

# Relationship between School Connectedness and Secondary School Students' Academic Outcomes in English Language in Anambra State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study sought to determine relationship between school connectedness and secondary school students' academic outcomes in English language in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions. The research design was correlation survey. Stratified disproportionate sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 420 students from SS2 students in Anambra state public secondary schools. A questionnaire was used to collect data which was administrated through direct delivery approach. Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Findings from the study revealed among others that the relationship between school connectedness and academic achievement of in-school adolescents in English language is high and positive. Based on the findings, it was recommended that there School authorities should provide a conducive school environment that encourages mutually beneficial relationship between the students and the school staff for effective teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** School, connectedness, Secondary School, Students, Academic Outcomes, English Language

## I. INTRODUCTION

School connectedness is an important construct to consider when examining a variety of student outcomes, particularly those related to academic and school success. Going by the idea that many societies in the world today, places so much emphasis on education as an important avenue for national development, it becomes important to examine critical constructs that are likely to contribute or affect the outcome of education. For example, it could be that higher achieving students are able to build stronger relationships with teachers, that stronger student-teacher relationships enhance student achievement, or that there is a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing relationship between school connectedness and achievement.

Ricarda, Anja, Anne, Linda (2014) defined academic outcome as a performance result that indicates the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college and University. The role of academic outcome as one of the predictors of one's life success, in the aspects of academic placement in schools for higher educational pursuits as well as the level employability in one's career is inevitable.

Thus the view of Chapman (2010) high academic outcome predicts students' high level of marketability, enabling them to choose their own placement. Therefore, in the context of this study, academic outcome is defined as the formal demonstration of learning attained by a student as measured by standardized academic achievement tests.

Schools are established with the aim of imparting knowledge and skills to those who go through them, and behind the idea is the goal of enhancing academic achievement. Apparently, the failure rate in subjects like English Language as Anyamene, Nwokolo and Ejichukwu (2016) observed with major examinations like WAEC and NECO makes it a worrisome situation. This is such that the schools are gradually losing its reputation which could likely result in loss of confidence in the students. More so, if not rectified, it could lead these young adolescents into being involved in all sort of societal crimes like drug abuse, dropping out of school, loss of interest in academic pursuit.

An effective, lasting academic outcome in the view of Elias (2006) is built on caring relationships and warm but challenging classroom and school environments. Therefore parents, schools and communities all need to work together to create an environment that facilitates healthy development of students. If students do not feel a sense of belonging at school, they may not feel connected to the school and this may lower their likelihood to focus or be engaged in the learning process. School connectedness thus according to Blum (2005) describes the quality of the social relationships within a student's experience of school: that is, the extent to which the students feel they belong to a school and feel cared for by the school community.

Students may feel more connected to their school when they believe that the adults and other students at school not only care about how well they are learning, but also being valued as individuals. Those students who feel connected to school are more likely to succeed academically and make healthy choices. Studies have shown that students who perceive a positive school environment and share positive relationships with their teachers tend to have higher grades (Davis, 2006; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) As Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2008) noted, students who do well

academically are less likely to engage in risky behaviours such as carrying dangerous weapons, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and engaging in risky sexual intercourse. Such students are more likely to stay focused and perform better in the classroom as they feel more connected to school. Hence, school connectedness in the context of this study makes more specific reference to an academic environment in which students believe that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals. It represents the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment.

Connectedness in essence tends to promote positive social interaction. Just as social interactions impact the success of adults in the working world, the school atmosphere can impact on students' ability to be academically successful. For instance, the significant time students have with teachers in school, and the quality of students' relationships with teachers is a critical influence on their social, emotional, and academic development (Wentzel, 2009). Students' academic outcome therefore is a direct result of dynamic interactions occurring between individuals in their social contexts.

School connectedness has the tendency to impact on other aspects of life including school behaviours, attendance and involvement, as well as potential to engage in behaviours that may compromise one's health (Odeh, Oguiche, Angelina & Ivagher, 2015). Furthermore, the presence of physical expression, relational expression and victimization in schools has also been linked to school connectedness and the higher the presence of these destructive forces, the lower the feeling of school connectedness may be among students. One could thus assert that physically and emotionally safe environment is essential to students' connection to school.

As observed by Blum, the idea of adult support whereby schools can form schools within a school, or create multidisciplinary teams of teachers in which a small number of teachers know each student and can ensure that every student has an identified advisor can increase school connectedness. Also, according to Patton et al (2006), teachers need to involve students in activities that traditionally involve only adults, for instance, parent-teacher conferences, curriculum selection committees, school health teams. Also students need to be engaged in appropriate leadership positions in the classroom and provided avenues for their voices and opinions to be heard. It is important that both students and adults are committed to learning and are involved in school activities.

