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Perseverance in the Face of Life-Trials and Academic Achievements in Senior Secondary Schools: A Comparative Analysis of Computer and Economics Students

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Abstract

The study explored the relationship between perseverance in the face of life trials and the academic achievements of senior secondary school students in Owerri Educational Zone II, Imo-state, Nigeria. This became imminent due to challenges faced in the Nigerian education sector, were students contend with poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, limited access to textbooks, teacher absenteeism, and parental illiteracy which demotivates most talented learners. Amidst these, some still excel academically and this has raised questions on the actual role perseverance play at enabling academic achievements in the face of adversities. To achieve a comprehensive study, the research postulated three (3) questions and a hypothesis. Adopting descriptive comparative research design using mixed method approach, a sample size of two hundred (200) senior secondary school students comprising of one hundred (100) computer science and one hundred (100) economics students was selected from the population. The instruments for data collection were the Perseverance Scale, adopted from the Duckworth's Grit Scale; students' academic achievement results and focus groups. Collected data were analyzed using Mean, Pearson Correlation and Fisher's r-to-z tests statistical tools while qualitative data from the discussion groups were thematically analyzed. Results from the analysis revealed the following: The overall level of perseverance among computer and economics senior secondary school students was moderate (3.45/5.00) with noticeable differences between the two (2) groups; students of computer science demonstrated higher academic achievements (73.4%) than their economics counterparts (68.1%); and the existence of a positive correlation between perseverance and academic achievements among the two (2) groups which was not significant at 0.05 limits. Based on the revelations, the research concluded that subject-specific demands, shaped students' perseverance levels with computer students showing greater level of perseverance than the economics students in Owerri Educational Zone II, Imo-state, Nigeria.

Keywords: Perseverance, Academic Achievement, Computer Education, Economics Education, Secondary Schools, Nigeria

1. Introduction

In the realm of education, student academic achievement has long been a central focus of research, policy, and practice. Numerous studies have explored the multifaceted factors influencing learners' academic performance, from socio-economic status, teaching quality, and curriculum structure, to psycho-spiritual variables such as immorality, motivation and resilience, and personality traits (Ibrahim *et al*., 2024 [10]; Alaribe *et al*., 2024; Zunaira *et al*., 2023 [25]). One of the increasingly recognized yet under-explored factor contributing to sustained academic success is perseverance, in context were students are faced with persistent trials and adversities (Alaribe *et al*., 2024). Perseverance often conceptualized as grit or sustained effort toward long-term goals despite setbacks, has garnered attention as a non-cognitive attribute critical to student success (Jiang *et al*., 2022) [13]. According to Duckworth *et al*. (2007) [7], perseverance embodies the capacity to maintain consistent interest and effort in pursuing a goal over time, even when confronted with failure, obstacles, or discouragement. In educational settings particularly at the senior secondary level, students frequently encounter academic pressures, family responsibilities, financial constraints, inadequate learning resources, and, in some regions, socio-political instabilities. These challenges make perseverance an indispensable asset for academic progress and eventual success (Rahul, 2024) [20]. The senior secondary school stage, typically marking the final phase before tertiary education, is often laden with high academic expectations and life-defining examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO) exams (Raji, 2021) [21]. At this stage, students are required to demonstrate not only cognitive competence but also strong psychological disposition for overcoming challenges. Therefore, understanding how perseverance operates amidst trials becomes essential for fostering academic achievements.

In many Nigerian schools, particularly in under-resourced or rural settings, students must often contend with poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, limited access to textbooks, teacher absenteeism, spirituality and parental illiteracy. These barriers can demotivate even the most talented learners. Yet, amidst these trials, some students manage to excel academically (Okunlola & Hendricks, 2024). This raises an important question: What role does perseverance play in enabling academic achievement despite adversity? Consequently, gender, subject orientation (such as Sciences vs. Arts), environmental factors and spiritualities may influence how perseverance manifests and affects outcomes. For instance, a student pursuing a course in Computer Science may face different challenges compared to one in Economics, ranging from curriculum rigors to societal expectations and available mentorship. Comparative analyses between students in different subject domains can thus shed light on how perseverance interacting with disciplinary demands can affect academic performances.

