

# Emotional Intelligence, Course Satisfaction and the Attitudes of Pre-service Special Education Teachers towards Career in Special Education

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## ABSTRACT

*The study investigated the effects of emotional intelligence and course satisfaction on pre-service special education teachers towards a career in special education. The study employed the descriptive survey design using the ex-post facto type. 230 special education students were randomly drawn from all four levels of study in the University of Ibadan, South-West, Nigeria. Three reliable and valid instruments were used to collect data from the participants. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple regression statistics were used to analyze the data. The result indicated that emotional intelligence and course satisfaction correlated positively with participants' attitude toward a career in special education. The result further demonstrated that emotional intelligence and course satisfaction had predictive influence on the criterion measure. Based on these findings, it was suggested that appropriate strategies and policies for emotional intelligence and course satisfaction should be encourage to forestall negative intents and advance the mainstay of a positive attitude towards a career in special education among pre-service special education teachers.*

**Keywords:** *Attitude, Emotional Intelligence, Course Satisfaction, Special Education*

## INTRODUCTION

While trying to prepare all future teachers for meeting the needs of learners in regular classrooms, there is always the need for professional special educators who can teach students with specific special needs. The need for improved teacher training arises from the limitations of many current teacher training programs (Wallace, 2002; Reynolds, Ross and Rakow, 2002). However, when the issue of teacher education is considered, special education is often given little or no priority. This does not augur well for pre-service teachers currently in the specialty as it may translate to dismal attitudes towards special education on the part of students undergoing training in the discipline. Attitude has been described as a learned predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given attitude object (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005). According to Callahan (1980) and Richardson (2003), attention to attitudes has become a growing concern in teacher education. It is believed that the potential effects of attitude are vital for the nature of commitment and resilience an individual may have. Thus, if any perceived trend of negative attitude is allowed among pre-service special education teachers, education for the special persons may soon be heading towards an avoidable failure. It is this rationale that has prompted this study.

Critically, it is assumed that a complex group of cultural, moral, societal, and professional factors may affect the interpretations of children with special needs in general, and their teachers in particular. This also includes cultural values and beliefs towards the children and their educators that might shape or affect pre-service teachers' attitudes towards a career in special education. Further scrutiny indicates that, the teacher education program reaffirms, rather than challenges, the past (Koehler, 1985; McDiarmid, 1990; Pajares, 1992). Until ways to provide pre-service teachers with schema in which to place the various strategies, techniques and pedagogical knowledge are devised, they have no need to challenge their pre-existing attitudes about teaching and learning. Based on this, the study investigates the perceived effects of emotional intelligence and course satisfaction on the attitudes of pre-service special education teachers towards a career in special education. Scholars tend to view emotional intelligence as a factor, which has a potential to contribute to more positive attitudes, behaviors and outcomes.

Nonetheless, the possibility of conceptualizing it as either ability or as a personality trait justifies its significance for positive attitudes. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others. The perception, use of comprehension and regulation of emotions, as well as their implication in our daily life, have been studied for decades, although they have sparked growing interest in recent years (Bar-on and Parker, 2000; Clarrochi, Forgas and Mayer, 2006). Several studies have explained how emotion affects not only the content of thought but also the very process involve in thought (Bless, 2000) and in social interactions (Lupton, 1998). In addition, emotion and skills for coping with them affect learning processes, mental and physical health, the quality of social relationships, academic and work performance (Brackett and Caruso, 2007).

The implications of these results in pre-service teachers' daily work are easy to deduce as teaching the special needs persons require appropriate levels of emotional stability. Unfortunately, according to Emmer (1994) teachers more often experience negative emotions than positive ones. Pre-service special education teachers' are most likely thought to teach in situations not only contradictory to their educational preparation, but to students who differ from them in language, culture, and experiences (Sobel and Taylor, 2005). This could breed stress and probably negative emotions in the candidate. While negative emotions interfere in cognitive capacity for processing information (Eyesneck and Calvo, 1992), positive emotions increase our creative capacity for handling difficulties (Frederickson, 2001), level of adjustment (Birch and Ladd, 1996). This in turn may produce a spiral effect that may create a positive environment for developing positive attitude to learning. Hence, the emotional intelligence capabilities seem to be indispensable in the evolving of positive attitude among pre-service special educators. The students' course satisfaction is also another factor that should not be taken for granted. According to Astin, (1993) student satisfaction can be defined as the student's perception pertaining to the university experience and perceived value of the education received while attending an educational institution. The author further added that course satisfaction represents an

