

## **Student-Teacher Relationships as a Panacea for Students' Academic Performance in Nigeria Secondary Schools: An Attachment Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the practices involved in student-teacher relationships vis-à-vis its correlational effect on academic performance of secondary school students in an attempt to suggest solutions to the lingering problems affecting secondary school students' academic performance in Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted and the population comprised all public secondary schools in Nigeria. Through homogenous sampling, 300 respondents were selected from the sampled schools. Two self-designed instruments, the "Student-Teacher Relationship Questionnaire (STRQ)" and the "Students Academic Performance Questionnaire (SAPQ)" were used to collect relevant data from the respondents. The face and content validity were done and the test-retest method of reliability was adopted to test the reliability of the instruments. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and Inferential Statistics and the three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed a significant correlation between the student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools. It also indicated that classroom engagement and motivation were significantly related to students' academic performance. The study recommends that teachers should be regularly trained and equipped with classroom engagement skills, and that they should furthermore be equipped through development programmes to develop various motivational strategies for better students' academic performance, among others.

**Key words:** Student-teacher relationships, classroom engagement, student motivation, academic performance, secondary schools.

### **Introduction**

The contributions of education to the development of society and the individual cannot be underrated, and that is why both developed and developing countries all over the world perceive education as a device for the advancement of both individual and national development. This developmental tenet is suffixed in the education policy documents of South Africa and Nigeria respectively (Department of Education, South Africa, 2003; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). This might seem to be responsible for various stakeholders' concern in education regarding the

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perceived problems that are likely to affect it as well as the implications such problems could have on the management and administration of education. Aspects of such problems as perceived by Fakunle (2017) and Babalola (2018) include intentional absenteeism of teachers, nonchalant attitude of teachers towards students, teachers' ineffectiveness and disconnectedness between secondary school students and their teachers. There is therefore an urgent need to really look into the future of our nation's education vis-à-vis the challenges ahead, with a view to achieving effectiveness, quality and relevance in the entire system to be able to keep abreast with international standards. By discussing the challenges ahead, managers and administrators, including teachers of secondary schools, must be aware of their massive task and be able to provide solutions to the problems currently threatening the system.

The success and or failure of any educational system, whether in developed or developing nations of the world, depends to a large extent on the teachers, because they form the hub of the educational system. It is further argued by Ekundayo, Omodan & Omodan (2018) that education itself can rarely rise above the quality of its teachers. There is therefore no doubt that the services of teachers in schools are indispensable and critical to the nation's future and the kind of individuals that society wants. The quality of the future citizens of a country depends on the quality, competence and practices of the teachers. The application of positive classroom pedagogy is therefore critical. This is corroborated by the argument of Okolocha & Onyeneke (2013) that one of the most important aspects of secondary schools is the application of pedagogical knowledge into a classroom-oriented plan of action, which constitutes the most essential fabric upon which the success of the school, its administration, and the entire democratic and pedagogical process rests upon.

The application of classroom pedagogy could only be achieved in an environment and atmosphere where the learners are free to interact within themselves and their teachers, in other words in situations where there is an interactive relationship between students and between students and teachers. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in the National Policy on Education, states that the purpose of teaching and learning should be to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom activities for all levels of education in Nigeria; to encourage the spirit of enquiry and creativity in both teachers and students; to help them to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives; to provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment

and to make them adaptable to any changing situation; and to enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession, not only in Nigeria, but also applicable in the wider world. Despite the stated teaching and learning objective to ensure effective classroom activities, the reverse is the reality, as observed by the researcher. It appears as if student engagement in classroom activities and student motivation for better productivity in secondary schools in Nigeria are still far from expected. This is supported by the observations of Falade (2018) and Faremi & Jita (2018) that a lack of motivation techniques in teaching and learning process is probably responsible for the perceived teacher and student ineffectiveness.

