

Self-Esteem As Correlate Of English Language Academic Performance Of Pupils With Intellectual Disabilities In Abakaliki Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract.

Pupils with intellectual disabilities often face challenges in achieving academic success, and low self-esteem may contribute to this struggle. While self-esteem is recognized as an important factor for academic achievement, its specific impact on pupils with intellectual disabilities remains underexplored. This study examined self-esteem as correlate of academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities in some schools in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 22 pupils with intellectual disabilities in schools. Instrument for Data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Self-Esteem and Academic Performance of Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities (SEAPPID). Academic performance data were obtained from cumulative English language results. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Findings indicated that pupils with higher self-esteem performed better academically and were more engaged in their studies. Furthermore, while girls showed slightly better emotional control and focus, gender differences in academic performance were minimal. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers adopt strategies that actively promote self-esteem in both male and female pupils with intellectual disabilities. Parents should be encouraged to play a more active role in supporting their children's self-esteem and academic growth by collaborating with teachers to strengthen learning outcomes. Promoting self-esteem is essential for improving academic performance and fostering resilience in pupils with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: *Self-esteem; Academic Performance; Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities; and Corr.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is an essential psychological concept that plays a vital role in different areas of a person's life, including their success in education. This is due to its influence on their physical, social, emotional, and academic health. When self-esteem is healthy, individuals tend to have an optimistic "I can" perspective, which reflects their ability to navigate life's challenges. A person's self-esteem has been shown to impact how well they perform tasks. In essence, self-esteem is about how a person perceives themselves. It includes recognizing one's own qualities and capabilities, such as personal values, ambitions, skills, self-worth, physical attributes and life purpose. Therefore, self-esteem serves as a driving force for achieving significant goals. People with high self-esteem are thought to face difficulties and obstacles with confidence and to engage in positive thinking (Salaudeen, 2014). For pupils with intellectual disabilities, self-esteem can have a strong effect since they often encounter specific challenges that influence how they see themselves and their academic success. Independence is an important factor for self-esteem. Many cultures value being independent and often judge it based on an individual's capacity to work and support themselves. Musette and colleagues (2019) noted that pupils with intellectual disabilities regularly face feelings of frustration and social exclusion negatively affecting their self-esteem and their academic achievement.

Intellectual disability, previously referred to as mental retardation is now preferred to reduce negative associations. This condition remains one of the most prevalent developmental challenges faced by individuals, related to cognitive dysfunction and behavioural issues. It presents difficulties when compared to children who do not experience developmental delays (Walker & Johnson, 2006). According to Ozoji, et al. (2016), intellectual disability involves significant limitations and challenges in adaptive skills during the developmental phase, greatly affecting educational outcomes. The effects of this disability are crucial, as they hinder the overall learning capabilities of pupils which in turn complicates the process of acquiring life skills, making it extremely hard, if not impossible. The phrase 'academic performance' refers to a pupil's educational standing at a specific time. Igwe, et al. (2017) discussed pupil performance and suggested that it serves as an indicator of results. They indicated that the primary results of education can be gauged in terms of the changes in individuals' knowledge, skills and attitudes that come from their school experiences. The connection between self-esteem and success in school has been thoroughly researched. Generally, pupils with higher self-esteem tend to perform better academically because they have faith in their abilities, which encourages them to participate in learning and keep trying when faced with difficulties (Raine, 2016). On the other hand, pupils with low self-esteem may develop a poor self image, which can negatively affect both their motivation to learn and their academic outcomes. Additionally, the surroundings in which a pupil lives are vital in influencing the self-esteem of those with intellectual disabilities. Elements like friendships, support from teachers and family relationships can strengthen or weaken a pupil's self-esteem (Falk & Sansour, 2024).

For example, pupils with intellectual disabilities who take part in psychosocial educational programmes often report higher self-esteem and improved social connections than those who do not receive this type of support. This necessitates the researchers to investigate into self-esteem as correlate of academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities in Our Lady of Compassion School, Okpaugwu, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

Statement of the Problem

Even though self-esteem is known to be important for success in school, we still don't fully understand how it relates to the school achievements of pupils with intellectual disabilities. A lot of these pupils have ongoing difficulties in their studies and this might be worsened by having low self-esteem tied to their learning experiences and social situations. This research will explore how much self-esteem affects the academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities. The relationship between self-esteem and intellectual disabilities has not been widely studied by researchers leading to a lack of thorough literature on the academic success of pupils with intellectual disabilities. This lack of information poses a major problem for teachers, parents and policymakers who are looking for effective ways to help these learners. Ebonyi State schools, the connection between self-esteem and academic performance has not been thoroughly examined leaving those involved without the necessary information to tackle this issue. The objective of this study is to examine self-esteem as correlate to academic performance of intellectual disabilities of pupils in school in Ebonyi State. The specific objectives are to: a) examine the relationship between self-esteem levels and academic performance among pupils with intellectual disabilities in ebonyi state schools; b) determine the impact of self-worth and belief in abilities on the academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities; 3) identify the differences in academic performance based on gender among pupils with intellectual disabilities in the school setting.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories are associated with self-esteem and academic performance, especially for students with intellectual disabilities. However, for the purpose of this current study and to have a better knowledge and understanding of the pupils with intellectual disabilities in the school setting, the current study is anchored on Social Comparison Theory, Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect (BFLPE), Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura), and Person-Centered Theory (Rogers) (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2021; Falk, & Sansour, 2024). The key tenet of these theories include:

Social Comparison Theory: This theory, rooted in Festinger's work, suggests that individuals compare themselves to others, influencing their self-concept and potentially impacting self-esteem, especially in educational settings.

Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect (BFLPE): This effect, proposed by Marsh & Parker, posits that a student's self-concept can be negatively impacted when placed in a high-achieving environment, potentially leading to lower self-esteem.

Person-Centered Theory (Rogers): This theory emphasizes the individual's self-understanding and how it influences behavior. It suggests that positive self-regard and a sense of worth are crucial for personal adjustment and development.

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura): This theory focuses on an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations. A strong sense of self-efficacy, developed through experiences and support, can significantly impact academic achievements.

III. METHODS

Design

The study employed a correlational research design. The research method involves observing two variables with a view to establish a statistically corresponding relationship between them. The study obtained data from an array of samples of the pupils with intellectual disabilities, and then describe the information to establish a relationship between variables such as self-esteem and academic performance.

Population and Sample

The population of the study is all the 22 pupils with intellectual disabilities in Ebony Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. All the 22 pupils with intellectual disabilities in the schools were used for the study thus, no need for sample as the population is manageable. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw all the pupils with intellectual disabilities and to ascertain self-esteem with their academic performance.

Instrument for Data Collection

In order to gain access to and cooperation from pupils with intellectual disabilities, the researchers obtained a consent letter to conduct the research from their teachers and parents. Introductory letter was also obtained from the Department of Special Education Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki Nigeria introducing the researchers and stating the purpose of the study. The letter was presented to the head teachers for their approval to assess pupils with intellectual disabilities in their various schools. Following the approval, the researchers administered and obtained primary data through the structured questionnaire from pupils with intellectual disabilities. The researcher guided the pupils by reading the items to them to determine the right answer due to their level of comprehension. The study employed a structured questionnaire titled Self-Esteem and Academic Performance of Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities (SEAPPID) to collect data from respondents.

This questionnaire utilized a two and four-point Likert Scales offering the following response options: Strongly Agree (SA 4points), Agree (A 3points), Disagree (D 2points) and Strongly Disagree (SD 1point) for items 1 to 15. The cumulative annual results consisting of first, second and third terms in English language was obtained by the researchers from the school selected for this study to examine the difference in academic performance of the male and female pupils with intellectual disabilities. The response format for cumulative results were modeled after 5 points of Excellent (70-100), Very Good (60-69), Good (50-59), Fair (40-49) and Poor (39 and below). This method was adopted because it is a faster and easier method of getting information from such learners. Data were collected through questionnaire and academic records and analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean score while hypotheses were tested using Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic of Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities

| Age | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| 12-14yrs | 3 | 13.64 |
| 15-20 | 11 | 50 |
| 21 -25 | 8 | 36.36 |
| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
| Male | 13 | 59.09 |
| Female | 9 | 40.91 |
| Total | 22 | 100 |

Table 1 indicate the demographic data of the 22 pupils with intellectual disabilities. The analysis reveals that the majority are aged between 15- and 20-years accounting for 50% of the respondents. This is followed by 36.36% who are aged between 21 and 25 years, while the youngest group, aged 12 to 14 years, constitutes only 13.64% of the sample. In terms of gender distribution, males represent a larger proportion at 59.09%, while females make up 40.91%. This signified that the data highlights a higher concentration of older pupils and a slight predominance of males within the school.

Research Questions 1: To examine the relationship between self-esteem levels and academic performance among pupils with intellectual disabilities in Our Lady of Compassion School.

