

## **Psychological Correlates of Academic Underachievement among Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom State**

**By**

**Dr. Isiguzo, Blessing Chioma**

[cisiguzo@gmail.com](mailto:cisiguzo@gmail.com)

**Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling  
Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt**

**&**

**Dr. Isukwem, Gideon Chiedozie**

**Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling  
Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt**

### **Abstract**

The study investigated psychological correlates of academic underachievement among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. The study used the correlational research design. Three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised all 48,840 SS2 students in the 235 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 400 students was randomly and independently selected for the study using the purposive sampling technique. Two instruments were used in collecting data for this study. They include; Psychological Inventory (PI) and Biology and Mathematics Achievement Test (BMAT). The Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instruments, the reliability coefficient of Psychological Inventory (PI) 0.81 and Biology and Mathematics Achievement Test (BMAT) was 0.74 respectively. Simple regression analysis was used in answering the research questions, while t-test associated with simple regression was implored in testing the hypotheses formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study showed that locus of control, motivation, and self-efficacy relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that students should be continually motivated to learn by both their parents and teachers, as this will inspire them to do better in school and achieve more scholastically. And the school counsellors should encourage the students to persevere as to achieve their academic goals despite any circumstance.

**Keywords:** Academic Underachievement, Locus of control, motivation, self- efficacy,

### **Introduction**

Academic achievement of students especially at the secondary school level is not only a pointer to the effectiveness of the school, but also a major determinant of the future of the youths and a nation's development in general. Learning is a medium through which the attainment of students' educational goals can be achieved. Learning outcomes have become a phenomenon of interest to many, and this account for the reason why scholars have been

working hard to unravel factors relating to students' academic underachievement (Aremu & Soka, 2002). Matthews and McBee (2007) stressed that the problem of academic underachievement has intrigued educators for quite some time and is an ongoing concern. They added that the issue of academic underachievement is one of great concern, especially because it is not a problem only among gifted learners but prevails at all ability levels. Academic underachievement can be conceptualised as decline in students' performance in standard examinations, test or classwork when compared to their actual performance (Shabbir & Rukhsana, 2011). Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006) explained academic underachievement as performing below expectation or potential. Reis and McCoach (2000) defined academic underachievement as a discrepancy between ability and achievement.

Psychologists often use this term academic underachievement for a student whose academic performance scores are significantly lower than those scored on the standardized intelligence and aptitude tests (Veas, Gilar, Miñano, & Castejón, 2016). In general, academic underachievement is defined as failure to meet the academic requirements of the school setting (Connor, 2002). Academic underachievers are students who exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments), and actual achievement as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations (Ibeawuchi & Iruloh, 2017). Marsh (2007) explained that an underachieving student is one whose actual attainment as indicated by his scholastic attainment in school, does not measure up to his potential academic achievement as indicated by his abilities. For Reis and McCoach (2000), academic underachievement is a lower level of achievement by an individual in school than what would be expected. Reports from school teachers and parents have shown that there is continuing decline in the academic achievement of many secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. The researchers have also observed that there is an increase in students' inability to perform well in various examination organized by bodies like the West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Premium Times on November 7, 2022 reported a decrease of more than five percent in performance of students when compared with the 81.7 percent pass rate recorded in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) examination of 2021. The report further shows that Akwa Ibom was ranked fifteen when considering the number and percentage of candidates that obtained five credits and above including Mathematics and English Language in Nigeria's 36 States and FCT. According to Akomolafe (2010), academic underachievement is based on

several factors, such as the student's attitude, interest, personal characteristics, motivation and social class which in addition to learning are known to influence their academic achievement. Other studies have also suggested that locus of control, parental level of education, school type and parental income level may relate to students' academic underachievement. This study will therefore examine psychological correlates of academic underachievement among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