### **Overview of Students' Academic Performance**

The academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria has become a great concern to all education stakeholders in recent time. This is supported by Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2014) who stated that there has been a remarkable record of failure in public examinations, especially in basic subjects such as English and Mathematics. The annual release of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) results has contributed to the public's condemnation of the entire education system in Nigeria because of the rate of graduates with poor results. According to the perception of general public, it is questionable whether teachers in public secondary schools are effective. The most important factor is the effectiveness of schools, and this is dependent on the student teacher relationship, and the quality and competence of teachers to teach effectively (Akinsolu, 2010).

Teachers have been said to play a crucial role in academic performance and educational attainment, because the teacher is ultimately responsible for translating policy into action and principles based on practice during interaction with the students (Afe, 2003). The unfortunate reality is observation as shown in WAEC results in many states of Nigeria, that the students perform below average, especially in English and Mathematics. This is supported by Ayeni (2014) that only about 23% of students who sat for WAEC between 2010 and 2014 obtained credit level passes in five subjects and above (including English Language and Mathematics) in Nigeria. This is not far from the analysis of Arafat (2015) that in 2015, WAEC Examination recorded that only 649,156 candidates (38.81%) of the 1,677,224 candidates that enrolled for the examination obtained 5 credit passes in Nigeria. Besides, the results of students who sat for WAEC in Ekiti

state in the period of 2012 to 2017 clearly showed that the academic performance of secondary school students is still below average (Bamikole, 2017).

The above is in line with the observations of Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2014) and Onaolapo (2017) that despite government's huge investment in public education, its output in terms of quality of students is unequal with government expenditure. One aspect that might have an impact on the poor academic performance of students in public secondary schools may be connected with student-teacher relationships. In other words, the perceived poor student-teacher relationships in terms of lack of vibrant classroom engagement and motivation for learners could be responsible for the observed poor performance of secondary school students in Nigeria.

### **Classroom Engagement and Motivation as Variables of Student-Teacher Relationships**

One of the variables that could sustain the student-teacher relationship for better academic performance is classroom engagement. Mango (2015) stated that classroom engagement is the extent to which students take part in educationally effective practices in the classroom. Student engagement in classroom is a term used to describe an individual's interest and enthusiasm for classroom activities which impacts on his or her academic performance and behaviour (Gallup, 2013). Evidence has it that children who have been described as actively engaged in classroom activities have more positive academic outcomes (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; DeTeso, 2011). It therefore becomes imperative for teachers to adopt strategies that could enhance student engagement toward improving student academic performance. This would only be possible if there is an adequate and friendly relationship between students and their teacher which was on the contrary as observed by the researchers that teachers seem not to take cognizance of this important aspect of the teaching and learning process.

Motivation is another factor of the student-teacher relationship that promotes student academic performance. It is believed that the quality of communication between teacher and student has a significant impact on the quality of learning motivation (Krasovskaya, 2016). In a number of studies, the key role of motivation in the relationship between teacher and student and its impact on academic achievement is demonstrated (Fan & Williams, 2010; Krasovskaya 2016). Motivational theories, according to Fan and Williams (2010), suggest that students' perception of their relationship with teachers plays an essential role in forming interest in the subject and motivating students to learn better. It can therefore be deduced that a formidable relationship

between students and teachers is a powerful motivational factor that can influence student academic performance. According to the researchers' own observations, coupled with those of Faremi & Jita (2018), this aspect is lagging behind.

### **A Brief Review on Student-Teacher Relationships**

The student-teacher relationships is one of the most important features in the context of learning. It is also one of the factors affecting student-teacher development, school engagement and academic motivation. Student-teacher relationships form the basis of the social context in which learning takes place (Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011). Student-teacher interactions are not only influenced by a number of aspects including gender, but in turn also influence a student's academic performance and behaviour (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Supportive and positive relationships between teacher and students ultimately promote a sense of school belonging and encourage students to participate cooperatively in classroom activities (Hughes & Chen, 2011). One positive aspect about the above perceptions from literature is evidence that good relationships between students and their teachers are essential to the development of all students in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). In the report of Hamre and Pianta (2001), they posited that positive student-teacher relationships are a valuable resource for students. A constructive relationship with a teacher enables students to be able to work on their own because they know their teachers are there for them in case problems arise. They also know that such teachers will recognise and respond to the problem promptly. As children enter the formal school setting, relationships with teachers provide the foundation for successful adjustment to the social and academic environment (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Roorda *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that the quality of student-teacher relationships is strongly related to students' motivation to learn. In the same vein, Nurmin (2012) found that teachers ensure more close relationships with highly engaged students. The association of teacher-student relationships is stronger with student engagement than with learning achievement (Cornelius-White, 2007). Self-determination theory also exemplifies on the importance of good student-teacher relationships. The theory argues that individuals have three basic psychological needs: the need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The need for relatedness, or belonging, refers to a human being's tendency towards wanting "to feel connected to others; to love and care" (Fosen, 2016). The need for belonging is so strong that individuals