Globally, there is growing advocacy for the integration of socio-emotional learning in schools to help students build psychological resilience, goal-setting behaviour, and perseverance (Risa & Asep, 2024) [22]. However, without empirical understanding of how perseverance is currently influencing academic outcomes at the senior secondary level in Nigeria especially in the face of persistent trials, policies and interventions may remain misdirected or ineffective. This study, therefore aimed to fill this gap by comparing the influence of perseverance on the academic achievements of Computer science and Economics students in Owerri Educational Zone (II) through the following questions and hypotheses;

1.1 Research Questions

1. What is the level of perseverance among senior secondary school students studying Computer and Economics?
2. What is their academic performance level?
3. Is there a correlation between their perseverance level and academic performance level?

1.2 Hypotheses

H_0: The correlation between their perseverance level and academic performance level is not significant at 0.05 significance limits.

H_A: The correlation between their perseverance level and academic performance level is significant at 0.05 significance limits.

Through the analysis of the above questions and hypotheses, the research provided a comparative cross-disciplinary insight for clearer understanding of perseverance as a factor in academic achievements towards informed teacher training, school counselling/spiritual programs, and educational policies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Perseverance

Perseverance according to Caldwell and Anderson (2024) [6] is widely acknowledged as a vital non-cognitive trait that supports long-term goal attainment despite adversity. It encapsulates a sustained effort, intrinsic motivation, and consistent interest, especially when outcomes are not immediately rewarding. Duckworth *et al*. (2007) [7] first operationalized the concept as grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. In educational settings, perseverance contributes to students' ability to remain engaged and focused amid setbacks (Kern, 2017) [14]. Recent studies affirm that perseverance predicts academic success independently of intelligence or socio-economic background. Hence, students who persevere are more likely to engage in deep learning strategies, persist through difficult tasks, and exhibit greater self-regulation and control (Babiera & Quirap, 2024; Mmassy, 2024) [4, 17].

There is no doubt that the zeal and ability to continue with one's task in other to achieve the intended goal despite obstacles is vital for improved outcome in students' academic achievement. One of the subjects introduced to help inculcate this component of affective domain into the life of the secondary school students was the Christian Religious Studies (CRS). According to the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2018), CRS does not only assist learners develop personal relationship with God, but also help them inculcate appropriate knowledge and skills for contributing to national development, think critically, and make moral decision. Biblically, some of Christ teachings, were centered on perseverance were some persons who persevered such as Job, Noah, and Paul, were richly rewarded.

It is important to note that perseverance, is a matter of choice where one chooses to either quit or keep pushing in the face of unfavourable conditions. Hence when students learn to stick to their studies in the midst of trials and distractions that has engulfed the present generation, they achieve a very impressive outcome. Unfortunately, researcher has shown that both schools and parents do not adequately motivate their wards towards exceling in the area of affective domain (Ipem *et al*., 2019) [12]. The researchers also observed that in CRS classes where this domain is majorly domiciled, it is not given the necessary attention it requires despite experts' maintenance that affective response could be learned through words, tasks and reward systems (Ipem *et al*., 2019) [12].

2.2 Trials in Education

In the academic context, trials refer to stressful, adverse, or obstructive conditions that hinder learning and learning outcomes. These may include internal trials such as self-doubt and health issues, external trials such as poverty, family instability, and inadequate school facilities (Malitha *et al*., 2022 [16]; or religious trials such as engaging in cheating during examinations without fear of reprisal or hate (Alaribe *et al*, 2024). In sub-Saharan Africa and especially in Nigeria, students frequently contend with poorly funded schools, teacher shortages, examination malpractice, and lack of adequate parental support (Ihebom & Uko, 2020; Burns, 2020) [11, 5]. Trials can erode motivation, reduce academic engagement, and also create feelings of hopelessness. However, perseverance often serves as a buffer that enables students continue striving despite these obstacles (Duckworth *et al*., 2007) [7].

2.3 Academic Achievements

Academic achievement according to Steinmayr *et al*., (2024), represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university. School systems mostly define cognitive goals that either apply across multiple subject areas (such as critical thinking) or include the acquisition of knowledge and understanding in a specific intellectual domain (such as numeracy, literacy, science, history). Therefore, academic achievement can be viewed as a multifaceted construct that comprises different domains of learning. Because the field of academic achievement is very wide-ranging and covers a broad variety of educational outcomes, the definition of academic achievement depends on the indicators used to measure it. Among the many criteria that indicates academic achievement, there are very general indicators such as procedural and declarative knowledge acquired in an educational system, more curricular-based criteria such as grades or performance on an educational achievement test, and cumulative indicators of academic achievement such as educational degrees and certificates. All criteria have in common that they represent intellectual endeavours and thus, more or less, mirror the intellectual capacity of a person (Steinmayr *et al*., 2024). In developed societies, academic achievement plays an important role in every person's life. Academic achievement as measured by the GPA (grade point average) or by standardized assessments designed for selection purpose such as the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) determines whether a student will have the opportunity to continue his or her education. Therefore, academic achievement defines whether one can take part in the next level of education, and based on the educational degrees one attains, influences one's vocational career after education.

