

**SELF-ESTEEM AS A CORRELATE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SOCIAL  
ADJUSTMENT IN ENUGU STATE**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the relationship between self-esteem and secondary school students' social adjustment in Enugu State. Three research questions guided the study and one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population for this study consisted of 17,861 senior secondary school (SS2) students. Research sample consisted of 1,824 students drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure. The instruments used for the study were Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS) with a reliability coefficient alpha of 0.83, and Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) with a reliability coefficient alpha of 0.90. Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used for data analysis. Results obtained from the study indicated that majority of the students in Enugu state have high self-esteem. The results also showed that majority of the students are

socially adjusted. Moreso, the result revealed a very high positive significant relationship between students' self-esteem and their social adjustment. The study concluded, among others that secondary school students' self-esteem is related to their social adjustment. It was recommended, among others that counsellors should provide both group and individual

counselling services to boost students' self-esteem. This will help students to relate cordially with their peers, teachers, parents and other people around them.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, correlate, students, social adjustment

## **Introduction**

There has being a general understanding among scholars all over the world that human beings by nature are social animals. As social species therefore, all individuals inherently seek the companionship of others for survival. Moreso, schools are recognized as social clusters comprising of individuals with different personality traits such as age, attitude, belief, behaviour, emotion, among others. Hence, for students to thrive well as active members of a school or any society, they must be willing and able to interact freely with their peers, classmates and teachers. However, experience from daily observation has shown that some students find it difficult to interact freely with people around them. Such students rarely engage in social interactions with others possibly because they feel unworthy and unable to handle social situations. Consequent upon this, they perform poorly in social activities, and as such are regarded as being socially maladjusted.

Social adjustment is defined as the degree to which an individual engages in competent social behaviour and adapts to the immediate social context (Romera, Gomez & Ortega, 2016). It is a psychological term used to describe an individual's ability to function in different social roles (Forsgren & Sillanp, 2020). Social adjustment is concerned with one's adjustment to his surroundings, it starts with a social set up which begins with parents, home and family extending to the community where the individual lives and then spreading to the wider society and the entire world. Abbasian, Najimi, Ghasemi, Afshar and Meftagh (2013) described social adjustment as an innate psychological disposition to cope with challenges confronting one in any given situation or environment, and the innate strength to accommodate any possible outcome or changes. In the view of Dockett, Griebel and Perry (2017), social adjustment is that condition of a person who is able to adapt with their social environment.

In clearer terms, the social adjustment of a student may best describe the degree to which a student engages in competent social behaviour and adapts to the immediate social context. It also describes people's ability to communicate with others in the social environment, with a view to create a balance between their role in the society and how they play such role (Dehghnnezhad, Hajhosseini & Ejei, 2017). Practically, social adjustment involves an effort made by a student to cope with the demands or challenges of a new environment, including the student's involvement in social activities and satisfaction with various aspects of experience. In this regard, the process of social adjustment enhances students' ability to behave in accordance with the norms, ethics, and value that will strengthen their survival so as to meet the social expectations of the social environment. In the context of this study, social adjustment is defined as the deliberate effort made by individuals to develop skills and competencies needed to function effectively in social group while acting in a socially appropriate manner.

Undeniably, socially maladjusted students manifest maladaptive behaviours such as persistent violation of social norms, truancy, substance abuse and impulsivity (Mariamma, 2020). This tends to dent the educational system with the suggestion that socially maladapted individuals are being churn out of schools, instead of well adjusted individuals which the stipulated lofty national educational goals and objectives were designed to produce. Therefore, the issue of social adjustment has remained a source of concern to a range of stakeholders, especially parents who are concerned with their children's welfare, teachers/school administrators who are concerned with retention rates, students striving to succeed, mental health professionals, such as counsellors and psychologists who help students overcome challenges in social adjustment and importantly, researchers who seek to examine factors associated with social adjustment of students.

