

Self-Efficacy and Social Support as Determinants of Academic Grit among Undergraduate Students in Public Universities in Abia State

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Abstract

This study examined self-efficacy and social support as determinants of academic grit among undergraduate students in public universities in Abia State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses. A correlational research design was adopted. The target population of the study consists of all the entire 46,701 undergraduate students. The sample of six hundred and fifty (650) undergraduate students were drawn from the population. Three instruments were used for this study. The General Self-Efficacy Scale designed and Standardised by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) were adapted to measure the respondent's self-efficacy level. Social support was assessed with Cohen et al. (1985) Short-Grit Scale was adapted for measuring undergraduates' academic grit. The instruments were face validated by three experts. Pilot study was conducted with 120 students to establish consistency of the instruments. The data obtained from the pilot study were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, and the results yielded coefficients of .89 for the GSES, .91 for the ISEI and .83 for the S-GS. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to answer the research question and to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significant. The study found a strong and significant relationship between social support, self-efficacy and academic grit. Based on the findings, it was concluded that self-efficacy and social support are significant determinants of academic grit among undergraduate students in public universities in Abia State. The study recommends that universities should implement programmes that enhance students' self-efficacy, strengthen peer and lecturer support systems, and promote counselling and mentorship services aimed at improving students' perseverance and academic commitment.

Keywords: Academic. Grit, Self-efficacy, Social support, Universities, Abia State

Introduction

University education plays a critical role in the development of human capital, national growth, and socio-economic advancement. It equips students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to function effectively in an increasingly competitive and dynamic global environment. However, the attainment of academic success in higher education requires more than intellectual ability alone. Students are often confronted with various academic, social, financial, and psychological challenges that demand persistence, resilience, and sustained commitment to long-term educational goals. Consequently, the concept of academic grit has emerged as an important factor in understanding students' ability to persevere despite obstacles and setbacks.

Academic grit according to Vargas Rubilar and Oros (2019) is refers to a student's passion and perseverance toward achieving long-term academic objectives despite difficulties, failures, and distractions. The concept, popularized by Linshinski and Yadav, (2021)

emphasizes sustained effort and consistency of interest over time. Students with high levels of academic grit tend to remain focused on their educational aspirations, exhibit resilience in the face of academic challenges, and maintain motivation even when immediate rewards are absent. Such students are more likely to complete academic tasks successfully, attain higher levels of achievement, and persist in their educational pursuits. In contrast, students with low levels of grit may become discouraged by challenges, lose interest in academic goals, and experience reduced academic performance.

In recent years, concerns have been raised regarding declining academic commitment, poor persistence, increasing dropout tendencies, and reduced motivation among university students in Nigeria. These challenges have prompted researchers and educators to explore factors that may enhance students' determination and perseverance in academic activities. Among the factors that have received considerable attention are self-efficacy and social support, both of which are regarded as important social-emotional determinants of students' academic behaviour and outcomes. Self-efficacy, derived from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997), is refers to an individual's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute actions required to achieve specific goals. Academic self-efficacy specifically relates to students' confidence in their ability to successfully perform academic tasks and overcome educational challenges. Students who possess strong self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to set challenging goals, invest greater effort in learning activities, persist during difficulties, and recover quickly from setbacks. Such characteristics are closely associated with the development of academic grit because confidence in one's abilities often strengthens perseverance and determination.

Social support is another important social-emotional factor that influences students' academic experiences and outcomes. Social support encompasses the emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal assistance received from family members, peers, lecturers, and significant others. Supportive relationships provide students with encouragement, guidance, resources, and a sense of belonging, which can help them cope effectively with academic stress and challenges. Students who perceive high levels of social support are more likely to remain motivated, develop positive attitudes toward learning, and demonstrate resilience in pursuing their academic goals. Consequently, social support may contribute significantly to the development and maintenance of academic grit (Cohen *et al.*, 2015). Although previous studies by Lutviantari *et al* (2024) and Locati *et al* (2025) have examined the individual effects of self-efficacy and social support on academic achievement, motivation, and student engagement, limited attention has been given to their combined influence on academic grit among undergraduate students in Nigerian public universities. This gap is particularly evident in Abia State, where students encounter numerous academic and socio-economic challenges that may affect their determination to achieve educational goals. Understanding how self-efficacy and social support contribute to academic grit is therefore necessary for developing interventions aimed at improving students' persistence, resilience, and academic success.

It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate self-efficacy and social support as determinants of academic grit among undergraduate students in public universities

in Abia State. The study is expected to provide empirical evidence that will assist educators, counsellors, university administrators, and policymakers in designing strategies that promote students' perseverance and commitment to academic excellence

Statement of the Problem

Academic success in higher education requires students to demonstrate persistence, resilience, determination, and sustained commitment toward achieving their educational goals. These qualities are often reflected in academic grit, which enables students to overcome challenges, remain focused on long-term objectives, and persevere despite obstacles and setbacks. Academic grit has become increasingly important in contemporary university education because students are exposed to various academic, social, emotional, and economic pressures that can hinder their educational progress.