seek to develop relationships even in adverse situations. The need to belong is a powerful motivation in itself, and that is why students who feel connected with and supported by their teachers are more likely to feel motivated to learn (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Student-teacher relationships are correlated with students' intrinsic motivation (OECD 2013). Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) highlight three types of student-teacher engagement, namely emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement. They further said that it is useful for understanding why good relations promote intrinsic motivation. According to Fredricks *et al.* (2004), emotional engagement refers to students' emotional reactions such as interest. Teacher warmth and attention to students can motivate students to participate in classroom activities. Such positive emotions drive student motivation (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand & Kindermann, 2008), and can therefore lead to behavioural engagement, i.e. when students cooperate by following rules and participating in learning activities (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). In line with the above, Furrer and Skinner (2003) believe that students' participation can be externally motivated by wanting to please teachers, which means that students might seek teacher approval and attention as a reward.

When there is no student-teacher relationships, it is overtly characterised by conflict which may be damaging to students, more damaging than simply a lack of close teacher-student relationships (Murray & Murray, 2004). That is why Spilt, Hughes, Wu and Kwok (2012) argue that conflicting relationships with teachers cause feelings of distress and insecurity in students, thereby restricting their ability to concentrate on learning. Students with more conflictual teacher-student relationships had insufficient down-regulation of cortisol levels, meaning they were constantly more stressed than students with good teacher-student relationships (Murray & Murray, 2004). Educators' relationships with students are equally beneficial to teachers, with research showing that good teacher-student relationships are positively correlated to teachers' job satisfaction and effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2009; Fosen, 2016). Negative teacher-student relationships are a common source of teacher stress and burnout (Chang, 2009; Spilt *et al.*, 2011). This is understandable when one considers the emotional labour that is part of teachers' work, especially in relation to dealing with disruptive student behaviour (Chang, 2009). This could eventually lead to brain drain in the system.

The above literature shows that student-teacher relationships have a great impact on students' attitudes towards achievement. It is also obvious that if students are comfortable with

their teachers and the school environment, positive relationships will be easily developed, which might benefit their social behaviours and skills. This is in consonance with Koen (2018)'s statement, that the development of interpersonal relationships, either between student and teacher or between students and students, is simply the keystone in building what individual learners want to achieve in both the classroom and life itself. From the above it can be deduced that student-teacher relationships are the emotional bond that exists between teachers and students in school. Both students and teachers have the power to shape and change the quality of these relationships (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). In the same vein Nugent (2009) suggests that by creating healthy relationships, teachers can motivate students during the learning process, which is one of the main objectives in a teacher's practice. To make relationships between teachers and students easier, teachers must be aware of the students' emotional and academic needs and must be able to work with it.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is rooted in the Attachment Theory. The theory is relevant to this study because it focuses on the relationships between two or more people, particularly long-term relationships such as those between parents and children and between romantic partners (Cherry, 2018). This theory was developed by one of the foremost psychologists, namely John Bowlby in 1958, and published in the trilogy *Attachment and Loss* in 1969 (Bowlby, 1969). He describes attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings and that it is a kind of behaviour focused to establish and maintain closeness and contact with an adult and figure who is sensible and responsive to the child needs (Bowlby, 1958; Cherry, 2018). The theory, according to Bowlby (1969) and Krstic (2015), argues that when adults provide emotional support in a predictable, consistent, and safe environment, it helps children to be more self-reliant and learn better, because they are sure that an adult will guide and help them. This is supported by Krstic (2015) that when children feel safe and comfortable, complementary exploratory systems, which encourage them to explore, are activated.

