

Relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra state, Nigeria


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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: <i>Self-Esteem, Academic Engagement, Secondary School Students, Psychological Factors</i></p> <p><i>Received: 14, Jan. 2026</i> <i>Revised: 19, Jan. 2026</i> <i>Accepted: 11, Feb. 2026</i></p> <p>©2026 Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International</p> 	<p><i>This study examined the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria. The specific purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between self-worth, self-competence, self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The research was anchored on Ryan and Deci Self-Determination Theory (2000), which emphasized the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate individuals. Correlational survey research design was adopted, with a target population of 19,080 senior secondary school students (SSII) in public secondary schools in Anambra State. A sample of 540 respondents was selected using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ) and the Academic Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ). The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha technique, yielding average coefficients of 0.89 and 0.92 for SEQ and AEQ respectively, indicating strong reliability. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to answer the research question, while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level using Pearson's r. Findings revealed that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between self-worth, self-competence, self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State. The study concluded that students with higher levels of self-worth, self-competence and self-acceptance are more motivated, persistent and actively involved in academic tasks. Based on the findings, the study recommended that to enhance academic engagement, school administrators and teachers should recognize students' achievements, implement students'-centred instructional strategies and integrate social-emotional learning to promote self-worth, competence and acceptance.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary Academic engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioural, emotional, cognitive and proactive dimensions, each contributing uniquely to how students experience and respond to the learning process. Behavioural engagement reflects participation in academic tasks, emotional engagement involves affective reactions to school and learning, cognitive engagement denotes investment in learning strategies and proactive engagement captures students' deliberate efforts to shape their learning experiences and actively influence the instructional process. Together, these dimensions play a pivotal role in shaping academic success, fostering resilience, and promoting lifelong learning (Skinner et al., 2024). Engaged students are more likely to demonstrate persistence, self-regulation and adaptive learning behaviours, which are associated with higher academic performance, deeper comprehension, and holistic development (Salmela-Aro et al., 2021; Furlong, 2018).

Self-esteem has been identified as a core psychological factor underpinning academic engagement, influencing not only how students perceive themselves, but also how they interact with academic tasks and school environments. Students with high self-esteem are more likely to persist through academic difficulties, invest cognitive effort, and participate meaningfully in classroom activities (Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2023). The role of psychological factors in shaping students' academic trajectories has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years, with self-esteem emerging as a crucial determinant of learners' engagement and academic performance. Self-esteem, broadly defined as an individual's perception of self-worth and personal competence, significantly influences students' motivation, resilience, and willingness to participate in learning activities (Rosenberg & Owens, 2021). In secondary school settings, students with high self-esteem are more inclined to approach academic tasks with confidence, embrace challenges, and exhibit persistence in the face of setbacks. In contrast, students with low self-esteem often grapple with self-doubt, reduced motivation, and disengagement, all of which can hinder their academic development (Brummelman et al., 2020). Supporting this view, Ikegbusi (2025) highlighted that innovative classroom management approaches that foster inclusivity and students' empowerment contribute to building students' self-confidence and enhancing their academic performance.

Research further emphasized that self-esteem is shaped by a confluence of internal and external influences, including personal achievements, peer and teacher feedback, classroom dynamics, and the overall school climate (Orth & Robins, 2024). Supportive teacher-student relationships, inclusive teaching practices, and emotionally safe learning environments have been shown to enhance students' self-esteem, thereby fostering greater academic engagement (Ikegbusi & Manafa, 2023). Conversely, unsupportive educational environments, negative feedback and peer pressure can undermine students' confidence and contribute to disengagement (Ikegbusi et al., 2026).

In the Nigerian context, and particularly within Anambra State, secondary school students represent a diverse population with varying socio-economic backgrounds, emotional profiles, and learning needs. These contextual factors influence their self-perception and by extension, their academic engagement (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2022). While global literature has extensively explored the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement, there is a paucity of localized research that considers the unique socio-cultural and educational realities of students in Anambra State. This gap in the literature is particularly salient given the increasing focus on psychological well-being and its implications for student learning and development in sub-Saharan African educational systems.

