

SELF-ESTEEM AS A PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES IN ANAMBRA STATE

OKAFOR SCHOLARSTICA OGECHUKWU

E-mail: so.okafor@coou.edu.ng

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus

Abstract

This study examined self-esteem as a predictor of academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State. The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of self-esteem on academic engagement of undergraduate students. The study reviewed relevant conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature. This research work was anchored on Sociometer and Adler's theories. The population of the study comprised undergraduate students of two public universities in Anambra state. The population of the study comprised 52246 students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam. The sample size of this study consisted of 300 students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The instruments used for data collection were Academic Engagement Scale (AES) and Fleming-Courtney self-esteem scale. Simple regression analysis was employed in analyzing the data. The result of data analysis showed that self-esteem positively predicts academic engagement of male and female university undergraduates, and that the positive effect of self-esteem is stronger in females university undergraduates than their males counterparts. The study therefore recommends that the university authorities should ensure that their guidance and counselling clinics should be up and doing. This will help in fostering effective counselling services within the university environment especially for students with psychological problems that might affect their academic engagement.

Key Words: Self Esteem, Academic Engagement, Predictor, University Undergraduates

Introduction

As an important predictor of academic achievement and an effective indicator of learning quality, academic engagement has attracted the attention of researchers. Over the last seven decades, researchers and educators have exhibited a growing interest in the concept of academic engagement as a way to improve disaffection, to avert student boredom, to enhance students' motivation and involvement in school-related activities, to increase successful student achievement levels, and to understand students' positive development. Academic engagement extends the concept of engagement, and it refers to the degree to which students engage in educational learning tasks (such as school-related coursework and learning activities) in the process of formal education (George, 2009). Engagement consists of how well a student participates in school (i.e. asking and answering questions, writing and reading on tasks, discussing about subject matter with peers and teachers) measured through rating scale (Lee, 2014) while curriculum based obtained scores are the academic achievement of learners. Christenson, Reschly, and Wylie (2012) explained that students' involvement and commitment to school is considered as their academic engagement, while, Landis and Reschly (2013) further described active involvement of students in curricular along with co-curricular activities known as their involvement, whereas their obligation to learning and educational goals is recognized as commitment.

The idea of enhancing students' engagement has been identified as the key to addressing problems of low achievement, high levels of student's misbehaviours, alienation and high dropout rates (Gebre, Saroyan, & Bracewell, 2014). The student's engagement in scheme can be seen as the extent to which students are committed to scheme and motivated to learn (Simon, Morton & Chen, 2009). Academic engagement refers to student's willingness, needs, desire, motivation and success in learning. The yard stick for measuring academic engagement is therefore the willingness and commitment of the students towards their academic activities. Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) opined that student academic engagement involves not only the time students spend on tasks but also their willingness to engage in anti-social activities such as cultism, rape, gangsterism, armed robbery, cyber-crime and premarital cohabitation.

Students engagement is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development (Arisukwu, 2013). The more students think about their course materials, the more

they practice and study (directly or indirectly), the more they tend to learn about it. The very act of being engaged also adds to the foundation of skills and dispositions that is essential to live a productive and satisfying life (Arisukwu, 2013). Existing literature suggests that high academic engagement promotes academic achievement (Johnson & Sinatra, 2013), enhances students' school adjustment ability (Wang & Fredricks, 2014), improves physical and mental health (Wefald & Downey, 2009), and reduces students' dropout decisions (Fan & Williams, 2010). On the contrary, low academic engagement among students can lead to academic failure, dropping out of school, drug abuse, juvenile crime, and the increase of negative emotions such as anxiety and depression (Li & Lerner, 2011).

Self-esteem on the other hand is one of the most researched areas in education and psychology. Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir and Kumar (2009) noted that research has documented the important role high self-esteem plays in academic achievement, academic engagement, social and personal responsibility. For people of all ages, the development of full human potential is enhanced through high self-esteem. High self-esteem can begin to develop when the acceptance of all individuals and their personal and group contributions are recognized and applauded, especially in a multi-culturally diverse world. Scholars have defined self-esteem according to their understanding of the concept. Malbi and Reasoner (2011) noted that self-esteem can be broadly defined as the overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way. It indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself or herself to be competent and worthy of living. Simply put, self-esteem is essentially one's feeling of self-competence and self-worth.

Self-esteem is a feeling that guides individuals' behaviour. It is a driving force behind motivation. In the words of Wiggins cited in Malbi and Reasoner (2011) self-esteem is the ability of an individual to deal with different challenges of life. It is the feeling of being worthy to do something extra ordinary, to enjoy the right and the ability to do hard work. Amini (2014) explained that self-esteem is the overall self-evaluation in a positive way. It is the belief that one has to be competent and worthy enough to achieve something in life. Simply put, it is a feeling of self-competence and self-worth. According to Woolfolk (2015) self-esteem is the worth or value that individuals attach to their self-assessments.