Besides the relevance for an individual, academic achievement is of utmost importance for the wealth of a nation and its prosperity. The strong association between a society's level of academic achievement and positive socioeconomic development is one reason for conducting international studies on academic achievement, such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), administered by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). The results of these studies provide information about different indicators of a nation's academic achievement; such information is used to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of a nation's educational system and to guide educational policy decisions. Given the individual and societal importance of academic achievement, it is not surprising that academic achievement is the research focus of many scientists especially in the field of psychology and educational disciplines.

2.4 Perseverance and Academic Achievements

The role of perseverance in educational success has gained prominence in recent literature. Research shows that students with higher levels of perseverance outperform their peers academically, even in the face of significant personal or environmental challenges (Duckworth *et al*., 2007; Kern, 2017; Risa, 2024) [7, 14, 22]. Perseverance is positively linked with academic self-efficacy, task completion, and long-term goal attainment particularly in environments of resource scarcity were students rely more on internal traits such as grit, self-control, religious upbringing and intrinsic motivation to succeed (Ahmad, 2023) [1]. This internal drive often compensates for external limitations.

Perseverance is a key secular and Christian virtue that seems to have great influence on students' academic achievement. Students' academic achievement is of a critical importance in field of education. It is the progress of students towards meeting academic benchmarks (Ipem *et al*., 2019) [12]. It is a measure of the quality of teaching-learning process. Students' academic achievement is positively and directly related to the quality of teaching-learning process. It is also true that increase in the quality and quantity of learning will definitely lead to increase in the student academic achievement. Students' academic achievement is influenced by many factors (Obasi & Obih, 2016) [18], some which have some gained attention in the field of educational research.

However, one of the variables that seem to have some level of influence students learning apart from the quality of instructional delivery is perseverance. This refers to ability to pursue a goal or passion overtime, and stick with it if no matter the encountered obstacles and setbacks (Schaffner, 2020) [23]. The means that perseverance is a form of purposefulness and goal-orientation, which requires long-term commitment and discipline and also fuelled by passion. Hence, it entails effort and practice as well as ability to learn from failure when thrown off our horses until success is achieved (Duckworth *el al*., 2007; Erisson, 2006) [7, 8].

2.5 Comparative Perspective of Perseverance across Computer Science and Economics Students

Computer science is practically inclined and resource-dependent, while economics requires theoretical reasoning and abstract analysis. The nature of these subjects may differently influence the development and application of perseverance. Some approaches as inherent in both subject-students are itemized in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Perspective between Computer Science & Economics

S. No	Variable	Computer Science	Economics
1.	Cognitive Demand	Problem solving under uncertainty	Understanding systems and casualties
2.	Time Investment	Project and debugging	Research and analysis
3.	Perseverance Form	Task persistent, mental endurance	Conceptual patience, analytic grit
4.	Types of Challenges	Technical, logical and iterative	Abstract, analytic and mathematical
5.	Failure Mode	Code errors, software debugs	Misinterpretation of models/data.

2.6 Theoretical Background

One of the theories that guided the actualization of this study is the Self-Determination Theory by Deci & Ryan as captured in Legault (2017) [15]. This theory explained that people were most motivated to succeed when their actions are self-chosen and aligned with their inner values. The theory emphasized three (3) basic psychological needs which include autonomy, which is the feeling of been in control of one's actions; competence, which indicates feeling effective and capable; as well as relatedness, which deals with feeling connected to others. When these needs are met, individuals exhibit higher levels of motivation, perseverance, and overall well-being (Legault, 2017) [15]. In the academic setting, students who feel supported in these areas are more likely to engage deeply in their academics, overcoming challenges also achieving better academic successes.