There are debates that locus of control could be linked to students' academic underachievement. Locus of control is a personality characteristic that determines the degree with which an individual believes they are in control of life events. It is a psychological and personality trait that influences people to attribute their own failure and success to either internal or external factors (Nwankwo 2005). The concept of locus of control has been originally developed by Julian Rotter, and can be generalized into basic dichotomy which is internal and external locus of control (Khir, Redzuan, Hamsan & Shahrimin, 2015). Locus of control refers to an individual's perception about the underlying main cause of events in his/her life (Edglossary, 2013). It has to do with belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or an event outside our personal control (external control orientation) (Anyamene, Nwokolo & Akunne, 2017). Fanelli (2010) explained that the concept has two extremes, at one extreme (internal), the individual thinks of himself as being responsible for his own behaviour. At the other extreme (external), the individual sees others or luck or circumstances beyond his control as responsible for his behaviour. Sagone and De-Caroli (2014) stated that individuals with internal locus of control believe that future outcomes depend primarily on personal actions, whereas individuals with external locus of control ascribe actions to factors outside their control, such as fate or chance. Kumar (2017) observed that students do causal analysis of their academic outcomes. They attribute their academic outcomes to internal factors such as intelligence, hard work and ability and to external factors such as luck, rules of examination system and biased marking etc. Students with an internal academic belief system excel in academics than the students with the external academic belief system (Syeda & Ruhi, 2014). A student with an internal locus of control believes that success or failure is not beyond his control for instance, this student would believe that grades are the outcome of his effort whereas a student with an external locus of control believes that success or failure is controlled by external forces beyond his control and may believe that grades do not reflect effort and are effected by external factors such as luck, examination system, or biased attitude

of the teacher (Tella, Tella & Adeniyi, 2011). Ugurogolo and Walberg as cited in Syeda and Ruhi (2014) reported that students who take more responsibility of their academics are more likely to perform better whereas those who attribute their academic success to external factors tend to be underachiever academically. Troncone, Drammis and Labella (2014) stressed that locus of control that there is a significant relationship between locus of control and students' academic underachievement.

Motivation is another variable that may relate to secondary school students' academic underachievement. Motivation is generally regarded as the drive to achieve targets and the process to maintain the drive. Motivation provides an important foundation to complete cognitive behaviour, such as planning, organization, decision-making, learning, and assessments (Tucker, Zayco, & Herman, 2002). (Muola, 2010) defined motivation as the drive to work with diligence and vitality, to constantly steer toward targets, to obtain dominance in challenging a difficult tasks and create sense of achievement as a result. Rabideau (2005) opined that motivation is the driving force behind all the actions of an individual. Kropff (2006) viewed motivation as an inner drive that directs a student's behaviour towards the fulfilment of a goal. Motivation as an academic engagement refers to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural indicators of student investment in and attachment to education (Tucker, Zayco & Herman, 2002). A look at all these definitions by many psychologists shows that most of them tend to agree that motivation means an internal state that initiates, sustains and directs behaviour (Woolfolk & Kapur as cited in Ejide and Ejiofor, 2023). According to Slavin (2006) motivation is one of the factors that contribute to academic success, motivation is what gets one going, keeps on going and determine where one is to go. Generally, all students are motivated, but their motivation may be focused on different things. Therefore, motivation could be described as the extent to which individuals differ in their need to strive to attain rewards, such as physical satisfaction, praise from others and feelings of personal mastery. Students with high motivation will act in ways that will help them to outperform others, meet or surpass some standard of excellence, or do something unique, whereas students with low motivation are susceptible to becoming underachievers (Muola, 2010). Awan (2011) stressed that all students are influenced by a need to achieve to a certain degree, students who hold a high desire of success, work hard to achieve, however, students who are less motivated tend to underachieve academically. Uguroglu and Walbert (2007), see motivation as an important contributor to students' academic achievement and underachievement. Gottfried as cited in Troncone, Drammis and

Labella (2014) stressed that there is positive relationship between motivation and academic underachievement. He explained that students with higher intrinsic motivation had higher academic achievement and intellectual performance than those with low intrinsic motivation. Another variable that may be related to secondary school students' academic underachievement is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has been conceptualized as one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Shahed, Hashmi and Hashmi (2016) described self-efficacy as trusting one's abilities and powers for learning and performance. They added that it is a key trait for both academic success and underachievement among students. Martinez-Pons (2002) described a self-efficacious individual as one who believes in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Bandura as cited in Chandler and Heffer (2009) hypothesized that self-efficacy affects an individual's choice of activities, effort, and persistence in achieving success. Duckworth (2016) described self-efficacy as personal judgment of one's capabilities to organize and execute course of action to attain designated types of educational outcomes. This made Agamugoro and Izuchi (2022) to suggest that the cognitive, emotional and functional processes are controlled and managed by personal beliefs. Self-efficacy is low when students lose confidence in their ability to perform task in school and in their daily activities. Self-efficacy beliefs influence the courses of action learners choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavours, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self- hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (Anderson, 2013). Bandura as cited in Ejide and Ifejiolor (2023) further stated that it will also influence the amount of effort expended on the task, the persistence on the task and the overall performance.