According to Anyamene, Ejichukwu and Azuji (2019), the concern on social adjustment of students is based on the notion that students' social dimension deals with their interpersonal or public interactions with other individuals. Infact, students, especially those in the secondary schools are faced with social problems with attendant academic problems that seem to have become part and parcel of their lives. Nwosu and Chinweuba (2021) in their study observed that many secondary school students in Enugu state are finding it difficult to adjust socially. Chigbu, Oguzie & Obi (2021) in their study reported that social maladjustment is common among secondary school students. The problem of social maladjustment has become a worrisome phenomenon because of its tendency to affect students' overall output in school and the likelihood that they may resort to anti-social behaviours like drug use and abuse, robbery, alcoholism, withdrawal from social situations, among others, as coping mechanisms. Nwosu and

Chinweuba (2021) observed that many factors may be affecting students' social adjustment either separately or jointly.

By these explanations, examining factors that are associated with social adjustment among secondary school students is very apt because of its relevance in increasing the understanding of what is needed to improve secondary school students' success in adjusting to their social environment. According to Santrock (2018), the better adjusted an individual is, the higher the quality of that individual's life. Consequently, students who are properly socialized would have better adjustment and invariably better quality of life.

Available researches indicate that one possible factor that may correlate with social adjustment among secondary school students is self-esteem. According to Nwokolo and Oguzie (2021), self-esteem is defined as the belief, perception and opinion people have about themselves which influence their behaviours and consequently affects their performance and achievements in life. It is the amount of realistic respect that one has for oneself. Self-esteem highlights an individual's subjective evaluation of his or her worth as a person, which has an important function to psychological well-being (Orth & Robins, 2013). Ersoy (2018) stated that self-esteem is the attitude and overall evaluation of one's own worth, or evaluation of given traits, position in the group, own activities and relationships with others. Self-esteem refers to the perception of an individual's abilities, skills, and overall qualities that guide and motivate specific cognitive processes and behaviours in the individual. It is an overall reflection of an individual's self-worth, which encompasses beliefs about the individual as well as the emotional responses to those beliefs.

Self-esteem is a very important aspect of an individual's overall life (Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018). People with high self-esteem participate more actively in their social environment in order to pursue further self-enhancement, while individuals with low self-esteem participate considerably less in order to protect the little self-esteem they have (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2013). One's confidence in one's ability to compete, perform, and satisfactorily complete a task may have a positive or negative effect on an individual. Thus, self-esteem may serve as a very important determinant of a student's actions and behaviour in social situations, as it represents the capacity to feel worthy of happiness and be able to successfully address life challenges. In the context of this study, self-esteem is defined as student's belief, attitude and opinion about themselves which in-turn influences their behaviour to themselves and others.

Research by Nwokolo and Oguzie (2021) has showed that students with low self-esteem display characteristics such as excessive self-criticism and dissatisfaction, hypersensitivity to criticism with resentment against critics, chronic indecision and exaggerated fear of mistake. Low self-esteem students exhibit excessive willingness to please others, perfectionism, dwelling

on the magnitude of past mistakes, pessimism and a general negative outlook (Shaffer, 2017). It appears that students' self-esteem may influence their level of adjustment to their social environment. In a study carried out by Ezunu and Nwankwo (2022), it was concluded that self-esteem variables are correlated with students' social adjustment.

Since, student's social adjustment plays very important role in their overall wellbeing, the problem of social maladjustment has raised a serious concern to teachers, counsellors, government, examination bodies and other stakeholders. Hence, establishing the influence of students' personal variables such as self-esteem as per its relationship to their social adjustment will provide counsellors, educators and researchers with good knowledge of various factors that predispose secondary school students to the problem of social maladjustment in Enugu state. This has necessitated the present study which sought to examine the relationships between self esteem and social adjustment of students.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the self-esteem scores of secondary school students?
2. What are the social adjustment scores of secondary school students?
3. What is the relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their social adjustment?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their adjustment.