Moreover, as Clark, Miller and Nagy (2005) noted, engaging students in planning for their future including career and personal goals assists them in mapping out steps to take to meet their goals and opening up the possibility for socialization and stronger relationships with students. This idea was further espoused by Education Development Centre (2008) when it stated the need to encouraging school staff to make a concerted effort to reach out to students who may be

experiencing academic or social issues and get to know them, use variety of teaching methods such as discussion questions, extra readings and group projects to foster critical and reflective thinking, problem -solving skills and a supportive psychosocial climate.

In effort to improve the declining academic achievement of students in Anambra State, the state government in recent times have implemented strategies to combat low student connectedness and promote a respectful and caring school environment in Anambra State. These strategies include changing school structures, training and retraining teachers for improved effectiveness, among others. The improvement on the structures led to reduced student-to-teacher ratio to enhance classroom interaction. These strategies are believed to have enabled the students to build and develop emotional and social competencies to improve students' outcome in schools.

Moreover, findings of research studies such as Adesemowo (2005), Adeyemo (2007), Dike (2007) and Wentzel, Battle, Russell and Looney (2010) have shown that early adolescents who feel appreciated by their teachers tend to be more interested in classroom activities, while also feeling more comfortable and happy in class than students who believe they are unimportant to their teachers. Additionally, students have a tendency to maintain higher academic motivation and interest when they perceive the school staff as helpful and emotionally supportive, and as providing a safe classroom environment and clear expectations for student behaviour.

It is the belief of the researchers that academic outcome would be improved upon if some factors were adequately addressed. Since achievement plays an important role in the lives and activities of students, it is necessary to investigate issues that surround it and provide how best to obtain this highly desired achievement. This study therefore is geared toward finding out whether school connectedness contributes to the academic outcome of secondary school students in Anambra State.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between school connectedness and students' academic outcomes in secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically the study seeks to find out:

1. Academic outcome scores of secondary school students in English in Onitsha Educational Zone.
2. The relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of secondary school students in English language.
3. The relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of male and female students in secondary schools in English language.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of secondary school students in English language?
2. What is the relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome in English language of female students in secondary schools?
3. What is the relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome in English language of male students in secondary schools?

### III. METHOD

#### The research design

The research design for this study is correlational research design. A correlational survey design is considered appropriate for this study because it seeks to establish a relationship between more than two variables (Nworgu, 2015; Walter, 2012). The study was conducted in Onitsha Education zone, Anambra state.

#### Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study is 420 students. Firstly, simple random sampling was employed in selecting 10 schools from the 31 secondary schools in the zone. Secondly, disproportionate stratified random sampling was further employed to choose 42 students from each of the already selected schools in the area.

#### Instrument for data collection

The instrument for the study is a questionnaire which has 3 sections; section A, B and C. Section A is on personal data of the respondents; Section B is titled "School Connectedness Questionnaire (SCQ)" for the students. Section C is the Academic outcome scores in English. The instrument was later subjected to face validity and the reliability of the instrument established using Cronbach Alpha statistics where 20 questionnaire copies were distributed to SS2 students from schools in Delta State (Asaba precisely) through purposive sampling technique in a trial testing to establish the reliability of the instrument.

#### Method of data collection

The administration of the instrument was done through direct delivery approach. By this method, copies of the questionnaire were distributed personally to the respondents by the researcher with the help of two research assistants.

#### Method data analysis

Data was collected and analysed. Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ). The scores of the teacher-made test, comprising the performance grades of the students on English language and indicating their achievements in schools were reported as aggregate scores as follows:

70 – 100 = Very good

50 – 69 = Good

0 – 49 = Poor .

The decision rule for judging the resulting correlation coefficient was that:

Low relationship = +0.00 – 0.39

Moderate relationship = +0.40 – 0.69

High relationship = +0.70 – 1.00

### IV. RESULTS

Analyses of data are hereby presented in tables as shown below:

Table 1: Range of Distribution scores of the Participants in English Language

Grade Range	Frequencies	Percentage
A = 4 – Very high	60	11.36%
B = 3 – High	120	23.64%
C = 2 – Moderate	184	45.00%
D = 1 – Low	76	20.00%
Total	420	100%

Source: Schools Record, from form-masters and form-mistresses

As shown in table 2 above, students' grade were obtained at the time of data collection ( $n=420$ ). This grades were converted to numerical points with grades A – E being represented with numerical values of 0 – 4. The table revealed that 60(11.36%) of the students scored A, 120(23.64%) scored B, 184(45.00%) scored C, while a total of 76(20.00%) scored D.

