Concrescence: Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research
Vol. 3, No. 1, 2026, ISSN: 1595-9287

Effect of Self-Determination Therapy on Academic Apathy Reduction Among "Top-Up" Students, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of self-determination therapy (SDT) on decreasing academic apathy among Top-up Students (TUS) at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental design was adopted, featuring an experimental group (n=10) and a control group (n=10). The investigation established four hypotheses that were tested at a 0.05 significance level. The pre-experimental observation revealed no significant difference between the experimental and control groups (t. cal. = 0.001, degrees of freedom (Df) = 18, and the significance level = 0.99). However, there was a significant difference between the pre- and post-experimental observations of the experimental group (t. cal. = 3.61, Df = 18, and significance level = 0.02). Additionally, there was no notable difference observed in the pre and post-experimental measurements of the control group (t. cal. = 0.001, Df = 18, and significance level = 0.99). The post-experimental observations revealed a notable difference between the experimental and control groups (t. cal. = 3.34, Df = 18, significant at 0.05). The study concluded that self-determination therapy had a notable impact on academic apathy reduction among TUS at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. It was recommended that students adopt learning methods that foster intrinsic motivation.

Keywords: Apathy, Academic Apathy, Self-Determination Therapy

Introduction

Academic apathy poses a significant challenge in higher institutions of learning across the world. Characterised by disinterest, detachment and reduced effort towards academic pursuit, it has the capacity to jeopardize academic career of individual learner including undermining academic excellence with its aversive effect on society. The detrimental effect of academic apathy on student motivation and learning outcomes underscores an urgent need for effective psychological interventions. Students experiencing academic apathy may exhibit negative behaviour such as truancy, skipping classes, neglecting assignments, procrastination towards academic activities and general display of passive behaviour towards realization of academic goals (Lee & Krammer, 2016). The habit of prioritising the acquisition of degree certificates at the expense of commensurate knowledge, especially among Top Up Students (TUS), could be traced to psychological and academic abnormality

that should be reduced or completely eradicated to sustain the dignity of the learning institutions.

According to Bosserman (2018), academic apathy is a behavioural deficit characterised by a lack of motivation, interest, and goals, and a diminished desire to succeed in school. In every teaching and learning situation, an individual student's motivation is a key factor that helps in actualising the set goals. The place of intrinsic motivation, as emphasised in Albert Bandura's theory of Self-Efficacy, cannot be overemphasised in students' academic learning and achievement. This view was supported by Filgona (2019), who posited that there are no important factors that aid learning more than personal motivation. Zamaripa et al. (2021) unveiled a significant relationship between self-concept motivation and academic achievement. Learning becomes more effective when it is driven by an individual's inner motivation and a clear desire to attain personally defined goals. The acquisition of certificates for the purpose of gaining employment, promotion, political elevation and administrative ranks without knowledge may rather result in immediate pleasure and self-harm in the long run, which could be avoided. These views were empirically substantiated by Modebellu and Nwaoba (2024), who suggested that there is academic apathy in our learning institutions towards counselling services, which is partly responsible for the decline in academic achievement among students. Learning institutions may not be exempted from students' apathy towards education, especially in providing a conducive learning environment and the qualities of the instructors. Academic apathy among students has resulted in reduced academic performance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Ewurum et al., 2023). Furthermore, Okoli (2017) identified socio-economic conditions, curriculum relevance and teacher quality as factors influencing academic apathy among students. Similarly, Adekoya and Ibrahim (2020) posited that academic apathy is influenced by the institution's environment, quality of teaching and students' socio-cultural background. Oyekanmi and Fasoto (2021) listed the enabling factors of academic apathy as institutional support, teaching methods, students' engagement and personal motivation. This study hinged on the Self-determination theory, therefore, seeks to investigate the effects of SDT on academic apathy reduction among TUS, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985), posits that human behaviour is motivated by three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT is a therapeutic approach that focuses on promoting intrinsic Motivation, Autonomy, and Self-regulation. Human autonomous psychological needs are grounded in individuals' perceptions of control and agency over their actions and decisions. This autonomy is expressed through experiences of volition, self-endorsement, and a sense of freedom, particularly the ability to make choices without external pressure or coercion (Deci& Ryan, 2020). Another innate need of human beings, as contended in this theory, is the competence needs, which include an individual's experiences of effectiveness and mastery, that are capable of producing a desired outcome. It involves experiencing a sense of accomplishment, proficiency and growth. The last human need, according to this theory, is relatedness needs, which emphasises the need to be connected, understood and valued by others (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2020). This involves experiencing a sense of belonging, empathy and mutual respect in promoting a self-driven motivation in achieving desired goals. SDT seeks to support individuals in satisfying these psychological needs by fostering improved learner motivation and engagement, strengthening self-esteem and confidence, and promoting more autonomous and self-directed behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2019).

