

## **Psychological Factors Influencing Academic Achievement among Secondary School Students in Shamva district of Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe.**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated psychological factors influencing academic achievement of secondary school adolescents in Shamva district. The design for the study is ex-post-facto. The population for the study is 300 participants who were independently and randomly selected. Two standardized instrument tagged “Psychological Factors Assessment Questionnaire and Economics Achievement test was used to collect data for the study. The reliability of the instruments was 0.91 and 0.86 respectively. Two hypotheses were formulated for the study. The data collected were analysed with an independent t-test. The data analysis showed that school phobia significantly influence academic achievement of students while achievement motivation does not. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended among others that, teachers, parents, counsellors as well as the school authorities should be made to aware of the existing relationship between self-concept, anxiety, achievement motivation, and focus of control and academic achievement. This would enable them provide a better, useful and relevant educational, vocational, personal and social services that will enable secondary school learners, teachers and parents and the school authorities and the community recognise and appreciate the presence of individual differences, among students and how best to reinforce them in every situation.

**Key words:-** Academic Achievement; Psychological factors; learners; school phobia; achievement motivation.

### **Background to the study**

Development of any nation depends largely upon the literacy rate and quality of education that is accessible to its citizens. Qualitative education is fundamental to the whole process of human development. It allows the individuals to become independent so that they can contribute meaningfully in the development of the society and the nation at large. Chaudary (2004) recommends that academic achievement is the knowledge attained or skills usually developed by pupils in schools, measured by test scores or by marks assigned by teachers pertaining to school subjects or to fields of liberal arts or to sphere of ideas and abstractions. As explained by Rajamnickam & Vasanthal (1993) academic achievement becomes evident as a student evolves into a resourceful and enthusiastic learner who is ultimately capable. Generally speaking

academic achievement is something that learners achieve at school, in class. It does not include other achievements in co-curricular activities. It requires dedication, sacrifice, self-discipline, motivation and cordial relationship with parents, peers teachers and the community.

Academic achievement as stated by Sunitha (2005) is the knowledge acquired and skills developed in school subjects, generally indicated by marks obtained in tests in annual examination. It is also believed that home environment factors like parent's encouragement, care, support, guidance, parenting and physical facilities have significant influence on academic achievement of the students. Some attempts have been made in establishing the direct relationship between certain psychological variables and academic achievement while some are still under investigation. Psychological factors constitute of many variables, but the ones to be considered in relation to the study of academic achievement include self-concept, achievement motivation, locus of control and school phobia.

Self-concept as one of the psychological factors is ones perception of oneself. It is seen as the way one looks at oneself in terms of competence, confidence, personal regard etc. which have bearing on personal experiences. Achievement motivation is a learned motive to compete and strive for success. It involves ones effort to improve the learner, to pursue, seek progress and strive to achieve goals. In like manner locus of control refers to an individual's perception about the underlying main causes of events in his/her life. It has to do with the belief that whether the outcomes of the individual's actions are contingent on what one does (internal control orientation) or an event outside one's personal control (external control orientation). School phobia is an anxiety disorder in children who have an irritation, persistent fear of going to school (Colman 2003). In other words, the school phobia may be viewed as a learner's sudden aversion to or fear of attending school, usually considered a manifestation of separation anxiety. Most learners enter school expecting to learn, but negative school experiences often reverse their views. In particular, students who have learning difficulties begin to perceive themselves as unable to learn (Chapman, 2008). In effect, when learners find themselves in situations where there are high levels of uncertainties, indefinites, or loss of specific (cherished) objects, they are bound to be anxious.

On the other hand, most people see themselves in several different roles. For example, adolescents in secondary school have varying beliefs about their athletic ability, their ability to make lasting friendship, their musical ability and their academic ability. They also have a generalised achievement motivation and self-concept, such as a propensity towards optimism or pessimism (Crowl, Kaminsky and Podell, 1997).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the fact that researchers have conducted studies on psychological influence on academic achievement of learners in other contexts, this study sought to identify psychological factors

influencing academic achievement among secondary school learners in Shamva district of Zimbabwe

### Objectives of the Study

- To determine how school phobia is influencing academic achievement of students in Shamva district.
- To establish the influence the influence of achievement motivation in academic achievement of secondary school learners in Shamva district secondary schools.

### Null Hypotheses

1. School phobia does not significantly influence academic achievement of secondary school learners
2. Achievement motivation does not significantly influence academic achievement of secondary school learners.

### Research methodology

This study employed the quantitative methodology and the descriptive survey design. Four hundred (400) secondary school adolescents from Shamva district of Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe were used for this study. To come up with the sample, stratified random sampling were used since the district comprises rural, Peri- urban, farming and mining schools. A 20 items questionnaire named Psychological Factors Assessment Questionnaire (PFAQ) was used to collect data for Psychological variables, while Economic Achievement Test (EAT) derived from the Secondary school learners test revision exercise books through the help of the mathematics teacher were used to verify learners' academic achievement. The test re- test technique was used to determine reliability of the instrument and the scores obtained were 0.81 for the PFAQ and 0.76 for the EAT.

