In a clearer term, he or she may analyze the data he has collected and discovers that different variables are related. On the other hand, he may need to establish a systematic and logical association between manipulated factors and observed effects (Adenuga & Ayodele, 2009; Koul, 2004)

Previous studies have shown that the ability to present scientific findings in an accurate, informative, coherent and logical manner is a core skill needed by researchers because it dictates success in publishing journal articles, preparing reports, obtaining grant funding and communicating research findings (Lee, Woods, & Tonissen, 2011; Adenuga & Ayodele, 2009; Ayodele & Akinlana, 2012). Quitadamo and Kurtz, (2007) noted that instruction in scientific writing at the undergraduate level can both prepare students for future careers and significantly improve their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the practice of writing regularly, from the beginning of a research project, is advocated as a way to develop, clarify and test ideas while experimental work proceeds (Lee, Woods, & Tonissen, 2011; Martin, 2009). The practice of regular writing also fosters creativity and research paper productivity (Adenuga & Ayodele, 2009, 2012; Boice, 1989).

2. Academic Locus of Control

Locus of control is a belief system regarding causes of person's experiences and factors affecting success or failure (Barzegar, 2011). Locus of control is seen as a predictor of many behaviors (Dilmaç, Hamarta & Arslan, 2009; Tella, Tella & Adeniyi, 2009; Atik, 2006). In addition, the predictor of academic and social behaviors is locus of control (Deniz, Traş & Aydoğan, 2009; Tella & Adika, 2008). Bostic (2010) defined locus of control as effects on life events.

Locus of control structure shows a distribution on dimensions of internal (influenced by inside forces) and external locus of control (influenced by outside forces such as chance or other people) (Akin, 2011). Person who has internal locus of control believes that his/her success /failure are reason of his/her efforts and abilities. If she/he has external locus of control, s/he thinks that her/his success or failure is because of fake or luck (Sarıçam & Duran, 2012). Academic locus of control has the same structure as locus of control (Sarıçam & Duran, 2012) and it shows the control of beliefs in terms of achievement and academic contexts (Daum & Wiebe, 2003).

However, academic locus of control as the way a student accounts for personal achievements and personal failures in school (Çetinkalp, 2010). Students with internal locus of control have a higher academic achievement than the ones with external locus of control and internal locus of control

has been found to be a positive predictor of academic achievement, while external locus of control to be a negative predictor of academic achievement (Eachus & Cassidy, 1997; Findley & Cooper, 1983). Similarly, individuals with internal locus of control are proud of their achievements and they feel ashamed of their failure and the ones with external academic locus of control experience little emotional change in achievement or failure (Hans, 2000; Mearns, 2006).

Also studies have shown that learning approach goals and learning avoidance goals were positive predictors of internal locus of control (Çetinkalp, 2010), and internal locus of control had a direct and positive relationship with the educational achievement of students (Ghasemzadeh & Saadat, 2011). In addition Akin (2010), found that while external academic locus of control correlated positively with learning-avoidance, performance-approach/avoidance goals, internal academic locus of control correlated negatively with performance-approach/avoidance goal, and the internal academic locus of control was related positively to learning-approach/avoidance goals. On the other hand, internal academic locus of control was predicted positively by social self-efficacy and internet addiction was explained negatively by internal academic locus of control and positively by external academic locus of control (Iskender & Akin, 2010).

Tella, Tella and Adeniyi (2009) found that there is a significant correlation between locus of control and academic achievement. Another research showed that high-achieving students have high score in internal locus of control than low achieving students (Shepherd, Owen, Fitch & Marshall, 2006; Yates, 2009). According to the study of Bostic (2010), there is a significant difference in academic achievement of students who have internal locus of control between students who have external locus of control. In another study, Sterbin & Rakow (1996) and Yates (2009) showed that students who have higher locus of control have high score on standardized test. Also, Yazdanpanah, Shragrad and Rahimi (2010) reported that students high on internal locus of control academically achieve higher than externals.