Several empirical studies have investigated the effect of SDT in reducing students' academic apathy. Key studies include Howard (2021), who established a correlational effect of academic stress on Intrinsic motivation of students instilled through the application of SDT. The study with a sample size of 344 participants concluded that there is a significant effect of STD on students' personal Values, Persistence, Motivation, and Poor Academic Performance. Additionally, Wood (2019) examined the impact of self-motivation on students' engagement in learning activities related to science subjects, utilising the framework of self-motivation theory. The potential outcome was explored through focus group interviews with 70 students aged between 9 and 13 years. The results revealed that the student-teacher relationship was the major factor that affected their perception of their teachers' effectiveness, which was responsible for the perceived competencies among the students.

Also, Akimosin (2019) conducted a study to examine whether motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation), academic self-concept, and learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic) could significantly predict the academic performance of high-ability underachieving students in Oyo State, Nigeria. Descriptive design and multi-stage sampling methods were adopted in the study. The proportionate stratified sampling method was employed to select nine secondary schools, comprising three secondary schools from each senatorial zone in Oyo State. A total of one hundred and eighty secondary school students were screened for academic underachievement from the schools' academic records and achievement tests in English and Mathematics. The Academic Motivation Scale, Blossom Intelligence Scale and the Academic Self-Concept Scales were administered to respondents to collect relevant data. Inferential statistics such as PPMC and multiple regression were used for analysis. Results revealed a significant positive relationship between motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, & amotivation) and academic achievement. There was also a significant relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement.

Similarly, Olayiwola (2020) established that self-efficacy had a significant effect on students' academic achievement motivation and their learning attitudes towards citizenship education courses in colleges of education across the South-West region of Nigeria. The study consisted of 652 respondents purposively selected from 12 Colleges of Education across the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The General Self-Efficacy Scale and the Achievement Motivation Inventory were administered to respondents for data collection using the stratified random sampling technique. The study established that achievement motivation and self-efficacy significantly predicted students' attitudes towards Citizenship Education courses among Colleges of Education students in Southwestern Nigeria.

Furthermore, Alheri et al. (2022) examined the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on the reduction of academic apathy among Nigerian students. The study was conducted among students of the College of Education, Waka-Biu, Borno State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive research design, 200 students were purposively selected as respondents. The Motivation for Academic Achievement Questionnaire was adopted for data collection. The study revealed a significant effect of intrinsic motivation on the academic achievement of College of Education students in Waka-Biu, Borno State, Nigeria. The reviewed literature suggests the existence of academic apathy in learning institutions across Nigeria, although with limited emphasis on the specific location of this study. The literature provided a conceptual foundation and helped to establish the background and general overview of the study. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge the identified gap by investigating the effect of self-determination therapy on the reduction of academic apathy among TUS at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

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Academic apathy constitutes a serious challenge among Nigerian students; it undermines motivation, engagement in learning, and overall academic performance. Despite concerted efforts to address this problem, academic apathy has remained persistent. For instance, Sharma and Sharma (2018), Odu (2017), and Rahman and Solarin (2022) reported the prevalence of academic apathy among students in different parts of Nigeria. Notably, although previous studies have employed various theories and interventions, none have applied SDT to assess its effectiveness in reducing academic apathy among TUS at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the efficacy of SDT on academic apathy reduction among TUS at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

The general purpose of this study is to assess the efficacy of SDT in reducing academic apathy among TUS students at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. The specific purposes include:

1. To determine the pre-test observation of the experimental and control groups;
2. Investigate the pre-test and post-test observation of the experimental group.
3. Examine the pre-test and post-test observation of the control group; and
4. Explore the post-test observation of the experimental and control groups.

Hypotheses of the Study

Four null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance in this study.

1. There is no difference in the mean scores of the participants in the experimental and the control group.
2. There is no difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test observation of the experimental group.
3. There is no difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test observation of the control group; and
4. There is no difference in the mean scores of the post-test observation of the experimental and control groups.

Methodology

The study adopted a Quasi-experimental design to investigate the effect of SDT-based interventions on the reduction of academic apathy among TUS at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

The population of the study comprised twenty (20) TUS that were selected from among the larger population of TUS and were assigned to the Experimental group (n=10) and Control group (n=10) based on pretest assessment of students that were randomly selected. To identify students with academic apathy, participants completed the Apathy Evaluation Scale (AES-C). Students whose scores were above the 49th percentile on the AES-C were considered to be exhibiting Academic apathy. The Apathy Evaluation Scale (AES-C) was also used to collect the post-experimental data in this study. T-tests and multiple regression analyses were used to examine the effects of SDT on academic apathy among respondents.

Results and Discussion

Below is the tabular presentation of the results obtained from testing the hypotheses of this study.

Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference in the pre-experimental observation of academic apathy between participants in the experimental and the control group.

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Table 1
Table Showing Pre-Experimental Observations of the Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	No	mean	st.Dev.	Df	t. cal.	Sig.	P
Pre- exp. Observ. 1	10	48.6	16.81				
				18	0.001	0.99	NS
Pre-exp. Observ. 2	10	48.7	17.41				

(Not significant at 0.05 critical region).