intermediate outcome, which becomes a pre-requisite for career commitment in future. In other words to teach successfully, pre-service special education teachers with course satisfaction, would study and have knowledge of the curriculum taught as well as a strong foundation in education and human growth and development. In addition, course satisfaction may call the attention and the assistance of cooperating teachers, related information from college courses, and direction from supervising teachers, creating room for setting of goals and maintaining them throughout the authentic classroom experience. However, the pre-service special education teachers' classroom experience is highly dependent on definable strategies and methodologies (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Anthony, Witcher and James, 2002).

Hence, Larson (2006) reports that the beginning years for pre-service special education teachers can be exceedingly demanding. This, when hinged upon their expectations from the post secondary era soon accrue to dissatisfaction among the students. In addition, and worthy of note is that the student course satisfaction in traditional learning environments has been overlooked in the past (Astin, 1993; DeBourgh, 1999; Navarro and Shoemaker, 2000). Student course satisfaction significantly correlates with area of study and support services (Dey, Wimsatt, Meader and Rhee, 1998). Unfortunately this seemingly lack of satisfaction in authentic classroom experience (Andrews, 2002) may not support the development of a positive attitude pre-service special education students.

Thus, course satisfaction may be an essential tool in development of positive attitude and special education students towards special education. The purpose of this study in a nutshell was to examine the predictive influence of emotional intelligence and course satisfaction on the attitude towards special education of pre-service special education teachers. To actualize the objective of this study the following research questions were addressed in the study.

1. Is there any significant correlation among emotional intelligence, course satisfaction and attitude towards special education?
2. Does the combination of emotional intelligence and course satisfaction predict attitude towards special education of pre-service special education teachers?
3. Does the relative contribution of emotional intelligence and course satisfaction predict attitude towards special education of pre-service special education teachers?

## METHOD

The study employed descriptive survey design utilizing the ex-post facto type. The study was carried out with students of the University of Ibadan, Oyo State in South-West Nigeria. Using the simple random sampling technique. A sample of two hundred and thirty students were selected for the study. The participants were selected from all level of study (100 to 400 levels) and they were all registered students of the University as at the time this study was conducted. The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 31 years with a mean age of 23.9 years. The study employed the following five standardized instrument. Emotional intelligence was assessed with the emotional intelligence questionnaire (EIS) developed by

Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden and Dornheim (1998). It is a thirty three item scale structured in a 5-point Likert format. Example of items in the scale are "I know when to speak about my personal problems to others", "I expect good things to happen". High score indicate increased level of emotional intelligence, while low scores indicated decreased level of emotional intelligence. It has Cronbach Alpha value of .88. Course satisfaction may be engendered by factors such as course prestige, course delivery, and academic performance, the utility of the course and career prospect among others. In lieu of this course satisfaction was measured with the following six items, prefixed with : I am satisfied with (1) my academic performance; (2) the course delivery; (3) the prestige associated with my course; (4) the usefulness of my course; (5) my lecturers and (6) my area of specialization. The response format varies from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The instrument has a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.81. The researchers personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaire from the students. The consent of all the participants was also sought before administration. Response rate of 100% was recorded. Relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was ascertained using Pearson product moment correlation while multiple regression was used to determine the predictive capacity of the independent variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows there a significant positive relationship among the three variables in the study with emotional intelligence and attitude towards special education being the most strongest at  $r$  value of .326. Going by the result presented on table 1, the two independent variable (emotional intelligence and course satisfaction), as a composite construct yielded a coefficient of multiple regression ( $R$ ) of 0.497, and a multiple correlation square ( $R^2$ ) of 0.250 and an adjusted multiple correlation square ( $R^2$ ) of 0.261. This shows that 26.1% of the total variance in attitudes towards a career in special education of the participants is accounted for by the combination of the two variables. The table as well indicates that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data produced an  $F$ -ratio value which was significant at 0.05 level. The findings thus, confirm that emotional intelligence and course satisfaction are potent predictors of attitudes towards a career in special education among the participants. From the result displayed on table 2, each of the independent variables made significant contributions to the prediction of procrastination in varying weights.

