



# EXPLORING THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL DYNAMICS: EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF ASSERTIVENESS TECHNIQUE ON LOW ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the psycho-social dynamics by examining the effect of assertiveness technique on low academic self-concept among secondary school students in the Onitsha education zone. Two research questions guided the study, and two null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The study design was quasi-experimental, non-randomised pre-test and post-test, control group research. The population of the study was composed of 988 senior secondary school students in the Onitsha education zone, and a sample of 70 students was selected through purposive sampling. The data was collected using the Academic Self-Concept Survey (ASS) questionnaire, and the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.84. The questionnaires were administered through direct delivery. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions, and the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA). The instrument norm of 72.50 was used to make decisions when answering the research questions. The findings of the study showed that assertiveness training was effective in improving the low academic self-concepts of secondary school students. Furthermore, it was revealed that the assertiveness training technique was more effective in improving the academic self-concepts of female secondary school students. Based on the findings and implications of the study, it was suggested that counsellors and therapists should use modelling and assertiveness training techniques in counselling sessions to enhance the academic self-concepts of secondary school students.

**KEYWORDS:** *Psycho-social dynamics, assertiveness, technique, academic self-concept*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape is not only shaped by cognitive abilities and academic achievements but is profoundly influenced by students' perceptions of their own academic abilities and worth. Academic self-concept, encompassing students' beliefs about their academic competence and value, plays a crucial role in shaping their educational journey. Within the realm of psychological interventions, assertiveness techniques emerge as a valuable tool, offering a unique avenue to influence these self-perceptions. The assertiveness technique, rooted in the principles of effective communication and self-expression, provides a promising avenue for enhancing students' assertiveness and self-concept. By fostering a healthy balance between expressing one's thoughts and respecting the perspectives of others, assertiveness training can potentially reshape the narrative surrounding academic self-concept, promoting a positive and empowering environment for students.

In the realm of education, self-concept serves as a foundational element for comprehending human behaviour and the learning process. The contemporary educational landscape places a premium on the enhancement of children's self-concepts,

recognizing it as a crucial objective for holistic development. Educational and social policies globally underscore the significance of fostering positive self-concepts, particularly in the academic domain.

Recent scholarship, exemplified by the work of Marsh and Craven (1997), illuminates the profound impact of positive academic self-concepts on various facets of academic life. From influencing academic behaviour to shaping choices, aspirations, and eventual achievements, the nexus between self-concept and academic outcomes is unmistakable. This correlation becomes even more pertinent in the context of secondary school students who navigate a myriad of challenges, stressors, and opportunities during a crucial phase of their academic journey.

For secondary school students, grappling with a low perception of their academic abilities can have far-reaching consequences. Beyond academic performance, low self-concept may impede the development of meaningful relationships, dampen feelings of happiness, induce anxiety, and curtail personal aspirations and achievements. Hattie's extensive meta-analysis in 2012, encompassing over 800 meta-analyses from 50,000 research



articles, underscored the pivotal role of self-concept as one of the 150 influences on student academic achievement.

In the perspective of Dramanu and Balarabe (2013), self-concept evolves through the amalgamation of environmental experiences and individual assessments of those experiences. The formative educational years represent a critical period for nurturing a positive self-concept in children. Consequently, for secondary school students, the awareness of their academic capabilities plays a pivotal role in their adaptation and overall success in the educational milieu. As highlighted by Liu and Wang (2008), academic self-concept, a subset of general self-concept, encompasses students' perceptions of their academic abilities shaped by interactions with peers, teachers, and parents.

Academic self-concept, in essence, reflects a learner's perception of their academic competence, commitment, involvement, and interest in schoolwork, as delineated by Hardy (2013). These perceptions are subject to environmental influences and the reinforcement of significant others, shaping the students' attitudes and actions. The reciprocal relationship between individual actions and self-perceptions underscores the dynamic nature of academic self-concept. In the context of this study, academic self-concept pertains to how secondary school students perceive their academic abilities, involvement, and interest in their schoolwork.

Recognizing its pivotal role, academic self-concept holds substantial importance for the personal adjustment of secondary school students and significantly influences various educational outcomes. Liem, McInerney, and Yeung (2015) assert that individuals are more likely to achieve greater success when they possess a strong sense of competence, high self-confidence, and positive self-perceptions. Consequently, students aspiring for academic excellence are anticipated to harbour elevated academic self-concepts.

