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POSTMODERN TRENDS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN MISSION SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE

NENE, Ifeanyi Cyril¹ (B.A, PGDE) & Prof (Mrs.) E.J. Egwunyenga² (PhD)

Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Faculty of Education, Delta State University, Abraka

Corresponding Author's Email: cyrilanene@vmail.com¹; jebele247@delsu.edu.ng²

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of postmodern trends on students' academic achievements in Catholic Mission Secondary Schools in Delta State. Employing an ex-post facto research design, the study used a correlational survey method to explore the relationship between postmodern trends and academic outcomes. The research involved a sample of 790 respondents from the population of Catholic Mission Secondary Schools in Delta State, utilizing a self-developed questionnaire and a checklist for data collection. The validity and reliability of the instruments were established through expert review and test-retest methods. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Version 23.0, with mean scores and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics applied to address research questions and hypotheses. Findings indicate a significant relationship between postmodern trends, including decentralized management structures and empathic pedagogy, and students' academic achievement. The study concludes that integrating postmodern pedagogical approaches can positively influence academic outcomes in Catholic Mission Schools. Recommendations are provided for enhancing educational practices and administration.

Introduction

Education has been approved as the bedrock of social, political and economic development of any nation. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) in the light of the foregoing deduced that education in Nigeria is an instrument “par excellence” that affects national development. Hence, no nation develops above her level of education. Oluremi and Oyewole (2013) afterwards said explicitly that "education constitutes the major motor for sustained human growth as well as the support around which every activity revolves. One of the most important indicators of the effectiveness of teaching can be the academic achievement of learners, which can be influenced by different factors such as learning methods and individual motivations (Nabizadeh, Hajian & Sheikhan, 2019). Student’s academic achievement has been the subject of national interest and cross-country comparative studies because it is a key educational policy and indicator that interest’s stakeholders. It is the measure of the quality of a country’s education. It is an essential criterion for evaluating all teaching-learning activities, using some standards of excellence and the acquisition of particular grades in examinations to measure candidates’ ability, mastery of the content, skills in applying the knowledge acquired to a particular situation. Thus, the current poor performance of students and management of senior secondary schools in West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) and in University Entry Exams in Nigeria is disturbing the minds of the parents, guardians, teachers, counselors and educationist.

Postmodern society is more diverse, and allows individuals much more freedom of choice than in the previous modern society. It displays a relativistic attitude towards what knowledge is taught as part of a curriculum, and probably even abandon the concept of a curriculum altogether. Postmodern trends are marking an end of traditional structures and institutions, secondary education system included. There is a departure from the one-size-fits-all approach and a descent to that realm defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony, or rejection towards grand narratives, ideologies, and various tenets of universalism, including objective concepts of reason, human nature, social progress, moral universalism, absolute truth and objective reality. This calls to question our current pedagogy, curriculum and style of school administration as adequate to improve student’s academic achievement. However, postmodernism, a broad term that encompasses a range of philosophical and cultural movement in the late 20th Century, emphasizes the need for the development of an empathic pedagogical approach that encourages students to question dominant power structures and to develop their own thinking. In this way, students would not just be mere recipients but active participants in the project of learning (Askeland & Payne, 2006). Another interest of postmodernism in education is its greater emphasis on multiculturalism. It emphasizes the recognition of the diversity of student backgrounds and experiences. Thus, it highlights the uniqueness of each student and allows them to create their own environment in which to learn.

One wonders about the impact of new technologies - internet, games, social networks, on teaching and learning. Postmodern trends have had a significant impact on the use of new technologies in education. New technologies have enabled new forms of learning and communication, and have facilitated the development of more personalized and student-centered approaches to education. Any attempt to significantly address the issue of decline in

student's academic achievements must be an approach that is broad and comprehensive. Such approach must take into consideration the effects such elements as teacher qualification, teacher capacity building, classroom management, methodology, personality, participatory school administration, teaching methods, intelligence, background, organization, opportunity, motivation, students' learning skills, family background, environmental causes, peer pressure, teacher-related factors, teacher-student relationship factor, school factors, socio-cultural factors and others. However, these factors may vary from person to person and society to society.

The conviction, therefore, is that to nip in the bud students' poor academic achievement, any approach employed must be comprehensive, such that it addresses the concerns of what we teach, how we teach, why we teach and the learning pattern. This is the crucial concern of postmodernism. In the view of Keith (1995), postmodernists want to be sure that students are provided with democratic, open, heterogeneous, non-sexist and self-reflective cultural identities. Hence, they are crucially concerned with what we teach, how we teach, and why we teach. It is in view of this situation that the study seeks to examine the relationship between postmodern trends and students' academic achievements in mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Statement of the Problem