### Data Analysis

Data collected was presented in tables and analysed using t-test statistic.

Hypothesis 1: School phobia does not significantly influence academic achievement of secondary school learners

Table 4.1: **The influence of school phobia on academic achievement of secondary school learners**

School Phobia	N	X	Std. Dev.	Df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Dec
Low	260	36.31	4.11	298	5.26	1.96	Sig.
High	140	39.18	5.16				

In table 4.1 it is shown that learners with high and low school phobia are 260 and 140 in number respectively. Learners with the school phobia had the mean score of 36.31 and standard deviation of 4.11 while those with high school phobia had mean score of 39.18 and a standard deviation of 5.16. Based on their mean scores it is deduced that the students with high school phobia under achieve as compared to their counterparts with low school phobia. Furthermore, when mean difference was subjected to an independent t-test statistics, a calculated t-value of 5.26 at the degree of freedom 298 at 0.000 level was found greater than 0.05, the chosen level of probability, it is then decided that school phobia significantly influence academic achievement of learners.

Hypothesis 2: Achievement motivation does not significantly influence academic achievement of secondary school learners

**Table 2: The influence of achievement motivation on academic achievement of secondary school learners**

School Phobia	N	X	Std. Dev.	Df	Cal-t	Cal-t	Cal-t
Low	208	37.24	4.60	298	0.343	1.96	Non-Sign
High	192	37.42	4.83				

In table 4.2, it is shown that students with high motivation had the mean score of 37.24 and a standard deviation of 4.60. On the other hand those with low motivation had the mean score of 37.42 and SD of 4.83. Based on their mean scores it is deduced that learners with low achievement motivation tend to under achieve as when compared to their counterparts with high achievement motivation. However when this means difference was subjected to an independent t-test, a calculated t-value of 0.343 was obtained at a degree of freedom of 298 at 0.732 significant level. Thus since the p-value of 1.96 is less than 0.05, the chosen level of probability has non-significant influence on academic achievement of learners.

### Research findings

Findings showed that, there is a significant difference between the influences of high/low school phobia on academic achievement of secondary school learners. It therefore appears to mean that those who have high level of school phobia find it difficult to benefit from the actual learning process. The result of this study is in agreement with the result of an earlier study carried out by Hogan (1995) who explains that many adolescents withdraw from social activities or avoid difficult tasks for fear of failing or being embarrassed. They may appear inattentive, forgetful or unmotivated to engage in classroom discussions. Academic performance starts to suffer and teachers may interpret learners' behaviour as defiant, disorganized or lazy.

Socially, learners may isolate themselves to avoid participation in peer interactions. They may have a poor self-concept and believe they lack the skills to initiate and sustain a friendship, which leads to further worries about being rejected by peers. Over time, learners are more likely to develop sadness and develop a stable pattern of anxious thinking. Avoiding school or minimizing academic and social activities offer youth effective, short-term relief to reduce anxious feelings, but over time have serious negative consequences. Additionally, families are affected by this problem. Parents often feel blamed by the school given the common misperception that the issue is simply a matter of discipline. In reality, parents struggle to manage conflicting feelings around empathic desire to comfort their children and exasperation associated with the battle to get them to school.

### **Achievement Motivation and Academic Achievement**

The result of this finding showed that, achievement motivation had insignificant influence on learners' academic achievement. Though, it is noted that, when achievement motivation is high, academic achievement is also high. The result of this study does not agree with the result of an earlier study carried out by Rabideau (2005) who opines that, motivation is the driving force behind all the actions of an individual. The influence of an individual's needs and desires both have a strong impact on the direction of their behaviour.

Supporting this view, Slavin (2006) maintains that, motivation is one of the factors that contribute to academic success, motivation is what gets one keeps on going and determine where one is to go. It is important to encourage the learners' academic motivation because motivation is crucial to their academic success at any age. Human beings are said to be extrinsically or intrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation is derived internally in the work itself. That occurs while a person is performing an activity in which he takes delight and satisfaction in doing that particular task. Gottfried (1990) reports that learners who are more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated succeed far better and those who are not motivated to engage in learning are unlikely to succeed.

### **Conclusion**

Schools have no worth without learners. Learners are most essential assets for any educational institution. The social and economic development of the country is directly linked with learners' academic performance. The learners' performance (academic achievement) plays an important role in producing the best quality graduates who will become great leaders and manpower for the country, thus responsible for the country's economic and social development. Learners' academic performance measurement has received considerable attention in previous research, it is challenging aspects of academic literature, and their performance is affected by social, psychological, economic, environmental and personal factors. These factors strongly influence on the learners' performance, but these factors vary from person to person and country to country.

## Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the researcher among others recommends that, teachers, parents, counsellors, school authorities as well as the community should be made aware of the existing relationship between self-concept, anxiety, achievement motivation, locus of control and academic achievement. This would enable them provide a better, useful and relevant educational, vocational, personal and social services that will enable learners, teachers and parents and the school authorities recognize and appreciate the presence of individual differences, among learners and how best to reinforce them in every situation.

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