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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AS A CORRELATE OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among Senior Secondary School Two (SS II) students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study, and one null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A correlational design of the ex post facto type was adopted. The population comprised 29,700 SS II students offering Commerce, Government and Civic Education, from which a sample of 395 students was drawn from 18 public senior secondary schools. Data were collected using the Students' Engagement and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (SEAQ) and the Students' Attendance and Academic Performance Checklist (SAAPC). The 387 valid responses were analysed using the mean, standard deviation, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and regression analysis. The findings revealed that the level of student engagement was high (grand mean = 3.35) and that engagement had a strong, positive and significant relationship with academic achievement ($r = .743$, $p < .05$), accounting for 55.2 per cent of the variance in achievement. It was concluded that student engagement is a significant predictor of academic achievement among SS II students in the State. It was recommended, among others, that teachers adopt learner-centred instructional strategies that promote students' active participation in learning.

Keywords: Student Engagement, Academic Achievement, Senior Secondary Schools, Delta State

1 INTRODUCTION

Students attend school to acquire the knowledge, skills and values required for productive participation in society, and the success of this learning is commonly gauged by their academic achievement in the subjects they offer. Academic achievement, therefore, serves as a principal index of the effectiveness of any school programme. It denotes the extent to which learners who have been exposed to prescribed curricular content over a given period have attained specified educational goals and objectives. As the central component of the education system and the future of society, the student warrants continuous development, and his or her achievement may be viewed as the net outcome of cognitive and non-cognitive attributes interacting with the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place (Arief, 2019).

Academic achievement also reflects the progress an institution makes towards the attainment of its educational goals (Kazazoglu, 2023). It captures the degree to which learners, guided by teachers, benefit from instruction and acquire knowledge and skills across subject areas (Mkpughe, 2015), and it finds expression in desirable changes in behaviour across the various domains of the curriculum (Nartgun & Kaya, 2016). Because achievement is the outcome that society most expects of schooling, identifying the learner-related conditions that shape it remains a matter of considerable educational importance.

Among such conditions are students' preparedness for learning, their regular attendance and, most critically, their engagement in learning. Attendance, which entails physical presence in school and participation in its activities, is closely tied to learning outcomes: irregular attendance and deliberate absenteeism have been shown to result in academic underachievement, inadequate preparedness and weakened engagement (Elegbeleye & Fagbenle, 2018; Fagbenle, 2018; Iyamu & Obiunu, 2016). Physical presence alone, however, does not guarantee learning; what students actually do while in school matters a great deal more. It is this quality of active involvement that the construct of student engagement seeks to capture.

Student engagement denotes the degree to which students are actively involved in educational activities within and beyond the classroom in ways that yield meaningful, high-quality learning (Russell & Slater, 2019). It is expressed in such academic behaviours as attending classes, completing assignments, contributing to discussions and collaborating with peers, all of which deepen understanding and enhance performance. Strydom et al. (2020) identify two complementary components of engagement: the time and effort that students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities, and the responsibility of the institution to provide a supportive learning environment through effective teaching, adequate learning resources and policies that encourage active participation. Schools that cultivate interactive, learner-centred environments, characterised by collaborative learning and constructive feedback, are therefore more likely to raise students' engagement and, by extension, their achievement. It may thus be expected that the extent of students' active participation in academic activities will shape their understanding, their retention of knowledge and, ultimately, their academic achievement.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Poor academic achievement among secondary school students remains a pressing concern in Delta State. Results released by the West African Examinations Council have repeatedly shown high failure rates in core subjects among senior secondary school candidates in Nigeria, and Delta State has not been insulated from this trend. Interventions aimed at reversing the situation have focused largely on teacher quality, curriculum reform and infrastructural upgrades, while explanations of the problem have tended to emphasise deficiencies in facilities and staffing. Comparatively little attention has been paid to student-centred variables. It has been observed that many students in the State come to school unprepared, miss classes frequently and participate minimally in academic activities. Yet the extent to which students' engagement accounts for their academic achievement has not been sufficiently established empirically in the State. The present study was undertaken to fill this gap.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State. Specifically, the study sought to:

determine the level of engagement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State; and

ascertain the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the level of engagement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria?
- What is the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State?

1.4 Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Student Engagement

Student classroom engagement is a central dimension of educational effectiveness and is widely recognised as an important determinant of academic achievement. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) conceive of engagement as the extent to which students are invested in, and committed to, their academic work; in practical terms, it describes the manner in which students participate during classroom instruction. Situated within this broader discourse, academic engagement refers to learners' active participation in educational tasks that promote learning and personal development (Adeyemo, 2021).