The postmodern period in education has ushered in a plurality of perspectives, encouraging students to question established norms, engage with diverse sources of knowledge, and negotiate their understanding of truth. While it has opened up vast avenues of critical thinking and creativity, the postmodern pedagogical approach has also raised complex questions about its influence on students' academic achievement. In the context of Catholic Mission Secondary Schools, there is an increase in the adoption of certain postmodern components and trends. School administrators and teachers are gradually moving away from the traditional and linear approaches to learning, towards the embrace of more diverse, inclusive and student centred methods. However, the extent to which postmodern trends have permeated the pedagogical practices in these Catholic institutions remains understudied. It is unclear how educators are balancing the need to integrate postmodern perspectives into their pedagogy while maintaining the essence of the Catholic educational ethos. As such, the potential influence of postmodernism on teaching methodologies and ultimately students' academic achievement is uncertain. Therefore, this study proposes to address this gap by examining the interaction of postmodern trends and students' academic achievement in Catholic Mission Secondary Schools in Delta State. It aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by postmodern approaches in education, thereby offering valuable insights for educators, policy makers, and stakeholders in the education sector. The findings could inform pedagogical strategies, curriculum development, and educational policies that balance the integration of postmodern perspectives with the promotion of academic achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between postmodern trends and students' academic achievements in mission schools in Delta State. The specific purposes are to:

1. Identify those postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.
2. Reveal the relationship between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools in Delta State
3. Identify the relationship between empathic pedagogy and student's academic achievement in catholic mission schools in Delta State

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. What are the postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools?
2. What is the relationship between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools?
3. What is the relationship between empathic pedagogy and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools?

Hypotheses

In line with the research questions above, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant relationship between postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools.
2. There is no significant relationship between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools.
3. There is no significant relationship between empathic pedagogy and student's academic achievement in catholic mission schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development propounded by Lev Vygotsky in 1934. Lev Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist who argued that culture has a major impact on a child's cognitive development. Piaget and Gesell believed development stemmed directly from the child, and although Vygotsky acknowledged intrinsic development, he argued that it is the language, writings, and concepts arising from the culture that elicit the highest level of cognitive thinking. He believed that the social interactions with adults and more learned peers can facilitate a child's potential for learning. Without this interpersonal instruction, he believed children's minds would not advance very far as their knowledge would be based only on their own discoveries. The main assertion of the Vygotsky' theory is that the cognitive development of children is advanced through social interaction with other people, particularly those who are more skilled. In other words, Vygotsky believed that social learning comes before cognitive development, and that children construct knowledge actively. He believes therefore that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing the brain's higher-order functions.

Socio-cultural theory stresses the important contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. Socio-cultural theory also suggests that human learning is largely a social process and that our cognitive functions are formed based on our interactions with those around us who are “more skilled” (Crain, 2010).

The major theme of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978: 57) states: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals”. This theory is relevant to this study which is on postmodern trends and students’ academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria because there is interaction between teachers and students on the one hand, and the school and the ‘outside’ environment on the other hand which can also be a contributing factor to students’ academic achievement. The researcher considers the socio-cultural theory adequate in providing a theoretical frame work for the study because of the clarity of objectives it would offer teachers and school administrators in order to enhance students’ academic achievement.

Concept of Postmodern Trend

There seems to be difficulty defining post modernism due to the fact that it holds different meanings to different people (Olufemi, 2023). Postmodernism calls one’s attention to the fact that there is a period called pre-modern and modern. It should be noted that all of these periods are linked with the history of Western cultural development particularly in Europe (Olaniyan, 2013). Furthermore, the pre-modern era is described as a period in which the western world believed in the supernatural and domination of an individual by tradition and authority was normal and unquestioned.

The period spanned from the medieval times until the French revolution of 1789. This was the era when the western world believed in the supernatural and domination of an individual by tradition and authority was normal and unquestioned. There was no doubt about the existence of God, Spirit, demons, and other beings that existed beyond human sense. However, modernism is characterized by the regulated nature of science, foundationalism owing to the fact that knowledge is absolute among others according to John Herman in the word of (Adegbola 2015). Olaniyan (2015) alluded by asserting that “modernism was a revolt to pre-modern philosophies as it rejected tradition and authority in favour of reason and it assumes that individual is autonomous and the sole source of meaning, and truth should be the individual who through enquiry and rational means come to position of good.” Hence postmodernism has been defined by a French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist as an “incredulity (a product of progress in the sciences toward meta-narratives (this mean that progress in turn presupposes it, yet facts change from time to time, therefore, there is no meta-narratives)” (Banjo, 2015). Thus, in postmodernism, intellect is replaced by the will, reason is replaced by emotion itself becomes a social construct.

Understanding the world around us calls for evaluating and analyzing the patterns of thought informing its culture. These are some basic features of post-modern world according to Ishola-Esan (2015).

The Anti-Foundation: To a post-modern man, knowledge is uncertain, history is dissolved, no distinction between the truth and fiction. Anti-foundationalism also projects that there is no transcendent mental or spiritual approach to pure reason or ultimate reality, nor is there unchanging internal essence within the individual except from physical law (Ishola-Esan, 2015, 56).