Furthermore, existing studies often overlooked the nuanced ways in which components of self-esteem, such as self-worth, self-competence and self-acceptance; interact with dimensions of academic engagement, including behavioural participation, emotional investment, cognitive effort and proactive initiative (Fredricks, 2024; Dweck & Yeager, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2022). For instance, students who believe in their academic competence are more likely to set ambitious goals, persist through challenges, and derive satisfaction from learning tasks. Similarly, those who practice self-acceptance tend to view setbacks as opportunities for growth, thus maintaining consistent engagement in their studies.

Moreover, the integration of digital technologies in education has emerged as a catalyst for enhancing students' self-esteem and engagement. Ikegbusi (2021) noted that exposure to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can empower students through interactive learning experiences, promoting autonomy, skill acquisition, and self-confidence. As such, ICT integration represents an important contextual variable in understanding how self-esteem can be nurtured within the school system to foster academic engagement (Ikegbusi et al., 2026).

Despite the acknowledged importance of self-esteem in educational outcomes, research specific to Anambra State's public secondary schools remains limited. The complex interplay between self-esteem and academic engagement within this region's unique cultural, socio-economic

and educational context is yet to be comprehensively examined. This study was, therefore, motivated by the need to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among secondary school students in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Academic engagement is widely recognized as a pivotal component of students' educational experiences, significantly influencing their motivation, participation, learning outcomes, and long-term academic success. However, there is growing concern in Anambra State, Nigeria, over the noticeable decline in academic engagement among public secondary school students. This is evidenced by low levels of classroom participation, diminished enthusiasm for learning and persistently poor academic performance. Such patterns of disengagement not only hinder students' immediate academic achievement but also pose serious risks to their cognitive development, emotional well-being and future educational and career trajectories.

Among the various factors implicated in students' academic disengagement, self-esteem has emerged as a key psychological construct warranting closer attention. Self-esteem, which encompasses individuals' evaluations of their self-worth, competence and personal value, plays a crucial role in shaping academic behaviours. Students with high self-esteem are more likely to approach learning with confidence, persistence and active involvement, while those with low self-esteem are often susceptible to self-doubt, fear of failure, withdrawal from academic tasks, and reduced academic ambition. In the socio-culturally diverse and economically stratified environment of Anambra State, disparities in students' self-esteem may serve as a significant internal barrier to sustained academic engagement.

Despite the well-documented relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement in international literature, there remains a paucity of context-specific empirical studies within the Nigerian educational system. Most existing research in the Nigerian context has prioritized external factors such as school infrastructure, teacher-student relationships and curriculum design, often overlooking the internal psychological dimensions, such as self-esteem, that shape how students engage with academic tasks. Moreover, findings from Western and Asian studies may not adequately capture the nuanced socio-cultural and educational dynamics of Nigerian students, particularly those in public secondary schools.

The absence of localized research on the influence of self-esteem on academic engagement limits the ability of educators, counsellors and policymakers in Nigeria to design evidence-based interventions that address students' psychological needs. Addressing this gap is essential for creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that enhance students' motivation and performance. Consequently, this study sought to examine the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the relationship between self-worth and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria.
2. assess the relationship between self-competence and students' academic engagement in secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.
3. investigate the relationship between self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between self-worth and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between self-competence and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following Null Hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between self-worth and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between self-competence and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant relationship between self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a multifaceted psychological construct that encompasses an individual's overall evaluation of their worth, competence, and value. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) defined self-esteem as the degree to which the attributes in one's self-concept are perceived positively, while the University of Maryland's Sociology Department (n.d.) characterized it as a general orientation, favourable or unfavourable, toward oneself. These perspectives underscore self-esteem as a subjective yet critical component of psychological functioning, influencing behaviour, emotion and motivation (Manafa & Ikegbusi, 2025).

Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' academic engagement and life outcomes. Psychology Today (n.d.) emphasized its importance as a foundational psychological resource, noting that high self-esteem fosters achievement, well-being, and resilience, whereas low self-esteem is associated with adverse outcomes such as depression, underperformance, and social withdrawal. This observation is consistent with Manafa (2025a), who asserted that motivation and psychological resources such as self-esteem are key determinants of commitment and performance among individuals, including educators and students. Similarly, Ikegbusi et al. (2025) observed that external conditions, such as access to basic needs, can influence self-worth, with significant implications for motivation and performance.

In the educational context, particularly among secondary school students in Anambra State, self-esteem significantly impacts classroom engagement. Students with a strong sense of self-worth tend to demonstrate greater motivation, active participation, and perseverance in academic tasks, whereas those with low self-esteem may experience academic anxiety, disengagement, and reduced performance (Obi & Okafor, 2022). Scholars commonly conceptualized self-esteem through three interrelated components: self-worth, self-competence and self-acceptance (Ahmed et al., 2021). Additionally, Manafa (2025b) emphasized that the administrative competencies of school principals, including leadership and communication skills, contribute to creating school environments that nurture students' psychological security, thereby fostering healthy self-esteem and improved academic behaviour.

Self-worth refers to the intrinsic value individuals attribute to themselves, influencing their sense of entitlement to respect and success. A strong sense of self-worth fosters emotional resilience, while low self-worth is linked to vulnerability to external validation and psychological distress (Garba & Yusuf, 2024; Rosenberg & Owens, 2021).

Self-competence denotes confidence in one's abilities to achieve goals and solve problems. It supports initiative and persistence and is central to academic motivation and success (Brummelman et al., 2020). Instruments like the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale assess this dimension by gauging individuals' perceived effectiveness and control over outcomes (Cherry, 2023).

Self-acceptance involves acknowledging and embracing personal strengths and limitations without harsh self-criticism. It contributes to psychological well-being, authenticity, and a balanced self-concept (Branden, as cited in Wikipedia contributors, 2023). Together, these dimensions interact to shape a healthy self-concept, which is essential for academic engagement, personal development and social functioning (Manafa & Ikegbusi, 2025).

Academic Engagement

Academic engagement is a vital construct in educational psychology, referring to the degree of students' active involvement, motivation, and commitment to learning activities. It is widely recognized as a key predictor of academic achievement, student well-being, and long-term educational success. Contemporary literature defines academic engagement as a multidimensional phenomenon comprising cognitive, emotional and behavioural components, each contributing uniquely to students' academic experiences and outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2019).

Academic engagement as the "positive, active, and sustained investment in learning activities," involving mental effort (cognitive), emotional reactions (emotional), and observable actions (behavioural). This holistic view emphasized that engagement transcends mere classroom attendance, requiring students' full psychological and behavioural involvement in academic tasks (Fredricks et al. 2019).

The dual role of intrinsic motivation, the internal satisfaction derived from learning, and extrinsic motivation, such as grades or recognition, in sustaining engagement. This suggests that both internal interests and external incentives are critical in motivating students to remain invested in their academic work (Appleton et al. (2020).

Academic engagement involves students' enthusiasm, commitment, and emotional investment in learning activities. This dynamic process is influenced by students' emotional responses, such as curiosity, excitement, or anxiety, which can significantly affect their behavioural participation and academic persistence, as highlighted by Lei and Chiu (2021). Their view emphasized that engagement is not static but fluctuates based on students' experiences and perceptions within the learning environment.

