

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF MADONNA UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*Students' academic performance is of very critical importance to parents, guardians, as well as other significant stakeholders. Among other factors, social support has been identified as a key variable influencing the academic performances of students. This study examined the relationship between social support and academic performance among Madonna University students. 270 students, selected through convenience sampling method participated in the study. It was hypothesized that social support will be significantly and positively related to academic performance. The social support variable was measured using the Social Support Behavior (SSB) Scale by Vaux et al (1987); while the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) was used to measure the academic performance of students. Correlation analysis was carried out to measure the relationship between social support and academic performance. Results of correlation analysis indicated that there was a positively significant relationship between social support and academic performance ( $r = 0.88$ ). This result validates the positive linear relationship between social support and academic performance. In order words, the higher the social support availed and accessed, the higher the quality of academic performance delivered. The findings of this study will be of immense utility to parents, guardians, educators, counselors, and significant others, in the development of strategies, for the facilitation and sustenance of enhanced academic performance of students.*

**Key Words:** Social Support, Academic Performance

**Introduction**

From post-independence, through the military interregnum, to the present democratic dispensation, Nigeria's education system has witnessed a number of turbulent times in a quest to effectively position that sector for the training and production of requisite manpower to drive the overall goals of sustainable national growth and development, consistent with contemporary trends among developed economies.

Concerns about children's academic performance in most Nigerian households constitute issues of topmost agenda. Although challenges exist at virtually all levels of the educational hierarchy, the striving to pass from a given class to the next higher class, and to ultimately acquire a degree, is most prevalent among university undergraduates (Bassi, Busso, Urzua, & Vargas, 2012). Consequently, the frantic search for factors most likely to be associated with students' academic performance at the university level, should constitute some interesting challenge to Nigerian scholars and researchers as it avails a window of opportunity that helps to inch closer to the knowledge of necessary interventions for the eventuation of improvement of academic performance.

The general perception is that the great majority of the present-day products of Nigerian universities are ill-positioned to effectively contribute to national growth and productivity (Ogbeide, 2012). As Uzoka (2006) had observed, most commentaries lament the present uncertainties regarding the quality of students and educational standards in Nigeria. According to Akor (2006) university education in Nigeria totters at the brinks due to the uninformed nature of intervention by concerned authorities in the management of educational institutions as well as the social and academic lives of the students.

To reverse the trend and bring about a more inspiring state of affairs, it behooves the various political leadership hierarchies in the country to mandate relevant authorities in the educational system to take a more perspicuous assessment of the relevant constituencies of the social life of students in schools across the nation with a view to interrogating and re-engineering all mundane and non-intellective approaches to the management of university/tertiary institutions, for the needed stimulation and nurturing of a system that consciously agitates students' creative capacities toward improved social and academic performance (Ogbeide, 2012). This will entail the tracking of students' performances, their challenges, as well searching for valuable insights on what intervention procedures may be required to effectively mitigate identified challenges threatening their prospects of desired academic performance.

It is believed therefore that a keen examination of possible antecedents of academic performance, at all levels of educational engagement, will be most expedient. Among a host of factors, social support has been particularly found to be related to students' performance at every educational level (Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, 2010; Iglesia, Stover, & Liporace, 2014). According to Gurung (2006) social support, refers to the experience of being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others who are present in one's life. Social support has been described as a promoter of health and well-being (Dollette, Steese, Philips & Matthews, 2004).

Social support for students emanates from a number of sources: from fellow students, family, friends, from teachers, from the immediate community, or even from social networks to which he/she may belong. Social support can manifest in the mould of material assistance or in the form of emotional support (Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, 2011). Several study outcomes have indicated that the individual's adjustive capacity is strongly linked to the quality of availed and received social support (Nahid and Sarkis, 1994; Holahan, Valentiner & Moos 1995; Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, 2011). It should therefore be useful to determine the mechanism through which students perceive and receive social support; and to assess the extent of its relatedness to academic performance, if any.

Oswald & Suss (1994) identified warmth; behavioral control; and psychological autonomy as the three dimensions of social support deriving from the family and friends constituencies. These highlighted dimensions stimulate and provide impetus for the development of social proficiencies; responsibility and competence; impulse control, positive self-esteem, self-worth and self-efficacy among other self-conceptions. These three dimensions also play the "Ombudsman" by inwardly counseling the individual against unacceptable social conducts; leading ultimately to the enhancement of academic performance.

