

STUDENTS' ATTITUDE AND INTEREST AS THE CO-RELATES OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOCIAL STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to investigate students' attitude and interest as they co-relate in academic performance of junior secondary school students in social studies in South Africa. To guide the study, two specific purposes, research questions and null/hypotheses respectively were formulated. The ex-post-facto survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised of all social studies teachers and JSS 1 to 3 students in South Africa, estimated to be 8663. A sample size of 200 respondents was selected using simple random sampling techniques. The researcher developed instrument entitled: Students' attitude and interest in social studies Questionnaire (SAISS) to generate data for the study. The instrument was validated by an expert in test, measurement and evaluation and also the supervisor. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability coefficient that yielded reliability index of 0.84 and 0.92 respectively. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data obtained while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The findings of the study revealed that there is significant relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject. The result also proved that there is significant relationship between students' attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject. It was recommended that negative behaviors should be discouraged in the school by the school administrators in order to roll out negative academic outcomes.

KEY WORDS: **Students' attitude, students' interest, academic performance, social studies, South Africa.**

INTRODUCTION

Secondary education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for further education of students. If a good foundation is laid at the secondary school level, students can better cope with the challenges of life and profession with great ease. However, different people have explained different factors responsible for the academic achievement of students. Factors that influence students' academic achievement at the junior secondary school are not conclusively known and could be multivariate in nature. They might include students' attitude towards school, interest in learning, study habit, attribution, self-efficacy, intelligence, and motivation. Udoh (2005) maintained that academic performance of students is a phenomenon that has educational, psychological and sociological connotation. Thus, students' academic achievement cannot be completely accounted for by only one or two variables but a number of them. Attitude towards

schooling denotes a positive or negative predisposition towards schooling and every activity in the school environment, which could be cognitive, emotional, or behavior (Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart & Roy, 2006). Fazio and Roskes (2004) said that attitudes are important to educational psychology because they strongly influence social thought, the way an individual thinks and social information. Most children come to school ready and willing to learn, how schools can best foster and strengthen their predisposition and ensure that they leave school with the motivation and capacity to continue learning throughout life has remained a matter of great concern. Without development of the right attitudes, students may not be well prepared to acquire the new knowledge and skills necessary for successful adaptation to changing circumstances and the necessary situation to achieve in their academic pursuit (Kuusinen & Leskinen, 2001).

In school, teachers manage much of students' learning. However, learning might be enhanced if students can manage it themselves; moreover, once they leave school, individuals have to manage most of their own learning. To do this, they need to be able to establish goals, to persevere, to monitor their learning progress, to adjust their learning strategies as necessary and to overcome difficulties in learning (Candeias, Rebelo, Olivera & Mendes, 2012). However, many youths express negative attitude to school as they do not tend to believe that the school and success in it will have a strong bearing on their future. Such negative feelings and attitudes may result in their becoming disaffected with school (Williams, 2000). They may withdraw from school activities, and in some cases, participate in disruptive behavior and display negative attitudes towards teachers and other students. Attitude to school can be, for some students, indicative of educational success and well-being. As such, this perception deserves to be treated alongside academic performance, an important outcome of schooling. The academic performance of students may partly depend on the kind of attitude they put up towards school and the level of success they wish to attain. It is for this reason that this investigation is necessarily embarked on to critically study the relationship and the extent to which students' attitude towards school can predict their academic achievement.

Studies on relationship between students' attitude towards Mathematics and academic achievement of students show positive correlation between students' attitude towards mathematics and academic achievement of students (Mohamed and Waheed 2011 citing Papanastasiou, 2000). In view of the foregoing discussion, it is imperative to study students' attitude and interest as they co-relate in academic performance of junior secondary school students in Social Studies in South Africa.