A comprehensive understanding of academic engagement also considers students' cognitive, emotional and behavioural involvement, reflecting their sense of responsibility and capacity for self-regulation. This multifaceted perspective, as articulated by Zepeda et al. (2022), emphasizes the ability of learners to manage academic tasks and remain committed to educational goals. Supporting this view, Nyarko (2025) stressed that sustained motivation and self-regulation are critical factors that help maintain long-term academic engagement and performance. Overall, academic engagement is a complex, evolving construct that integrates how students think, feel and act within the learning environment. It is shaped by individual, interpersonal, and institutional factors, making it essential for educators and policymakers to understand its dimensions in order to foster supportive learning environments that enhance students' academic success.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which explains human motivation through the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. When these needs are met, individuals experience enhanced intrinsic motivation, well-being, and sustained engagement.

Competence reflects the need to feel effective and capable. In academic settings, students who perceive themselves as competent are more likely to persevere, engage actively, and exhibit higher self-esteem. Autonomy refers to the need for volition and control. Students who are allowed to make meaningful choices in their learning feel more motivated and valued, which enhances both engagement and self-worth. Relatedness denotes the need for connection with others. Supportive relationships with teachers and peers foster a sense of belonging, which reinforces students' emotional security and academic participation.

SDT posited that fulfilling these needs fosters intrinsic motivation, which is crucial for academic engagement and positive self-esteem. Conversely, environments that thwart these needs may lead to disengagement, low achievement, and diminished self-worth. By applying SDT, this study positions self-esteem not merely as an internal trait but as an outcome shaped by students' experiences of competence, autonomy and relatedness. The theory thus offered a strong lens for understanding how motivation drives academic engagement among public secondary school students.

2. METHOD

The study employed a correlational research design. A correlational design is appropriate for examining the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State, as it allowed for the identification of the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables without any manipulation (Ikegbusi, 2022). This design is particularly useful in determining whether higher self-esteem is associated with higher levels of academic engagement, as well as understanding the nature of these associations. The population of this study consisted of 19,080 senior secondary school students (SS2) from 275 public secondary schools across the six education zones of Anambra State, with 8,505 male students and 10,575 female students. The study sample comprised 540 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. Stratified random sampling was first used to ensure representation across the six education zones in Anambra State. From each zone, five public secondary schools were randomly selected, yielding a total of 30 schools. Subsequently, 18 students were randomly drawn from each selected school using simple random sampling, resulting in 90 students per zone and a total sample size of 540. This approach as described by Obi et al. (2022: 92), ensured both representativeness and the elimination of selection bias.

Data were collected using two structured instruments: The Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ) and the Academic Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ). The instruments were organized into three sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, and school level, to facilitate subgroup analysis. Section B comprised the SEQ, which measured self-esteem across three dimensions: self-worth, self-competence, and self-acceptance. The SEQ contained 18 items, six per dimension, rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). Section C featured the AEQ, which assessed academic engagement through 18 items covering behavioural, emotional, and cognitive components. Like the SEQ, the AEQ employed a 4-point Likert scale for response consistency and comparability. Both instruments were student-friendly and structured to ensure clarity, ease of administration, and effective measurement of the constructs. The resulting data enabled rigorous analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement among senior secondary students.

To establish reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 20 students from public secondary schools in Enugu State, selected for its educational similarities with the main study area. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach Alpha. For the Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ), the subscale coefficients were: Self-Worth (0.87), Self-Competence (0.90), and Self-Acceptance (0.89), yielding an overall reliability of 0.89. The Academic Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ) recorded a coefficient of 0.92. These values exceed the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein

(2017), indicating high internal consistency and confirming the instruments' reliability for the main study.

Data were collected through direct, face-to-face administration of the research instruments, facilitated by three trained research assistants. This approach allowed for real-time clarification of any ambiguities, enhancing response accuracy and completeness. A total of 540 questionnaires were distributed across the selected schools. Following retrieval and screening, 431 properly completed questionnaires were deemed valid for analysis, while 88 were discarded due to incomplete responses and 21 were unreturned. The data collection spanned three weeks, during which participants were adequately informed of the study's purpose and encouraged to respond honestly. This method ensured a high response rate and yielded reliable data for analyzing the relationship between self-esteem and academic engagement.

