

Teachers' Competencies as Predictors of Students' Academic Engagement in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

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Abstract: *The study examined teachers' competencies as predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study was a correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 24,933 SS2 students in 267 public secondary schools in the six education zones in Anambra State. The sample of 1,247 SS2 students was used for the study. Multistage sampling procedure comprising proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. The instruments Teachers' Competencies Questionnaire (TCQ) and Students' Academic Engagement Questionnaire (SAEQ) were used for data collection. The instruments were subjected to face and construct validation. Face validation was done by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach Alpha technique and the average coefficient values were established at 0.82 for TCQ and 0.85 for SAEQ. Simple linear regression statistical tool was used to answer research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' communication and pedagogical competency has a high positive and significant prediction on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study concluded that teachers' competencies are positive and significant predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on the findings, the study recommended that public secondary school teachers should always adopt good verbal and non-verbal communication in classroom teaching and learning in order to improve students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.*

Keyword: Teachers' competencies, students' academic engagement, public secondary schools

Introduction

Without proper engagement of students through the roles played by their teachers, students' academic engagement behaviour may deteriorate. Students who do not participate sufficiently in academic activities may suffer crippling effects that affect society generally, in addition to the individual students. For example, Anierobi et al. (2024) noted that low academic engagement, which raises the risk of low academic performance and failures among students may have a trickle-down effect that lower students' literacy and dropout rates. It is expected of students at secondary education level to gain the skills and information required to equip them for both further education and a productive life in society. Teachers are responsible for making sure that students are participating actively in their academic work and quickly following directions. Adinna and Anene (2024) asserted that teachers use strategies like assigning take-home projects and using stimulus modification during curricular presentations of students to make sure they are actively engaged.

Academic engagement refers to the extent and intensity with which students participate in and apply them to learning and other school activities, as well as the supportive relationships and structures that exist to support students' engagement. Okeoma et al. (2024) defined academic engagement as the extent to which a student participated in academic and non-academic-related activities as well as identified with and values for the goal of studying. Okeoma et al. further described academic engagement as the quality of students' participation or conception with the schooling endeavour. They classified academic engagement into six dimensions such as; cognitive, behavioural, emotional, psychological and social engagement. In general, students who are effectively engaged in learning perform better in school and on standardized tests, and they are more likely to persist in school than students who are less engaged. Students who are engaged in school activities report more positive attitudes toward school and improved achievement.

Academic engagement is a path to academic success involving students' cognitive, behavioural and emotive commitments to their learning. The process of understanding concepts and academic content offered to students involves cognitive processes and efforts on their part (Bamusibule et al., 2024). Furthermore, Bamusibule et al. proposed that affective engagement refers to students' capacity to positively identify with the school and its extracurricular activities. In contrast, behavioural engagement involves students' manifest, overt, and observable behaviours like taking notes in class, attending regularly, and participating in discussions. By implication, students must be actively involved in their academic work to gain the knowledge and abilities that will help them in the future.

Students' academic engagement is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development. The more students think about their course materials, the more they practice and study (directly or indirectly), the more they tend to learn about it. The very act of being engaged also adds to the foundation of skills and dispositions that is essential to live a productive and satisfying life. Anierobi et al. (2024) suggested that high academic engagement promotes academic achievement, enhances students' school adjustment ability, improves physical and mental health and reduces students' dropout decisions. On the contrary, low academic engagement among students can lead to academic failure, dropping out of school, drug abuse, juvenile crime and the increase of negative emotions such as anxiety and depression.

Contextually, students' academic engagement is the simultaneous experience of concentration, interest and willingness to enjoy academic task within and outside the classroom. It is the extent and intensity with which students participate in and apply themselves to learning and other school activities, as well as the supportive relationships and structures that exist to support students to engage in classroom activities. Students who are engaged in classroom activities achieve greater academic success. Students' engagement not only predicts grades, achievement test scores and learning; it also predicts attendance, retention, school completion and academic resilience. Essentially, students' academic engagement could largely depend on teachers' competency.

Competency refers to the skills and personality of a teacher in handling the instructional process with the help of instructional methods, teaching aids and resources. Isaac (2019) averred that competency is a set of knowledge, skills and proficiency in creating a meaningful experience when organizing an activity. As a professional, a teacher needs to plan and implement the learning process, evaluate the learning outcomes, provide guidance and training, conduct a research, develop and manage school programs and professional competency. Competency is the ability of an individual to do job properly. A competency is a set of defined behaviours that provides a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviours in individual employees. Ilanlou and Zand (2022) regarded competency as a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skills, behaviours and values used to improve performance, or as the state or quality of adequately or well qualified, having the ability to perform a specific role.