Grit Theory as proposed by Duckworth (2007) [7] was also reviewed in the research. Grit, was defined as the combination of passion and perseverance toward long-term achievements and goals. This suggests that success is strongly predicted by sustained effort and commitment rather than intelligence or talent. Hence, individuals with higher grits, tend to persist better through setbacks, thereby maintaining motivation and hardwork during difficult moments. In the education setting, gritty students were more likely to overcome academic challenges and also achieve their set goals through consistencies in effort and resilience.

Lastly, the Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation (EVTAM) by Wigfield *et al*. (2016) [24] was also reviewed. This Theory posited that students' motivation to performing tasks, were determined by two (2) strategic factors. These factors the belief in their ability to succeed (expectancy) and how important, useful and enjoyable they perceive the task to be (value). Hence, the higher a student's expectancy and value are, the more likely he/she is to engage in the task perseveringly. In the educational setting, when a student expects to perform well and also perceive the given task as meaningful / beneficial, he/she tends to be more motivated into putting greater efforts in achieveing desired success.

3. Methodology

This study adopted descriptive comparative design, using mixed method approach. The population comprised all senior secondary school students in Owerri Education Zone II, Imo State, Nigeria. A total of two hundred (200) students, comprising of one hundred (100) Computer science students and one hundred (100) Economics students were purposively selected from five (5) public secondary schools. The instruments for data collection were the Perseverance Scale (adapted from Duckworth's Grit Scale), academic achievement results of current term and focus groups discussions for exploring student experiences. Data collected were analysed using Mean, Pearson Correlation and Fisher's r-to-z tests. Qualitative data from discussions were also thematically analyzed.

4. Results

4.1 Research Question One: What is the level of perseverance among senior secondary school students studying Computer and Economics subjects?

Table 2 illustrates the summary of the result of the analysis carried out for research question one;

Table 2: Level of Perseverance

Subject	Mean	SD	Perseverance Level	Interpretation
Computer	3.72	0.54	High	Strong persistence in solving practical task
Economics	3.41	0.63	Moderate	Consistent effort but slightly less resilient
Overall	3.45	0.59	Moderate	Students show appreciable perseverance level

Key: 1.00-1.99: Very Low; 2.00-2.99: Low; 3.00-3.49: Moderate; 3.50-4.49: High; 4.50-5.00: Very high

The analysis of research question one, revealed that the overall level of perseverance among senior secondary school students in both Computer and Economics subjects is moderate. However, notable differences were observed between the two groups which includes Computer students demonstrating higher level of perseverance in areas involving problem-solving persistence and resilience after failure (such as debugging code, and completing technical assignments) while Economics students, who also showed perseverance, scored slightly lower particularly in areas requiring sustained effort over time towards grasping abstract theories and mathematical models.

Quantitatively, the perseverance scale (based on a 5-point Likert rating) showed that Computer students' mean score was three point seven-two (3.72) with a standard deviation of zero point five-four (0.54) while the Economics students' mean score was three point four-one (3.41) with a standard deviation of zero point six-three (0.63).

4.2 Research Question Two: What is their academic performance level?

The result from the analysis of research question two is shown in Table 3;

Table 3: Academic Performance Level

Subject	Mean	SD	Performance Level	Interpretation
Computer	73.4	9.2	High	Students performed well with majority scoring above 70%
Economics	68.1	10.4	Moderate	Good performance though slightly below computer students
Overall	70.3	9.0	High	Students generally showed commendable academic achievements.

Key: 0-49: Low; 50-59: Fair; 60-69: Moderate; 70-100: High

Table 3 revealed that students in Computer Studies demonstrated higher average academic performances of seventy-three-point four percent (73.4%) compared to those in Economics who had sixty-eight-point one percent (68.1%). The overall performance in both subjects was above average (70.3%), indicating that perseverance positively influence achievement. However, the slightly lower performance of Economics students may be attributed to differences in content difficulty, teaching methods, or student interest.

4.3 Research Question Three: Is there a correlation between their perseverance level and academic performance level?

The analysis of research question three is shown in Table 4;

Table 4: Perseverance vs. Academic Achievement

Group	N	Mean (P)	Mean (A)	r	p-value	Interpretation
Computer	100	3.72	73.4	0.68	0.001	Strong Positive, Statistically Significant Correlation
Economics	100	3.41	68.1	0.41	0.022	Moderate Positive, Statistically Significant Correlation

From the analysis of research question three shown in Table 4, both groups showed positive correlation between perseverance and academic achievement. The correlation is stronger among Computer Science students (r = 0.68) than Economics students (r = 0.41). Using Fisher's r-to-z test, if the difference between the two correlations is significant, it supports the hypothesis that the relationship varies by discipline.