Pajares and Schunk (2001) observed that having a higher level of self-efficacy increases an individual's accomplishments. Kapucu (2017) opined that individuals who have a high level of self-efficacy are more confident in mastering difficult tasks and persist in achieving in these tasks. Therefore, learners' self confidence in their capabilities is critical in determining their academic achievement (Pajares and Schunk 2001). Adeyemi and Agokei (2010) opined that the self-efficacy of a student is essential to his/her academic success in school. They further added that when self-efficacy beliefs are negatively related to students' performance and effort, the end result is academic underachievement. Yaman (2015) stressed that students

who have a low sense of efficacy for accomplishing a task may avoid it; whereas those who believe they are capable participate readily. Students who feel efficacious are hypothesized to work harder and persist longer when they encounter difficulties than those who doubt their capabilities hence, they become academic underachievers (Soh, 2011).

There are worries about the increasing nature of academic underachievement of secondary school students especially in external examinations like WAEC and JAMB. Students' academic underachievement has resulted in low and negative remarks about the educational standard in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria as a nation when compared to other nations. Poor academic achievement has made job recruitment processes difficult as there are fewer persons with the required pass grade to fill in vacant positions in most organizations.

Academic underachievement has also resulted in negative labelling of students by their peers and even family members, thus causing some students to becoming school drop-out. The situation is so critical that parents now blame their children's academic underachievement on the teaching methodology adopted by the teachers, the school and lack of fund from the government. Today, the poor results obtained by male and female students in test of general ability are alarming and needs the attention of all educational stakeholders and researchers. Therefore, this study investigated psychological correlates of academic underachievement among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The study investigated psychological correlates of academic underachievement among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following;

1. Determine the extent locus of control relate to students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Examine the extent motivation relate to students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Find out the extent self-efficacy relate to students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent does locus of control relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?

2. To what extent does motivation relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?
3. To what extent does self-efficacy relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses which were tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study;

1. Locus of control does not relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?
2. Motivation does not relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?
3. Self-efficacy does not relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the correlational research design. Three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised all 48,840 SS2 students in the 235 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 400 students was randomly and independently selected for the study using the purposive sampling technique. Two instruments were used in collecting data for this study. They include; Psychological Inventory (PI) and Biology and Mathematics Achievement Test (BMAT). The Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instruments, the reliability coefficient of Psychological Inventory (PI) 0.81 and Biology and Mathematics Achievement Test (BMAT) was 0.74 respectively. Simple regression analysis was used in answering the research questions, while t-test associated with simple regression was implored in testing the hypotheses formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Discussion

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does locus of control relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 1: Simple Regression Analysis on the extent locus of control relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.731 <sup>a</sup>	.534	.533	2.39543

Table 1 revealed that the regression coefficient R was calculated to be 0.731 while the regression squared value was computed to be 0.534. This shows that there is a high and positive relationship between locus of control and students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. Judging by the coefficient of determination, it shows that 53.4% change in students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students can be explained by locus of control, while 46.6% was accounted by other variables not considered in this study.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does motivation relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 2: Simple Regression Analysis on the extent motivation relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.627 <sup>a</sup>	.393	.392	2.73241

Table 2 revealed that the regression coefficient R was calculated to be 0.627 while the regression squared value was computed to be 0.393. This shows that there is a positive relationship between motivation and students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. Judging by the coefficient of determination, it shows that 39.3% change in students' academic underachievement among senior secondary



school students can be explained by motivation, while 60.7% was accounted by other variables not considered in this study.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent does self-efficacy relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis on the extent self-efficacy relate with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.654 <sup>a</sup>	.428	.427	2.65302

Table 3 revealed that the regression coefficient R was calculated to be 0.654 while the regression squared value was computed to be 0.428. This shows that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. Judging by the coefficient of determination, it shows that 42.8% change in students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students can be explained by self-efficacy, while 57.2% was accounted by other variables not considered in this study.

### Testing of Hypotheses

The null hypotheses formulated for the study were tested using t-test associated with simple regression, which is a relationship.