Deconstruction of Languages: For a post-modernist, language does not reveal meaning, it only constructs the meaning. Hence, words, according to Wells in the word of Ishola-Esan (2015, 57) means ‘only whatever we wish them to mean.’ The deconstruction is done, firstly by analyzing the metaphors inherent in scientific language and secondly, interrogating the text to uncover its hidden political or sexual agenda. This gives room for individuals to express their view. Post modernism prefers to talk about “plurality of voices” more than “singular voice” on subject matter because they unashamedly deny existence of objective truth (Ojo 2015, 33). Therefore, in postmodern world, words mean whatever we may wish them to mean. Thus, deconstruction is done by analyzing the metaphors inherent in the scientific language and by interrogating the text to uncover its hidden political or sexual agenda.

The Denial of Truth: Truth is said to be relative. Thus, what is truth to me may not be truth to another person. This gives room for various opinions over a matter that is already settled in the Bible. Truth is perceived by every human community is that community’s interpretation of the world. Explaining further Olaniyan (2015, 96) asserts thus:

There is no absolute truth, and the definition of truth is connected more by considerations for pragmatic concerns hence, what makes one feel good, solves one’s problems, attracts one and works is the truth. But if what works for an individual is the truth; the result will be confusion and chaos within society since there would not be a criterion to ascertain that a general and objective truth exist.

Concept of Students’ Academic Achievement

Students, teachers, parents and the entire society are much concerned about the academic achievement of students. Academic achievement is the ability to prove the acquisition of the planned outcome (Wibrowski, Matthews & Kitsantas, 2017). Academic achievement describes academic outcomes that indicate the extent to which a student has achieved their learning goals. According to Ayeni & Amanekwe (2018) cited in Ayeni and Bamire (2022) defines academic performance as the extent to which students have demonstrated commitment to the acquisition of content knowledge and skills during teaching-learning process and achieve short or long-term educational objectives through the scores or grades obtained in the teacher-made test, terminal examinations and external examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE), the Senior School Certificate Examinations conducted by National Examinations Council (NECO-SSCE) among others.

Academic achievement has to do with what a learner is able to accomplish by execution of class work in the school. Stiggings (2011) sees academic achievement as something a learner do or achieve at school, college or university, in class, in a laboratory or field work. Academic achievement refers to achievement of individuals' objective to various types of knowledge and skills. According to the author, the objective are established based on the age, prior learning and capacity of individuals with regards to education, socialization and qualification.

Some of the purposes of academic achievement measurement are enumerated in Ukwuije (2009) as follows: to determine the relative effectiveness of a programme in terms of students' behavioural outputs; to identify students growth or lack of growth in acquiring desirable knowledge skills, attitudes and social values; to help teachers determine the effectiveness of their teaching technique and learning material; to help motivate students to learn as they discover their progress or lack of progress in given task; to encourage students to develop a sense of discipline and systematic study habits; to acquaint parents or guardians with their children performance ; to predict the general trend in the development of teaching learning process; to make reliable decision about education planning and to provide educational administrators with adequate information about teachers effectiveness and school need.

Any academic institution's performance is often evaluated in terms of the degree of educational success—or the degree to which the teachers and students have met their learning objectives. Accordingly, a student's academic achievement is determined by how well they can express their information in writing or verbally. According to Ariel (2019), a student's achievement is a function of both cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics, as well as the social and cultural environment in which the learning process takes place. Asikhia (2010:229) cited in Jegede, Awodun and Olusola (2013) raised the alarm that despite huge investments by government and parents, that students' academic achievement has remained poor, particularly in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), while teachers decry low education outcome even in internal examinations. This is still the case with regards to student's academic achievement in the recent times (Areghan, 2022).

Post-modern Trends and Students Academic Achievements in Secondary Schools

Postmodernism marks a fundamental shift away from modernism and becomes an obvious event in education. It is from this perspective that postmodern trends appear reactionary to the principles of modernism. While modernism strives to define and establish order, truth and knowledge, postmodernism revels in and exposes the chaos that reigns in our fragmented world.

In the realm of education, postmodern trends refer to the shift away from traditional, linear approaches to learning and the embrace of more diverse, inclusive and student centred-centred methods. This includes a focus on critical thinking, interdisciplinary studies, and the recognition of multiple perspectives and narratives. Postmodern education also emphasizes the importance of social justice, cultural diversity and the deconstruction of power dynamics within educational institutions. It encourages educators to create inclusive and collaborative learning environments that empower students to question, challenge, and construct their own knowledge.

In recent years, postmodernism has taken on educational form in the form of educational theory, methods of reflecting on the practice of postmodern teachers, postmodern educational research methods, etc. The postmodern movement is the era that inherits modernism and is a form of transition from it. Some proponents of this version of postmodernism believe that it was initiated by the works of Richard Rorty (Rahnama et al., 2009). However, there is no specific age at which individuals suddenly decide to become postmodern. Instead, postmodern trends are like a graph in which the younger a person is, the more postmodern their worldview tends to be. This connection between age and postmodernism comes from a past where people had access to a limited amount of information, so it was harder for them to question the truth. For this reason, older generations often believe what they are told because they do not have access to information that might make them think differently.