Teachers' competencies are regarded as a multidimensional construct, which encompasses numerous interconnected elements toward the transformation of knowledge to learners. Obi et al. (2024) described teachers' competencies as demonstrable, professionally acquired, specified requisite teaching skills, abilities, and attitudes essential for effective teaching. Continuing, Obi et al. further stressed that the possession of a repertoire of these prerequisite teaching skills and attitudes spans beyond the three domains of learning and, therefore, may not be restricted only to them. Thus, a teacher can be competent in the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective areas of the instructional process. In line with this, Obiekwe et al. (2024) noted that teaching and learning depend on teachers' competencies; consequently, a competent teacher could be conceptualized as one who produces desired results in psychomotor, cognitive and affective domains of education.

Teachers' competencies are regarded as a multidimensional construct, which encompasses numerous interconnected elements towards the transformation of knowledge to learners. Okeke et al. (2024) described teachers' competencies as demonstrable, professionally acquired, specified requisite teaching skills, abilities, and attitudes essential for effective teaching. Okeke et al. (2024) concluded that teachers' competencies include critical thinking competency, instructional delivery competency, pedagogical competency, interpersonal competency, communication competency and ICT competency. Ughamadu et al. (2025) stressed that the possession of repertoire competency prerequisite teaching skills and attitudes spans beyond the three domains of learning and, therefore, may not be restricted only to them. Ughamadu et al. further listed competencies to include communication, dialogue, classroom management, critical thinking, instructional delivery, interpersonal relationship, decision-making, ICT and pedagogical competency. Thus, a teacher can be competent in the cognitive, psychomotor and affective areas of the instructional process. In line with this, Onu and Ogbuanya (2024) noted that teaching and learning depend on teachers' competencies; consequently, a competent teacher could be conceptualized as one who produces desired results in psychomotor, cognitive and affective domains of education. Onu and Ogbuanya added that communication competency, ICT competency, instructional delivery competency, interpersonal competency and pedagogical competency are components of teachers' competencies.

Contextually, teachers' competencies are the correct method of conveying units of knowledge, application of knowledge and skills to students. It referred to the overall ability and authority of teachers in carrying out their profession, including responsibilities in educating students with knowledge and skills. However, for the purpose of this study, communication and pedagogical competency were given priority.

Teachers' communication competency is the ability that teachers use when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Some examples include communicating ideas, feelings or what is happening around their environment. Ibezim (2024) opined that communication competency involves listening, speaking, observing and empathizing. It is also helpful to understand the

differences on how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and digital communications, like email and social media. Teachers' communication competencies include communication models, interaction among teachers, students, social environment and learning topics. Teachers also have competencies in using oral, body and professional language in their fields. This competency helps teachers in classroom management. Obiekwe et al. (2024) disclosed that communication competencies include voice, body language and words such as speaking, singing and sometimes tone of voice, sign language, paralanguage, touch, eye contact, or the use of writing. Ughamdu et al. (2025b) asserted that communication competency help teachers to deliver improved classroom and good classroom management in the school.

Teachers' pedagogical competency is an encompassing term concerned with what teachers do to influence learning. Oyinloye and Umoru (2022) described pedagogy as the interaction between teachers, students, the learning environment and learning activities. The authors added that it is a broad term used to describe how teachers and students relate to the teaching method used in the classroom or online environment. Oyinloye and Umoru further mentioned that pedagogical competencies needed of teachers include: instructional planning competencies, instructional delivery competencies, and instructional evaluation competencies. Pedagogical competency is the method, procedure, strategy and technique used by teachers to impact knowledge, skills, values, understanding and norms to the learners in a school setting. Chukwudolue et al. (2024) noted that pedagogical competency is the knowledge of principles and techniques of classroom behaviour and management. Ughamadu et al. (2025) opined that a general way of presenting teaching knowledge and belief is to guide the prospective teachers on decisions about organization of activities, use of curricular materials, contents of students' assignment and evaluation of students learning through orientation. Oguejiofor and Obigwe (2025) maintained that the attainment of any educational goals and objectives depend on the pedagogical competency of the teachers. Essentially, teachers' pedagogical competency could depend on teachers' values in the school to get students engaged in the classroom activities.