4.4 Research Hypotheses: The correlation between their perseverance level and academic performance level is not significant at 0.05 significance limits.

The summary of the hypotheses is shown in Table 5;

Table 5: Perseverance vs. Academic Achievement Significance

Group	R	z^{I} (Fisher)	N	SE	z-statistics	z-tabulated	p-value	Significance
Computer	0.68	0.8290	100					
Economics	0.41	0.4355	100	0.272	1.447	1.96	$\simeq$ 0.147	Not significant

From Table 5, it is exposed that the z-statistics is less than z-tabulated (1.447 < 1.960) which implies that the null hypotheses is accepted. Hence, the correlation between the perseverance level and academic performance level of both computer science (0.68) and economics students (0.41) is not significant at 0.05 significance limits.

5. Discussions

The analysis of research question one revealed that senior secondary school students studying computer studies exhibited higher level of perseverance (3.72/5.00) compared to their counterparts in economics (3.41/5.00). This aligned with Babiera and Quirap (2024) [4], Mmassy (2024) [17] Grit Theory (Duckworth *et al*., 2007) [7], which emphasized that sustained effort and passion were critical predictors of long-term success especially in cognitive-demanding tasks such as computer programming, etc. Hence, the structured, problem-solving nature of computer studies fostered perseverance more effectively than economics, which may rely more on conceptual understanding and memorization. Furthermore, the Self-Determination Theory in Legault (2017) [15] students' motivation and perseverance increased when engaged in activities that promote autonomy, competence, and relevance; characteristics often present in hands-on computer studies curricula.

The analysis of research question two revealed that senior secondary school students offering computer studies tended to achieve slightly higher academic scores (73.4) than their counterparts in economics (68.1). This can be attributed to the hands-on, problem-solving approach in computer studies, which promotes active engagement and practical learning. According to the Expectancy-Value Theory by Wigfield *et al*., (2016) [24], students performed better academically when they value a subject and believe they can succeed in it. Computer studies which is perceived to be more aligned with future career opportunities in technology, increase students task value and general performances. In contrast, economics which often involves abstract concepts and theoretical analysis, may not immediately engage students who prefer practical application, potentially affecting their motivation and achievement (Ahmad, 2023) [1].

The result from the analysis of research question three showed positive correlations of point six-eight (0.68) for computer studies students and point four-one (0.41) for economics students, which were not statistically significant (1.447 < 1.960) at 0.05 significant limits. This showed that students with higher perseverance, tended to perform better academically. Also, the lack of statistical significance implies that the trend is not strong and consistent enough to generalize across a wider students' population. This exposition shows that other mediating factors such as teaching quality, learning strategies, and subject interest might influence academic performance stronger than perseverance. Hence, grit may not always translate to higher achievement if students are not psycho-spiritually motivated or intrinsically supported to sustain higher academic achievements in schools (Alaribe *et al*., 2024; Duckworth *et al*., 2007 [7]).

6. Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from the study;

1. Subject-specific demands, shaped students' perseverance levels with computer students showing greater level than economics students.
2. With non-significant correlation, the findings of the study cannot be used to draw a generalized conclusion beyond the sampled subjects, and
3. Perseverance in the face of life trials, affect the academic achievements of senior secondary school computer science and economics students in Owerri Educational Zone II, Imo-state, Nigeria.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- ✓ Introduction of perseverance and resilience training across schools in Owerri Educational Zone II;
- ✓ Providing more hands-on resources to computer studies across schools in Owerri Educational Zone II in order to strengthen students' engagement;
- ✓ Incorporating critical thinking activities into economics subjects in Owerri Educational Zone II in order to promote deeper learning outcomes, and
- ✓ Including psycho-spiritual support programs that will enhance the perseverance traits of students in Owerri Educational Zone II by religious organizations and CRS teachers.

8. Limitations & Suggestions for Further Studies

This study was limited to public secondary schools in one Education Zone of Imo-state, Nigeria. Also, self-report scales, academic achievement results for one term and focus groups were used to solicit data for the analysis. Hence, the researchers suggest that future research involving longitudinal tracking, incorporating of private secondary schools and subjects other than computer science and economics should examined in order to improve the generalizability of the research outcome.

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