This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between social support, perceived and received, and the observable manifestations of academic performance of a Nigerian sample of undergraduate students. The study outcome is expected to provide more instructive insights into the salient dynamics that underpin and provide excitation for the support-achievement nexus. The designers, administrators and the regulators of the education system in Nigeria would find the outcome of this study enlightening and beneficial especially for the re-engineering of hitherto mundane perspectives, to a more cosmopolitan and functional approach to educational development and management, consistent with global best practices.

### ***Social Support and Academic Performance***

Academic development is considered as having a strong relationship with social development (Konoshi, Hymel, Zumbo & Li, 2010). The reason why availability of social support tends to predict better academic performance takes anchorage on the two perspectives of the social support construct - the *main effect* model; and the *buffering* model - as conceptualized by Cohen & Wills (1985). The academic arena has often been seen as a hassle-fraught, stress-laden domain (Richaud de Minzi, 2006; Wrzesniewski & Chylinska, 2007; Shokri, Farahani, Nouri, & Moradi, 2013). Consequently, the perception of the availability as well as the actual utilization of availed support, constitute elements that can significantly abate the stressful experiences

that often characterize academic pursuits. The prospect of actual accessibility of social support is particularly crucial because it strengthens the feeling of a resource unconditionally ceded for utilization at the beneficiary's behest. They function as protective factors that insulate against the disorientating impacts of stressors; thus hedging against low achievement and school disengagement (Mackinnon, 2012; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010).

Findings of numerous studies appear to be convergent on the idea that social support constitutes a very significant factor in determining positive outcomes among children and adolescents (Arslan, Cardark & Uysal, 2013; Uglesia, Stover & Liporace, 2014). Steinberg and Darling (2005) examined the relationship between social support and academic achievement among a sample of students. Their study outcome indicated that social support emanating from family and friends appeared to impact some significant influence on the academic performance and long-term educational plans of the students. Wentzel (1998) also conducted a study on social support of parents, teachers, as well as peers, for their motivational influence on academic and pro-social goals, among 167 middle school students in a predominantly middle class community. The study findings revealed that parental and peers support predicted academic goals.

Concerning the role of peers in the motivation of teens to remain participative of students' activities and programs, Dollete, Steese, Philips & Matthews (2004) found that when teens had positive peer interactions in their extra-curricular activities, they reported greater levels of commitment and increased motivation to continue to participate in the activities. In other words, the findings point to the fact that teens whose activities lacked positive peer relationships would deliver lower levels of commitment and motivation toward their talents and other relevant activities.

The crucial role played by social support, particularly from family and friends in individual's performance has actually been underscored by a number of studies. In a study carried out by Steinberg and Darling (1994), students were directly requested to report on the extent to which their parents and friends encourage them, in board ramifications, to put up excellent academic performance in their institutions of learning. On the part of the concerned parents, they were asked to indicate their level of involvement in their wards' school activities, the standards of performance, as well as their expected outcomes for their wards' performance. For friends, the questions were about the level of premium they attached to academic achievements; and the extent to which they were supportive of high performance among their friends. Findings of the study revealed that both family and friends significantly influenced the academic performance of the students.

Also, Holahan, Valentiner & Moos (1995), in a cross-sectional study involving first year students found that youngsters with elevated levels of perceived parental support reported higher levels of well-being and happiness, and were less prone to distress and anxiety compared to those with lower levels of parental support. Similarly, Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline and Russel (2004) examined the role of perceived social support from family and friends by tracking students' performance via their Grade Point Average (GPA) from the beginning of the First Semester to the end of the Second Semester. The outcome of the study showed that, after controlling for academic aptitude - college admission test - perceived parental support and peer social support were significantly predictive of the students' academic adjustments. Their finding was in consonance with outcomes of earlier studies, which indicated that social support was a crucial buffer factor, which provided the necessary enablement to students.

On their part, Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, (2009) carried out a study involving 120 undergraduate university students to examine the role social support plays in low and high performing students. Findings of their study revealed that student enjoying high levels of social support reported better academic performance than those with low levels of social support. The outcomes of all these studies tend to suggest that the availability and receipt of the right quality and quantity of social support from family, friends and relevant others, significantly contributed to the development of elevated levels of academic performance by students.