Table 2: Range of Distribution scores of School Connectedness of Secondary School Adolescents (N=420)

School Connectedness Scores	N	%	Remark
20 – 40	350	83.39	Low school connectedness
41 – 60	61	14.55	High school connectedness
61 – 80	9	2.06	Very high school connectedness

Result of Table 2 reveals that 83.39% of the 420 secondary school adolescents have low school connectedness as seen on the table. Also, 14.55% and 2.06% out of the secondary school adolescents have high and very high school connectedness respectively.

#### Research Question 1

What is the relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of secondary school students?

Table 3: Pearson r on the students' school connectedness and academic outcome of students

n	r	Remark
420	0.65	Moderate positive relationship

Table 3 reveals that there is moderate positive relationship of 0.65 existing between adolescent's school connectedness and academic outcome of secondary school students.

#### Research Question 2

What is the relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of male secondary school students?

Table 4: Pearson r on the school connectedness and academic outcome of male Secondary school students

n	r	Remark
420	0.56	Moderate positive relationship

Table 4 indicates that there is Moderate positive relationship of 0.56 existing between school connectedness and academic outcome of male secondary school students.

#### Research Question 3

What is the relationship between school connectedness scores and academic outcome of female secondary school students?

Table 5: Pearson r on the school connectedness and academic outcome of female secondary school students

n	r	Remark
420	0.66	Moderate positive relationship

Table 5 indicates that there is Moderate positive relationship of 0.66 existing between school connectedness and academic outcome of female secondary school students.

## V. DISCUSSION

Findings were discussed under the following headings:

#### *Relationship between School Connectedness and Academic outcome of Secondary School Students*

Findings from this study reveals; that most students in secondary schools rated their school connectedness high, while few of these students rated their school connectedness Low and Very High respectively. The study further reveals that the relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of students in secondary schools is Moderate and positive. These findings agreed with Odeh, Oguche, Angelina and Ivagher (2015), and Adekunle (2014). The findings of these studies showed that students with high school connectedness achieved academically higher than those with low school connectedness. The findings indicated that students' academic achievement is a direct result of active interactions occurring between individuals in their social contexts. In the case of adolescents in secondary

school in Anambra State, the school setting is the social context.

The reason for this finding could be attributed to the social environment of the school which results from relationships among the teachers, students, staff and school management. The social environment of the school will likely have impact on the students and the outcome of that student in the school. Adekunle (2014) study for instance indicated that school climate, discipline and physical facilities have influence on academic achievement of secondary school students. This point toward the notion students who feel more connected to school learn towards performing better in the school.

Moreover, going by the assumptions of theories of social connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), students' perceptions of connection to school tend to have substantial implications for their behaviours inside and outside the classroom. With regard to academic outcomes, previous research equally shows that adolescents who perceive a positive school environment and share positive relationships with their teachers tend to have higher grades (Davis, 2006; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) and more cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement at school. As is evidenced by these research findings, school connectedness could be perceived as an important construct to consider when examining a variety of student outcomes, particularly those related to academic and school outcome.

#### *Relationship between School Connectedness and Academic outcome of Male and Female Secondary School Students*

Findings reveal that relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of male and female students in secondary school is moderate and positive. This finding agrees with the finding of Topor, Keane, Shelton and Calkins (2010) and Chohan and Khan (2010). Their studies noted that academic outcome was excellent among boys and girls with high school connectedness, and that school connectedness is significantly related to academic outcome. Studies have suggested that individual characteristics are related to students' perceptions of school connectedness. For example, Wentzel, Battle, Russell and Looney (2010) showed that gender is a consistent predictor of perceptions of school connectedness in that girls have a higher sense of relatedness with their teachers, stronger feelings of school belonging and more positive perceptions of teacher support than do boys. This could explain the observed higher relationship of the study variables among girls in this study, though the difference is not substantial.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are made: Majority of students in secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government rates school connectedness high. The relationship between school connectedness and academic outcome of students in secondary schools is moderate and positive. And, the relationship between school

connectedness and academic outcome of male and female students in secondary school is moderate and positive.

#### *Implication of the Study*

The findings of this study have a lot of implications for students, teachers, parents, and other concerned persons. The findings thus creates awareness that teachers, who wish to educate their students, cannot just rely on school learning but need to totally involve them in school decisions making so as to be fully part of the school activities as well as their parents in making the needed progress.

### VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The study has shown that school connectedness promotes belongingness, cohesiveness, security and motivates students to persevere regardless of challenges. Thus, schools need to work in conjunction with parents to incorporate participative decision making to achieve common goals in students' best interests. This fosters the value of education and reinforces parental roles in initiating learning activities at home to improve students' performance in at school.
2. School authorities should provide a conducive school environment that encourage mutually beneficial relationship between the students and the school staff for effective teaching and learning. Such environment should be safe, students treated fairly by teachers and happy to be in school as well as feel they are a part of the school.

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