



THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

JOURNAL OF THE NEO CYCLE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ASSOCIATION (NCEP)

Vol. 20 No. 1 | <https://journal.ncep.org.ng> | ISSN 1596-9398

Influence of Teacher-Student Interaction on Self-Esteem and Social Competence Among Secondary School Students in Public Secondary Schools in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of teacher–student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. A correlational research design was adopted to determine the nature and strength of these relationships. The study population comprised of 38,940 secondary school students, from which a simple random sample of 390 participants was drawn. Data were collected using a validated and reliable questionnaire instrument, with internal consistency established through Cronbach's alpha statistics. Data analysis involved the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation, linear regression, and multiple regression analyses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that teacher–student interaction significantly and positively related to students' self-esteem and social competence. Additionally, a significant joint influence of teacher–student interaction on both self-esteem and social competence was established. The study concludes that nurturing, empathetic, and dialogic teacher–student interactions enhance students' emotional resilience, confidence, and social adaptability. It is, therefore, recommended that teachers adopt positive interpersonal strategies such as active listening, empathic communication, constructive feedback, and recognition of students' efforts to foster holistic learner development and socio-emotional well-being within the school environment.

Keywords: Teacher-Student Interaction, Self-Esteem, Social Competence, Secondary School Students

INTRODUCTION

Secondary school students, typically aged between 11 and 18 years depending on the education system, occupy a critical developmental stage known as adolescence period marked by rapid physical growth, cognitive advancement, emotional fluctuations, and complex social transitions. During this phase, learners not only acquire academic knowledge but also undergo profound identity formation, negotiating their place within family systems, peer networks, and the wider society (Afolabi et al., 2021). These overlapping developmental demands make adolescence a dynamic yet fragile period in which students' sense of self, behavior, and interpersonal relationships are highly susceptible to environmental influences. Consequently, secondary school experience becomes both a crucible for personal growth and a testing ground for psychological resilience.

Adolescence is characterized by the interplay of biological changes, the quest for self-identity, heightened emotional sensitivity, and an intensified desire for peer acceptance. While these changes can facilitate maturity and independence, they may also evoke confusion, insecurity, and vulnerability when insufficiently managed (Oshodi & Adeyemo, 2022). Rejection, bullying, or persistent academic difficulties can erode adolescents' self-worth, manifesting as low self-esteem and social withdrawal. Similarly, without adequate guidance, the pressure to conform to peer expectations may weaken their capacity for healthy social relationships, ultimately impairing social competence. Thus, adolescence constitutes a double-edged stage—one of potential growth or maladjustment depending largely on the quality of support provided by teachers, parents, and peers.

Self-esteem represents an individual's evaluative judgment of personal worth and ability, influencing how one thinks, feels, and behaves in different contexts. High self-esteem correlates with confidence, resilience, and adaptive functioning, while low self-esteem is often associated with anxiety, withdrawal, and underachievement (Omede & Oguche, 2020). Again, Ekedama (2024) conceptualised Self-esteem as a crucial component of mental health and well-being, influencing how individuals perceive and value themselves.

Closely related, social competence refers to the ability to interact effectively with others, maintain relationships, communicate constructively, and manage conflicts productively (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Both constructs are foundational for adolescents' academic success and socio-emotional adjustment. Neglecting them during this sensitive stage can result in adjustment difficulties that may persist into adulthood.

Recent national and international data reveal troubling patterns in adolescent mental health. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that 20–30% of adolescents experience symptoms linked to poor self-image, social withdrawal, and peer relationship difficulties—patterns mirrored in secondary schools across Delta State. In Sapele Local Government Area, classroom observations revealed that several students frequently avoid participation, exhibit visible social hesitation, and show discomfort during group work. Principals and

teachers noted that these behaviors are not isolated but reflect a pervasive lack of confidence, particularly in public speaking and interpersonal communication. Such students also tend to struggle with cooperative learning strategies, heightening feelings of inadequacy and reinforcing low self-esteem. These qualitative observations complement statistical evidence, underscoring the urgency of addressing psychological and social challenges among students in this region.

Empirical findings consistently suggest that low self-esteem and poor social competence have detrimental effects on adolescents' overall adjustment. Students exhibiting these traits are more prone to depression, academic disengagement, and susceptibility to peer influence (Chowdhury et al., 2021; WHO, 2023). Multiple factors ranging from family background and socioeconomic status to school experiences have been identified as contributors. Adolescents from neglectful or authoritarian homes, or those deprived of parental emotional support, often internalize feelings of inadequacy that hinder social adaptability (Oshodi & Adeyemo, 2022). Similarly, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may develop inferiority complexes when comparing themselves to peers with greater access to resources. Academic underperformance further compounds this challenge, as repeated failure undermines self-efficacy and self-worth (Afolabi et al., 2021). Hence, low self-esteem and poor social competence rarely stem from a single cause but emerge from a constellation of interrelated social, familial, and academic factors.