In recent years, public universities in Abia State have witnessed concerns relating to declining academic commitment among some undergraduate students, poor study habits, low motivation, examination failures, delayed graduation, and withdrawal from academic programmes. Despite the opportunities provided by higher education institutions, many students find it difficult to maintain consistent effort and determination in the face of academic challenges. This situation suggests that a significant number of students may lack the level of academic grit required to achieve sustained academic success. Researchers have identified several factors that may influence students' ability to persevere academically. Among these factors are self-efficacy and social support. Self-efficacy influences students' confidence in their ability to perform academic tasks successfully, while social support provides the emotional, informational, and practical assistance needed to cope with academic demands. Students who possess strong self-efficacy beliefs and receive adequate support from family members, peers, and lecturers are more likely to remain committed to their academic goals and demonstrate greater perseverance when faced with difficulties.

However, despite the recognized importance of self-efficacy and social support in promoting positive educational outcomes, there is evidence that many undergraduate students continue to experience low confidence in their academic abilities, inadequate support systems, and difficulties in coping with academic pressures. These challenges may negatively affect their level of academic grit and ultimately their academic performance and educational attainment. Although previous studies have examined self-efficacy, social support, and academic achievement separately, limited empirical studies have specifically investigated the extent to which self-efficacy and social support determine academic grit among undergraduate students in public universities in Abia State. Consequently, there is insufficient local evidence to explain how these social-emotional factors contribute to students' perseverance and commitment toward academic goals within the study area. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to determine self-efficacy and social support as determinants of academic grit among undergraduate students in public universities in Abia State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of social-emotional factors (self-efficacy and social support) on academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the influence of self-efficacy on academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State.
2. Examine the influence of social support on academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State?
2. What is the relationship between social support on academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State?

Null Hypotheses

Ho1: Self-efficacy does not significantly relate to academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State.

Ho2: Social support does not significantly relate to academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State.

Methodology

The research design for this study is the correlational research design. Nworgu (2015) ascertained that correlation research design is ideal for studies where there is need to establish the nature of relationship between two or more variables. Thus, this design was considered appropriate for this study as there is need to establish possible systematic associations among the variables without implying causality. This study was carried out in Abia State, Nigeria. Abia State occupies about 4902 square kilometres and is located between latitudes 5.4° N to 6.0° N, and longitude 7.2° E to 8.0° E. Abia State is made up of 17 Local Government Area. Abia State has a population of 4,143,100 inhabitants (National Population Commission, NPC, 2006), and a density 660/km².

The target population of the study consists of all the entire 46,701 undergraduate students enrolled for the 2024/2025 academic session at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (27,750); and Abia State University, Uturu (18951) (www.MOUAU.edu.ng2024; , <https://abiastateuniversity.edu.ng/2023>).

The study used a sample of six hundred and fifty (650) undergraduate students drawn from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU) and Abia State University (ABSU). The sample size consisted of 330 males and 320 female students. The two universities being the major public institutions in Abia State provide a fair representation of the undergraduate population in the area. Thus, within these universities, students were chosen through convenience sampling, such that only those who were accessible and willing to participate formed the sample until the required number of 650 respondents was attained.

Three instruments were used for this study. The General Self-Efficacy Scale designed and Standardised by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) were adapted to measure the respondent's self-efficacy level. Social support was assessed with Cohen *et al.* (1985) shortened version of the Interpersonal Support Evaluation Inventory. Short-Grit Scale was adapted for measuring undergraduates' academic grit. The adapted General Self-Efficacy Scale GSES, consists of 10 items and was scored on 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The scale were weighed thus, SA (4), A(3), D(2), and SD(1). The adapted Interpersonal Support Evaluation Inventory, ISEI, consists of 10 items and were scored on a 4-point rating scale, Definitely False (DF), Probably False (PF), Probably True (PT), and Definitely True (DT). Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 were scored thus, DF(1); PF(2); PT(3); DT(4), while items 1, 2, 7 and, 8 were reverse scored. The adopted Short-Grit Scale consists of 8 items and were scored on a 4-point Likert type Scale; Very much like me (VM); Somewhat like me (S); Not like me at all (N). Items 2, 4, 7 and 8 will be weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively, while items 1, 3, 5, and 6 will be weighted 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

The instruments were face validated by one expert in the Department of Psychology, and two from the Department of Psychological Foundations of Education, all from the University of Uyo. The instruments were submitted alongside the purpose of study, research questions and the hypotheses to enable the validators examine if the constructs/items were in line with the purpose of the study. The suggestions and corrections of validators were taken into consideration during the final drafting of the instruments.