Collected data were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level using Pearson's r . A p -value < 0.05 indicated a statistically significant relationship; otherwise, the null hypothesis was retained. All analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25. The Pearson correlation technique was chosen for its suitability in determining linear relationships, offering valuable perspectives into the association between self-esteem and academic engagement.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between self-worth and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 1: Pearson r on Self-Worth and Academic Engagement among Public Secondary School Students in Anambra State

Variables	*N	Self-Worth	Academic Engagement	Remarks
Self-Worth	431	1.00	0.812	High
Academic Engagement	431	0.812	1.00	

Table 1 showed a strong positive correlation between self-worth and academic engagement ($r = 0.812$), indicating that higher levels of self-worth are associated with greater academic engagement among public secondary school students. This suggested that students who perceive themselves positively are more likely to be motivated, attentive and actively involved in learning. The high correlation emphasized the critical role of self-worth in fostering confidence, resilience and sustained participation in academic activities.

Research Question 2: What is the correlation between self-competence and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 2: Pearson r on Self-Competence and Academic Engagement among Public Secondary School Students in Anambra State

Variables	*N	Self-Competence	Academic Engagement	Remarks
Self-Competence	431	1.00	0.845	High
Academic Engagement	431	0.845	1.00	

Table 2 revealed a strong positive correlation between self-competence and academic engagement ($r = 0.845$), indicating that students who perceive themselves as academically capable are significantly more engaged in learning. This suggested that self-competent students are more

likely to participate actively, set academic goals and persist through challenges. The strength of the correlation highlighted the role of self-competence in promoting confidence, motivation and sustained involvement in academic tasks.

Research Question 3: What is the correlation between self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State?

Table 3: Pearson r on Self-Acceptance and Academic Engagement among Public Secondary School Students in Anambra State

Variables	N	Self-Acceptance	Academic Engagement	Remarks
Self-Acceptance	431	1.00	0.862	High
Academic Engagement	431	0.862	1.00	

Result in Table 3 indicated a strong positive correlation between self-acceptance and academic engagement ($r = 0.862$), indicating that students with higher self-acceptance are significantly more engaged in academic activities. Students who accept themselves, including both strengths and limitations, tend to exhibit greater confidence, reduced anxiety and a more proactive attitude toward learning. This high correlation emphasized the role of self-acceptance in fostering persistence, enthusiasm and active participation in academic tasks.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between self-worth and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State.

Table 4: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Self-Worth and Academic Engagement

Variable	r	r ²	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Self-Worth	0.854	0.729	33.998	.000	Significant

Table 4 revealed a statistically significant relationship between self-worth and academic engagement ($r = 0.854$, $p < .001$). As the p-value is less than the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.729$) indicates that self-worth accounted for 72.9% of the variance in academic engagement. The high t-value ($t = 33.998$, $p < .001$) further confirmed the significance of the result. These findings suggested that students with higher self-worth are considerably more engaged in academic activities, exhibiting motivation, persistence and active participation. In contrast, lower self-worth hinders engagement.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between self-competence and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State.

Table 5: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Self-Competence and Academic Engagement

Variables	r	r ²	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Self-Competence	0.895	0.801	41.558	.000	Significant

Table 5 indicated a statistically significant relationship between self-competence and academic engagement ($r = 0.895$, $p < .001$). As the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.801$) revealed that self-competence accounts for 80.1% of the variance in academic engagement. The high t-value ($t = 41.558$, $p < .001$) further substantiates this significance. These results suggested that students with strong self-competence are more engaged in academic tasks, exhibiting greater motivation, persistence and

enthusiasm, while those with low self-competence may be less inclined to participate actively in learning.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State.