Among these, the school environment, particularly the nature of teacher-student interaction, plays a decisive role. Teachers' behaviors, attitudes, and communication patterns significantly shape how students perceive themselves and relate to others. Negative teacher behaviors such as ridicule, excessive criticism, or emotional detachment can intensify feelings of inadequacy, while supportive and affirming interactions foster confidence and belongingness (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Given that adolescents spend much of their formative years in school, teacher-student interactions serve as crucial determinants of both self-esteem and social competence. Thus, this study focuses specifically on the influence of teacher-student interaction, recognizing its central role in promoting or undermining adolescents' psychological development.

Teacher-student interaction encompasses the verbal and non-verbal exchanges, emotional dynamics, and relational patterns that occur between teachers and students in both formal and informal learning contexts (Adeoye & Adejumo, 2021; Wentzel, 2020). Beyond the transmission of knowledge, it involves empathy, emotional attune, and the social modeling of appropriate interpersonal behaviors. Positive teacher-student interactions characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and respect have been linked to improved emotional well-being, resilience, and social connectedness among students (Wang et al., 2020). Conversely, punitive or emotionally distant teacher behaviors can heighten stress and erode self-worth, contributing to maladaptive social patterns. Through daily classroom engagements, teachers serve as role models, demonstrating communication, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution strategies that students internalize as templates for social functioning (Skinner & Pitzer, 2019).

In the Nigerian educational context, where systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited resources often strain teacher-student engagement, the importance of nurturing positive interactions cannot be overstated (Adebayo & Olorundare, 2021). Teachers operating under stress may struggle to provide individualized attention, thereby diminishing the relational quality that supports students' self-esteem and social growth. Within areas such as Sapele Local Government, where socioeconomic hardship intersects with educational limitations, teacher-student interaction emerges as both a pedagogical and psychosocial necessity for holistic student development.

Anchoring this study is Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) in Ekedama (2024) later expanded by Ainsworth in the 1970s, which posits that early relationships with caregivers form internal working models guiding individuals' perceptions of self and others. Secure attachments foster emotional safety, exploration, and competence, while insecure attachments lead to anxiety and relational difficulties. Extending this framework to educational settings, teachers serve as secondary attachment figures who provide emotional security, guidance, and affirmation during adolescence. Supportive teacher-student relationships, therefore, function as protective factors that reinforce self-esteem and enhance social competence. Conversely, conflictual relationships may undermine students' self-worth and hinder social integration (Okeke & Eze, 2022). Attachment Theory thus provides a robust explanatory basis for understanding how the quality of teacher-student interactions influences adolescents' psychological and social adjustment.

In light of these theoretical and empirical considerations, this study seeks to examine the influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. The study is premised on the understanding that the classroom is not merely a site of instruction but a microcosm of human relationships where adolescents learn not only what to think, but also how to feel, relate, and believe in their own potential.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does teacher-student interaction relate to self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area?
2. To what extent does teacher-student interaction relate to social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area?
3. What is the joint influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between teacher-student interaction and self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area
2. There is no significant between teacher-student interaction and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area
3. There is no significant joint influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area

METHODS

This study adopted a correlational research design, which was considered appropriate for determining the degree and direction of relationships among teacher–student interaction, self-esteem, and social competence without manipulating any variables. The design provided the advantage of measuring multiple variables simultaneously and exploring their interrelationships within the natural school environment.

The population comprised all 38,940 students enrolled in public secondary schools in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, Asaba, 2025). From this population, a sample of 390 students was selected using a simple random sampling technique from ten secondary schools. The sample size was deemed adequate following the recommendation of Taro Yemen's formula for determining sample size (Ekedama, 2024), who suggested that a sample of 390 is sufficient for populations between 25,000 and 49,999 at a 95% confidence level.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument contained two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B measured teacher–student interaction, self-esteem, and social competence using a four-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree (4)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*. The face and content validity of the instrument were reviewed and approved by experts in Guidance and Counselling, while reliability was established through a pilot test conducted with 30 students outside the study area, yielding satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

The questionnaire was personally administered to students in their classrooms after obtaining the principals' permission and explaining the study's purpose. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product–Moment Correlation and regression statistics. Linear regression tested the first two hypotheses, while multiple regression analyzed the third. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Pearson's correlation coefficient and coefficient of determination between teacher-student interaction and self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State

| Variable | N | r | r ² | r ² % | Decision |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Teacher-Student Interaction | 390 | 0.156 | 0.024 | 2.4 | Positive Relationship |
| Self-Esteem | | | | | |

Table 1 shows a correlation and coefficient of determination which was used to determine the influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. From the result, $r^2 = 0.024$. The result indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. Teacher-student interaction contributed 2.4% of the variance in self-esteem.