3. Help-Seeking Behaviour

Help-seeking in psychology has received a significant amount of attention focussing mainly on attitudes and individual differences. Help seeking is complex and characterized by efforts that unfold in socio-environmental and situational contexts. In such contexts, help seeking is influenced by multiple factors, many of which have a significant impact on the outcomes of actions (Koldjeski et al., 2004). The concept of 'help-seeking behaviour' has gained popularity in recent years as an important vehicle for exploring and understanding both delay and prompt action

across a variety of different human conditions.

Help-seeking is an important factor in learning (Koulkazarian, 2007). Thus, acquiring appropriate help-seeking behaviours is an important life skill for children and young people. When students do not understand how to complete an assignment, their willingness to seek help is an important concern because it affects performance, grades and, ultimately, level of conceptual understanding (Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001).

Appropriate help-seeking behaviour is regarded as an adaptive mode of coping with concerns or problems (Gourash, 1978), whereas the outcome of a maladaptive coping style can increase emotional and behavioural problems (Dubois et al., 1994). Rickwood et al. (2005) conclude that the help-seeking behaviours of young people are fundamental to their mental health and well-being and can have a positive impact across the lifespan. In addition, the literature is clear that help-seeking is an important factor in learning (Koulkazarian, 2007). Thus, acquiring appropriate help-seeking behaviours is an important life skill for children and young people.

Rickwood et al. (2007) stated that young people have the greatest need for mental health interventions but they are the least likely group to seek help for such issues. It is also clear that among young males the rate of seeking help is even lower still. Möller-Leimkühler (2002) found that only 23% of moderately or severely distressed Australian adolescents sought help for their distress and only 17% sought professional help. Help-seeking is significantly higher among female adolescents than it is for young men (Farrand et al., 2007).

4. Social Support

Social support was reported by Ray (2002) to foster self-esteem, capability, coping, and belonging. Suls (1982) cited by Ayodele (2013) mentioned the following positive effects of social support: it reduces uncertainty and worry, sets good examples, encourages people to share their problems with others, provides sympathy, and makes helpful information available to those who need it.

The effects of social interaction and social support on college student success, retention, academic performance, and other outcomes are profound. Students who perceive a small or relatively inactive support network of friends and peers are more likely to depart from the college than those who perceive a strong support network (Tinto, 1993). According to Bean (2005), "social support and close friendships form the core components of social integration.

Anderman and Jensen (2007) found correlations between

students' senses of belonging and their academic performance. In measuring feelings of belonging within classes and institutions alongside academic motivations and performance, they found a positive correlation between both senses of belonging and academic motivation. Furthermore, instructional practices which emphasized student cooperation and interaction with other students and professors encouraged growth in a sense of belonging among students.

Many other researchers have also looked into the influence of social support on academic gains, finding largely positive correlations between support and academics (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Ullah & Wilson, 2007). In addition, researchers have also found that strong friendship groups can improve students' academic self-confidence and have improvements on the academic goals students set for themselves (Antonio, 2004). Rayle, Kurpius, and Arredondo (2006) found social support to be the strongest predictive variable of student retention among several variables (including self-esteem and university comfort).

Social support is positively correlated with academic achievement in adolescents and emerging adults (Robbins, Lauber, Le, Davis, Langley & Carlstrom, 2004). It is typically assumed that social support leads to increased academic achievement and most studies are designed with this theoretical assumption in mind (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Indeed, the positive relationship between perceived social support and academic achievement has been frequently demonstrated. Cross-sectional research suggests there is a positive correlation between perceived social support and grade point averages in high school (Domagala-Zysk, 2006; Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen, 2000). Rueger et al. (2010) found that classmate social support was a predictor of academic performance for boys, but not for girls. Together, these results suggest that boys utilize peer social support in ways more conducive to improved academic performance than girls.