Engagement is generally treated as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioural engagement concerns students' participation in academic activities such as attending classes, completing assignments and contributing to discussions. Emotional engagement relates to students' affective reactions to learning, including interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm and a sense of belonging. Cognitive engagement reflects the mental effort that students invest in learning, including their willingness to grapple with complex ideas, master difficult skills and employ deep learning strategies. Conceived in this way, engagement extends beyond physical attendance or mere compliance to encompass students' intrinsic motivation and commitment to academic success.

Scholars increasingly regard classroom engagement as both an indicator and a predictor of achievement, given its role in sustaining concentration, persistence and self-regulated learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Academic engagement may be further understood in terms of two interrelated components. The first, academic identification, reflects positive relationships with teachers, interest in subject matter and a sense of belonging within the school; the second, academic participation, involves sustained effort on learning tasks, timely completion of assignments, punctuality and regular class attendance. Together, these components build learners' academic resilience and support their performance. Fostering high levels of engagement is therefore essential for raising achievement, particularly at the secondary level, where motivation and participation strongly influence educational success (Skinner & Pitzer, 2016).

Within the classroom, engagement is the observable expression of these psychological and behavioural dimensions. It reflects the extent to which learners take part in instructional experiences that promote understanding, critical thinking and durable retention of knowledge. Such engagement may be relatively passive, as in attentive listening, or overtly active, as in writing, answering questions, contributing to discussions and working collaboratively with peers (Simonsen et al., 2018). Understood in this sense, classroom engagement constitutes a cornerstone of effective teaching and classroom management.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical evidence from Delta State lends support to this position. Onoyase (2020) investigated engagement strategies and their influence on students' achievement in English Language and Mathematics, with the aim of identifying the practices most effective in raising achievement. The study found that participatory discussion, collaborative learning and interactive questioning substantially improved students' achievement, and it recommended that teachers be trained in engagement techniques. Although such studies affirm the value of engagement, few have directly quantified the strength of the relationship between students' overall engagement and their achievement in subjects such as Commerce, Government and Civic Education in public secondary schools in Delta State. This is the focus of the present study.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design of the ex post facto type. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to establish the nature and strength of the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement without manipulating either variable. According to Peretomode and Peretomode (2015), a correlational design is suitable where the purpose of an investigation is to determine the degree and direction of the relationship between two or more variables as they naturally occur in a given population.

The population of the study comprised 29,700 Senior Secondary School Two (SS II) students offering Commerce, Government and Civic Education in public senior secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample of 395 SS II students offering these subjects was drawn from 18 public senior secondary schools across the State.

Two instruments were used for data collection. The first was a questionnaire titled the Students' Engagement and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (SEAQ), which was structured in sections and rated on a four-point Likert-type scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The second was the Students' Attendance

and Academic Performance Checklist (SAAPC), which was developed to obtain objective records of students' achievement scores in the three subjects.

Of the 395 copies of the questionnaire administered, 387 were properly completed and used for analysis. Research question one was answered using the mean and standard deviation; research question two was answered using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and the coefficient of determination; and the null hypothesis was tested using regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance.

4 RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the level of engagement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviations on the level of student engagement (N = 387)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev.
1	I participate actively in classroom discussions.	196	149	28	14	3.36	0.81
2	I ask questions during lessons.	184	156	32	15	3.31	0.84
3	I contribute ideas during group activities.	192	151	29	15	3.34	0.82
4	I pay attention during lessons.	210	142	22	13	3.42	0.76
5	I respond when questions are asked in class.	188	154	30	15	3.33	0.83
6	I show interest in classroom activities.	201	146	25	15	3.38	0.79
7	I participate in practical or hands-on activities.	179	160	33	15	3.30	0.85
8	I collaborate effectively with classmates.	194	148	30	15	3.34	0.82
9	I engage in academic discussions outside the classroom.	172	165	35	15	3.28	0.87
10	I make meaningful contributions during lessons.	186	156	30	15	3.32	0.83
11	I respond positively to teachers' questions.	205	145	24	13	3.40	0.78
12	I show enthusiasm during learning activities.	198	149	25	15	3.37	0.80
13	I complete classroom tasks actively.	202	146	24	15	3.38	0.79
14	I participate in academic competitions or activities.	168	167	37	15	3.26	0.89
15	I remain engaged throughout lesson periods.	190	152	30	15	3.33	0.82
	Grand mean / Average standard deviation					3.35	0.82

Key: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; $\bar{x}$ = Mean. *Decision rule:* a mean of 2.70 and above indicates a high level of engagement; 2.50–2.69, a moderate level; and 2.49 and below, a low level.