Table 2: Pearson's correlation coefficient and coefficient of determination between teacher-student interaction and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State

| Variable | N | r | r ² | r ² % | Decision |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Teacher-student interaction | 390 | 0.206 | 0.042 | 4.2 | Positive Relationship |
| Social Competence | | | | | |

Table 2 shows a correlation and coefficient of determination which was used to determine the influence of teacher-student interaction on social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. From the result, $r^2 = 0.042$. The result indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. Teacher-student interaction contributed 4.2% of the variance in social competence.

Table 3: Multiple correlation coefficient and coefficient of determination among teacher-student interaction, self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State

| Variable | N | R | R ² | R ² % | Decision |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Teacher-Student Interaction | | | | | Positive Relationship |
| Self-Esteem | 390 | 0.246 | 0.060 | 6 | |
| Social Competence | | | | | |

Table 3 shows a multiple correlation and coefficient of determination which was used to determine the influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. From the result, $R^2 = 0.060$. The result indicates a positive relationship among the three variables. Teacher-student interaction contributed 6% of the variance in self-esteem and social competence.

Table 4: Regression analysis of the influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area

| Model | Sum of Square | Df | Mean Square | F | p |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression | 2541.155 | 1 | 2541.155 | 9.63 | .002 ^b |
| Residual | 102354.538 | 389 | 263.800 | 3 | |
| Total | 104895.692 | 388 | | | |
| Variables in Equation | | | | | |
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficient | | Standardised Coefficient | t | P |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| Constant | 139.380 | 3.108 | | 44.84 | .000 |
| Teacher-Student Interaction | -.793 | .255 | -.156 | -3.104 | .002 |

$\alpha = 0.05, R = 0.156, R\text{-Square} = 0.024$

a. Dependent Variable: Self-Esteem

b. Predictors (Constant): Teacher-Student Interaction

Table 4 is the result of a regression analysis, which was used to examine the influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. The result shows that $F(1, 389) = 9.633, p < 0.05$ level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there is a significant influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State.

Table 5: Regression analysis of the influence of teacher-student interaction on social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State

| Model | Sum of Square | df | Mean Square | F | p |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression | 4465.473 | 1 | 4465.473 | | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 100430.220 | 389 | 258.841 | 17.252 | |
| Total | 104895.692 | 388 | | | |
| Variables in Equation | | | | | |
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficient | | Standardised Coefficient | t | P |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| Constant | 143.845 | 3.413 | | 42.141 | .000 |
| Teacher-Student Interaction | -1.328 | .320 | -.206 | -4.154 | .000 |

$\alpha = 0.05, R = 0.206, R\text{-Square} = 0.043$

a. Dependent Variable: Social Competence

b. Predictors (Constant): Teacher-Student Interaction

Table 4 is the result of a regression analysis, which was used to examine the influence of teacher-student interaction on social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. The result shows that $F(1, 389) = 17.252, p < 0.05$ level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there is a significant influence of teacher-student interaction on social

competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State.

Table 6: Regression analysis of the joint influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State

| Model | Sum of Square | df | Mean Square | F | P |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression | 6337.540 | 2 | 2376.513 | | |
| Residual | 98558.152 | 389 | 255.332 | 8.274 | .000 ^b |
| Total | 104895.692 | 388 | | | |

| Model | Variables in Equation | | | T | p |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|
| | Unstandardized Coefficient | Standardised Coefficient | | | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| Constant | 152.084 | 4.661 | | 32.628 | .000 |
| Teacher-Student Interaction | -.586 | .260 | -.115 | -2.254 | .025 |
| Self-Esteem | -1.099 | .336 | -.171 | -3.275 | .001 |

$\alpha = 0.05, R = 0.246, R\text{-Square} = 0.060$

a. Dependent Variable: Social Competence

b. Predictors (Constant): Teacher-Student Interaction; Teacher-Student Interaction

