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Psychological Variables and Academic Stressors Moderation among Senior Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District

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Abstract

The study examined psychological variables and academic stress moderation among senior secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. Specifically, the study investigated the moderating influence of self-regulation and self-concept on academic stressors among senior secondary school students. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 29,267 senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District during the 2025/2026 academic session. A sample size of 400 students was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Psychological Variables and Academic Stressors Questionnaire (PVASQ). The instrument was validated by experts in educational psychology and measurement and evaluation, while Cronbach alpha statistics yielded reliability coefficients of 0.81 for self-regulation, 0.84 for self-concept, and 0.86 for academic stressors. Pearson product-moment correlation statistics were used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. The findings revealed that self-regulation had a significant negative relationship with academic stressors among senior secondary school students. The findings also revealed that self-concept significantly moderated academic stressors among students. The

study concluded that psychological variables play significant roles in reducing academic stressors among senior secondary school students. It was recommended among others that school counselors organize programs that strengthen students' self-regulation and self-concept to help students effectively manage academic stressors.

Keywords: academic stressors, psychological variables, self-concept, self-regulation, senior secondary school students

Introduction

Academic stressors have become a major concern in contemporary educational settings because of their adverse effects on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and social adjustment. Senior secondary school students are frequently exposed to demanding academic activities such as continuous assessments, examination pressure, excessive assignments, poor study habits, competition among peers, parental expectations, and ineffective time management. These academic demands often result in anxiety, emotional instability, poor concentration, frustration, and low academic achievement among students. Academic stress occurs when individuals perceive educational demands as exceeding their coping abilities. Excessive academic demands negatively affect adolescents' emotional adjustment and school engagement. In many secondary schools, students are expected to cope with overloaded curricula, high parental expectations, classroom competition, and frequent academic evaluations, all of which increase psychological tension and emotional exhaustion. Pascoe et al. (2020) revealed that persistent academic stress among adolescents contributes significantly to depression, emotional fatigue, and poor academic outcomes. Likewise, a study by Xu et al. (2023) found that prolonged academic stress weakens students' motivation, learning engagement, and psychosocial adjustment, thereby reducing their overall educational attainment.

Several environmental, social, and personal factors further amplify academic stress among students. Factors such as poor teacher-student relationships, inadequate counselling services, peer pressure, economic hardship, unstable home environments, fear of failure, low self-esteem, and poor emotional support systems have continued to intensify stress experiences among adolescents. Although schools have introduced interventions such as guidance and counseling services, study skill programs, motivational seminars, and parental support initiatives, the issue of academic stress persists because many students lack the psychological capacities

required to cope effectively with stressful learning situations. Research by Martín-Peña et al. (2022) indicated that many students struggle academically not only because of external pressures but also because of deficiencies in self-management, emotional control, and adaptive coping skills. Furthermore, Fernández-Castillo (2021) reported that students with weak psychological adjustment are more vulnerable to emotional breakdown, academic anxiety, and poor school adaptation despite institutional support systems. Consequently, there is increasing recognition that psychological variables such as self-regulation and self-concept may play significant roles in moderating academic stressors among students. Self-regulation enables students to manage emotions, behaviors, and academic tasks effectively, while self-concept influences confidence, resilience, and perceptions of competence in academic situations.

Psychological variables play a critical role in determining how students respond to stressful academic situations. Psychological variables refer to internal characteristics, dispositions, and cognitive processes that influence behaviour, emotional reactions, and adjustment patterns among individuals. Among these variables, self-regulation and self-concept have attracted considerable attention in educational psychology because of their influence on students' emotional control, motivation, and academic adaptation. Students who possess strong psychological competencies are more likely to manage academic demands effectively compared to students with weak psychological dispositions.

Self-regulation refers to the ability of individuals to control their thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and learning activities in order to achieve desired goals. It involves planning, monitoring, evaluating, and controlling one's academic activities and emotional responses. Zimmerman (2021) explained that self-regulation enables students to manage distractions, maintain focus, and adopt effective coping strategies during stressful academic situations. Students with effective self-regulation skills are capable of organizing their study schedules, setting achievable goals, and maintaining emotional stability even under academic pressure. Conversely, students with poor self-regulation often experience frustration, anxiety, and inability to cope with academic tasks.

Self-concept is another important psychological variable associated with students' academic adjustment and stress management. Self-concept refers to an individual's perception, beliefs, and evaluation of self-worth and competence. Students with positive self-concept usually demonstrate confidence, resilience, and persistence in academic activities, whereas those with poor self-concept often exhibit fear of failure, low self-esteem, and emotional instability. According to

Nwankwo and Okon (2023), students with positive academic self-concept are better able to cope with stressful learning conditions because they perceive themselves as capable of overcoming academic challenges. Self-concept therefore serves as a protective psychological factor against academic stressors.