Besides, self-esteem is seen to be shaped both by the degree of discrepancy between a person's goals and the accomplishments, and by the degree of emotional support perceived from parents and peers. Self-esteem would also develop out of a person's experience with success and failure. This would mean that if a person succeeds in a certain task and gets a positive feedback from the others about the performance, he or she would develop a greater self-esteem. However, when the discrepancy is large, this person will see himself or herself as failing to live up to the own goals or values and thus result in a lower self-esteem. It is this global evaluation of one's own worth that is usually referred to as self-esteem (Lian & Yusooff, 2009). Self-esteem is also a vital factor that affects the level of proficiency in all fields of human endeavour. Therefore, self-esteem in a person plays an important role in improving a person's competency and proficiency which eventually can develop the person to his or her full human potential.

As a basic psychological structure, self-esteem can serve as a motivator for academic engagement (Lim & Lee, 2017). Expectancy-value theory suggests that individuals' positive self-evaluation can predict academic outcomes, such as academic engagement (Fang, 2016). A study by Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) showed that self-esteem affected the fields related to academic engagement, and that there was a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and academic engagement. The study by Filippello, Buzzai, Sorrenti, Costa, Abramo and Wang (2019) found that self-esteem can predict a person's level of academic engagement. Lawrence in Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir and Kumar (2009) asserted that research has consistently shown a positive correlation between how people value themselves and the level of their academic attainments. Those who feel confident, generally achieve more, while those who lack confidence in themselves achieve less. Students usually have no problems in talking to the tutor about their literacy difficulties. Once they have learned to trust their tutors, they will often bring up other problems of a more personal nature. This is not to suggest that tutors become counsellors, but they prepare to listen to students who may wish to confide in them. Whilst the majority of students are likely to have low self-esteem as a result of feeling inadequate over not being able to read, write or spell like most others, they may in addition have low self-esteem as a result of others experiences, probably beginning in childhood. Anthony, Wood and Holmes (2007) argued that students with high self-esteem have comparatively high academic achievements than students with low self-esteem. Self-esteem affects all aspects of the life of an individual, such as, job success, school achievement, social development and professional development. Based on the

foregoing, this work examined self-esteem as a predictor of academic engagement of university undergraduate in Anambra State.

Statement of Problem

The Nigerian society places great emphasis on education because it is believed to be the only avenue for national development. However, this can only be achieved if undergraduates who are in the citadel of learning get actively involved in academic activities which will enhance their academic engagement. In spite of these laudable values attached to academic engagement, studies have shown that students' engagement is declining because of low self-esteem. This could be because they are confronted with so many school and non-school related demands and responsibilities. This problem seems to be a major one that requires urgent and serious solution since students' academic engagement affects the quality of graduates being produced.

Researches provide no reliable and consistent indication concerning the influence of self-esteem on academic engagement. While some studies reported significantly high relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement of students, others found no relationship between self esteem and academic engagement. In view of this inconclusiveness and disparity in research findings, this study set out to examine if self-esteem predicts academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the predictive value of self-esteem on academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the predictive value of self-esteem on academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State.
2. Ascertain the predictive value of self-esteem on academic engagement of male and female university undergraduates in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does self-esteem predict academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State?
2. To what extent does self-esteem predict academic engagement of male and female university undergraduates in Anambra State?

Method

The study adopted a correlational research design aimed at determining if self esteem predicts academic engagement among university undergraduates in Anambra State. Nworgu (2015) noted that correlation studies indicated the direction and magnitude of the relationship between the variables of the study. The rationale for adopting this design is to establish the influence of self esteem on academic engagement.

The population for this study comprised 52,246 students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The population was considered appropriate because the students are in the best position to give accurate data on the problem under study. Data from the Registrars Department of the respective universities shows that they have a population strength of fifty two thousand and two hundred and forty six (52246) students in the 2019/2020 session. The sample size was 300 students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The sample was selected using simple random sampling technique involving balloting.

The instrument for data collection were researcher developed questionnaires of Academic Engagement Scale (AES) and self-esteem scale by Fleming-Courtney (1984). The instrument consist of two sections, A and B. Section 'A' seeks to obtain information on the personal characteristics of the respondents while section 'B' contained Engagement Scale (AES) and Fleming-Courtney self-esteem scale. The AES obtained information on academic engagement of university undergraduates. The items were placed on 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Fleming-Courtney self-esteem scale contains 36 items for measuring self-esteem of the students. The items of the instrument were structured on a 7-point scale, the response options are Very often, Often, Slightly Often,

Sometimes, Slightly Never, Never, and Almost Never. The range of scores is weighted as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

The face and content validity of the instruments were established by three experts. Two of the experts were lecturers in Guidance and Counselling and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation, all from Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The experts were required to scrutinize the items for clarity, appropriateness of language, relatedness to research questions and hypotheses. The comments, suggestions and corrections by the experts helped in the final modification and rearrangement of the items leading to the final development of the instrument.