5. The Problem

It has been observed that students' experience on writing research project has not been encouraging; some attributed this problem to students' factor while others blamed the citadel of learning for this problem. For instance, Al-Naggar, Al-Sarory, Al-Naggar and Al-Muosli, (2012), Bourke et al., (2004), and Gasson and Reyes, (2004) suitability of research topic, intellectual environment of the department, and access to equipment and computers and gender which have been investigated and linked to completion as the problems. In Nigeria, Adenuga and Ayodele (2009) reported the problem of poor service quality (organizational factors) while Ayodele and Akinlana reported the problem of writing apprehension

(personal factor). Therefore, this study was designed to determine the influence of academic locus of control and social support on research help-seeking behaviour among undergraduates in South-west Nigeria. Also, it will establish the level of research help-seeking behaviour among undergraduates.

6. Research Hypotheses

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship among the variables of the study (academic locus of control, social support, and research help-seeking behaviour).
2. There is no significant prediction of academic locus of control and social support on undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour.
3. There is no significant difference in students' research help-seeking behaviour based on gender and discipline.

7. Methodology

Design: This study employed a survey research design of an ex-post – facto type in which the existing status of the independent variables were only determined during data collection without any manipulation of the variables by the researcher.

Sample: Sampling was done through a multiple simple random procedure. There are six States in the South-west Nigeria; sampling of the States was done through simple random sampling techniques of which three States were selected. From each of the States two Universities were purposively selected (one private and one public). In all six (6) Universities were selected while three hundred final year undergraduate students (100 each from Arts, Sciences, and Social Sciences) were randomly selected from each of these schools, making a total of one thousand eight hundred (1800) participants in all. This sample included 1023 (56.8%) male and 777 (43.2%) female. Their age ranges between 19 and 27 with a mean of 22.7 and standard deviation of 9.23

Instrumentation: Four validated instruments were used for collection of data for the study. They are:

1. *Academic Locus of Control Scale (ALCS):* Academic Locus of Control Scale was developed by Akın (2007). It consists of two subscales (academic external locus of control and academic internal locus of control). This instrument is a "5" point Likert type scale consisting of 17-items. Separate scores were provided for Internal Academic Locus of Control (score range = 6-30) and

External Academic Locus of Control (score range = 11 – 55). In the concurrent validity, significant relationships were found between the Academic Locus of Control Scale, which was developed in this study, and Locus of Control Scale (Dağ, 2002). The internal consistency reliability coefficients were .94 for internal academic locus of control and .95 for external academic locus of control. Findings also demonstrated that item-total correlations ranged from .57 to .92. Test-retest reliability coefficients were .97 and .93 for two subscales, respectively. The item-total correlations ranged from .57 to .92.

2. *Students' Thesis Writing Scale (STWS):* STWS was a self-developed questionnaire by the researcher to tap into the experience of the postgraduate students in writing thesis or dissertation. It is 15-items scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Sample items include: 'Generally speaking, thesis writing is of no interest to me' and 'my evaluation of self-worth in research depends on my interest and attitude towards it'. The reliability was ascertained through test-retest method within two weeks intervals. The validity co-efficient index of 0.75 and a test-retest reliability of 0.81 were obtained (Adenuga and Ayodele, 2009). Thus, the instrument was reliable and valid to use.
3. *Research Help-Seeking Behaviour Scale:* This scale was self-developed with a view to measuring undergraduates' behaviour towards research help-seeking. The scale consists of 15 items. Getting a high score with regard to the whole scale indicates a positive behaviour towards help seeking while a low score indicates a negative behaviour. A minimum of 15 points and a maximum of 75 points can be obtained from the scale. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale is .80. The test-retest coefficient was found to be .77.
4. *Social Support Evaluation Scale (SSES):* The scale measures the extent to which the individual is considered as beloved, interested, valued and accepted by the social network he/she belongs to. In this respect, the individual's perceptions regarding social support received from family, friends (close friends and classmates) and teachers are evaluated. The scale is a likert scale and consists of 41 items and three factors. Factor I is Friend Support; Factor II is Family support; and Factor III is Teacher Support. A high score obtained from the scale suggests a high degree of perceived social support. Internal consistency coefficients have been obtained for the criteria validity of the scale ($r = -.62$; $p < 0.01$) and sub-dimensions are calculated as .89, .86 and .88. The test-retest reliability coefficient has been calculated as .57 for all of the scale; the split-half Guttman reliability is .88. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale is .83. The highest score that