Table 6: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Self-Acceptance and Academic Engagement

Variables	r	r ²	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Self-Acceptance	0.902	.814	43.273	.000	Significant

Table 6 revealed a statistically significant relationship between self-acceptance and academic engagement ($r = 0.902$, $p < .001$). Given that the p-value is below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.814$) indicated that self-acceptance accounted for 81.4% of the variance in academic engagement. A high t-value ($t = 43.273$, $p < .001$) further confirmed the significance of the relationship. These findings suggested that students with higher levels of self-acceptance are more engaged in academic activities, displaying greater motivation, persistence and resilience, while low self-acceptance may hinder active participation and academic performance.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between Self-Worth and Academic Engagement

The study revealed a strong positive relationship between self-worth and academic engagement among public secondary school students ($r = 0.854$, $p < .05$), indicating that students with higher self-worth are significantly more engaged in academic tasks. This suggested that a positive self-perception enhances students' motivation, confidence and persistence in learning activities. These findings aligned with Adeyemi and Okonkwo (2024), who reported that high self-worth fosters deep learning strategies and academic perseverance. Similarly, Hassan and Bello (2024) emphasized the role of self-worth in promoting intrinsic motivation and active classroom participation. However, contrasting views by Nwachukwu and Emeka (2024) argued that external factors such as peer influence and teacher support may exert a stronger influence on engagement. Garba and Yusuf (2024) also highlighted the importance of structured goal-setting and clear academic objectives in sustaining student commitment.

Relationship between Self-Competence and Academic Engagement

The study revealed a significant and strong positive relationship between self-competence and academic engagement ($r = 0.895$, $p < .05$), indicating that students who perceive themselves as academically capable are more likely to be actively involved in learning tasks. High self-competence was associated with increased confidence, goal-setting behaviour, resilience and enthusiasm in academic activities. These findings are consistent with Adeyemo and Uchenna (2024), who identified self-competence as a key predictor of academic engagement, highlighting its role in fostering effort, persistence and proactive learning. However, Bello (2024) cautioned that self-competence alone may not sustain engagement without supportive external factors such as teacher guidance, parental involvement and conducive school environments. He emphasized that structured academic support systems are essential to fully translate students' perceived competence into sustained engagement.

Relationship Between Self-Acceptance and Academic Engagement

The study revealed a strong positive correlation between self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students ($r = 0.902$, $p < .05$), suggesting that students who accept themselves, acknowledging both strengths and limitations, are more likely to be emotionally stable, confident and actively involved in academic activities. Such students tend to

exhibit greater focus, resilience and intrinsic motivation in their learning processes. These results aligned with Martinez (2025), who identified self-acceptance as a key contributor to academic perseverance and a growth-oriented mindset. His findings linked self-acceptance with improved motivation and engagement. In contrast, Nyarko (2025) argued that while self-acceptance is significant, external supports such as parental involvement and teachers' encouragement play a more decisive role. He concluded that self-acceptance, when reinforced by a supportive environment; more effectively promotes sustained academic engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

This study established a significant positive relationship between self-esteem components, self-worth, self-competence and self-acceptance and academic engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State. The concluded that students with higher levels of these self-perceptions are more motivated, persistent and actively involved in academic tasks. While these intrapersonal factors are critical to students' engagement, the literature also pointed to the complementary role of external supports such as teachers' guidance, parental involvement and structured learning environments. Therefore, educational stakeholders should prioritize holistic interventions that not only nurture students' self-perception but also create enabling environments that reinforce sustained academic engagement.

Recommendations

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

1. School administrators should prioritize recognizing students' achievements and offering consistent emotional support through mentorship and positive reinforcement to strengthen self-worth and enhance academic engagement.
2. Teachers are encouraged to adopt student-centred strategies, such as goal setting, collaborative learning and timely feedback, to foster self-competence and increase students' motivation, persistence and academic participation.
3. School administrators should incorporate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks into the curriculum to cultivate self-acceptance, emotional resilience and a supportive learning climate that sustains students' engagement and well-being.

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