Table 2. Mean Summary of Self Esteem and Academic Performance of Pupils with ID

| S/N | Item | SA | A | D | SD | Mean |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|----|-------------|
| 1 | I feel good about myself | 8 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 3.41 |
| 2 | I feel I am as good as others | 6 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 2.68 |
| 3 | I believe that my self-esteem affects my school performance. | 3 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 2.86 |
| 4 | I don't feel happy when I complete my work. | 3 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 2.41 |
| 5 | I think my teachers believe I can succeed. | 1 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 2.36 |

Table 3 presents the outcomes regarding the relationship between self-esteem levels and academic performance among pupils with intellectual disabilities at Our Lady of Compassion School. A mean score below 2.50 is rejected whereas a mean score of 2.50 or higher is accepted as accurate. Out of the five question items, three (3) with mean scores (3.41, 2.68 and 2.86) were affirmed as contributors to positive self-esteem, while two items with the mean scores (2.41 and 2.36) were not. This implies that there is a positive self-image and the belief in the connection between self-esteem and academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities in Our Lady of Compassion School.

Research Question 2: How do self-worth and belief in abilities impact the academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities?

Table 3. Mean Summary of the Impact of Self-Worth and Belief in Abilities on the Academic Performance of Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities

| S/N | Item | SA | A | D | SD | Mean |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|----|-------------|
| 6 | When I face challenges in my studies, I believe I can overcome them. | 5 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 3.18 |
| 7 | I often set goals for myself in my academic work. | 5 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 3.23 |
| 8 | I believe that my efforts can lead to success in my studies. | 4 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 3.05 |
| 9 | I feel that I can learn new things in school. | 3 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 2.86 |
| 10 | I am satisfied with my performance in school | 5 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 2.32 |

Table 3 indicates the results of self-worth and belief in abilities impacting the academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities. In the analysis, five question items were presented, four accepted as relevant to self-worth and belief in abilities, with their mean scores exceeding the criterion mean score of 2.50. The mean values obtained for the items were 3.23, 3.18, 3.05 and 2.86 respectively. These values signified respondents feel confident in their ability to overcome academic challenges, set goals and believe that their efforts can lead to success, although satisfaction with their performance is notably lower with the mean score of 2.31. This means that the pupils possess a positive outlook regarding their capacity to overcome challenges in school.

Research Question 3: What are the differences in academic performance based on gender among pupils with intellectual disabilities in the school setting?

Table 4. Mean Summary of the Differences in Academic Performance based on Gender among Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities

| S/N | Item | SA | A | D | SD | Mean |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|----|-------------|
| 11 | Boys perform lower compared to girls | 6 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 2.55 |
| 12 | Girls tend to perform better in language reading | 5 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 2.50 |
| 13 | Girls control their emotion more than the boys. | 4 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 2.59 |
| 14 | Teachers give more attention to the female pupils with intellectual disabilities. | 9 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 2.70 |
| 15 | Boys receive more support from parents in academic pursuits. | 3 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 2.36 |

Table 4 shows the results of perceptions regarding gender performance and support among pupils with intellectual disabilities. The analysis reveals that items 11, 12, 13 and 14 with mean scores (2.55, 2.50, 2.59 and 2.700) slightly above the criterion mean score of 2.50 were accepted by the respondents, while item 15 with the mean score of 2.36 below the criterion mean was rejected. The results reveals that there is a perception of greater academic support and emotional regulation among girls compared to boys, while the idea that boys receive more parental support lacks consensus.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation of Self-Esteem and Academic Performance

| Variable | N | Mean | SD | r-cal | Decision |
|----------------------|----|-------|--------|-------|-------------------------|
| Self-Esteem | 22 | 2.824 | 1.14 | 0.605 | H ₀ Rejected |
| Academic Performance | 22 | 2.652 | 0.0992 | | |

Hypothesis 1 shows the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance among a sample of 22 respondents. The findings revealed a mean self-esteem score of 2.824 with a standard deviation of 1.14 indicating a moderate level of self-esteem among the participants. Conversely, the mean academic performance score was 2.652, accompanied by a significantly lower standard deviation of 0.0992. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r-cal) was calculated to be 0.605. This value indicates a moderate positive correlation between self-esteem and academic performance. Given this correlation, we can infer that as pupils' self-esteem improves, their academic performance tends to enhance as well.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation in Academic Performance between Male and Female pupils with Intellectual Disabilities

| Variable | N | Mean | SD | r-cal | Difference | Decision |
|----------|----|------|--------|-------|------------|-------------------------|
| Male | 13 | 2.55 | 1.14 | 0.057 | 0.05 | H ₀ Rejected |
| Female | 9 | 2.50 | 0.0992 | | | |

Hypothesis 2 reveals the analysis of academic performance between male and female pupils with intellectual disabilities comprising 13 males and 9 females. The findings revealed that the mean academic performance score for male pupils was 2.55, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.14 while female pupils had a mean score of 2.50 with a lower standard deviation of 0.0992. The calculated Pearson correlation coefficient (r-cal) for this comparison was 0.057 with a difference of 0.05 indicating a very weak positive correlation between the academic performance of male and female pupils. Based on the data, we rejected the null hypothesis (H₀), which posited that there is no significant difference in academic performance between male and female pupils with intellectual disabilities.