Statement of the problem

Social studies as one of the social science subjects, is a subject that teaches and enlightens one about the society. It exposes students to the general ways of life of the society thus creating in them a positive mindset about the subject. Despite the role played by social studies over the years, attitudes of many students towards the subject have been both negative and discouraging, as most of them rather develop positive attitude and interests in science and art subjects. It is quite obvious that student's negative attitudes towards the subject is caused by parent's preference of professional courses and science oriented courses as they feel jobs are only readily available for science students or students whose career choice is professional. This has caused a very big gap in students' interest and attitude towards social studies which eventually affect their

academic performance in the subject matter. It is on this ground that this research is conducted to fill up the existing gap.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to find out students' attitude and interest as they co-relate in academic performance of junior secondary school students in social studies in South Africa. Specifically, the following objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. To find out the relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject.
2. To examine the relationship between students' attitude towards social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered:

1. What is the relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject?
2. What is the relationship between students' attitude towards social studies and their academic performance in the subject?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. There is no significant relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject.
2. There is no significant relationship between students' attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Literature Review

Students' Interest in learning and Academic Performance

Students' interests powerfully influence academic and professional choices. According to Paul (2013), students' interest in academic subjects decline across their years in school. Interest starts out strong in the elementary grades but bottoms out in early high school, just at the moment when students are preparing to make choices about further education and future careers. Interest in academics is lower among weak students than among successful ones, meaning that those who are most in need of interest's boost are least likely to feel it. Moreover, our nation's education policy, with its emphasis on improving standardized test scores in a small number of subjects, may be eliminating exactly those experiences that lead students to discover and develop their interests (Candeias, Rebelo, Olieira and Mendes, 2012).

Eberly Center (2014) advanced seven corresponding strategies that could possibly be adopted by the teacher to capture and sustain the learner's interest in the learning of any given subject matter:

Clearly articulate learning goals.

Students will be more motivated to work if they know what goals they are working towards. Thus, it is a good idea not only to articulate goals for the course, but also for specific lectures, discussions, and assignments. For example, before beginning a lecture, an instructor might write on the board the skills, knowledge, and perspectives students will gain that day (with appropriate effort), using concrete, student-centered language (Candeias, Rebelo, Oliveira and Mendes, 2012).

Show relevance to students' academic lives

Students will be more motivated to work hard if they see the value of what they are learning to their overall course of study. Consequently, it is important to explain to students how your course will help prepare them for subsequent courses (e.g., a mathematics professor might help to motivate psychology students by explaining how the math skills they learn will help them in quantitative courses for their major). This gives students a better appreciation of the combined value of the courses they take and lets them see how each contributes to their overall education. It is also helpful to point out when students are learning skills that will help them later in the same course

Demonstrate relevance to students' professional lives

Students are more likely to exert effort in a course if they anticipate an eventual payoff in terms of their future professional lives. Consequently, instructors can enhance motivation by linking their course content to students' intended professions, pointing out how the skills and knowledge students are gaining in class will help them after they graduate. An information systems instructor, for example, can motivate students to learn information systems principles by pointing to real-life database failures that resulted when these principles were not applied.

Highlight real-world applications of knowledge and skills

One effective way to harness student motivation is to have students apply what they are learning to real-world contexts. For example, a marketing professor might use a real-world industry case study to give students practice applying marketing principles to complex, contextualized problems. Similarly, in an information systems course, the instructor might assign a service-learning project in which students must build a database for a non-profit community organization. This kind of task allows students to work within authentic constraints, interact with real clients, and explore possible professions. Such assignments may also create possibilities for future internships or jobs. All of these factors are likely to increase student motivation. Even in courses that are more theoretical than applied, instructors can convey the relevance of course content simply by pointing out its significance in the real world. For example, a mathematics professor teaching optimization might point out that financial institutions use optimization techniques to maximize trade efficiency.

Connect to students' personal interests

Motivation is often enhanced when teachers connect course material to students' personal interests.

Allow students some degree of choice

One possible way to enhance student motivation is to allow students to choose topics for papers and projects that connect the course content to their outside interests and passions.

Show your own passion and enthusiasm

Your own enthusiasm about the course content can be powerful and contagious. Even if students are not initially attracted to or interested in the material, by clearly demonstrating your own enthusiasm, you can often raise students' curiosity and motivate them to find out what excites you about the subject. This can lead them to engage more deeply than they had initially planned and to discover value they had overlooked. Shirey and Reynolds (2012) demonstrated in an investigation that interest in a learning material might lead to the attention given to learn it, and this in turn might culminate in the actual learning. While the extent to which a given material is learnt may depend partly on the quality of attention accorded to it by the learner; the attention given to the material may be a function of the magnitude of interest that the learner has in the material.