can be achieved from the scale is 205 (Gökler, 2007). Within the scope of this research, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is determined as .79.

Procedure: The researcher administered the measuring scales, which guarantee confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, personally with the assistance of three trained research assistants. The researcher consulted with the Registrars and the Deputy Registrars of the selected tertiary institutions in order to intimate them with the purpose of the study. The researcher with the help of four other trained research assistants visited the universities' faculties to administer the instruments directly on the subjects on the earmarked days for the seminar presentation by the faculties. The researcher explained all aspects of the questionnaire to the respondents. The researcher through the help of the Deputy Registrars was able to administer the questionnaire with ease. The cooperation received made it possible to have 100 per cent rate of return. However, it took the researcher a period of six weeks to administer and retrieve the distributed measuring scales.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected through the questionnaires was analyzed using percentage and frequency counts for demographic information about the respondents. Hypotheses were tested using Multiple Regression Analysis, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 alpha levels.

8. Results

Table 1 reveals that the undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour has a mean score of 24.515 (32.69%),

Table 3. Model Summary of the multiple Regression Analysis of the significant influence of academic locus of control and social support on undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour.

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE	Change Statistics				
					R ² Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig. F Change
1	.513	.263	.259	9.242	.259	18.709	1	1798	.013
2	.382	.146	.146	13.009	.146	21.922	2	1797	.000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Academic locus of control; social support.
- b. Dependant Variable: Research help seeking behaviour.

In Table 3, in examining the regression analyses results, it was observed that the two constructed models in the study were significant ($F_{(1,1798)} = 18.709$; $P < .05$, $F_{(2,1797)} = 21.922$; $P < .05$). It was observed that all variables (academic locus of control and social support) predict research help-seeking attitude significantly with 35.7% of variance explanation percentage. In the 1st model, academic locus of control and sub-dimensions (internal and external locus of control) explains the research help seeking behaviour with a percentage of 25.9%. In the 2nd model however, social

which is not satisfactory. This is because it is less than 50%, though higher than the minimum score of 15 which is 20%. It could then be deduced that research help-seeking behaviour among the undergraduate students is not encouraging and satisfactory, which may be as a result of some factors inherent in the students or in the school.

Table 1. Level of undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour.

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev
research help-seeking behaviour	1800	15.00	75.00	24.515	13.912

Table 2. Correlation matrix of the relationship between academic locus of control, social support, and research help-seeking behaviour.

Variables	ALC	SS	RHSB
Academic locus of control (ALC)	1.000	.407**	.517**
Social support (SS)	.407**	1.000	.388**
Research help-seeking behaviour (RHSB)	.517**	.388**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 2 indicated that there is a significant relationship among the variables of the study (academic locus of control, social support, and research help-seeking behaviour). A positive significant relationship was observed between academic locus of control and research help-seeking behaviour ($r = .517$) as well as students' social support ($r = .388$). Also, positive relationship was observed between academic locus of control and social support (.407). The findings imply that academic locus of control, social support, and research help-seeking behaviour were positively related to one another.

support and sub-dimensions (support received from friends/colleagues and support received from tutors/teachers) explains the research help seeking behaviour with a percentage of 14.6%. It was observed that both inter and external academic locus of control variables contributed significantly to the model ($\beta = .191$, $t = 3.403$, $p < .013$; $\beta = .157$, $t = 1.987$, $p < .000$). It was observed further that support received from friends/colleagues contributed to the model ($\beta = .133$, $t = 2.104$, $p < .01$), and support received from tutors/teachers did not significantly contribute to the

model ($\beta = -.041$, $t = -.741$, $p < .05$).