With the advent of technology, the younger generation has become accustomed to gathering information from a variety of sources. While much of the information gathered may not be accurate, it still makes the younger generation question the veracity of what others have told them. Instead, they want to discover the truth for themselves. The desire to discover one's own truth is the essence of postmodernism. A common criticism of postmodernism and its relationship with students academic achievement is that postmodernism has deconstructed our reality to the point of no return without any clear goals or objectives. This very simplistic vision of postmodernism is problematic in that it does not take into account everything that can be achieved through a rejection of modernist tenets. Modernist education is much more language-centric while conveying a false vision of science as a certain kind of knowledge that is too homogenous and functions as an oppressive discourse about power (Harkin, 1997).

Decentralized Management Structure and Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement

The term "decentralization" is highly imprecise. Its wide usage means that different people have come to define it differently. But its central focus refers to a movement from the centre to the periphery (Lauglo, 1995, Karlsen, 2000). It simply means the distribution of authority within an organization from the top in a hierarchical authority structure. It refers to the process that transfers administrative and financial decision-making powers from central ministries of education to the local governments, communities and schools. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019:3) defines decentralization as "the transfer of powers and responsibilities from the central government level to elected authorities at the sub-national level, who have some degree of autonomy". The term "decentralization" in public education refers to a process that transfers administrative and financial decision-making powers from central Ministries of Education to local governments, communities, and schools (Sherman, 2016). In a nutshell, it is the distribution of administrative powers through the hierarchy of the school system.

The goal of raising the standard of education also introduces or at least legitimizes educational decentralization. Since education is a social service that uses a lot of resources from the government, it is crucial to decentralize management of the system by including other important stakeholders in school-based management in order to maximize effectiveness and meet the system's overall objectives. The concept of school-based management (SBM) entails the transfer of administrative authority and power from the federal government to

local school districts, giving the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) the power to engage in joint decision-making, policy formulation, planning, and policy intervention with the goal of enhancing school governance, the caliber of education service delivery, students' academic performance, and meeting educational objectives (World Bank, 2007).

In Nigeria specifically, the increasing pressure on government finances by the rising demand of education services has shown that the central government cannot solely control the education system. According to Ayeni and Bamire (2022), the perceived inadequacies in the central government's control of the school system has led to the growing interest and demand of stakeholders' involvement in the school management and the recognition being accorded the decentralization of education services to smaller administrative units such as the school districts, and school boards and more recently school based management committee which has potential to bring improvement in the quality of decision-making, school management, education service delivery and students' academic achievement in secondary schools.

The School Based Administration Advisory group is comprised of 12 to 19 individuals spread across key partners in each school, specifically the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA), Old Students Association, Communities, Traditional Institution, Civil Society Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations and other expert and social foundations. This collaboration is important on the grounds that a virile and responsive school-community relationship and stakeholders partnership in school management is a building block for a sustainable quality assurance in education.

An empirical study was conducted by Ayeni and Bamire (2022) on the Role of School Based Management and Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Owo Local Government of Ondo State, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Respondents comprised 99 key members of the SBM randomly sampled from nine public secondary schools. Data were collected using School Based Management Questionnaire (SBMQ) and Students' Academic Performance Inventory [SAPI]. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. Data were analyzed using percentage, mean and multiple regression analysis. The result indicated that the school-based management committee made moderate contributions in all the different dimensions of the key roles that are performed in secondary schools. The result further revealed that a combination of the key roles of SBM jointly accounted for 28.6% (0.286) contribution to students' academic performance at < 0.05 . The study concluded that the School Based Management Committee (SBMC) made a moderate contribution to the school management which accounted for a low contribution to the students' academic performance; limited contributions of the SBMC were also recorded in the award of school projects, capacity training of teachers and selection of students' textbooks. It was recommended that the Government through the Ministry of Education should reinvigorate SBM practice and prioritize the significant inputs of the school-based management committee to enhance the quality of decision-making and mobilize adequate resources for infrastructural development and support for teachers' capacity training to improve the quality of teaching-learning process for better academic performance of students in public secondary schools.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Teng and Tsang (2021) on educational decentralization and students' academic achievement: a cross-cultural analysis, discovered that

decentralisation has been implemented globally. However, few studies have compared the effects of different decentralisation strategies on students' academic achievement in diverse cultural contexts. Using data from 49 countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015, the study examined the relationship between three delegation strategies (school autonomy, teacher participation and parental involvement), student achievement and societal culture. Their findings suggest that teacher participation in school management is the most effective educational decentralisation strategy for enhancing students' mathematics, reading and science performance. This strategy is particularly effective in countries with high power distance. The findings indicate that parental involvement does not have a significant effect on student academic achievement and that its effect is suppressed by a culture of uncertainty avoidance. Furthermore, school autonomy does not have a significant effect on students' academic achievement in any of the societal cultures examined.