Students Attitude and Academic performance

According to Adebisi (2006), attitudes are positive or negative feelings that an individual holds about objects or ideas. In his own submission, King (1981) declared that attitudes are generally regarded as enduring though modifiable by experience and or persuasion and are also learnt rather than innate. He went further to say that achievement of any learner will to a great extent depend on his attitude towards the learning materials. There is a general belief that a positive attitude more often than not lead to successful learning. Urda and Schoenfelder (2006) assert that cognitive variables such as ability-related and expectancy beliefs, motivation, competency beliefs, goal structures, and social relationships, general attitudes toward school, and attitudes toward specific academic subjects are related to academic performance and that these can equally differ across gender, racial groups, and socio-economic backgrounds (Akey, 2006). The extent to which families actively take part in their children's academic life also tends to influence students' attitude to school as well as the students' academic achievement.

A study by Kuperminc, Daniel and Alvarezlimenez (2008) showed that family contexts that are less exciting and less involved in their children's education are manifested in less positive attitudes toward school, less resilience levels and have higher probability of dropping out of school (Rumberger, 2001). Students from families with inactive participation in their school have statistically greater probability of believing that having rigorous studies and completing school courses with good grade are not important to have a job or maintaining a career in life.

When schools are able to provide interesting activities for their students and the way those activities are engaged, and even the participation of students and their families in school decisions have influence on how students feel at school, how they react to school life, and their overall attitude toward schooling that later tends to reflect their academic performance (Urda and Schoenfelder, 2006; Alamiyeseigha and Kpolovie, 2013). The more a school engages the major stakeholders (students, teachers, parents and the community), the greater the extent to which students' positive attitude to school and to learning is aroused (Rumberger, 2001). Racial

groups and parental educational level have also been found to influence or correlate meaningfully with students' attitude towards schooling as well as competence beliefs and academic achievement (Linnehan, 2008; Candeias, Rebelo and Oliveira, 2013). The study by Linnehan (2008) divulged that with the exception of Asian group, parental educational level is significantly related with more favorable attitudes toward college. Other results showed that students' attitude towards school is influenced by three broad factors; attitudinal contents, attitudinal context and personal components. Learning, competence beliefs and motivation constitute attitudinal contents. The kind of environment (urban or rural), socio-economic background (occupational status), parental educational level, and the school circumstance constitute the attitudinal context.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted an Ex-post Facto research design because the phenomena for design studies have already occurred.

Area of the Study

The area of this study is South Africa.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all social studies teachers and JSS 1 to 3 students in South Africa, estimated to be 3,406,983 in number.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The respondents in the study will consist of 200 JSS3 students. These were obtained through the simple random sampling method which was used in randomly selecting 40 students from each of the 5 schools selected out for use in the study. Hence, the sample size reads 200 respondents.

Research Instrument

The researchers developed two research instruments such as a research questionnaire and researcher-made achievement test. The research questionnaire was tagged "Students' attitude and interest in social studies Questionnaire (SAISS), while the researcher-made achievement test was tagged "Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT).

Validation of the Research Instrument

The instrument was face and content validated, which was done by an expert in test, measurement and evaluation and the supervisor. They were expected to assess the validity of the items measuring the variables in the research objectives. All the corrections and comments were incorporated into the final form of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

Crombach Alpha technique was used to determine the reliability of the instruments (SAISS and SSAT), using 30 respondents who did not form part of the main study. Data collected from the respondents were subjected to reliability test and it produced the reliability coefficient of 0.84 and 0.92 respectively.