Therefore, the hypothesis that stated that there is no significant prediction of academic locus of control and social

support on undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour by this finding was rejected.

Table 4. T-test analysis showing differences in undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour based on gender and career choice.

Gender	N	X	SD	Mean diff.	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P
Male	1023	21.811	15.455	1.732	1798	1.666	1.960	Not Significant
Female	777	23.543	13.870					
Science	600	25.909	14.051	3.113	1798	7.009*	1.960	Significant
Non-Science	1200	22.796	17.883					

The results presented in Table 4 revealed that the obtained value of t is 1.666 for the gender difference in undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour which was less than the t -critical value of 1.960 at .05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant gender difference. Further analysis of the result based on the respondents' mean scores revealed that female undergraduates with average mean score of 23.543 were better off in their research help-seeking behaviour than their male counterparts with a mean score of 23.543.

The section that measures the difference between science and non-science students revealed a significant difference between science and non-science undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour. The science students had an average mean score of 25.811 over their non-science counterparts with a mean score of 22.796. This implies that there was a significant discipline (field of study) difference in research help-seeking behaviour among undergraduate students.

9. Discussion of Findings

Findings of the first hypothesis revealed that academic locus of control; social support and research help-seeking behaviour were positively related to one another. It can be deduced individuals' belief about themselves to achieve educational goals, appropriate social support received from significant others, and research help-seeking behaviour exhibited to a great extent can enhance their academic success or career. This finding corroborates the earlier finding of Aramugam (2011) who reported that students have at their fingertips the opportunity to explore the world and take in vast amounts of information along the way in order to improve their learning and increase academic performance.

Academic locus of control was reported by the outcome of this research to account for 25.9% of the variance on undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour. The finding of this study is line with the position of previous research of Bostic (2010) that there is a significant difference in academic achievement of students who have internal locus of control and those students who have external locus of control.

In another study, Sterbin and Rakow (1996) and Yates (2009) showed that students who have higher locus of control had high score on standardized test. Also, Yazdanpanah, Shragrad and Rahimi (2010) reported that students with high internal locus of control academically achieve higher than externals.

Social support and its sub-dimensions (support received from friends/colleagues and support received from tutors/teachers) accounted for 14.6% of the variance on undergraduates' research help-seeking behaviour. The implication of this result is that the support received by the students either from their course mates and/or teachers to an extent will determine the undergraduates' success in project writing. This result is in tandem with Rayle, Kurpius, and Arredondo (2006) that social support is the strongest predictive variable of student retention among several variables (including self-esteem and university comfort). Also, Social support is positively correlated with academic achievement in adolescents and emerging adults (Robbins, Lauber, Le, Davis, Langley & Carlstrom, 2004).

The outcome of the hypothesis of no significant difference in students' research help-seeking behaviour based on gender and discipline revealed significant discipline difference but no gender difference. The mixed findings of this hypothesis could be due to the students' orientation about their field of study and belief about seeking help. This outcome support the report of Rickwood et al. (2007) that young people have the greatest need for mental health interventions but they are the least likely group to seek help for such issues.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this study show the predictive effect of academic locus of control and social support on research help-seeking behaviour. Academic locus of control and social support were found to exert more influence on help-seeking behaviour among the undergraduates when it comes to research work and research writing. The results therefore suggest the need for enhanced academic environment that will motivate students to seek for help. Also, quality of student services in higher educational institutions needs to be ensured In spite of the findings, a limitation of this study is

worth noting. The data used in this study came from a cross-sectional self-report design. Therefore, one cannot draw causal conclusions. Future researchers could undertake this topic in an experimental mode or type.

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