Evidence suggests decentralization from provincial and territorial governments to local school districts may not be sufficient to improve achievement and that increased autonomy for communities and teachers is necessary to improve schools and learning. Decentralization works if local players are given the resources and empowerment to attain increased student achievement. For example, Sherman (2016) conducted an empirical study that showed that in the U.S., it has been found that in secondary schools where teachers feel more influential in school decision-making, the test scores in both math and language are significantly higher. It has been suggested that the best-case scenario is for a school district to articulate a clear concise vision, but then to allow schools to determine the best ways to attain it. The biggest danger is high performing schools do not share their successful decision-making approaches with low performing schools, which can lead to inequity in students outcomes. So finding ways to share these approaches is another requirement for success.

When decentralization encourages increased local participation in school management, it improves accountability and responsiveness to student needs and fosters better use of resources, thus improving conditions for students. It is argued that the gap between government officials and schools is just too great to enable speedy and informed decisions. Closer parent-school partnerships can also improve learning in both the classroom and home environments. This parent collaboration can elicit commitment to self-made decisions and greater accountability on the part of teachers and principals who are better able to make the best decisions for improving school operations and learning.

One outcome of decentralization, as exemplified by school-based management reforms, is better classroom instruction and improved student performance. To achieve these, two things need to be addressed: 1) the quality and quantity of educational contributions from teachers, parents and others and 2) the efficiency with which these contributions are put into action. The belief underlying this theory is that more school and family engagement in the education process produces more learning – when highly educated teachers are more involved, more resources combined with parent feedback and ideas should lead to higher student achievement. When teachers are empowered and schools can make decisions that directly affect their own students – under the umbrella of a broader vision for a school district – decentralization is at its best (Sherman, 2016).

There is a lack of strong theoretical argument and empirical evidence to show that Decentralized Management Structure improves the quality of teaching (Leithwood and Menzies 1998), and there is little research addressing how Decentralized Management Structure directly impacts student achievement. Fiske (2000) believes there are limits to what administrative decentralization can attain, because there is no reason to presume that a redesigned educational system by itself will lead to either efficiency or to better teaching and learning. However, decentralized education promises to be more efficient, better reflect local priorities, encourage participation of all stakeholders, improve learning outcomes and quality of teaching. Governments with severe fiscal constraints are also enticed by the potential of decentralization to increase efficiency of spending. But does it improve academic achievement?

Empathic Pedagogy and Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement

Empathy includes both, our ability to relate emotionally and the subtlety of our contextual analysis in order to help understand the other. Empathy is the ability to understand other's perspectives, and is a necessary soft skill for 21st century teachers. Empathy skills benefit students by supporting deeper understanding of users, increased creativity, and ethical skill development.

Pedagogy is the method and practice of teaching children, based on the principles of cognitive and social development. It emphasizes a teacher-centered approach and the use of instructional methods that are appropriate for children's learning needs. The main aims often identified with the transmission of knowledge. Other aims include fostering skills and character traits. They include helping the student develop their intellectual and social abilities as well as psychomotor and affective learning, which are about developing practical skills and adequate emotional dispositions, respectively.

Teacher empathy has become an essential topic in educational research for enhancing students' academic achievement. In the scholarship of teaching and learning, empathy is roundly praised mainly for being an effective vehicle for promoting student learning. Empathy is a central tenet of education in drama and the arts (Meekin, 2013 & Mayo, 2013). There is also evidence showing that empathy is a strong predictor of desirable academic and prosocial character outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2017: 120). Students too have been reported to place much store on empathy. It was found that student perceptions of how empathetic they found their teachers to be, positively correlate with perceptions of their own learning success (Meyers et. al. 2019:162; Bozkurt and Ozden, 2010). Indeed, the call for a greater emphasis on empathy was sounded when some educational researchers highlighted what they called "commodification" of education in which institutions are run as businesses (Hardy 2015), where "students are viewed as consumers, and teachers and educational institutions are regarded as educational product providers" (Barton and Garvis 2019, 124–125). These authors believe that the commodification of the education landscape is the dry rot that eats into the bonds of the relationship between tutor and student, making irrelevant if not old-fashion aims such as the public good and processes such as moral development (Barton and Garvis 2019; Daviet 2016; Schwartzman 2013). In a similar vein, empathy has been dispensed as the healing balm that helps soften the "entitlement mindset" of students (Jiang,

Tripp and Hong 2017; Kopp and Finney 2013); students with a “consumerist” disposition and even those seized by narcissism.

It has been established that teacher empathy affects learning. According to McAllister & Irvine (2002), students perform better academically when their teachers exhibit empathy. A better learning environment is created when educators exhibit tolerance and acceptance for their students. The Wingspread Declaration, which advocates for nurturing learning environments in schools, lends credence to this finding. A caring school environment not only improves academic performance but also reduces antisocial behavior. Clearly, students figure out how to treat others in the way they have been dealt with (Viadero, 2004).