Data analysis technique

The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The results of the statistical analysis were tested for significance at 0.05 alpha levels. The result was considered significant if the calculated value was either equal to or greater than the critical value, but non-significant if less.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One

The research question sought to find out the significant relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject. In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected as shown in table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Variable	N	Arithmetic mean	Expected mean	r	Remarks
Students’ interest in social studies	200	15.50	12.5	0. 79*	*Strong to perfect relationship
Academic performance		51.32	50		

Source: Field Survey

Table 1 presents the result of the descriptive statistics of the relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject. The two variables were observed to have strong to perfect relationship at 79%. The arithmetic mean for students’ interest in social studies 15.00 was observed to be greater than the expected mean score of 12.5. In addition to that, the arithmetic mean as regards their academic performance 51.32 was observed to be higher than the expected mean score of 50. The result therefore means that there is remarkable relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Research Question Two

The research question sought to find out the significant relationship between students’ attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject. In order to answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data collected as shown in table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of the relationship between students’ attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Variable	N	Arithmetic mean	Expected mean	r	Remarks
Attitude toward Social Studies	200	13.48	12.5	0.77*	*Strong to perfect relationship
Academic Performance		51.32	50		

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 presents the result of the descriptive statistics of the relationship between students’ attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject. The two variables were observed to have strong to perfect relationship at 77%. The arithmetic mean for students’ attitude toward social 13.48 was observed to be greater than the expected mean score of 12.5 In addition to that; the arithmetic mean as regards their academic performance 51.32 was observed to be higher than the expected mean score of 50. The result therefore means that there is remarkable relationship between students’ attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject. In order to test the hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows:-

1. Students’ interest in social studies as the independent variable
2. Academic Performance as the dependent variable

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was then used to analyze the data in order to determine the relationship between the two variables (see table 3)

TABLE 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Variable	Σx	Σx^2	Σxy	r
	Σy	Σy^2		
Students’ interest in social studies (x)	3100	48518	160865	0.79*
Academic Performance (y)	10264	537584		

***Significant at 0.05 level; df =198; N =200; critical r-value = 0.139**

Table 3 presents the obtained r-value as (0.79). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical r-value (0.139) at 0.05 levels with 198 degree of freedom. The obtained r-value (0.79) was greater than the critical r-value (0.139). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant relationship between students’ interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Hypothesis Two

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between students’ attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject. In order to test the hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows:-

1. Students’ attitude toward social studies as the independent variable
2. Academic Performance as the dependent variable

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was then used to analyze the data in order to determine the relationship between the two variables (see table 4)

TABLE 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between students’ attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Variable	Σx	Σx^2	Σxy	r
	Σy	Σy^2		
Students’ attitudes toward social studies (x)	2696	36822	140121	0.77*

Academic Performance (y) 10264 537584

***Significant at 0.05 level; df =198; N =200; critical r-value = 0.139**

Table 4 presents the obtained r-value as (0.77). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical r-value (0.139) at 0.05 levels with 198 degree of freedom. The obtained r-value (0.77) was greater than the critical r-value (0.139). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant relationship between students' attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Discussion of findings

The results of the data analysis in tables 1 and 3 which sought to find the significant relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject, was significant due to the fact that the obtained r-value (0.79) was greater than the critical r-value (0.139) at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. This result implies that there is significant relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject. The result is in agreement with the research findings of Paul (2013), who stated that students 'interest in academic subjects decline across their years in school. Interest starts out strong in the elementary grades but bottoms out in early high school, just at the moment when students are preparing to make choices about further education and future careers. The result of the analysis caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was retained.

The results of the data analysis in tables 2 and 4 which sought to find the significant relationship between students' attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject, was significant due to the fact that the obtained r-value (0.77) was greater than the critical r-value (0.139) at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. This result implies that there is significant relationship between students' attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject. The result is in agreement with the research findings of Urda and Schoenfelder (2006), who assert that cognitive variables such as ability-related and competency beliefs, goal structures, social relationships, general attitudes toward school, and attitudes toward specific academic subjects are related to academic performance and that these can equally differ across gender, racial groups, and socio-economic backgrounds. The result of the analysis caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was retained.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the research, the following conclusions were drawn: There is significant relationship between students' interest in social studies and their academic performance in the subject. The result also proved that there is significant relationship between students' attitude toward social studies and their academic performance in the subject.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the work it was therefore recommended that:

1. Students should be friendly with all subjects taught in the school in order to achieve good academic performance and move forward academically.

2. Students should develop good learning attitude towards all subjects taught by their teachers.
3. Negative behaviors should be discouraged in the school by the school administrators in order to roll out negative academic outcomes.

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