Table 1 shows that SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State demonstrated a high level of engagement in classroom activities. All 15 items recorded mean scores between 3.26 and 3.42, each of which exceeds the 2.70 benchmark for a high level of engagement. The respondents indicated, most strongly, that they paid attention during lessons ($\bar{x}$ = 3.42) and responded positively to teachers' questions ($\bar{x}$ = 3.40); they also reported participating actively in classroom discussions, collaborating with classmates and showing enthusiasm for learning activities. The lowest-rated items related to participation in academic competitions ($\bar{x}$ = 3.26) and academic discussions outside the classroom ($\bar{x}$ = 3.28), suggesting that engagement was somewhat weaker beyond regular lessons. The grand mean of 3.35 confirms that the overall level of engagement was high, while standard deviations ranging from 0.76 to 0.89 indicate relative homogeneity in the respondents' ratings.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 2: Pearson correlation between student engagement and academic achievement

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev.	r	r^2	r^2 (%)	Decision
Student engagement	387	3.35	0.82	.743	.552	55.2	Strong positive relationship
Academic achievement	387	68.42	9.76				

Table 2 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient of .743 between student engagement and academic achievement, indicating a strong, positive relationship among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State. The coefficient of determination (r^2 = .552) shows that 55.2 per cent of the variance in students' academic achievement is associated with their engagement in academic activities, while the remaining 44.8 per cent is attributable to other factors not examined in this study. In other words, students who engage more actively in academic activities tend to record higher academic achievement.

Hypothesis One (H_{01}): There is no significant relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 3: Regression analysis of the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Regression	12404.203	1	777.590	22.111	.000	H_{01} rejected
Residual	2112.064	385	331.082			
Total	14516.267	386				

Table 3 presents the regression analysis of the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State. The regression model was significant, $F(1, 385) = 22.111$, $p < .05$. Since the p-value (.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. There is, therefore, a significant relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State.

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Level of Engagement among SS II Students

The findings on research question one revealed that the level of engagement in academic activities among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State was high ($\bar{x}$ = 3.35, SD = 0.82). Students reported attending to lessons, responding to teachers' questions, contributing to discussions and collaborating with peers, which reflects the behavioural, emotional and cognitive dimensions of engagement described by Fredricks et al. (2004). The comparatively lower ratings for out-of-class academic discussion and participation in academic competitions, however, suggest that engagement was concentrated largely within formal lessons. This pattern accords with the view of Strydom et al. (2020) that engagement depends, in part, on the opportunities institutions create for participation beyond regular instruction.

5.2 Relationship between Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

The findings on research question two and the corresponding hypothesis revealed a strong, positive and significant relationship between student engagement and academic achievement, with engagement accounting for 55.2 per cent of the variance in achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State. This implies that students who participate actively in academic activities are more likely to learn effectively and, consequently, to perform better. The finding agrees with Kaliisa, Misiejuk, López-Pernas, Khalil and Saqr (2023), who observed that students' participation and engagement in learning activities contributed positively to academic achievement and learning motivation, and who maintained that active engagement strengthens understanding and retention. It is similarly consistent with Ajibade and Adeagbo (2025), who reported that student motivation and active classroom participation correlated significantly with academic achievement among junior secondary school students in Oyo State, and with Adewale and Yusuf (2021), who found that student-related factors, notably preparedness and engagement, contributed significantly to academic achievement in public secondary schools in Lagos State.

The finding further aligns with Ajao, Akinoso and Awofala (2024), who documented higher achievement among students taught through activity-based instructional approaches and attributed the gain to improved participation and

classroom engagement. Samuel and Okonkwo (2025) likewise found that students with stronger emotional regulation and academic commitment were more engaged in classroom learning and achieved better academic outcomes. Within Delta State, Enamuotor, Asiyai and Akporehe (2026) established a relationship between teachers' job engagement and students' academic achievement in public secondary schools, suggesting that engaged teachers may foster the kind of student engagement that translates into achievement. Taken together, these studies corroborate the present finding and underscore the importance of student engagement as a lever for improving academic achievement.

6 CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement among SS II students in public senior secondary schools in Delta State. On the basis of the findings, it was concluded that SS II students in the State exhibit a high level of engagement in academic activities, and that engagement is a strong and significant predictor of their academic achievement. Efforts to improve academic achievement in the State should, therefore, give deliberate attention to student-centred factors, particularly the quality of students' participation in learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Teachers should adopt learner-centred instructional strategies, such as group discussion, collaborative learning, problem-solving activities and interactive questioning that promote active student engagement.
- Secondary education policy makers in Delta State should organise seminars, workshops and orientation programmes to sensitise students to the importance of active engagement for academic achievement.
- School principals should expand opportunities for engagement beyond regular lessons through academic clubs, competitions and peer study groups, since these areas recorded the lowest levels of engagement.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

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