Social support has been found to be related to healthy levels of development. For example, social supports from family and friends have been involved in cases of psychological well-being. Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, (2010) conducted a study to examine the relationship between social support and psychological problems, using 120 undergraduate university students. Their study findings revealed that social support was significantly correlated with depression, anxiety, and with stress in a negative way. Also, outcome of the

study of Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, (2010) in the relationship between social support and academic achievement among 120 undergraduate students of International Islamic University in Malaysia indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between social support and academic achievement; suggesting that the higher the social support, the higher the level of achievement.

Against the backdrop of these diaries, it could be safely concluded that the provision of social support from the respective constituencies of parents and peers, would almost certainly influence students' academic achievement in a very positive way. This is because when students perceive the availability of social support, and go ahead to actually utilize same, they have a feeling of being loved, cherished, and cared about. They therefore, tend to reciprocate these gestures by summoning the necessary personal internal resources to deliver performances that would cause their respective benefactors to be proud of them; and to perceive their "investments" as worth the while. Because the presence of social support acts as a buffer, recipients of social support tend to be insulated against everyday routine worries that often generate anxiety, depression and other pathological social conditions; thus motivating such students to deliver the requisite focus and momentum to achieve.

A profound knowledge of the crucial role social support plays in the prospect of students' academic performance as well as the mechanism through which such support is propagated, remain highly invaluable. Parents, teachers, school administrators and significant others in the Nation's education system may leverage inherent insights to guide them on the quality, quantity and regularity of social support to be extended to these youngsters, in order to create a psychological state that would effectively conduce to the facilitation of enhanced academic performance.

### **Hypothesis**

There will be a significant and positive relationship between Social Support and Academic Performance among university undergraduate students.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The study participants were 270 undergraduate students of Madonna University Nigeria (MUN) in Years 2, 3, and 4 selected through purposive sampling technique. Of these participants 170 (62.96%) were females, while 100 (37.04%) were males from the Departments of Business Administration, Psychology and Mass Communication. 121 participants (44.81%) were from the Department of Business Administration, 32 (11.85%) from the Department of Psychology, while 117 (43.34%) were from the Department of Mass Communication.

Of the total study population, 70 (25.93%) were second year Students; 92 (34.07%) were third year students; while 108 (40.00%) were year four or final year students. In terms of their ages, 19 of them were 19 years old, 31 were 20 years old, 83 were 21 years old, 72 were 22 years of age, 30 were 23 years, 23 of them were 24 years old, while 12 were 25 years old.

First year students were excluded from this study, for a number of reasons: First, many of the students were still very young; just fresh from secondary schools, and yet to really take a bearing on the *raison d'etre* of their being in the University. Secondly, some of them, on account of the peculiarities of their backgrounds were yet to effectively integrate themselves into the mainstream university sociology. The logic escorting this exclusion takes anchorage on the expectation and belief that after the students' first year in the University, many of these highlighted social encumbrances would have been remarkably vitiated. They would thus have attained a reasonable level of acculturation with the sophistication and cosmopolitanism of University communities; and this would allow for more equitable basis of evaluation.

### **Measures**

**Social Support:** This variable was measured using the Social Support Behaviours Scale (SSB) developed by Vaux, Reidep & Stewart (1987). The SSB is a 45 item questionnaire designed to assess the availed supportive behaviours from the respective domains of family and friends. The scale is established on a 5-point Likert-type rating. The ratings run from 1 = no one would do this; through 3 = some family members/friends would probably do this; to 5 = most family members /friends would certainly do this. The higher the scores, the more reflective it is of the presence of Social Support. The internal constituency values

accruing from family and friends were respectively 0.79 and 0.77; and this was considered adequate for the study.

### **Results**

A total of 270 undergraduate students of Madonna University, Nigeria (Okija Campus) from the three Departments of Business Administration, Psychology and Mass Communication participated in the study. Analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between Social Support and Academic Performance using correlation analysis. The analysis indicated significant and positive relationship between the two constructs with a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.88$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . This result (see Table 1) is indicative of the fact that higher scores in Social Support tend to predict the attainment or higher academic performance among the students.

**Table 1: Correlation between Social Support and Academic Performance**

Variable	1	2
1. Social Support	-	-
2. Academic Performance	0.88**	-

\*\*Correlations significant at the 0.01 level (2 - tailed)

### **Discussion**

This study investigated the relationship between Social Support and academic performance among 270 undergraduate students of Business Administration, psychology and Mass Communications, department of Madonna University, Nigeria. Female and male students in second, third and final years from the three departments participated in the study. While social support was tested for psychological construct, variables tested for demographics in the study included age, gender, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), departments of study, as well as the year of study, (i.e. years two, three, and four).