Ishak et al. (2014), conducted a research on social skill aspects and their connection to empathy among gifted and talented kids in Malaysia. The study looks at six social skill dimensions and how they relate to empathy in gifted and talented students in Malaysia. These dimensions include the ability to lead, manage conflict, influence others, form bonds with others, collaborate effectively, work as a team, and communicate effectively. Participants in the research were 240 bright and talented 15-year-olds (81 males and 159 females). The Malaysian National bright Centre recognized these pupils as bright and talented, and they are currently enrolled as full-time high school students at the Center. Data was gathered using Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory (MEQI). Data was gathered during a school vacation program in which they had participated using a survey approach. The study's findings indicate that all aspects of social skills strongly correlate with empathy ($p < 0.00$, $n = 240$), and the r values are more than 0.60. The conclusions of the study are also discussed in connection to counseling services for the bright and gifted.

In the same way physicians provide better health care when they empathize with their patients, instructors provide a better education when they empathize with their students. Nursing students reported that teacher empathy improved their learning (Mercer et al., 2016). In addition, students' perceptions of teacher empathy are related to both students' perceptions of their learning (Bozkurt and Ozden, 2010) and to their performance on objective tests and papers. Additional evidence comes from a meta-analysis of teacher-student relationships (including studies of preK-12 and postsecondary students), which noted that teacher empathy was among the strongest predictors of positive student outcomes, a broad category that included academic performance as well as affective and behavioral outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2017,120).

Although many people suspect that empathy is associated with lowering academic standards, we argue that sympathy, not empathy, is associated with lowering standards. Sympathy is “a pity-based response to a distressing situation that is characterized by a lack of relational understanding and the self-preservation of the observer” (Sinclair et al. 2017, 440). If instructors sympathize with students, they might lower standards and make the course easier as a way to quickly reduce the student's distress. But if teachers empathize and sincerely try to walk that mile in students' shoes, they conclude that lowering standards is absolutely the last thing that they should do. An empathetic response considers what students need to be successful after they graduate. This means students need to be well prepared and held to high standards of academic performance. Instructors high in teacher empathy do not lower standards; they identify and remove obstacles to learning.

Advice for removing obstacles to learning is offered by Verschelden (2017) in her book, *Bandwidth Recovery*. Verschelden argues that poverty, racism, and social marginalization reduce students' mental bandwidth and interfere with students' learning as well as their likelihood of graduating. One example of this reduction of bandwidth from poverty comes from research by Mani et al., (2013). When faced with an unexpected hypothetical expense, poor people show a drop in intelligence that wealthier people do not experience. Verschelden offers a wide variety of examples of interventions likely to increase students' mental bandwidth, including persuading students that intelligence is changeable, dividing large projects into smaller pieces and providing feedback on each step, and prompting students to identify multiple pathways for meeting their goals. Removing obstacles in these ways does not involve lowering standards, but it does increase the chances that students will successfully complete their courses.

Research Methods and Procedures

The study adopted the Correlational Survey method of the Ex-post facto research design. The ex-post facto design was most suitable for the study because it covered both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, which enabled the researcher to obtain important and accurate data concerning the current attributes of a phenomenon and where necessary, to make valid conclusion from the facts discovered. The population of this study comprised of all the catholic mission secondary school teachers and students in Delta State. It is a finite population because the actual size of the population is known. The population of the study comprised seven hundred and ninety respondents catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State (Source: Ministry of Education, Asaba, Delta State; Statistical Data of Secondary Schools, 2022/2023 Session). The sample of this study consisted of 790 respondents, drawn from catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State. The multi-staged random sampling technique was used.

The instrument for this study was a self developed questionnaire titled "Postmodern Trends and Students' Academic Achievement Questionnaires (PTQ) and a checklist titled "Students Academic Achievement Checklist (SAAC). The instrument was divided into two sections (Sections A and B). Section A contained demographic variables of the respondents. Section B was structured into six (6), which consisted of B(i) - B(v). The validity of the instrument was based on face and content validity by the researcher's supervisor and another expert in the Department of Educational Management and Foundations, Delta State University Abraka. The reliability of the instrument for the study was established using the test retest reliability method. The instrument PTQ was administered to twenty (20) teachers randomly drawn from catholic mission schools excluded from the sample at two weeks interval. The instrument "PTQ" was personally administered to the respondents by the researcher and two guided research assistants. The researcher recruited the two research assistants who were acquainted with the purpose of the study, as well as how to administer and retrieve the instruments. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Version, 23.0 was employed to analyze the data collected from the respondents. Mean (\bar{X}) score was used to answer the six research questions while Hypotheses was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics in order to test for the relationship between variables, at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Respondents Profile

Table 1: Sex Characteristics

Sex	No of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Male	440	58
Female	318	42
Total	758	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 shows that 58% of the respondents are male while 42% are female. This implies that more males attended to the questions more than females.