The Nigerian society places great emphases on education because it is believed to be the only avenue for national development. However, this can only be achieved if students who are in the citadel of learning get actively involved in academic activities which will enhance their academic engagement. In spite of these laudable values attached to academic engagement, the researcher observed that some students are disengaged in the classroom activities which maybe traceable to poor application of teachers' qualities or characteristics. The students' disengagement could be as a result of incompetencies of teachers in the areas of communication, classroom management and pedagogical competency, and teachers' variables such as gender, marital status and experience among others. This might have resulted to students' academic engagement being declining as obtainable in students' low participation in class, low test scores, poor attendance, lack of homework completion and disruptive behaviour. It is against this background that the researcher deemed it necessary to determine teachers' competencies as predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine teachers' competencies as predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the predictive value of teachers' communication competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. examine the predictive value of teachers' pedagogical competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the predictive value of teachers' communication competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of teachers' pedagogical competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

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

1. Teachers' communication competency is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Teachers' pedagogical competency is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Method

The study was carried out in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study was a correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 24,933 SS2 students in 267 public secondary schools in the six education zones in Anambra State. The sample of 1,247 SS2 students was used for the study. Multistage sampling procedure comprising proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. Two instruments 'Teachers' Competencies Questionnaire (TCQ) and Students' Academic Engagement Questionnaire (SAEQ)' were used for data collection. The instruments were subjected to face and construct validation. Face validation was done by three experts, one in Measurement and Evaluation, two in the Department of Educational Foundations, all in the Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus while construct validation was carried out with Principal Component Analysis approach using SSPS version 26 and the results showed that the construct validity was met. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach Alpha technique and the average coefficient value of 0.82 for TCQ and 0.85 for SAEQ were obtained and considered highly reliable and suitable for the study. The researcher visited the public secondary schools with the help of four research assistants. Out of 1,247 copies of the instrument administered, 1,128 copies representing 90% of the instrument were correctly completed. Simple linear regression statistical tool was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question One: What is the predictive value of teachers' communication competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of simple regression analysis on the predictive value of teachers' communication competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β
Constant	38.108	2.591	
teachers' communication competency	0.832	0.197	0.808
R	0.808		
R ²	0.717		
Adj. R ²	0.682		

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 1 indicated that the regression line has a positive intercept as presented by the constant value of 38.108. This means that if all the variables are held constant or fixed (zero) at the expense of teachers' communication competency, students' academic engagement will be valued at 38%. The analysis showed that teachers' communication competency positively predict students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State as shown by the regression coefficient ($R = 0.808$). However, the standardized beta is also values at $\beta = 0.808$ which revealed that teachers' communication competency is a positive predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This implies that a unit improvement in teachers' communication competency led to 0.808(81%) improvements in students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.717 indicated that the explanatory power of the variable was highly strong. This implies that 72% of the variations in students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State were accounted for by the variations in teachers' communication competency. The adjusted R^2 supported the claim of the R^2 with a value of 0.682 indicating that 68% of the total variation in students' academic engagement was explained by teachers' communication competency. Thus, adjusted R^2 supports the statement that the explanatory power of students' academic engagement highly depends on teachers' communication competency in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Question Two: What is the predictive value of teachers' pedagogical competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Summary of simple regression analysis on the predictive value of teachers' pedagogical competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β
Constant	35.901	3.437	
teachers' pedagogical competency	0.682	0.223	0.649
R	0.649		
R ²	0.604		

Adj. R ²	0.566
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The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 2 indicated that the regression line has a positive intercept as presented by the constant value of 35.901. This means that if all the variables are held constant or fixed (zero) at the expense of teachers' pedagogical competency, students' academic engagement will be valued at 36%. The analysis showed that teachers' pedagogical competency positively predict students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State as shown by the regression coefficient ($R = 0.649$). Furthermore, the standardized beta is also values at $\beta = 0.649$ which revealed that teachers' pedagogical competency is a high positive predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This implies that a unit rise in teachers' pedagogical competency led to 0.649(65%) rises in students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.604 indicated that the explanatory power of the variable was moderate. This implies that 60% of the variations in students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State were accounted for by the variations in teachers' pedagogical competency. The adjusted R^2 supported the claim of the R^2 with a value of 0.566 indicating that 57% of the total variation in students' academic engagement was explained by teachers' pedagogical competency. Thus, adjusted R^2 supports the statement that the explanatory power of students' academic engagement moderately depends on teachers' pedagogical competency in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Teachers' communication competency is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 3: Test of significance on the simple regression analysis on significant predication of teachers' communication competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β	t- value	p- value
Constant	38.108	2.591		27.805	0.000
teachers' communication competency	0.832	0.197	0.808	24.071	0.000
R	0.808				
R ²	0.717				
Adj. R ²	0.682				
F	48.561				0.000

The summary of the test of significance of simple regression analysis as shown in Table 3 showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.808 while the R^2 is 0.717 and Adjust R^2 is 0.682. The F-ratio associated with regression is 48.561, the t-test is 24.071 and the p-value = 0.000. Since p-value (0.000) is less than the specified level of significance 0.05, the study therefore rejected the null hypothesis that teachers' communication competency is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State and accepted the alternative hypothesis that teachers' communication competency is a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Teachers' pedagogical competency is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 4: Test of significance on the simple regression analysis on significant predication of teachers' pedagogical competency on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β	t- value	p- value
Constant	35.901	3.437		26.895	0.000
teachers' pedagogical competency	0.682	0.223	0.649	24.211	0.000
R	0.649				
R ²	0.604				
Adj. R ²	0.566				
F	43.128				0.000