**Hypothesis 1:** Locus of control does not relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 4: T-test associated with simple Regression on the relationship between locus of control and academic underachievement among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.977	.519		7.668	.000
	Locus of Control	.737	.035	.731	21.343	.000

Table 4 revealed that locus of control is related with academic underachievement among senior secondary school students by 0.731. The t-test value 21.243 associated with linear regression was statistically significant at 0.000 when subjected to 0.05 alpha level of significance. By implication, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, locus of control relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

**Hypothesis 2:** Motivation does not relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 5: T-test associated with simple Regression on the relationship between motivation and academic underachievement among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.852	.510		13.431	.000
	Motivation	.555	.035	.627	16.061	.000

Table 5 revealed that motivation is related with academic underachievement among senior secondary school students by 0.627. The t-test value 16.061 associated with linear regression was statistically significant at 0.000 when subjected to 0.05 alpha level of significance. By implication, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, motivation relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

**Hypothesis 3:** Self-efficacy does not relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 6:** T-test associated with simple Regression on the relationship between self-efficacy and academic underachievement among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient s Beta	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	5.313	.563		9.444	.000
	Self-Efficacy	.641	.037	.654	17.257	.000

Table 6 revealed that self-efficacy is related with academic underachievement among senior secondary school students by 0.654. The t-test value 17.257 associated with linear regression was statistically significant at 0.000 when subjected to 0.05 alpha level of significance. By implication, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, self-efficacy relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

### Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. 53.4% change in students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students can be explained by locus of control, while 46.6% was accounted by other variables not considered in this study.
2. 39.3% change in students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students can be explained by motivation, while 60.7% was accounted by other variables not considered in this study.
3. 42.8% change in students' academic underachievement among senior secondary school students can be explained by self-efficacy, while 57.2% was accounted by other variables not considered in this study.
4. Locus of control relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

5. Motivation relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.
6. Self-efficacy relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Locus of Control and Academic Underachievement**

The result of this study showed that locus of control relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between locus of control and students' academic underachievement was rejected in favour of the alternative that locus of control relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. The findings of the present study is in agreement with an earlier study by Majzub, Bataineh, Ishak and Rahman (2016) who found out that locus of control significantly relate to students' academic underachievement. Thangal, Joshi and Rajaguru (2016) also found out that locus of control relate significantly with students' academic underachievement and added that for students who are underachievers to perform better, they must have an internal locus of control and strive to utilize their abilities to push through their failures.

The reason why the finding of the present study would stand correct is based on the fact that students who are underachievers usually believe that their own efforts do not affect their success or failure in the world, whereas those who are high achievers attribute their successes to their abilities and their failures to their lack of effort, and this aptly a function of their locus of control.

### **Motivation and Academic Underachievement**

The finding of the study revealed that motivation relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between motivation and students' academic underachievement was rejected in favour of the alternative that motivation relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. The finding of the present study agrees with that of Troncone, Drammis and Labella (2014) who found out that there is positive relationship between motivation and academic underachievement. Their findings further stressed that students with higher intrinsic motivation had higher academic achievement and intellectual performance than those with low intrinsic motivation. Awan (2011) also found out that motivation significantly relate with both students' academic achievement and underachievement in school.

The reason why the finding of the present study would stand correct is based on the fact that motivation is the driving force behind all the actions of an individual. And since all students are influenced by a need to achieve to a certain degree, students who hold a high desire of success, will work hard to achieve, however, students who are less motivated tend to underachieve academically.

### **Self-efficacy and Academic Underachievement**

The finding of the study revealed that self-efficacy relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between self-efficacy and students' academic underachievement was rejected in favour of the alternative that self-efficacy relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State. The finding of the present study agrees with that of Shahed, Hashmi and Hashmi (2016) who found out that self-efficacy is a key trait for both academic success and underachievement among students. Yaman (2015) found out that self-efficacy significantly relate to students' academic underachievement. His finding further showed that students who have a low sense of efficacy for accomplishing a particular task may avoid such task; whereas those who believe they are capable will participate in it readily. Adeyemi and Agokei (2010) also found out that the self-efficacy of a student is essential to his/her academic success and failures in school.

The reason why the finding of the present study would stand correct is based on the fact that self-efficacy beliefs influence the courses of action learners choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in any given endeavour, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize. Therefore, self-efficacy can be said to have relationship with students' academic underachievement.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was gathered that academic underachievement is a major problem among secondary school student especially in Akwa Ibom State. It was also gathered that locus of control, motivation, and self-efficacy relate significantly with students' academic underachievement in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Students should be continually motivated to learn by both their parents and teachers, as

this will inspire them to do better in school and achieve more scholastically.

2. Teachers should be quick to identify students with academic problems and endeavour to assist academic underachievers.
3. Counselling for students with academic underachievement should be encouraged in all schools with the aim of equipping students with practical adjustment and adaptation skills to perform better academically.

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