Table 2: Age composition of respondents

Age	No of Respondent	Percentage (%)
21 – 30years	379	50
31 - 40years	349	46
41years and above	30	4
Total	758	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents are between the age of 251-30years since about 50% indicated so, 46% are between the age of 31-40years and 4% are above 41years. This implies that the study population comprise of those of who have knowledge about the postmodern trends and students' academic achievement in Catholic Mission Secondary Schools in Delta State.

Answering of Research Questions

The research questions earlier asked will be answered below;

Research Question 1: What are the postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools?

Table 3: Mean Scores and standard deviation analysis on the postmodern trends

S/N	Postmodern Trends	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Societal influence and learning environment	3.15	1.20	+
2.	Empathetic pedagogy	3.13	1.25	+
3.	Decentralized management structure	2.99	1.19	+
4.	New technology	2.72	1.27	+

Keys: + = Agree; - =Disagree; Benchmark = 2.50

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Data in Table 3 shows the mean score and standard deviation analysis on postmodern trends. Result on the table revealed that respondents agree on all items with mean scores above

benchmark of 2.50. Conclusively, the postmodern trends that influence student’s academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State include decentralized management structure, empathetic pedagogy, new technologies, societal influence and learning environment.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between decentralized management structure on students’ academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools?

Table 4: Decentralized management structure on students’ academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State

Variables	Mean	SD	r	r ²	r ² %	Remark
Decentralized management structure	3.06	1.37	0.832	0.735	74%	Positive Relationship
Students’ academic achievement	3.77	1.44	0.901	0.828	83%	

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Data in Table 4 shows the mean score and standard deviation analysis on decentralized management structure. Result on the table revealed that respondents agree on both items with mean scores above benchmark of 2.50. Thus, decentralized management structure influences student’s academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between empathetic pedagogy and students’ academic achievement in catholic mission schools?

Table 5: Empathetic pedagogy on students’ academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State

Variables	Mean	SD	R	r ²	r ² %	Remark
Empathetic pedagogy	2.83	1.25	0.682	0.465	47%	Positive Relationship
Students’ academic achievement	3.77	1.44	0.901	0.828	83%	

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Data in Table 5 shows the mean score and standard deviation analysis on empathetic pedagogy. Result on the table revealed that respondents agree on both items with mean scores above benchmark of 2.50. Thus, empathetic pedagogy influences student’s academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Testing of Hypotheses

The null hypotheses formulated in this study were tested below using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) statistical tool;

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools and students’ academic achievement in catholic mission schools in Delta State.

Table 6: PPMC Correlations

		Postmodern trends	Students' academic achievement
Pearson Correlation	Postmodern trends	.731	.997
	Students' academic achievement	.997	.731
Sig. (1-tailed)	Postmodern trends	.	.901
	Students' academic achievement	.901	.
N			

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Table 6 presents the Pearson correlation analysis for hypothesis 1, which aims to investigate the significant relationship between postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools. The computed PPMCC correlation value ($r=0.997$) is significant ($p = 0.997 \alpha 0.05$) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools was rejected. Thus, there is significant relationship between postmodern trends in catholic mission secondary schools and students' academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools in Delta State.

Table 7: PPMCC Correlations

		Decentralized management structure	Students' academic achievement
Pearson Correlation	Decentralized management structure	.832	.983
	Students' academic achievement	.983	.832
Sig. (1-tailed)	Decentralized management structure	.	.901
	Students' academic achievement	.901	.
N			

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

From Table 7, the computed PPMCC correlation value ($r = 0.832$) is significant ($p = 0.832 \alpha 0.05$) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools was rejected. Thus, there is significant relationship

between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between empathic pedagogy and student's academic achievement in catholic mission schools in Delta State.

Table 8: PPMCC Correlations

		Empathic pedagogy	Students' academic achievement
Pearson Correlation	Empathic pedagogy	.682	.901
	Students' academic achievement	.901	.682
Sig. (1-tailed)	Empathic pedagogy	.	.874
	Students' academic achievement	.874	.
N			

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Table 8 presents the Pearson correlation analysis for hypothesis 3, which aims to investigate the significant relationship between empathic pedagogy and student's academic achievement in catholic mission schools. The computed PPMCC correlation value ($r = 0.682$) is significant ($p = 0.682 \alpha 0.05$) at 0.05 level of significance, which suggests that the relationship is statistically significant at a conventional significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between empathic pedagogy and student's academic achievement was rejected. Thus, there is significant relationship between empathic pedagogy and student's academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Discussion of Results

Influence of Postmodern Trends on Students' Academic Achievement

Findings on research question 1 show that some of the postmodern trends which influences students' academic achievements in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta state include; decentralized management structure, empathetic pedagogy, new technology (ICT), learning environment and societal influences. From the findings obtained in research question two and hypothesis one, it could be deduced that there is significant relationship between postmodern trends and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools as shown that the calculated mean and standard deviation for both is above 2.50 and the computed PPMCC correlation value ($r=0.997$) is significant ($p = 0.997 \alpha 0.05$) at 0.05 level of significance

This finding agrees with Ozmen (2007) who concluded that post-modernity has influenced all aspects of life, including the field of education as one of the most important educational goals is to increase a sense of social responsibility toward others, including those who are marginalized and called outsiders; and at the same time developing students' diverse identities so that they can fight against inequality and develop basic human rights. This finding is also

in line with the works of Richard Rorty as referenced by Rahnama et al., (2009) who initiated that postmodern trends are like a graph in which the younger a person is, the more postmodern their worldview tends to be and with the advent of technology, the younger generation has become accustomed to gathering information from a variety of sources; which in turn fosters the desire to discover one's own truth is the essence of postmodernism.