Discussion

The study revealed the relationship between self-esteem levels and academic performance among pupils with intellectual disabilities in Our Lady of Compassion School. The results showed that different aspects of self-esteem significantly contribute to creating a supportive academic atmosphere. Most pupils feel a sense of self-worth and trust in their capacity to achieve educationally. This optimistic outlook is evident in their recognition of feeling positive about themselves and their awareness that self-esteem influences their performance in school. Such positive beliefs can enhance the learning environment, as pupils who see their own potential are usually more engaged in their studies and participate more in class discussions. On the other hand, there are signs that some pupils have self-esteem that is not high enough to encourage successful academic results. Some individuals expressed discontent regarding their performance

and doubted their teachers' confidence in their abilities. The findings showed the importance of fostering self-esteem in pupils with intellectual disabilities to enhance their academic performance. This study illustrated the link between self-esteem and the school performance of these pupils in Our Lady of Compassion School. In essence, when pupils with intellectual disabilities feel appreciated and capable, they are likely to take on academic challenges and feel more satisfied with their learning experience, even if their progress is gradual. This research aligned with the work of Marsh and Martin (2011) who found a relationship between self-concept and academic success.

This means that strong self-beliefs can encourage pupils to perform well in their studies and build resilience when facing difficulties. The findings also revealed how self-worth and belief in abilities influence the academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities. Pupils displayed a notable level of trust in their ability to tackle educational challenges. This confidence is essential, as it allows them to confront obstacles and chase their academic ambitions with resolve. It was noted from the findings that even though pupils with intellectual disabilities might have limited thinking skills, those with less severe conditions actively pursue goals and believe in their chances of succeeding. This link between setting goals and self-belief indicates that when pupils picture realistic targets, they are more inclined to create plans that can improve their academic performance. The research showed that pupils feel positive about their skills, but they do not consistently experience a strong sense of accomplishment in actual learning situations. A study conducted by Lichtenstein (2020) emphasized the importance of self-belief in educational settings, pointing out that learners who trust their abilities are likelier to tackle tough assignments and keep going through difficulties. However, this rarely applies to pupils with mild intellectual disabilities. Additionally, findings from Schunk (1991) further affirmed the importance of self-esteem in boosting motivation and academic success among pupils with intellectual disabilities. The results showed a noticeable difference in how boys and girls with intellectual disabilities perform academically in the researched area. Participants mentioned that girls usually excel more in language and reading tasks than boys.

Moreover, it was noted that girls are seen to have better control over their emotions which helps them behave well in class and stay focused on their studies. It was also noted that teachers seem to pay more attention to female pupils with intellectual disabilities. Interestingly, the idea that boys get more support from their parents in their school work was not commonly accepted. This was shown in the findings of the tested hypothesis. The hypothesis indicated a weak positive link between how boys and girls with intellectual disabilities perform academically. Although boys had a slightly higher average score compared to girls, the correlation was low, which can be concluded that the differences based on gender in academic performance were limited. This finding agrees with Williams and Carter (2016) who found little gender difference in academic performance among pupils with intellectual disabilities. However, it goes against Morgan's (2014) conclusion, which indicated that female students with intellectual disabilities typically perform better than males because they have stronger language skills and better emotional control. Johnson (2015) pointed out that teachers often find girls with intellectual disabilities easier to handle, which influences how much attention they give to them.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of this research have indicated that self-esteem significantly affects how well pupils with intellectual disabilities perform academically in Our Lady of Compassion School, Okpaugwu, Ebonyi Local Government Area, Abakaliki Ebonyi State. The research found that pupils who possess higher self-esteem tend to participate more positively in their studies, have confidence in their skills and strive for academic achievement despite obstacles. In contrast, pupils with lower self-esteem often doubt their abilities and lack the drive needed to achieve better academic results. Additionally, the study pointed out minimal differences in academic performance between genders showing that both boys and girls with intellectual disabilities have similar academic capabilities, though girls displayed better emotional control and received more attention from teachers. These results revealed the necessity of promoting self-esteem in pupils with intellectual disabilities as a way to boost their academic performance, enhance their learning experiences and encourage resilience in facing educational challenges.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided to improve the academic performance of pupils with intellectual disabilities:

1. Teachers should adopt strategies that actively promote self-esteem among pupils with intellectual disabilities. Teachers should also ensure equal attention is given to both boys and girls to address any imbalance in instructional support.
2. Parents should be encouraged to play a more active role in nurturing their children's self-esteem and academic growth. Parents should collaborate with teachers to understand their child's progress and contribute to strengthening their academic skills at home.
3. School administrators should implement programmes that focus on building self-esteem and improving emotional regulation for pupils with intellectual disabilities and professional development opportunities for teachers to better understand how to work with pupils with intellectual disabilities.

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