

EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

This study is a survey of the influence of emotional health on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Cross River State, Nigeria. A total of two thousand and four (2004) respondents were selected from twenty three (23) public primary schools in Calabar, Cross River State. An instrument named 'Primary School Pupils' Questionnaire' was developed to collect data. A research hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 critical level. Data collected were analysed using a t-test of one sample mean (pop t-test). Result of the study showed significantly high influence of emotional health on pupils' academic performance. The counselling implications were highlighted and recommendations were also made.

Introduction

The school as a social organization is an identifiable setting for the achievement of the goal of education of the nation, state and community it is sited in. It is therefore, a formal system purposed for the all round development of the individuals for sustainable development of the society. At the primary school which is the foundational level of education, majority of the children commute from home to school. This is to foster effective transition and gradual integration into the larger society.

As they participate in class activities or socialize, diverse emotions are displayed or may be inferred from their behaviour. Some of these children are very social, mingle, play and share jokes with others. Many are shy, withdrawn, fearful and helpless. Some show affection and love for others; some are proud, confident, secured, relaxed and full of amusement, yet some show evidence of weakness either from ill health, over work or abuse. These diverse emotions irrespective of the role of the school, tend to influence the academic achievement of the pupils.

Emotional Health and Academic Performance

Emotional health is an integral part of an individual's wholesome development which to a great extent, influences an individual's ability to adjust as well as foster activities. It is an individual's feeling, the subjective reactions to the environment which are accompanied by natural and hormonal responses (Basse, 1997). This means that emotion is a reaction to one's interpretation of what he perceives. It is inner directed and its reaction may be covertly or overtly.

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Denga (1988) stated that it is an aroused state of the organism that involves physical bodily response to precise stimulus. It is an important constituent of the affective domain which is made up of feelings, attitude, temperament and other reactions. Onyejiaku (1991) emphasised that as an important constituent of the affective domain, emotion has the greatest influence on one's thought processes and behaviour. This means that emotion affects the way one thinks and experiences situations as pleasant or unpleasant. Thus, when the situation is perceived as pleasant, it is seen as positive with mixed feelings such as enthusiasm, excitement, calm, peacefulness, etc; but when perceived as unpleasant, it is seen as negative with feelings such as anxiety, anger, guilt, sadness, etc. Onyejiaku (1991) also added that it is possible to be high on both positive and negative dimensions of emotion at the same time.

Health is simply defined as a state of wellness (McCosh Health Centre, 2008). This refers to a state of reduced stress, anxiety and depression. Therefore, emotional health is the state of well being of one's feelings or displeasure of one's feelings.

School children like adults have such strong feelings expressed when they undergo an experience of pleasure or displeasure. Children in primary schools come from different home backgrounds. Some of the children live with their biological parents while others live with their guardians and take to such roles as house helps, cooks, gardeners and even sales boys and or girls. Whatever family background they come from, at school they are faced with the task of learning. Learning at school depends largely on the emotional well being of the individuals. Harper and Lynch (2007) and Lewallen (2004), posited that academic success is an excellent indicator for the overall well being of children and a primary predictors and determinant of youths and adults health out comes. Similarly, Zin, Bloodworth, Weissberg and Walberg (2004) found in their study that emotional behaviour can have a strong impact on success in school and ultimate life.

Shittu (2004) found from his investigation that poor parental care with gross deprivation of social and economic needs usually yield poor academic performance of the child while good parenting support by strong academic performance of the child. A child, who is brought up by biological parents, would be emotionally stable because he may be well taken care of, have his emotional and educational needs well provided. The love provided by the parents is bound to build confidence in the child ensuring that he studies with confidence; than one who is not shown even the minimal affection, nor have his educational needs provided for. It is even worse where children are battered, underfed, lie in poor environment and may be abused or molested in any form. Dunkle and Nash (1991) found such factors as hunger, physical and emotional abuse, and chronic illness as leading to poor school performance.

The state of poverty in most homes according to Danesty and Okediran (2002) have thrown many children to street hawking which has psychological problems such as sex networking behaviour, juvenile delinquent behaviour which

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takes much of the children school time thereby resulting to poor academic performance and drop out syndrome. In many of such homes too, discipline is sadly lacking. Since disciplinary measures can not be taken out on the children who are co-providers for the home, they become controllers of 'selves' living loose life styles which have negative emotional and educational implication on their school performance.

In some homes, children are not allowed to make friends. This has severe impact on their feelings and may evoke emotional disturbance. Though positive emotions may sustain activities and give intensity, direction and colour to behaviour, but when not in the right direction, it becomes negative (Papalia and Olds, 1994). Roeser, Ekcles and Strobel (1998) found that students with frequent feelings of internalized stress such as sadness, anxiety, depression show diminished academics performance, exhibit school difficulties, including learning delay and poor achievement. A research work by Gumora and Arsenio (2002) on the relationship between emotional disposition and academic performance among middle school students concluded that emotional regulation significantly contributes to grade point average of students. Also, a longitudinal research carried out by Hanson, Austin and Lee Bayha (2004) indicated that increasing sadness or helplessness among students was related to subsequent decline in gains in test score, in reading, languages and mathematics. They however found that students that were reported to have caring relationship in school had high expectations in school.