The test-re test method of reliability was applied. In doing this, the researcher was assisted by two research assistants who administered copies of the questionnaire on a sample of 30 students randomly selected from University of Nigeria Nsukka. After an interval of two weeks, copies of the questionnaire were administered again on the same sample. The responses were collected and the scores were computed using the Cronbach Alpha. This produced a coefficient of 0.87. The result was indicative of the internal consistency of the instrument, which was considered satisfactory for the study.

The researcher employed the direct delivery technique in administration of the questionnaire. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents in the area by the researcher, after which 283 copies were retrieved and used for data analysis giving 94.3% return rate.

The data collected were analyzed using simple regression analysis. The choice of the estimation technique was as a result of its advantage over other techniques which is preferred given its desirable properties of unbiased, consistency, efficiency, sufficiency, best linear (Gujarati 2004). Squared regression coefficient (R^2), alpha value were used in analyzing the data. The square of the coefficient of determination R^2 or the measure of goodness of fit is used to judge the explanatory power of the explanatory variables on the dependent variables. If R^2 equals one, it implies that there is 100% explanation of the variation in the dependent variable by the independent variable and this indicates a perfect fit of regression line. While where R^2 equals zero. It indicates that the explanatory variables could not explain any of the changes in the dependent variable. Therefore, the higher and closer the R^2 is to 1, the better the model fits the data. The t-statistics test tells us if there is an existence of any significance relationship between the dependent variable and the explanatory variables. The t-test will be conducted at 0.05 or 5% level of significance. Decision rule: Reject H_0 if $t_{cal} > t_{a/2, (n-k)}$.

Presentation of Data Analysis

Research Question 1: To what extent does self-esteem predict the academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis with Self Esteem as Predictor of Academic Engagement of University Undergraduates

	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	5.182	39.330	.000
Self esteem	.443	12.994	.000
R	.651		
R^2	.511		
Adj. R^2	.509		

Data in Table 1 shows that self esteem positively predicts academic engagement of university undergraduates, such that a unit increase in self esteem leads to .443 increase in academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is .511. This is an indication that self-esteem explained 51.1% of the variance in academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State. The t-statistics value of 12.994 with corresponding significance value of .000 which are within the acceptable threshold indicates that self esteem positively predicts academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra state.

Research Question 2: To what extent does self-esteem predicts the academic engagement of male and female university undergraduates in Anambra State?

Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis with self-esteem as Predictor of Academic Engagement of Male and Female Undergraduates

		<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>0</i>
Male Undergraduates	Constant	4.822	24.532	.000
	Self Esteem	.719	9.950	.000
	R	.619		
	R ²	.584		
	Adj.R ²	.480		
Female Undergraduates	Constant	4.069	31.453	.000
	Self Esteem	.474	9.270	.000
	R	.636		
	R ²	.587		
	Adj.R ²	.484		

Data in Table 2 indicates that self-esteem explained 58.4% of the variance in the academic engagement of male university undergraduates. The t-statistics value of 9.950 with corresponding significance value of .000 which are within the acceptable threshold shows that self esteem positively predicts academic engagement of male university undergraduates in Anambra state.

Similarly, the coefficient of determination (R²) for female university undergraduates is .587. This is an indication that self esteem explained 58.7 variations in academic engagement of female university undergraduates. The t-statistics value of 9.270 with corresponding significance value of .000 which are within the acceptable threshold indicates that self esteem positively predicts academic engagement of female university undergraduates in Anambra state. These results suggest that the positive effect of self-esteem is stronger in female university undergraduates than males.

Discussion of Findings

This work examined self-esteem as a predicator of academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State. Data were sourced from undergraduates of two public universities in Anambra State and the following were discovered. The study found that self-esteem positively predicts academic engagement of university undergraduates in Anambra State. This implies that self-esteem influence positive conduct, such as adhering to the norms of the classroom, following the rules, and refraining from engaging in disruptive behaviours in school. It also influence participation in learning and academic-related tasks such as discussion contribution, asking questions, paying attention, concentrating, exhibiting persistence, and putting forth effort. This further implies that self-esteem influence students' investment in learning, willingness and thoughtfulness to expend the effort required to understand and masters difficult tasks, the use of appropriate learning strategies, challenge preference, and self-regulation. This agrees with the findings of Filippello, Buzzai, Sorrenti, Costa, Abramo and Wang (2019) found that self-esteem can predict a person's level of academic engagement. This also agrees with the findings of Sirin and Rogers-Sirin (2015) that there was a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and academic engagement.

