

Attitude and Achievement: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: *Attitude is a psychological construct that refers to an expression of favour or disfavour toward a person, place, thing or event (the attitude object). The role of attitude as an important aspect of the affective domain (feeling) in learning has attracted attention of educators and researchers over the years. The extent to which attitude influence students' achievement however has remained a subject of controversy. This paper explored the theoretical and empirical perspectives on influence of attitude on students' achievement. It critically examined the role of the teacher in building students' attitude; and concluded that attitude can be changed to improve students' learning and achievement.*

Keywords: *Attitude, Achievement*

INTRODUCTION

Since the Bloom's Taxonomy there has been increased awareness among educators that none of the domains of learning objectives (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) should be relegated. Cognitive, affective and psychomotor address the objectives of thinking, feeling and doing respectively. The three represents balanced learning objectives. Although, cognitive and psychomotor domains seem to occupy much attention and space in contemporary classroom learning, the affective will continue to be an important determinant of the success in the other two domains. Feeling plays decisive role in peoples' thoughts and actions.

Attitude is a psychological construct that refers to an expression of favour or disfavour toward a person, place, thing or event (the attitude object). It is an evaluation of an attitude object, ranging from extremely negative to extremely positive (Brandt & Wetherell, 2012). The role of attitude as an important aspect of the affective domain (feeling) in learning has attracted attention of educators and researchers over the years. It is believed that when a person evaluates an attitude object favourably or positively, action is initiated. So, it is suggestive that attitude can influence learning achievement. Omeh (2010) described achievement as something which has been accomplished successfully, especially by means of exertion, skill practice or perseverance. In education, achievement is viewed as a systematic and purposeful quantification of learning outcomes. Achievement involves the determination of the degree of attainment of individuals in tasks, courses or programmes of which the individuals have been sufficiently exposed. In the context of this paper, academic achievement refers to the extent to which students have achieved mastery of the objectives of the subjects they are exposed to in school. Positive attitude to learning is considered a strong driver of academic achievement.

Attitude is not static; it can change. Because of this, teachers and significant others have roles to play in bringing about positive attitude among students through some deliberate actions. This paper therefore explores theoretical and empirical perspectives on attitude as it relates to

academic achievement; critically examines the role of attitude in achievement; and finally determines the role of the teacher in attitude formation based on extant literature.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ATTITUDE

The influence of attitude on academic achievement has been a subject with much attraction. Fishbein constructed the value-expectancy model that argues that a person's attitude determines his/her intended behaviour, which could ultimately affect the outcome. Based on the model, a person will hold certain attitudes towards an object by evaluating it. After going through this process, the person then decides whether to hold a favourable or unfavourable view towards it. Such a positive or negative attitude therefore could further influence the person's intentions to engage in various behaviours with regard to that particular object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Based on the person's intended behaviour, this could be regarded as a significant predictor of the final outcome (Li, 2012). The argument therefore is once a favourable attitude is formed towards academic work, a student is likely to strive to put in extra effort to succeed.

Attitudes have different functions. Nordlund (2009) observed that at least four different functions have been identified in literature. Attitudes have a knowledge function as required to make sense out of experiences. Attitudes further enable a person to maximize rewards and to minimize punishments, which is inherent in an adjustment or utilitarian function. Attitudes also have an ego-defensive function, in that people are able to protect themselves from unpleasant realities. Attitudes finally enable people to express their personal values and self-concept, i.e. attitudes have a value-expressive function.

In Technology Acceptance Model developed by Davies (1989), attitude is presented as an important element in technology adoption. According to Chen, Li and Li (2011), attitude influences behavioural intention to use a system which in turn influences the actual use of a system. Both perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (two determining factors in the model), have attitude as an underlying propeller. In other words, people do not just adopt a system; they first form a positive attitude in their belief that a system will be easy to use as well as useful to them before adoption takes place.

Moreover, attitude also has been recognized as a major player in engagement theory. Akey (2006) stated that the level of engagement of individuals is a predictor of achievement. Student engagement can be defined as the level of participation and intrinsic interest that a student shows in school. According to Akey, engagement in schoolwork involves both behaviours (such as persistence, effort, attention) and attitudes (such as motivation, positive learning values, enthusiasm, interest, pride in success). Thus, engaged students seek out activities, inside and outside the classroom, that lead to success or learning. They also display curiosity, a desire to know more and positive emotional responses to learning and school. These are behaviours that both on positive attitude.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON ATTITUDE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Many studies support attitude's influence on achievement. Michelli (2013) found that there is a significant relationship between attitudes toward and achievement in math, and concluded that educators should be aware of students' attitudes and seek to improve them in order to positively influence students' academic achievement. Moreover, Hemmings and Kay (2010) explored the relationship between students' attitude towards mathematics and the amount of effort they would put into studying the subject, and the results indicated that their mathematics attitude was significantly associated with the amount of effort they would expend in the subject. Thus,

achievement is attained. This conclusion agreed with the position of Okafor (2007) that teacher characteristics influence students' mathematics achievement. Teachers have enormous role to play in improving students' attitude to those subjects to which they show aversion. Adodo and Gbore (2012) studied the effect of attitude and interest of students on academic performance in science. It also investigated which of the variables, as essential attribute to study integrated science, would predict students' performance. The outcome showed that science interest which is an attribute of positive attitude possessed the strongest strength for predicting performance among students in their different ability level group.