Pilot study was conducted in order to establish the consistency of the instruments. The exercise was carried out at Abia State Polytechnic, Aba, which was chosen because it shares similar characteristics with the target population of the main study but was not included in the actual sample. This ensured that there was no contamination of the main research population while still providing a representative trial setting. A total of one hundred and twenty students (120) were randomly selected from different departments of the polytechnic to participate in the pilot exercise. The research instruments administered during the study included the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), the Interpersonal Support Evaluation Inventory (ISEI) and the Student General Survey (S-GS). The pilot study was designed not only to assess the internal consistency of these instruments but also to evaluate the clarity of instructions, the comprehensibility of the items, and the overall suitability of the data collection procedures.

Feedback from the respondents showed that the items were generally clear, straightforward, and easy to respond to. The data obtained from the pilot administration were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, and the results yielded coefficients of .89 for the GSES, .91 for the ISEI, .93 for the SAS, .84 for the FDS, .87 for the OPS, and .83 for the S-GS. These coefficients were all above the minimum benchmark of 0.70 indicating that the instruments possessed strong internal consistency and were therefore suitable for use in the main study.

The outcome of the pilot study provided evidence that the research instruments were both reliable and valid for the target population. It also demonstrated that the research procedures could be implemented smoothly and effectively, thereby confirming the appropriateness of the instruments and methods for the main investigation.

Data were collected using Google Form Online Survey. This was considered appropriate as it allowed the researcher reach out to a wide array of undergraduate students in the quickest possible time. The researcher reached out to Faculty presidents in the selected faculties who served as research assistants. They helped the researcher gain access to undergraduate students' Whatsapp Platforms where the purpose of the research and the nature of the items were explained to the students. Thereafter, the Google form version of the instruments were shared to the students. sis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation, PPMC was used in answering the research questions while the Simple Linear Regression and Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses

Result

Research Question One: What is the relationship between self-efficacy and academic grit of public university undergraduates in Abia State?

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Academic Grit

Correlations		Self_Efficacy	Academic_Grit
Self_Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.524**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	650	650

Table 1 revealed that the correlation coefficient between self-efficacy and academic grit is 0.524. This proves that there is a strong and positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic grit of public university undergraduates in Abia State. This implies that undergraduates who believe more strongly in their own abilities are more likely to stay determined, hardworking, and persistent in their studies. When undergraduates in public universities in Abia State feel confident that they can succeed, they are less likely to give up when schoolwork is difficult and more likely to keep trying until they achieve their academic goals.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between social support on academic grit among students in public universities in Abia State?

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship between Social Support and Academic Grit

Correlations		Academic_Grit	Social_Support
Social_Support	Pearson Correlation	-.108**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	650	650

Data in Table 2 revealed the relationship between social support and academic grit. The data yielded a correlation coefficient of -0.108 which implies a negative and weak relationship

between the independent and dependent variables. Therefore, social support has a weak relationship with academic grit among the undergraduates of public universities in Abia State. The negative value also suggests that as social support increases, academic grit slightly decreases, but the relationship is so weak that it does not have any strong or meaningful effect on academic grit among undergraduates in public universities in Abia State.

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and academic grit of public university undergraduates in Abia State.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression of Self-Efficacy and Academic Grit

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.115	1	24.115	244.941	.000 ^b
	Residual	63.797	648	.098		
	Total	87.912	649			
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.707	.115		14.906	.000
	Self_Efficay	.505	.032	.524	15.651	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic_Grit

The results in Table 3 showed the predictive relationship between self-efficacy and academic grit. The Beta value was ascertained to be $B = 0.524$ ($p < 0.05$) and the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05 revealed that the regression model is significant since the P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 at 95% confidence level. The F-value $F(1, 648) = 244.941$; t-value = 15.651 and p-value = .000, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, self-efficacy significantly predicts and had a positive significant relationship with academic grit among the public university undergraduates in Abia State. Therefore, For public university undergraduates in Abia State, confidence in their ability to succeed plays an important role in helping them stay focused and continue striving even when academic work becomes difficult.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between social support and academic grit of public university undergraduates in Abia State.

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression of Social Support and Academic Grit

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.034	1	1.034	7.714	.006 ^b
	Residual	86.877	648	.134		
	Total	87.912	649			

Model		Coefficients ^a		t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	3.920	.156		.000
	Social_Support	-.184	.066	-.108	.006

Table 4 showed the predictive influence of social support on academic grit. The Beta value of $B = -0.108$ ($p < 0.05$) revealed that the regression model is significant, since the P-value $0.006 < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level. The F-value $F(1, 648) = 7.714$; t-value = -2.777 and p-value = .006 showed a significant relationship between the social support and academic grit, thus the null hypothesis was not accepted. This implies that social support actually had a small but significant negative effect on students' academic grit.

Discussion of Findings.