The study hypothesized that there will be a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and academic performance among University undergraduate students. Results of the correlation analysis showed that perceived social support indeed has a significantly positive relationship with academic performance among students. This result ( $r = 0.88$ ) confirmed the hypothesis. This result corroborates previous findings by Eisenberg, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro (1990) that there was a highly significant positive relationship of perceived support with attendance and performance.

The outcome of this study equally confirmed previous findings by Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline & Russell (1994) that parental social support significantly predicted Grade Point Average (performance). This study result was also in agreement with prior research outcomes by Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah (2009; 2010; 2011) that there were significant negative relationships between social support and psychological problems; thus alluding to the positive relationship between social support and performance (having effectively attenuated the undermining impact of psychological challenges).

The outcome of the present study was also in tandem with the findings by Iglesia, Stover & Liporace (2014) which underscored the positive relationship between social support and academic achievement; even though their study also examined sources of the support and gender differences. These findings highlight the notion that the perception of availability of social support by individuals tend to bolster their beliefs that the requisite resources to diligently engage in and excel in their academic endeavors are in attendance. They therefore tend to be better adjusted having concluded the appraisal of the social support's capacity to effectively put at abeyance, distractions and undermining elements that may impinge the prospects of optimality in their performance. Contingent upon these thoughts and beliefs, social support can be seen as a key indicator of academic performance especially through its stress-buffering mechanism.

### **Implications of the study**

The findings of this study provide a number of theoretical and practical implications in the domain of academic achievement particularly among undergraduates in university organizations. The vast illumination of critical home-school dynamics that are predictive of and contributory to, the drive toward academic excellence, constitute a significant contribution to the enrichment of the quantity of theoretical discussions in this domain.

Consonant with the exchange theory therefore, when students perceive the availability and accessibility of necessary enabling resources from parents, teacher and peers, they tend to reciprocate in the form of scaling up their efforts to achieve, in order to ensure that the various constituencies supplying the support do not have cause to express regrets over ‘wasted investments’. This notion is particularly prominent in most Nigerian cultural settings where activities in families, households, and kindred are driven by a keen sense of community.

Practical implications of this study involve the crucial imperatives of leveraging the insights inherent in this study outcome, to awaken and agitate the appreciation in the general corpus of students (of Madonna University, Nigeria; and sundry University organizations), of the care being extended toward their psychological well-being; and thus trigger in these students, the necessary excitation of feelings of obligation to reciprocate through tenacious commitment to diligence in learning; for enhanced academic performance.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the relationship between social support and academic performance among undergraduate students of Madonna University, Nigeria. Part of the focus was to examine the extent of convergence that would be established between the findings of present study, and the outcomes of prior studies. This is in consonance with Kantowitz, Roediger and Elme’s (1994) assertion that converging operations are veritable means for enhancing the generalizability of scientific results.

Results of this study substantially converged with findings of past studies in which the relationship between social support and academic performance were the issue of consideration. The outcomes of the present study indicated that there was a positively significant relationship between social support and academic performance among university undergraduate students. It could therefore be asserted that the quantity and quality of social support extended to, and received by students from the various provinces – parents, teachers, peers – are predictive of and contributory to, enhanced academic performance of university undergraduate students. The crucial salience of appreciating the fact that the performance delivered by students do not stem exclusively from issues of academics but very importantly also, from the social support provided for them, is germane.

Mention should be made of some of the limitations of this study. The study sample was exclusively from a faith-based catholic private university. This could certainly impugn the fidelity of the study outcome vis-à-vis extrapolating the result to other populations. Again, the sample came from just three departments of the university - fundamentally from the social sciences and management to the total eclipsing of the other faculties. This is a source of limitation to the extrapolate ability of the study findings. Also, students of the university are from backgrounds of manifestly higher socio-economic status. It would therefore appear inappropriate to attempt to generalize the study outcomes to, for instance, public university populations with students of parentages of relatively lower socio-economic profiles.

Of great concern also, was the measure used to assess Academic Performance – CGPA. It should be appreciated that grade point averages often differ remarkably by career and by sundry allied factors. For instance a grade point average of 4.5 may represent a very sterling performance in some careers, while in some other careers it may just be a shade above average. This constitutes a source of error and it is considered a limitation to the findings of this study.

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