Table 6 shows a multiple regression, which was run to determine the joint influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. Result showed that the model (combination of all the predictors) as a whole can predict social competence. The model as a whole explains 6% of social competence, $R^2 = 0.060, F(2, 389) = 8.274, p < 0.05$ level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant joint influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding revealed that there is a significant influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. This finding implies that the nature and quality of the relationship between teachers and learners are central to students' self-perceptions and psychological adjustment. When teachers demonstrate warmth, fairness, encouragement, and respect, students often interpret these behaviours as affirmations of their worth and competence, which strengthen their self-esteem. Conversely, when teacher-student interactions are characterised by hostility, indifference, or excessive criticism, students may internalise negative self-evaluations and feelings of inadequacy. One possible reason for this result is that adolescents spend a significant portion of their formative years in school, where teachers represent key authority figures and role models. Supportive teacher behaviours such as active listening, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement cultivate a sense of belonging and competence among students, which enhances their self-esteem. In contrast, poor interaction or

communication breakdown between teachers and students can lead to disengagement, anxiety, and diminished self-worth. Furthermore, in many Nigerian secondary schools, teachers often act as parental substitutes; hence, their attitudes, tone of communication, and relational warmth have amplified effects on students' self-concept. This finding agrees with Ojobor (2024), who found that positive teacher–student rapport significantly improved students' attitudes and performance, suggesting that relational dynamics in classrooms extend beyond academics to affect emotional well-being. The finding also agrees with Mills-Webb (2025), who found that strong interpersonal connections in classrooms are also associated with lower behavioural problems, improved social adjustment, and reduced emotional distress. The finding further aligns with Di Lisio et al. (2025), who reported that sustained positive teacher relationships predicted higher self-esteem and school engagement across academic years.

The second finding demonstrated that there is a significant influence of teacher-student interaction on social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. This finding suggests the powerful role that teachers play in shaping students' interpersonal development. When teachers provide consistent guidance, model prosocial behaviour, and foster respectful communication, students develop stronger interpersonal skills and social confidence. On the other hand, when interactions are authoritarian, dismissive, or punitive, students may experience social withdrawal, lower peer acceptance, and weaker social skills.

This finding aligns with Camacho et al. (2023), who found that supportive teacher–student relationships foster social skill development and social adjustment among adolescents. The finding also agrees with De Jong et al. (2022), who reported that strong teacher–student relationships were associated with lower behavioural problems and higher levels of cooperation among students. The finding further agrees with Wang et al. (2024), who found that teacher warmth and engagement predicted students' social skills development over time, even after controlling for family background.

The third finding revealed a significant joint influence of teacher-student interaction on self-esteem and social competence among secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. This finding suggests that the interpersonal environment created by teachers is a powerful determinant of not only how students view themselves, but also how they behave socially and relate with others. When teacher–student interaction is positive, students are likely to feel valued, capable, and connected. This reinforces self-esteem and gives them more opportunities to practise social skills in a safe, supportive context. Conversely, when the interaction is negative, students may feel undervalued, less confident, withdraw socially, or struggle to trust peers, hampering both self-esteem and social competence. The finding is in line with Muhonen (2024), who reported that students who experienced positive teacher–student relationships demonstrated higher levels of social competence, mediated by the quality of educational dialogue. The finding also agrees with Gebresilase and Wei (2025), who found that teacher–student interaction positively predicted self-esteem, which in turn enhanced academic performance. The finding further aligns with Magro et al. (2025), who confirmed through a longitudinal analysis that

improvements in the quality of teacher–student relationships were associated with increases in social competence across school years.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that teacher–student interaction plays a crucial role in shaping the psychological and social development of secondary school students in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. The quality of relationships and communication between teachers and students directly affects how students perceive themselves and how effectively they relate with others. When teachers engage positively with students, it fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth, which in turn enhances students' self-esteem. Similarly, such interactions create an emotionally secure learning environment where students can develop confidence, interpersonal skills, and the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively, thereby improving their social competence. High self-esteem encourages students to engage socially and interact confidently, while strong social competence further boosts their self-image through positive peer and teacher feedback. Teacher–student interaction is not just an instructional tool but also a socio-emotional mechanism that promotes holistic student development. Therefore, teachers who maintain positive, supportive, and responsive relationships with their students contribute significantly to building emotionally resilient and socially competent learners, which is vital for their academic success and overall personal growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- i. teachers adopt positive interpersonal strategies such as active listening, empathic communication, constructive feedback, and recognition of students' efforts to foster holistic learner development and socio-emotional well-being within the school environment
- ii. Schools should promote interactive learning environments where students are encouraged to collaborate, express themselves, and participate in group activities under the guidance of teachers.
- iii. Educational administrators should integrate teacher–student relationship enhancement into school improvement policies by ensuring that teachers receive continuous training in socio-emotional learning and mentorship.

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