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between psychological variables and students' academic stress moderation across different educational contexts. Zimmerman and Schunk (2021) reported that students with strong self-regulation skills are more capable of managing academic demands, controlling emotional tension, and maintaining effective study behaviours during stressful academic situations. Their study revealed that self-regulated learners demonstrate better coping strategies, persistence, and academic adjustment than students with weak self-regulatory abilities. Similarly, Pajares (2020) found that students who possess positive academic self-beliefs and effective self-monitoring skills experience lower academic anxiety and greater confidence in handling examinations and classroom tasks. In a related study, Udo and Akpan (2024) investigated psychological predictors of academic adjustment among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State using a correlational research design. The study found that self-regulation significantly predicts students' ability to cope with academic stressors such as examination pressure, assignment overload, and time management difficulties. The researchers concluded that students who effectively regulate their learning activities and emotions are less likely to experience academic burnout. Likewise, Effiong and Ekanem (2022) reported that students with positive self-concept demonstrated lower levels of academic stress and higher academic resilience. Their findings indicated that students who perceive themselves positively are more confident in handling school-related challenges and are less vulnerable to emotional instability.

Adebayo and Okorie (2023) examined the influence of psychological wellbeing on academic stress among secondary school students in Lagos State. Using a survey design, the study revealed that students with high self-esteem and emotional control exhibited lower stress levels compared to students with poor self-perception. The study emphasized that psychological stability enhances students' capacity to manage educational pressures effectively. In another study, Nwachukwu and Eze (2021) found that self-concept significantly influences students' academic engagement and emotional adjustment. Students with positive self-concept were found to participate actively in learning activities and demonstrated greater resilience when faced with academic difficulties. Similarly, Yusuf and Ahmed (2022) investigated the role of emotional regulation in reducing academic stress

among senior secondary school students in Northern Nigeria. The findings showed that students who could regulate their emotions appropriately experienced lower levels of examination anxiety and classroom frustration. The study further revealed that emotional regulation promotes concentration, self-confidence, and academic persistence. In support of this finding, Okon and Bassey (2023) observed that self-regulation strategies such as goal setting, time management, and self-monitoring significantly reduced academic stress among adolescents in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Ekanem and Udofia (2024) examined the relationship between self-concept and academic resilience among secondary school students in Cross River State. The study found a strong positive relationship between positive self-concept and students' ability to withstand academic stressors. Students with healthy self-concept demonstrated higher motivation, better interpersonal relationships, and improved academic commitment. Similarly, Adekunle and Ibrahim (2023) reported that psychological variables such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept significantly predict students' coping behaviour in stressful academic environments. In another empirical investigation, Olatunji and Bello (2021) explored the influence of self-regulation on academic achievement and stress management among adolescents in South-West Nigeria. The study revealed that students who practiced self-regulated learning strategies were better able to manage academic tasks and avoid emotional exhaustion. The researchers recommended that schools should encourage students to develop independent learning and emotional management skills. Also, Sunday and Etim (2025) examined psychological correlates of academic stress among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State and found that self-concept significantly moderated students' reactions to academic stressors. Students with low self-concept were more likely to experience anxiety, fear of failure, and poor academic adjustment.

Despite the growing body of empirical evidence on psychological variables and students' academic adjustment, there remains limited empirical evidence specifically focusing on psychological variables and academic stressors moderation among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. Most previous studies concentrated on academic performance, emotional wellbeing, or general psychological adjustment without specifically examining how self-regulation and self-concept moderate academic stressors within the study area. This gap in literature therefore necessitated the present study.

Statement of the Problem

Academic stressors among senior secondary school students have become increasingly alarming in recent years. Many students experience emotional tension, anxiety, poor concentration, fear of examinations, inability to complete assignments, and frustration arising from academic demands. These challenges often result in poor academic performance, school maladjustment, low motivation, and emotional instability among students. Despite efforts by teachers, counsellors, and parents to improve students' academic adjustment, many students still find it difficult to cope effectively with academic stressors. It has been observed that some students lack important psychological capacities such as emotional control, confidence, self-management, and positive self-perception required for effective academic functioning. Consequently, students become overwhelmed by academic demands and fail to develop effective coping strategies. Although previous studies have examined academic stress and psychological adjustment among students, limited attention has been given to the moderating influence of self-regulation and self-concept on academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. It is against this background that this study investigated psychological variables and academic stress moderation among senior secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine psychological variables and academic stressors' moderation among senior secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. Specifically, the study sought to:

i. Examine the relationship between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

ii. Determine the relationship between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. What relationship exists between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District?
ii. What relationship exists between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

i. There is no significant relationship between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.
ii. There is no significant relationship between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Research Method