The study further found that self-esteem predicts academic engagement of male and female university undergraduates in Anambra State. The study also found that the positive effect of self-esteem was stronger in female university undergraduates in Anambra State than males. This implies that self-esteem predicts male and female university undergraduates students academic engagement.

Conclusion

The importance of self-esteem in predicting academic engagement cannot be overemphasized. Self-esteem construct is recognized today to be a major factor in learning outcomes especially academic engagement. Self-esteem affects all aspects of the life of an individual, such as, job success, school achievement, social development and professional development. The study found that self-esteem is an important predictor of academic engagement among university undergraduates in Anambra State. The present study provides strong evidence for the usefulness and importance of self-esteem in determining academic engagement.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have far reaching implications for guidance and counselling practice. One of such implications is that guidance and counselling programmes in universities should be made strong enough to carry activities that will help learners get the best out of their school lives. Students sometimes get into severe problems because they lack support and help network. They lack services where to seek help when they are stressed, depressed, or confused in making decisions.

The findings also imply that teachers, parents, and the community at large have to effectively play their roles in bringing up the children to become responsible individuals. Understanding the student's psychological makeup is necessary in this context, this will help to determine the type of care and counselling the study require.

Recommendations

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

1. The university authorities should ensure that their guidance and counselling clinics should be up and doing. This will help in fostering effective counselling services within the university environment especially for students with psychological problems that might affect their academic engagement.
2. Parents should monitor the activities of their children at school especially those living in off campus accommodation in order to ensure that they engage effectively with their academics.
3. Students should be encouraged to meet with guidance counsellors whenever they derail from their academic activities, this will help them to enhance their academic engagement in order to improve their academic performance.

REFERENCES

- Akinleke, O.W. (2012). An investigation of the relationship between test anxiety, self esteem and academic engagement among polytechnic students in Nigeria. *International Journal of Computer Applications* 51(1):47-50
- Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of research on student engagement*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Fan, W., & Williams, C.M. (2010). The effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement and intrinsic motivation. *Educational Psychology*, 30, 53–74.
- Filippello, P., Buzzai, C., Sorrenti, L., Costa, S., Abramo, A., & Wang, K. T. (2019). Italian version of the Family Almost Perfect Scale: psychometric characteristics and relationships with academic engagement, self-esteem, and personal perfectionism. *Applied Development Sciences*, 1–13.
- George, D.K. (2009). What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *J. Coll. Stud. Dev.* 50, 683–706.
- Johnson, M.L., & Sinatra, G.M. (2013). Use of task-value instructional inductions for facilitating engagement and conceptual change. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 38, 51–63.
- Landis, R. N., & Reschly, A. L. (2013). Reexamining gifted underachievement and dropout through the lens of student engagement. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 36(2), 220 - 249.
- Lee, J.S. (2014). The relationship between student engagement and academic performance: Is it a myth or reality? *The Journal of Educational Research*, 107(3), 177 - 185.
- Li, Y., & Lerner, R.M. (2011). Trajectories of school engagement during adolescence: implications for grades, depression, delinquency, and substance use. *Development Psychology*, 47, 233–247.
- Lian, T. C., & Yusooff, F. (2009). The effects of family functioning on self-esteem of children. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(4), 643-650.
- Lim, Y., & Lee, O. (2017). Relationships between parental maltreatment and adolescents' school adjustment: mediating roles of self-esteem and peer attachment. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26, 393–404.
- Malbi, R. S., & Reasoner, R. W. (2011). *Self-esteem, enhancing*. Kuala Lumpur: Self-Esteem Seminars Sdn. Bhd.
- Naderi, H., Abdullah, R., Aizan, H. T., Sharir, J., & Kumar, V. (2009). Self esteem, gender and academic engagement of undergraduate students. *American Journal of Scientific Research*, 3, 26 – 37.
- Simons-Morton, B., & Chen, R. (2009). Peer and parent influences on school engagement among early adolescents. *Youth & Society*, 41 (1), 3-25.
- Sirin, S.R., & Rogers-Sirin, L. (2015). Exploring school engagement of middle-class African American adolescents. *Youth Sociology*, 35, 323–340.

- Stovall, I. (2003). Engagement and online learning. UIS Community of Practice for E-Learning. Retrieve from [http://otel.uis.edu/copel/ Engagement and Online Learning.ppt](http://otel.uis.edu/copel/Engagement%20and%20Online%20Learning.ppt)
- Wang, M.T., & Fredricks, J.A. (2014). The reciprocal links between school engagement, youth problem behaviors, and school dropout during adolescence. *Child Development*, 85, 722–737.
- Wefald, A.J., & Downey, R.G. (2009). Construct dimensionality of engagement and its relation with satisfaction. *Journal of Psychology*, 143, 91–112.
- Zeinvand, A. (2006). Relationships between self esteem, social support and student's educational progression in a high school in Dareh Shar city in Iran. University of Tabiat Moallem, Theran, Iran.