The theory proposes a motivational system that guides relational behaviour (Riley, 2012). Student-teacher relationships can also be viewed from a motivational perspective, in which students benefit not only from their perception of caring teachers, but also from the structure that is provided by the classroom environment, and the support that teachers provide in response to

students' needs (Davis, 2003). It cuts across various forms of organisations and has produced many interesting findings, including research on student-teacher relationships (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2011; Riley, 2012). Attachment is a theoretical framework used by researchers to better understand how children develop positive working relationships with their teachers (DeTeso, 2011). The perspective of attachment theory underpinning teacher-student relationships argues that students' perception of teacher nurturing and caring can provide a solid foundation for students' academic performance and general social growth (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Berman-Young, 2014).

Pianta (1999) and Berman-Young (2014) suggest that pupils transfer patterns of adaptation to interactions with new adults and new situations, while also potentially learning new patterns of adaptation. From these situations one could see that classroom engagement fosters student-teacher interactions as a result of good relationships. The teaching-learning process based on relationships engenders the critical thinking and inquiring skills required from learners to emancipate themselves in various situations (Du Preez & Botha, 2018). Viewing these perspectives, it is evidenced that students' interactive relationships with their teachers will help them learn how to navigate the environment of the classroom and beyond (Berman-Young, 2014). This is why Hamre and Pianta (2001) concluded that children with full interactive engagement with their teachers will develop positive motivational beliefs about school and classroom engagements, which would definitely have a positive impact on their academic performance.

This theory is therefore relevant to this study because it underpins the importance of student-teacher relationships as the basis of academic excellence for students, as well as teachers' job satisfaction. There is no doubt that when good and amiable relationships exist between students and their teachers, this will enable students to develop sense of belonging and a kind of free mind to consult and interact with their teachers at any point without fear or intimidation. This is why student engagement and motivation respectively, as tools for teacher-student relationships, is an antidote that could instigate students' interest and positive feelings about school, achievement and their academic performance (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the practices involved in student-teacher relationships vis-à-vis its correlational effect on academic performance of secondary school students in an attempt to proffer

a lasting solution to the lingering problems affecting student performance in Nigeria, with the following objectives:

- The relationship between classroom engagement as a subset of student-teacher relationships and academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria.
- The relationship between motivation as a subset of student-teacher relationships and academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

In order to discover the extent of student-teacher relationships in public secondary schools in Nigeria, the following research question was raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of student-teacher relationships in secondary schools in Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between classroom engagement as a variable of student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria.
3. There is no significant relationship between motivation as a variable of student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The study examines the practices involved in student-teacher relationships in correlation with academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria, with cognizance to classroom engagement and student motivation. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. It is descriptive because it involves the collection of data in order to describe the existing situation with respect to student-teacher relationships in Nigerian secondary schools. As a survey design, it covers a wide scope to be able to make generalization possible (Omopariola, 2017).

**Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The target population of this study comprised all public secondary schools in Nigeria. Nigeria consist of six geo-political zones with at least six states in each of the zones, with at least 200 public secondary schools in each of the states. The sample size for the study consists of 300 respondents using the Multi-Stage sampling procedure. The first stage involved the selection of one state in each of the geo-political zones using simple random sampling. The second stage involved the random selection of two secondary schools from each state, and the third stage involved the selection of 300 respondents; 25 participants from each of the selected schools, involved both students and teachers, were selected using convenient sampling. This sampling technique is appropriate since it empowers scientists to make use of participants who are advantageous for the study (Alvi, 2016).

**Data Collection**

The research instruments used for data collection was the Student-Teacher Relationships Questionnaire (STRQ), administered to students, and the Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (SAPQ), designed to collect information from the teachers. The instruments were validated by experts in the department of Educational Management and Leadership at both the University of The Free State, South Africa and Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti Nigeria for necessary validation and modification through the use of face and content validity. According to Fakunle (2017), face and content validity will ensure that the instruments measure what they are supposed to measure. The test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instruments. After the instruments were administered to the respondents twice within an interval of two weeks, according to the test-retest principle, the results of the two tests were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) with reliability coefficient of 0.76 for (STRQ) and 0.79 for (SAPQ) respectively. This implies that the instruments were highly reliable.