Self-Efficacy and Academic Grit

The present study established a strong and positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic grit among undergraduates in public universities in Abia State. It further revealed that self-efficacy significantly predicts grit, suggesting that students' beliefs in their own competence strongly determine the extent to which they persevere and sustain interest in long-term academic goals. This finding underscores the central role of self-efficacy in enabling undergraduates to thrive in the challenging Nigerian university context.

The finding aligns with multiple studies across cultural settings. For instance, Wang *et al.* (2022) reported that self-efficacy was positively correlated with grit and significantly predicted grit among Chinese undergraduates. Similarly, Xu *et al.* (2023) found that grit and self-efficacy functioned as mediators in the growth mindset academic behaviour pathway, demonstrating their crucial role in sustaining persistence. These studies resonate with the present research by confirming that self-efficacy enhances students' perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, which are the twin pillars of grit.

Other evidence also reinforces the finding. Miler and Kass (2019), in a qualitative study of Spanish students with disabilities, found that self-efficacy nurtured grit and strengthened resilience, which helped students overcome academic barriers. This echoes the current study by showing that regardless of disability status, students who believe in their competence demonstrate greater grit. Likewise, Khudabad and Soni (2024), although reporting only a low correlation between self-efficacy and academic performance, still found a positive significant relationship, suggesting that self-efficacy remains a reliable contributor to persistence, even if mediated by other factors such as self-control.

The current finding can be theoretically situated within Grit Theory, which emphasizes perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Self-efficacy enables students to sustain effort despite adversity, thereby operationalizing grit in academic contexts. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory by Deci *et al.* (2008), self-efficacy fulfills the competence need, which drives intrinsic motivation and persistence in goal pursuit. PERMA Theory further supports the finding by linking self-efficacy with positive emotions and accomplishment, both of which are vital for long-term perseverance.

The consistency across these studies affirms that self-efficacy is not merely a psychological belief but a powerful driver of grit. For Nigerian undergraduates, where academic challenges are compounded by economic hardship and systemic instability, self-efficacy emerges as a vital protective factor that nurtures academic grit, enhances resilience, and improves long-term achievement.

Social Support and Academic Grit

The findings of this study revealed a weak correlation between social support and academic grit, and further showed that social support had a negative significant predictive relationship with academic grit among undergraduates in Abia State. These outcomes provide a multifaceted perspective, suggesting that while supportive networks may be somewhat associated with perseverance, they may, under certain conditions, hinder rather than enhance grit when considered as a predictive factor.

The weak correlation result diverges from prior studies. For instance, Lase and Wibowo (2024) found a moderate positive correlation between peer social support and grit among Indonesian working students. Similarly, Yang and Wu (2021) established that social support was positively related to grit and mediated the relationship between meaning in life and grit among nurses in China. Likewise, Amoadu *et al.* (2024) reported a positive and significant correlation between social support and academic grit among undergraduates in the United States. These studies consistently emphasize that social support fosters perseverance, unlike the weak relationship observed in the present research.

Theoretically, the findings can be situated within Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the need for relatedness as a basic motivator. While relatedness is important, the negative prediction observed in this study suggests that in the Nigerian undergraduate context, social support may not always promote autonomous motivation, and might in fact reduce intrinsic drive when students lean excessively on external aid. Within PERMA Theory, relationships are meant to enhance well-being, but the present outcome indicates that not all forms of support are adaptive; support that fosters dependency rather than encouragement may lower perseverance. From the perspective of Grit Theory, grit thrives on sustained passion and effort over time, which may be undermined when social support becomes a substitute for individual commitment.

The results highlight a contextual paradox: although social support is generally associated with academic grit across different cultures and populations, in the present study it demonstrated only a weak association and even a negative predictive effect. This suggests that the quality and type of social support matter more than its mere presence. For Nigerian undergraduates, especially within Abia State, support networks may sometimes dilute resilience by fostering dependence.

Conclusion

The findings of this study established that socio-emotional variables are central to understanding academic grit among undergraduates in public universities in Abia State. Specifically, self-efficacy, self-acceptance demonstrated strong and positive relationships with grit and were significant predictors of students' perseverance and sustained effort. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that fostering self-belief, resilience in the face of frustration, and a balanced sense of self, complemented by realistic optimism, provides a stronger foundation for academic grit than reliance on external support systems alone.

Recommendations

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

1. Students should be encouraged to actively participate in personal development programs such as mentorship initiatives, resilience workshops, and skill-building activities that enhance self-efficacy, self-acceptance, and frustration tolerance. This will help them develop the perseverance and grit necessary to navigate academic challenges.
2. Lecturers and academic advisors should deliberately integrate socio-emotional learning into their teaching practices by offering constructive feedback, creating supportive classroom climates, and modeling perseverance. These strategies will help foster optimism and strengthen students' confidence in their academic abilities.

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