Influence of Decentralized Management Structure on Students' Academic Achievement

From the findings obtained in research question two and hypothesis two, it could be observed that there is significant relationship between decentralized management structure and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools. The findings obtained shows that the calculated mean and standard deviation for both is above 2.50 and the computed PPMCC correlation value ($r = 0.832$) is significant ($p = 0.832 \alpha 0.05$) at 0.05 level of significance. The finding reconfirms the position of Sherman (2016) who revealed in his studies that decentralization is at its best when highly educated teachers are involved, more resources combined to empower teachers and schools to directly affect their own students and the efficiency with which these contributions are put into action leads to higher student achievements in schools. This finding agrees with Ayeni and Bamire (2022), who found that the perceived inadequacies in the school system has led to the growing interest, demand of involvement in the school management and the recognition being accorded the decentralization of education services to smaller administrative units such as the school districts, and school boards and more recently school based management committee which has potential to bring improvement in the quality of decision-making, school management, education service delivery and students' academic achievement in secondary schools.

Similarly, this finding upholds with the study conducted by Teng and Tsang (2021) on educational decentralization and students' academic achievement: a cross-cultural analysis, discovered that decentralization has been implemented globally and their findings suggest that teacher participation in school management is the most effective educational decentralization strategy for enhancing students' mathematics, reading and science performance.

It is important to state that a decentralized management structure can have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. It would increase autonomy, give room for improved decision-making, enhance collaboration, increased accountability and personalized learning. This conclusion agrees with the positions of Ayeni and Bamire (2022).

Influence of Empathic Pedagogy on Students' Academic Achievement

The analysis obtained from research question two and hypothesis three shows that there is significant relationship between empathic pedagogy and students' academic achievement in catholic mission schools. The findings obtained shows that the calculated mean and standard deviation for both is above 2.50 and the computed PPMCC correlation value ($r = 0.682$) is significant ($p = 0.682 \alpha 0.05$) at 0.05 level of significance.

This finding conforms with that of Meekin and Mayo (2013) who found that, empathy is a central tenet of education in drama and the arts and that teacher empathy has become an essential topic in educational research for enhancing students' academic achievement.

This finding reasserts the position of McAllister and Irvine (2020) who reported that students perform better academically when their teachers exhibit empathy and also better learning environment is created when educators exhibit tolerance and acceptance for their students. A caring school environment not only improves academic performance but also reduces antisocial behavior and that students can clearly figure out how to treat others in the way they have been dealt with.

The finding reaffirms Cornelius-White (2017) meta-analysis of teacher-student relationships. He noted that teacher empathy was among the strongest predictors of positive student outcomes, a broad category that included academic performance as well as affective and behavioral outcomes.

It goes without contradiction to conclude that empathic pedagogy is a veritable model that enhances students' academic achievement. By adopting empathic pedagogy, educators can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that improves students' academic achievement and personal growth. It would enhance student engagement, support diverse learning, encourage creative and critical thinking, fosters emotional intelligence essential for self-regulation and academic achievement. This conclusion agrees with McAllister and Irvine (2020).

Conclusion

The researcher concluded that postmodern trends which influence students' academic achievements in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State include; decentralized management structure, empathetic pedagogy, new technologies, learning environment and societal influences. There are significant relationships between postmodern trends, decentralized management structure, empathetic pedagogy, new technologies, societal influence and students' academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.

Recommendations

1. Catholic mission secondary schools should priority decentralized management structure in their administration.
2. The catholic mission schools should continue to prioritise enhanced autonomy and flexibility for teachers and administrators to address the unique needs of students.
3. Administrators should create institutional climate that empowers teachers, parents, and students to participate in decision making process.
4. The study recommends that catholic mission secondary schools should continue to ensure that they advance the traditional and linear approaches to learning, towards embracing more diverse, inclusive and student centred methods of teaching and learning.

5. Emphasis should be laid on the recognition of the diversity of student backgrounds and experiences which highlights the uniqueness of each student and allows them to create their own environment in which to learn.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study has made the following contributions to knowledge:

- 1) The study established the invaluable contributions that postmodern trends can make to students' academic achievement in catholic mission secondary schools in Delta State.
- 2) The study established the need to advance the traditional linear approaches to teaching and learning, towards embracing more diverse, inclusive and student centred methods of teaching and learning.

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