In another study, Li (2012) studied the relationship between social science students' attitude towards research methods and statistics, self-efficacy, effort and academic achievement. The study found that there was a positive correlation between attitude towards research methods and statistics, self-efficacy, effort and academic achievement. Also, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to estimate the prediction power of attitude and self-efficacy on effort. The result showed that both attitude and self-efficacy could significantly predict effort. Thus, attitude is not only important in achievement in mathematics and sciences, it is equally important in social sciences. Al-Qahtani (2012) concluded that there were significant positive associations between academic achievement and both the environmental and attitudinal factors.

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ATTITUDE AND ACHIEVEMENT

It may be deduced from the foregoing that theoretical and empirical perspectives favour the influence of attitude on achievement. Attitude therefore is a psychological construct that though, has been found difficult to measure, is worth given serious consideration by educators. Though there are various models of attitude available, multi-component model of attitude is the most influential. In this model, attitude is an evaluation of an object and has cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Brandt & Wetherell, 2012). These components also are known as taxi CAB (where the initials represent cognition, affective and behavioural respectively). Cognitive component of attitude refers to the beliefs, thoughts, and attributes that an object is associated with. Many times a person's attitude might be based on the negative and positive attributes they associate with an object. The affective component of attitude refers to the feelings or emotions linked to an attitude object. Affective responses influence attitudes in a number of ways. For example, many people are afraid/scared of snakes. So this negative affective response is likely to cause one to have a negative attitude towards snakes. The behavioural component of attitude refers to past behaviours or experiences regarding an attitude object. Hence, people might infer their attitudes from their previous actions and experiences.

In addressing the students' attitude that may influence their achievement, the teacher has enormous role to play. It is believed that some behaviours external and internal to the teacher have very significant influences on students' attitude to learn. According to Okafor (2007) the most important resource in the classroom is the teacher. A highly motivated and well trained teacher can rise above the constraining circumstances of poor material resources in school to motive students to develop liking for a subject. In other words, students' apathy to learning can be influenced by the teacher. The internal influence could be the way the teacher teaches the subject, his knowledge of content, his friendliness with the students and so on.

It is rightly stated that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2013). It is in that vein that a teacher does not give out what he or she does not have. To be capable of attitudinal change, the teacher should have positive attitude to students' learning. One's attitude towards any subject, job or situation determines the one's performance in that

field. If a teacher develops a positive attitude towards his/her job, it would make the teacher to work harder towards the success of his/her students. When the students noticed that their teachers are hard-working and have concern for them, it motivates them and this will result to good performance. In a study, Yara (2019) observed that teachers attitude towards mathematics is a predictor of students achievement in mathematics. Yara concluded that students' positive attitude towards science could be enhance by the teacher related factors such as teachers enthusiasm resourcefulness and helpful behaviour.

The role of teacher in the success of any educational system cannot be overemphasized and that is why the National policy on education (FRN, 2013) provides that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teacher, this shows the importance of teacher in the school. The success of any academic programme depends greatly on the teacher since he is the prime mover that will put all that is contained in the curriculum into action. The teacher's attitude in the classroom is very important in learning of the subject matter. Ololube (2009) stated that teaching is a diverse and complex activity because the goal of any teaching task is achievement. He said that all the interrelated actions of the teacher in any given moment in the classroom must lead to students' academic achievement. Domino (2009) observed that teachers exert both negative and positive influence on students' attitude to learning. According to the researcher, teachers influenced students' understanding and attitudes toward the subject through the way they teach, by making certain that their students understand, and through their personalities. Students have claimed that they understood and liked mathematics when their teachers had fun and interesting lessons, had the students actively engaged in the classroom, showed the students how the mathematics that they were learning was related to their lives, taught at a relatively slow pace, helped students outside of the classroom, cared about their students, and were enthusiastic about mathematics and teaching mathematics (Domino, 2009). All these are indicators of positive attitude on the side of the teacher.

Apart from teacher involvement in attitudinal change among students, peers also have roles to play in influencing attitudinal change among students. As children shift from initial attachment with parents, they found new fellowship and engagement with peers. During school, pupils interact and work alongside peers. These social perceptions and relationships are related to and predictive of school-related outcomes (Patrick, Knee, Canevello & Lonsbary, 2007). It has been shown that one internalizes higher cognitive ability through social interaction. Individuals master their surroundings when immersed in dialogue and engaged in the social construction of meaning. Similarly, Patrick *et al.* (2007) found students perceptions of dimensions of their classroom social environment, including affiliation, cohesion, fairness, mutual respect, and support from teachers and students are associated consistently with adaptive motivational beliefs and achievement behaviours (Allport, 2014). This engagement can also be enhanced by providing students with opportunities to interact with their peers.

CONCLUSION

Attitude is a psychological construct that allows individual to evaluate an attitude object either favourably or unfavourably. When an attitude object is evaluated favourably, individuals have the tendency to engage in behaviours that are likely to improve their achievement. Theoretically and empirically, attitude has been found as a motivating force in achievement. It is therefore important that students are made to improve on their attitude towards learning in other to attain desirable achievement in their academic endeavour. The teacher has onerous role to play in instilling positive attitude on their students through some positive teacher behaviours.

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