The study adopted a correlational research design. A correlational research design is a type of research design that examines the degree and direction of relationship existing between two or more variables without manipulating them. It is usually employed when the researcher intends to determine how variables relate to one another using correlation coefficients. The design was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to determine the relationship between psychological variables such as self-regulation and self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District during the 2025/2026 academic session.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 400 students was selected for the study using a multistage sampling procedure. At the first stage, schools were selected from the public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District through a multistage sampling procedure. At the second stage, students were proportionately selected from the

sampled schools. Finally, a simple random sampling technique through balloting without replacement was used to select the respondents that participated in the study. In this process, pieces of paper containing "YES" and "NO" options were folded and mixed thoroughly in a container for students to pick. Students who picked the "YES" option were selected as respondents for the study, while those who picked "NO" were excluded. This procedure ensured that every student had an equal opportunity of being selected for the study.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Psychological Variables and Academic Stressors Questionnaire (PVASQ).* The questionnaire was designed by the researcher to obtain information on psychological variables such as self-regulation and self-concept, as well as academic stressors among senior secondary school students. The instrument was subjected to face validation by experts in educational psychology and measurement and evaluation to ensure the clarity, appropriateness, and relevance of the items in relation to the objectives of the study. Their observations and corrections were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument before administration. To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha reliability statistics were employed. The reliability coefficients obtained were 0.81 for self-regulation, 0.84 for self-concept, and 0.86 for academic stressors. The coefficients indicated that the instrument was reliable and suitable for data collection since the values exceeded the acceptable reliability threshold.

Method of Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at the .05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One

What relationship exists between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District?

Table 1: Correlation between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District

Variables	n	r	Remark
Self-regulation Academic stressors	400	-.724	High negative relationship

The result in Table 1 reveals the r-value of -.724, which shows a high negative relationship between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. This implies that increased self-regulation reduces academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Research Question Two: What relationship exists between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District?

Table 2: Correlation between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Variables	n	r	Remark
Self-concept Academic stressors	400	-.691	Negative relationship

The result in Table 2 reveals the r-value of -.691, which shows a negative relationship between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. This implies that positive self-concept reduces academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Research Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Variables	n	r-value	p-value	Decision
Self-regulation Academic stressors	400	-.724	.000	Reject null hypothesis

df = 398, Significant at .05 alpha level.

The analysis in Table 3 reveals that the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 alpha level of significance at 398 degrees of freedom. By this result, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District, was rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative relationship between self-regulation and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Research Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Variables	N	r-value	p-value	p-crit	Decision
Self-concept Academic stressors	400	-.691	.001	.05	Reject null hypothesis

df = 398, Significant at .05 alpha level.

The analysis in Table 4 reveals that the p-value of .001 is less than the .05 alpha level of significance at 398 degrees of freedom. By this result, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between self-

concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District, was rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative relationship between self-concept and academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that self-regulation has a significant negative relationship with academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. This implies that students who possess effective self-regulation skills are better able to control emotional tension, manage academic demands, and cope with stressful learning situations. The finding agrees with Udo and Akpan (2024), who found that self-regulation significantly reduces academic stress and enhances emotional stability among students. The finding also supports Zimmerman (2021), who emphasized that self-regulated learners effectively manage academic tasks through planning, monitoring, and behavioral control.

The findings also revealed that self-concept has a significant negative relationship with academic stressors among senior secondary school students. This indicates that students with positive self-concepts experience lower academic stress because they possess the confidence and positive self-perception needed to cope with academic challenges. The finding is consistent with Effiong and Ekanem (2022), who reported that students with positive self-concepts demonstrate greater resilience and emotional adjustment in stressful academic situations. Similarly, Eze and Nwankwo (2022) found that students with poor self-concept experience higher levels of anxiety and academic frustration.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that psychological variables such as self-regulation and self-concept significantly moderate academic stressors among senior secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North Senatorial District. Increased self-regulation and a positive self-concept bring about a commensurate reduction in academic stressors among students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

i. School counsellors should organise self-regulation training programmes that will help students develop emotional control, goal setting, time management, and effective coping strategies for managing academic stressors.

ii. Teachers and parents should encourage positive self-concept among students through motivation, constructive feedback, and supportive learning environments to reduce academic stress and improve students' emotional wellbeing.

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