**Data Analysis**

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse data collected; the research question was answered using descriptive such as simple percentages, while the three hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Findings

The results for this study is statistically presented below, using both descriptive and inferential statistics such as simple percentages to answer the research question and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test all the hypotheses.

### Research Question

What is the level of student-teacher relationships in secondary schools in Nigeria?

**Table 1**

*Level of student-teacher relationships in secondary schools in Nigeria*

| Level of student-teacher relationships | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Low (20.00 - 33.64)                    | 30        | 10.0       |
| Moderate (33.65 - 37.35)               | 240       | 80.0       |
| High (37.36 - 84.00)                   | 30        | 10.0       |
| Total                                  | 300       | 100.0      |

Table 1 presents the level of student-teacher relationships in secondary schools in Nigeria. Using a mean score of 35.50 and a standard deviation of 1.86 on student-teacher relationships, the result reveals that 30 respondents, representing 10% of the total sample, had a low level of student-teacher relationships, 240 (80%) indicated a moderate level while 30 (10%) had a high level of student-teacher relationships. This implies that the student-teacher relationship as an apparatus for academic performance in secondary schools in Nigeria is moderately lagging.

### Testing of Hypotheses

*Hypothesis 1:* There is no significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria.

In order to test the hypothesis, scores on student-teacher relationship and academic performance were subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 2

**Table 2***Student-teacher relationships and academic performance of secondary schools students*

| Variable                      | N   | Mean  | SD    | R       | P    | Remark      |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|---------|------|-------------|
| Student-teacher relationships | 300 | 35.50 | 1.86  |         |      |             |
|                               |     |       |       | 0.612** | 0.01 | Significant |
| Academic performance          | 300 | 52.58 | 11.14 |         |      |             |

**\*\*p<0.05**

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria ( $r=0.612$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected. The relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria is moderately high and statistically significant in a positive direction.

**Hypothesis 2.** There is no significant relationship between classroom engagement and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria.

In order to test this hypothesis, scores on classroom engagement and academic performance were subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 3

**Table 3***Classroom engagement and academic performance of secondary school students*

| Variable             | N   | Mean  | SD    | R       | P    | Remark      |
|----------------------|-----|-------|-------|---------|------|-------------|
| Classroom engagement | 300 | 19.22 | 2.66  |         |      |             |
|                      |     |       |       | 0.515** | 0.01 | Significant |
| Academic performance | 300 | 52.58 | 11.14 |         |      |             |

**\*\*p<0.05**

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant relationship between classroom engagement and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria ( $r=0.515$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected. The relationship between classroom engagement and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria is moderate and statistically significant in a positive direction.

### Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between motivation and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria.

In order to test this hypothesis, scores on motivation and academic performance were subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The result is presented in Table 4

**Table 4**

*Motivation and academic performance of secondary school students*

| Variable             | N   | Mean  | SD    | R       | p    | Remark      |
|----------------------|-----|-------|-------|---------|------|-------------|
| Motivation           | 300 | 16.30 | 2.80  |         |      |             |
| Academic performance | 300 | 52.58 | 11.14 | 0.737** | 0.01 | Significant |

\*\* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 reveals that there is a significant relationship between motivation and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria ( $r=0.737$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected. The relationship between motivation and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria is high and statistically significant in a positive direction.