The results indicated that the following beta weights which represented the relative contribution of the independent variables were observed; emotional intelligence. The analysis of relationship among emotional intelligence, course satisfaction and attitude of pre-service special education teachers as shown in the correlation matrix of table 1 indicates there is a significant correlation between the independent variables and the criterion measure. The multiple regression analysis on table 2 shows that emotional intelligence and course satisfaction could significantly predict attitude of the participants. The magnitude of this relationship in predicting the attitude of pre-service special education teachers is reflected in the values of co-efficient of multiple  $R^2$  and in multiple  $R^2$  adjusted as shown on table 2.

Thus, it can be said that 12.9 % of the total variance in the attitude of pre-service special education teachers is accounted for by the combination of emotional intelligence and course satisfaction. The F-ratio value of 16.677 which is significant at 0.05 level provides further affirmation to the fact that the predictive capacity of the independent variables to the criterion measure are not due to chance factors. With regards to the extent to which each of the two independent variables contributes to the prediction, it could be ascertained that emotional intelligence is a better predictor of attitude of special education students towards special education. Bar-on and Parker (2000); Ciarrochi, Forgas and Mayer (2006), Bless (2000) and Lupton (1998) provide support for the current findings. Generally, one particular attribute of emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion. It should be noted that attitudes are learned predispositions and may be partially governed by emotions either positively or negatively. In view of this, Scholars tend to view emotional intelligence as a factor, which has a potential to contribute to more positive attitudes, behaviors and outcomes.

Perhaps, this provides a probable explanation on how the ability of engaging in perception, use of comprehension and regulation of ones emotions, as well as others would have strong implication on the learned predispositions to be generated. Course satisfaction is also a potent predictor in this study. This is in line with prior related findings of Navarro and Shoemaker (2000), DeBourgh (1999) and Astin (1993). Also, Dey, Wimsatt, Meader and Rhee (1998) reported student course satisfaction to significantly correlate with area of study and support services. Hence, the current finding could be said to be expected. In addition, according to literature, satisfaction is an important intermediate outcome to commitment and an important influence on the student's level of motivation. Course satisfaction is therefore a significant tool in promoting expected participating attitude towards special education.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and correlation among variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Attitude towards Special Education	Emotional intelligence	Course satisfaction
Attitude towards special education	68.76	11.88	1.00		
Emotional Intelligence	91.31	31.13	.326	1.00	
Course satisfaction	22.11	12.26	.137	.214	1.00

**Source:** Survey, 2013

**Table 2:** Summary of Regression Analysis between Predictor Variables and Procrastination

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	F-ratio	$\beta$	T- Ratio	Sig
Attitude towards special education	.497	.250	.261	16.766			.000
Emotional intelligence					.337	5.417	.000
Course satisfaction					.250	2.420	.014

**Source:** Survey, 2013

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on special education students' voices regarding their experiences and attitudes towards a career in special education. This is important as it is a novel attempt to hear out the students. For instance, a negative disposition held by pre-service special education teachers towards special education poses unforeseen danger to the profession and special needs students in future. The present study has revealed that there is yet a positive attitude towards special education among special education pre-service teachers. However, it would be unwise to wait for a negative change before responding appropriately to curb the problem before it becomes more than the observed.

Therefore, embracing a student responsive approach to education is vital to developing positive attitudes with the students. In addition, although the current finding may have allayed fears of negative dispositions to special education among special education students, the study has revealed significant issues that should not be ignored. Given the findings of this study, it is obvious that engaging in necessary vital activities that develops emotional intelligence and course satisfaction would lead to developing positive attitudes. Therefore, stakeholders in the educational sector should embrace specific intervention programmes for enhancing emotional intelligence and course satisfaction into pre-service special education teachers' curriculum. It is hoped that this would encourage the mainstay of positive attitude towards special education among pre-service special education teachers.

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