Table 1 illustrates the findings derived from Hypothesis 1. The table indicates that t. cal. equals 0.001, the degree of freedom (Df) is 18, and the significance level is 0.99. Given that the significance level exceeds 0.005, the first null hypothesis is accepted. Consequently, there is no notable disparity in the pre-experimental observations of academic disinterest between the experimental and control groups.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-experimental and post-experimental observations of the experimental group.

Table 2**:** *Table 2 Shows the Difference between the Pre-experimental Observation and the post-experimental observation of the Experimental Group*

Variable	No	Mean	St. Dev.	Df.	t.cal.	Sig.	P
Pre exp observ of exp grp.	1	48.6	16.81				
				18	3.61	0.02	**
Post exp. Observ of exp grp	2	28.9	3.87				

(significant at 0.05 Critical region)

Table 2 represents the data derived from the examination of hypothesis 2. The table indicates that t. cal. is 3.61, degrees of freedom (Df) is 18, and the significance level is 0.02. The null hypothesis is rejected as the significance level is below 0.05. Consequently, a substantial disparity exists between the pre- and post-experimental observations of the experimental group. Consequently, self-determination treatment was beneficial in diminishing academic indifference among TUS at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3**:** There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-experimental and post-experimental observations of the control group.

Table 3: *Shows the Difference between the Pre-and Post-experimental observations of the control group*

Variable	No	Mean	St. Dev.	Df	t.cal.	Sig.	P
Pre exp. Obsv. Cont. grp	10	48.6	18.19				
				18	0.01	0.99	NS
Post exp. Observ. Cont. grp	10	48.7	17.40				

(Not significant at 0.05 critical region).

Table 3 presents the results derived from testing Hypothesis 3. The table reveals that t. cal. = 0.001, Df = 18, and significance level = 0.99. Given that the significance level exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. Consequently, there is no substantial change between the pre- and post-experimental observations of the control group.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the post-experimental observation of the experimental and control groups.

Table Four Shows the Difference between the Post-experimental Observations of the Experimental and Control Groups

Variables	No	Mean	St. dev.	Df	t. cal.	Sig.	P
Post exp. Obser. Exp. Grp	10	28.9	3.87				
				18	3.34	0.03	**
Post exp. Observ. ContGrp	10	48.6	18.19				

(significant at 0.05 critical region).

Table four displays the data derived from hypothesis four. The table indicates that t. cal. = 3.34, Df = 18, and significance is at 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected due to a significance level below 0.05. Consequently, there exists a substantial disparity in post-experimental observations between the experimental and control groups.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from testing hypothesis one showed there was no significant difference in the pre-experimental observations of the experimental and control groups. This indicates that there was a presence of academic apathy among participants of the two groups before the commencement of the experimental study. This view is in agreement with previous studies of Ewurum et al. (2023) and Modebellu and Nwaoba (2024). The inability of parents to provide basic needs such as transportation, snacks, and regular payment of school fees, among others, for their wards could also be a demotivating factor contributing to the prevalence of academic apathy among students.

Also, results obtained from testing hypothesis two revealed that there was a significant difference between pre- and post-experimental observation of the experimental group. Thus, there was a significant effect of self-determination therapy on the reduction of academic apathy among TUS, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria. This finding was supported by a previous study of Printers (2021), which revealed that SDT was significant in increasing intrinsic motivation among learners, thus reducing learners' apathy. Learners need to be exposed to self-driven goal achievement through improved intrinsic motivation and increased self- efficacy, and that was what learners were exposed to during the experimental study, which evidently led to reduced apathy among learners.

Furthermore, the third hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference between the pre- and post-experimental observation of the control group. This was because there was no treatment administered to the control group; hence, there was no effect to trigger any significant change. Although the control group was exposed to current affairs to keep them intact while the study lasted, that was not sufficient to trigger any significant reduction in their academic apathy. This finding was supported by Nejati et al. (2024), who studied the effects of rational emotive behaviour therapy on performance under pressure

among adolescent soccer athletes. He posited that the control group made no significant change in their irrational thinking patterns compared to the experimental group because, while REBT was administered to the experimental group, video clips of soccer were administered to the control group just to keep them intact for the period of the experiment.

Moreover, result from testing hypothesis four revealed a significant difference between the post-experimental observation of the experimental and control groups. This resulted from the administration of treatment to the experimental group, whereas the same was not done to the control group. Hence, while there was a significant difference between pre-experimental and post-experimental observations of the experimental group, there was no significant difference between pre-experimental and post-experimental readings of the control group. This finding was consistent with Adewara et al. (2023).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that self-determination therapy (SDT) has a significant effect on the reduction of academic apathy among TUS, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

Recommendations

It is recommended that students should be exposed to techniques that promote self-motivation (intrinsic motivation) in actualising their educational objectives and goals through self- discovery and self- exploration.

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