### Discussion

The findings of the study show that the level of student-teacher relationships in secondary schools in Nigeria is moderate. This is an indication that the use of student-teacher relationships is actually in operation, but a high priority is not placed on it in managing classroom activities by teachers in secondary schools. The findings of the study further indicate that there is a significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic performance of secondary school students in Nigeria. This is in consonance with Spilt, Hughes, Wu and Kwok (2012), who argue that students who have conflicting relationships with their teachers have feelings of distress and insecurity, which restrict their ability to concentrate on learning. This is also supported by Fosen (2016) who found that teachers' relationships with students are not only beneficial to students but equally significant to teachers' performance. Good student-teacher relationships are positively correlated to teachers' job satisfaction and effectiveness. Since there is a correlation between the

student-teacher relationships, it has justified the argument of Krstic (2015) that when emotional support is consistently provided by a teacher in a safe environment, it helps children to be more self-reliant. They also learn better because they are sure that an adult will guide and help them. That may be the reason why Krstic (2015) also concluded that when children feel safe and comfortable, their willingness to explore is encouraged and activated.

The findings of the study also reveal that there is a significant relationship between classroom engagement and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria. This is supported by the research of DeTeso (2011) that children who have been described as actively engaged in classroom activities have been found to have more positive academic outcomes. It also supports the conclusion by Okolocha and Onyeneke (2013), that secondary schools are the application of pedagogical knowledge into a classroom-oriented plan of action which constitute the most essential fabric upon which the success of the school, its administration and the entire democratic process rest. This showed that students' interactions and engagement with their teachers will help them learn how to navigate the environment of the classroom (Berman-Young, 2014). This is also in line with attachment theory that could be used to better understand how children develop positive working relationships with their teachers (DeTeso, 2011).

The findings of the study further reveal that there is a significant relationship between motivation and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nigeria. This, according to OECD (2013), is an indication that student-teacher relationships are correlated with students' intrinsic motivation. This is also supported by Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris' study (2004) that good relations promote intrinsic motivation among learners. This finding is also supported by Skinner, Furrer, Marchand and Kindermann (2008) where they state that teachers' attention to students can motivate students in order to participate in classroom activities, because positive emotions drive student motivation. The argument of Self-determination theory, that individuals have three basic psychological needs (relatedness, autonomy, and competence) refers to human beings' tendency towards wanting "to feel connected to others" (Fosen, 2016). This is corroborated by Ryan and Patrick (2001) that the need to belong is a powerful motivation in itself, and that is why students who feel connected with and supported by their teacher are more likely to feel motivated to learn. This is also in line with the suggestion of Fan and Williams (2010) that

students' perception of their relationship with teachers plays an important role in motivating them to perform better.

### **Conclusion**

From the attachment theory perspective and the inference drawn from the findings of this study, it can be stated that student-teacher relationships are as important as the teaching and learning component itself. Based on the above it is evidenced that when there is a decent connection between learners and their instructors, this will empower learners to communicate with their teachers at any time without dread. Effective classroom engagement therefore provides students with opportunities to socialise while learning, because it keeps students motivated towards their works, provides appropriate instruction with friendly feedback, and keeps disruptive behaviour to a minimum (Ekundayo, Konwea & Yusuf, 2010). Learners with a positive engagement with their teachers will experience positive motivational convictions about school and classroom commitment, and this would positively correlate with their performance and achievement in school. Classroom engagement and student motivation are therefore dimensions and determinants of student academic performance in secondary schools in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above empirical exploration, ranging from the identification of the problem, related literature, findings and conclusion, the following recommendations to enhance students' academic performance were made. These are however not limited to the Nigerian context.

1. Intensive efforts should be made by all relevant stakeholders to work towards improving the existing relationships between students and teachers. This should be done vis-à-vis other subordinate staff that works directly or indirectly for student achievement to better the current academic performance of students through professional inspection of teachers and other supervisory actions for effective teaching and learning.
2. Secondary school administrators, alongside with government through agencies such as the ministry of education at both state and federal levels and federal and state teaching service commissions, should constantly ensure that teachers are trained and equipped with classroom engagement skills that will enable teachers to effectively communicate feelings,

ideas and thoughts. This will enable students to develop a sense of belonging and enhance their readiness to learn for better academic performance through healthy relationships.

3. Teachers should be equipped through various development programmes such as workshops, capacity building, training and retraining sessions to enable them to develop various motivational strategies that could be used to motivate students' interest, and develop them to learn for better academic performance and overall achievement.

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