### **Methods**

This study adopted the correlation research design. According to Nwokolo and Oguzie (2021), this type of study seeks to establish the relationship that exists between two or more variables. The population of the study comprised all 17,861 senior secondary two (SS2) students from all public secondary schools in Enugu state. Source: Enugu State Post-Primary Schools Management Board (ESPPSMB, 2023). The sample size for the study consisted of 1,824 SS2 students drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure.

The instruments used for data collection were the Hare Self-esteem Scale and Social Adjustment Scale. The researchers administered copies of the instruments through direct delivery method. Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to analyse the data.

### **Results**

**Table 1: Range of scores on students' self-esteem**

Range of scores	N	%	Remark
30 – 89	235	12.88	Low self-esteem
90 – 120	1589	87.12	High self-esteem

Table 1 revealed that 1589(87.12%) of the students with the scores ranging from 90 to 120 have high self-esteem, while 235(12.88%) of the students who scored between 30 and 89 have low self-esteem.

**Table 2: Range of scores on students' social adjustment**

Range of scores	N	%	Remark
33 – 82.59	389	21.33	Socially maladjusted
82.60 – 132	1435	78.67	Socially adjusted

Table 2 indicated that 1435(78.67%) of the students with the scores ranging from 82.60 to 132 are socially adjusted, while 389(21.33%) of the students who scored between 33 and 82.59 are socially maladjusted.

**Table 3: Pearson r on students' self-esteem and their social adjustment scores**

Source of Variation	N	Self-esteem r	Adjustment r	Remark
Self-esteem	1824	0.00	0.81	Very High Positive Relationship
Adjustment	1824	0.81	0.00	

Table 3 indicated that there is very high positive relationship of 0.81 between the secondary school students' self-esteem and their social adjustment.

**Table 4: Significant of Pearson r on the students' self-esteem and their social adjustment using probability table of r**

N	cal. r	df	pvalue	Cal.pvalue	Remark
1824	0.81	1823	0.05	0.00	S

S = Significant

Table 4 revealed that at 0.05 level of significance and 1823df, the calculated  $r=0.81$  has pvalue 0.00 which is less than the critical pvalue 0.05. Therefore, the second null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between secondary school students' self-esteem and their social adjustment.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings of the study were discussed as follows:

#### **Secondary School Students' Self-esteem in Enugu State**

The finding of this study revealed that majority of secondary school students (87.12%) in Enugu state have high self-esteem. This finding therefore shows that despite the various life challenges encountered by the students at the course of their day to day life activities in this modern day society, many students still view themselves as unique, capable and worthy individuals. This finding is consistent with the reports from previous researchers (Igbo, Ezegbe, Mbagwu & Odo, 2016; Mehboob & Shahzad, 2019; Okafor, Obi & Oguzie, 2018; Nwokolo & Oguzie, 2021) that majority of secondary school students have high self-esteem. However, this finding contradicts that of Iheawuchi and Iruloh (2017) and Dramanu and Balaraba (2013) who reported that majority of secondary school students have low self-esteem. The finding also contradicts the report from the previous study conducted by Edeh (2019) who observed that many secondary school students experience low self-esteem especially those who are victims of domestic violence.

One possible reason for the finding of this study contradicting the report of Iheawuchi, Iruloh, Dramanu, Balaraba and Edeh may be as a result of the various self-esteem enhancing programmes being provided to the students by their counsellors and researchers who may have worked in one way or the other to encourage high self-esteem among students in Enugu state.