The summary of the test of significance of simple regression analysis as shown in Table 4 showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.649 while the R^2 is 0.604 and Adjust R^2 is 0.566 The F-ratio associated with regression is 43.128, the t-test is 24.211 and the P-value = 0.000. Since p-value (0.000) is less than the specified level of significance 0.05, the study therefore rejected the null hypothesis that teachers' pedagogical competency is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State and accepted the alternative hypothesis that teachers' pedagogical competencies are significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings on the predictive value of teachers' communication competencies on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State revealed that teachers' communication competency has a high positive predictive value of 0.808(81%) on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This means that improvement in the practical application of teachers' communication competencies will bring about 81% improvements in students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study also showed that teachers' communication competencies significantly predicted students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The positive and significant findings are as a result of the fact that teachers need clear communication for the good understanding of students and avoiding the problems of students while learning from their lecture. The findings is in consonance with the findings of Ibezim (2024) that effective communication is vital for collaborating with parents and guardians to support students' academic progress. In line with this, Okaforcha and Aniefuna-Mokwugwo (2025) revealed that teachers' practical applications of communication competencies to different learning styles, abilities and comprehension ensure that every student can access information clearly. This requires translating complex topics, using varied examples, and adjusting their approach based on students' feedback. This agrees with Onyejekwe et al. (2025) findings that, teachers' communication competencies can significantly affect students' perception of school, their own abilities, and their motivation. Positive communication can boost students' confidence and interest in learning, while poor communication can lead to disengagement and a negative self-view. Ughamadu et al. (2025) findings asserted that effective communication is key to fostering a positive and respectful atmosphere where students feel safe to ask questions and express their ideas. This includes both clear explanations and active listening to show respect and build trust. In the findings of Obi et al. (2025), teachers' communication competencies serve as a direct model for their students. By demonstrating effective listening and clear expression, teachers provide a practical example that students can apply to their own lives, which is a critical component of their overall development. The similarities found in these studies are as a result of the fact that the unique importance of teachers' communication competency which lies in its direct impact on students' learning and well-being through adapting to diverse needs, fostering positive relationships and serving as a model for students. It allows teachers to translate complex information into understandable terms, actively listen to identify knowledge gaps and use both verbal and non-verbal cues to create a supportive and effective learning environment. This ability to connect with students on an individual level is crucial for academic success and personal development.

Findings on the predictive value of teachers' pedagogical competencies on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State revealed that teachers' pedagogical competencies have moderate positive predictive value of 0.649(65%) on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This means that improvement in the practical application of teachers' pedagogical competencies will bring about 65% improvements in students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study also showed that teachers' pedagogical competencies significantly predicted students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. In line with the findings of the study, Chukwudolue et al. (2024), findings revealed that pedagogical skills are needed by teachers for effective teaching and learning. Similarly, Onyejekwe et al. (2025) stated that effective teachers should understand the fundamentals of teaching and possess pedagogical skills. It is therefore clear that pedagogical competencies are essential for effective teaching and learning. The findings are in agreement with that of Okaforcha et al. (2025) who identified the ability of describing objectives, selecting materials and organizing materials logically as some of the important pedagogical competencies teachers should possess. Oguejiofor and Obigwe (2025) findings noted that teachers need to be competent in pedagogical knowledge and skills because it helps them to plan teaching and learning programme, to execute the interaction, manage the learning process and also make proper assessment. Okaforcha and Aniefuna-Mokwugwo (2025) emphasized that pedagogical competencies are very indispensable for teachers as it facilitates effective planning of lessons, making decisions about lesson pace, explaining materials clearly, and responding to individual differences on how students learn. The similarities found in these studies are as a result of the fact that the unique importance of teachers' communication competencies which lies in its ability to go beyond simply imparting knowledge to fostering personalized, adaptive and effective learning experiences that cater to diverse students' needs. These competencies allow teachers to not only understand how students learn but to tailor their teaching methods, manage the classroom effectively, utilize technology and assess learning outcomes, ultimately improving students' engagement, achievement and motivation.

Conclusion

From the results of this study, teachers' competencies are driving forces that determine the academic engagement of students. Hence, the study concluded that teachers' characteristics are positive and significant predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Recommendations

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

1. Public secondary school teachers should always adopt good verbal and non-verbal communication in classroom teaching and learning in order to improve students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Post Primary Schools Service Commission, Awka should ensure that teachers engage themselves in self-development. This will enable them to acquire necessary pedagogical skills needed for effective teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

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