Statement of the Problem

The academic performance of most pupils in the primary school has been found to be low. This has become a thing of concern because most of these children after leaving school cannot read nor write. Accusing fingers have been pointed to teachers, government and even parents who might have failed to present the lesson well or failed to provide the children with the necessary materials and equipments for learning effectively. One has never thought it wise to think of the children's feelings or emotional well being. The problem therefore is that children may be affected by their emotional health either positively or negatively. The question this study seeks to answer: does the emotional health of pupils influence their academic performance? Specifically to what extent does emotional health influence their academic performance?

Hypothesis

H₀: The influence of emotional health on pupils' academic performance is not significantly high.

Methodology

The design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey design. The population comprised of all pupils in public primary schools in Calabar, Cross River State. A total of two thousand three hundred and forty-five (2345) pupils

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were randomly selected from twenty three (23) primary schools and constituted the sample of the study.

The instrument used for this study was questionnaire which was supported with oral interview. The instrument was developed by the researchers and validated by one of them, an expert in educational test and measurement. The instrument used was a 12 item, Primary School Pupils' Questionnaire, comprising of two sections. Section A consisted of sex and class of pupils. Section B consisted of ten (10) dichotomously scored items, meant to measure pupils' self reported influence of emotional health on academic performance. They were to indicate by ticking 'yes' or 'no' against the items (statement). An indication of 'yes' was taken as indication for influence, and a score of 6 and above indicate a high influence, below 6, is an indication of low influence.

Face and content validation procedures were adopted to ensure professionally acceptable validation standard. Fifty (50) pupils who were not part of the sample were administered the questionnaire twice within an interval of two weeks. A test re-test reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researchers with the help of pupils' teachers. However, three hundred and forty-one (341) returned questionnaire were partly completed and hence invalidated. Only two thousand and four (2004) were used for the analysis.

Data Analysis

The population t-test technique was used in testing the only hypothesis of the study at .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis

The influence of emotional health on pupils' academic performance is not significantly high. To test this hypothesis, the researchers reasoned that for the influence of emotional health to be adjudged significantly high, the score made should be greater than 5.00 (which is half of the number of score 10).

Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) is that, the mean score representing the significance of emotional health of the pupils' academic performance is not significantly higher than 5.00.

$$H_0: \mu = 5.00$$

$$H_1: \mu \neq 5.00$$

A t-test of one sample mean (pop t-test) was used to test the null hypothesis. The results of the analysis are shown on Table 1.

Table 1: A t-Test Analysis of Whether the Influence of Emotional Health on Pupils' Academic Performance is Significantly High

Variable	x	SD	t- value
df			
Influence of emotional health on academic performance	5.00	2.25	40.00*
Reference mean	5.00		

* Significant at .05 level (critical t-value = 1.65); N = 2004

Data in Table 1 shows the calculated t-value of 40.00 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.65 (for the one tailed test) at .05 level of significance and is therefore significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. The interpretation is that the influence of emotional health on pupils' academic performance is significantly high.

Discussion of the Findings

The study found that emotional health influences academic performance of pupils and the extent of this was also seen to be significantly high from the only hypothesis of the study. This means that pupils may be handicapped in academic performance by the state of their emotional health. This study confirms that of Shittu (2004) who found that poor parental care with gross deprivation of social and economic needs usually yield poor academic performance of children while good parenting with stable and economic environment enhance emotional stability for academic achievement of the child. Nevertheless, Shittu also noted too that in some homes, children are provided with all the necessary things but the slightest bit of affection is not displayed towards the child due to the fact that one of the parents is late, or is divorced. Such children also suffer emotionally even though they may not express or speak of it at home. This pent up emotional problem often times affect the children's perception and interpretation of school as a place for abandoning them thereby unwilling to partake effectively in class resulting in poor performance. Therefore, whatever be the cause of the emotional trauma, pupils' emotion influences their academic performance.

This finding is also in agreement with Hanson, Austin and Lee Bayha (2004) who emphasised that increasing sadness and helplessness among pupils was related to subsequent decline in academic performance. Thus, sadness and helplessness from such factors as hunger, physical and emotional abuse and chronic illness as found by Dunkle and Nash (1991) due to poverty often throw children into streets to hawk for wares. The trauma faced by these children is enough to forestall concentration in class. This emotional behaviour has strong impact on success in school and ultimate life (Zin, Bloodworth, Weishberg and Walberg, 2004).

Implication for Counselling

From the findings of this study, policy makers, the parents, educators and the general public need take critical look again at the concept of ‘the right of the child’. Judging from the fact that the emotional state of the child influences his academic performance simply implies that his ability to function effectively as a member of the society in future to a great extent is determined by his emotional health right from the foundational level of education. Therefore, the right of the child goes beyond the provisions of food, clothes, physical facilities and materials for his academic attainment to diverse ways of showing care, protection and love. This also highlights the need for ‘children counselling’ for all in order to enhance better understanding and appreciation of children through the use of various forms of counselling techniques.

Recommendation and Suggestions

The school counsellor should through the Parents/Teachers Association organize a day’s workshop for the parents whereby issues on the right of the child may be effectively addressed.

The government should ensure that policies promulgated concerning the ‘child’ are enforced. To enforce such policies will call for awareness of them, their meanings, ways of implementing and the implications for contravening them.

The government should make life meaningful for their citizenry by enforcing same salary structure for both state and federal workers. The situation whereby various states in a nation have different salary structures does reflect the unity of the nation and the right of the masses who are not opportune to work in federal establishment but are working in state establishment.

Parents should be conscious of their responsibilities and not molest nor abuse their children by forcing them into child labour in order to help with the upkeep of the house.

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