#### **Secondary School Students' Social Adjustment in Enugu State**

Furthermore, this study revealed that majority of secondary school students (78.67%) in Enugu state are socially adjusted. This finding shows that many of the students interact effectively with their social environment. This means that majority of students in Enugu state function optimally in social situations, relate cordially with their peers, classmates, teachers, parents and other people around them. This finding is consistent with the findings by previous researchers (Ishaq, 2017; Njoku & Akaninwor, 2019) who reported that many students have high level of social adjustment. Adgboyega, Ibitoye and Lawal (2017) in their study observed that

adolescents from responsive homes adjust better in social situations than their counterparts from autocratic and permissive homes. The possible reason for the high level of social adjustment observed among the students in this study may be as a result of the feeling of warmth, care, regard and support provided by their parents which could have helped them feel worthy and capable of interacting freely with people around them. Worthy, Lavigne and Romero (2021) observed that students raised by responsive parents tend to have higher self-esteem and social skills. Perhaps, the students through the supportive atmosphere created by their parents' responsive parenting style developed adequate sense of worth and value that may have strengthened their social capacity.

However, this finding contradicts the previous finding by Nwosu and Chinweuba (2021) who in their study observed that many secondary school students in Enugu state are finding it difficult to adjust socially. It also disagrees with the report of Chigbu, Oguzie and Obi (2021) who concluded that social maladjustment is common among secondary school students. One likely reason for the previous researchers' reports of social maladjustment among secondary school students in Enugu state may be because of the terrorist attacks going on in many parts of that area as at 2021. Currently, the rate of terrorist activities seems to have reduced. Perhaps, the reduction of terrorism in the area and the intervention of counsellors and researchers who may have worked on students and their parents have helped them to their original state of sociability.

### **Relationship between Students' Self-Esteem and their Social Adjustment in Enugu State**

The result of the study also revealed that the students' self-esteem has very high positive significant relationship with their level of social adjustment. This finding indicates that students' self-esteem is clearly linked to the way they relate to people around them. It also shows that as students' self-esteem increases their likelihood to relate cordially with their peers, classmates, teachers, counsellors, parents, and other people also increases, vice versa. This finding agrees with the report by previous researchers (Mohammadi, Ghasemi, Jafari & Rad, 2014; Harris & Orth, 2019; Mehboob & Shahzad, 2019) who concluded that there is a very high positive relationship between students' self-esteem and their social adjustment. This finding of the study also supports the findings of Ezunu and Nwankwo (2022) reported that self-esteem variables are significantly correlated with students' social adjustment.

The similarity in this finding of the study and those of the previous researchers may be because people with high self-esteem participate more actively in their social environment in order to pursue further self-enhancement, while individuals with low self-esteem participate considerably less in order to protect the little self-esteem they have (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2013). Similarly, Ozuome, Oguzie, Mokwelu and Anyamene (2020) concluded



that students with high self-esteem are intrinsically motivated to successfully achieve their desired academic and social goals. The implication of this is that students with high self-esteem will feel worthy and adequate enough to relate cordially with people around them, and therefore perform optimally in social situations. Hence, encouraging students' self-esteem would help to boost their social adjustment, and enable them to relate well with their classmates, peers, siblings, parents, teachers, and other people in the society.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that majority of secondary school students in Enugu state are have high self-esteem and are socially adjusted. The study further concluded that secondary school students' self-esteem is significantly related with their social adjustment.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Findings of the study revealed that students' self-esteem is significantly related to their level of social adjustment. Therefore, counsellors should provide both group and individual counselling services to boost students' self-esteem. This will help students to relate cordially with their peers, teachers, parents and other people around them.
2. School administrators and curriculum planners should design the curriculum to accommodate interesting social programmes that will encourage students to participate in various social activities. This will make them feel worthy and capable of relating with their social environment.
3. Government and non-governmental organizations should create sensitization programmes that will help discourage any form of behaviour or action that is capable of reducing students' self-esteem and ruining their social adjustment.
4. Government should encourage social activities such as games, debates, among others by backing them up with reinforcing packages in form of scholarships, gifts and awards, among others to students who performed excellently in such social activities. This will help to encourage interpersonal interaction among students, boost their self-esteem and make them socially adjusted.

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