La Shawn's (2011) findings offer valuable insights into strategies for enhancing academic self-concept. Enhancement techniques are typically devised based on two predominant approaches. The first, a self-enhancement orientation, directly targets self-concept through methods like praise and performance feedback. The second, as highlighted by Clark (2016), adopts a skill development orientation, indirectly influencing academic self-concept by targeting constructs related to self-concept, such as academic achievement. These diverse approaches provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and improving academic self-concept among secondary school students.

Assertiveness for instance is an important behaviour modification technique that could be used to improve the self-concept of students in schools. The technique of assertiveness training holds a longstanding position in the realm of behaviour therapy. Assertiveness, a psychological concept, encapsulates three fundamental aspects of human expression—behaviour, cognition, and emotion. As noted by Makinde and Akinteye (2013), the behavioural dimension of assertiveness technique empowers individuals to openly communicate their emotions, assert their objectives and goals in various situations, and experience a sense of achievement and success in interpersonal

relationships. On the affective front, assertive individuals can articulate and manage both positive and negative emotions without succumbing to anxiety and unwarranted anger. Research, including that conducted by Animasahun and Oladeni (2012), has demonstrated that assertiveness training contributes to the enhancement of assertive behaviour in students. Additionally, the study by Anyamene, Nwokolo, and Ezeani (2016) investigating the impact of assertive training on the low self-esteem of secondary school students indicated that the successful application of assertiveness techniques could positively influence students' academic self-concept.

Furthermore, Ayodele and Sotonade's (2014) research indicated that male participants tend to derive greater benefits from self-management and assertiveness training programs. Conversely, Anyamene, Nwokolo, and Ezeani's (2016) study on the effect of assertive training on low self-esteem among secondary school students found no significant gender difference, suggesting that assertive training is effective for both male and female students. A similar observation was made by Agbakwuru and Ugwueze (2014) in their investigation of the effect of assertive training on the improvement of resilience in early adolescents, where both male and female participants were equally affected by the assertiveness training. Considering these research findings, it is evident that gender can influence responses to various treatment approaches, potentially impacting the outcomes of treatments such as assertiveness training, which plays a crucial role in students' social adjustment within school environments. Amidst this backdrop, this study aims to explore the psycho-social dynamics inherent in the academic lives of secondary school students. Specifically, the research endeavours to unravel the impact of assertiveness techniques on low academic self-concept.

### Statement of the Problem

The study aims to explore the psycho-social dynamics involved in the impact of assertiveness techniques on the academic self-concept of secondary school students. While there is existing literature on interventions for enhancing academic self-concept, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the specific psycho-social dynamics associated with assertiveness training and its effectiveness in addressing low academic self-concept among secondary school students. This gap highlights the need for a focused investigation into the degree of interactions and psychological processes involved in assertiveness training to address the unique challenges associated with low academic self-concept in this particular demographic. The study seeks to bridge this gap by providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of assertiveness techniques and their contribution to enhancing academic self-concept among secondary school students.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this research is to examine the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving the low academic self-concept of senior secondary school students in Onitsha education zone. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. The effect of assertiveness techniques on improving the low academic self-concept of secondary school students, in comparison with those who underwent



conventional counselling, as measured by their pre-test and post-test scores.

2. Differences in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving low academic self-concept among male and female secondary school students, assessed through their gained mean scores.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving the low academic self-concept of secondary school students, in comparison with those who underwent conventional counselling, as measured by their pre-test and post-test scores?
2. What is the difference in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving low academic self-concept among male and female secondary school students, assessed through their gained mean scores?

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is significant difference in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving the low academic self-concept of secondary school students, in comparison with those who underwent conventional counselling, as measured by their pre-test and post-test scores.
2. The differences in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving low academic self-concept among male and female secondary school students, assessed through their gained mean scores is not significant.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a quasi-experimental design, specifically a non-randomized pre-test, post-test, and control group approach. The study comprises two treatment conditions, namely the Experimental group and the Control group, focusing on students with low academic self-concept. In this design, participants are not randomly assigned to groups, and the study aims to assess the impact of different treatments on the academic self-concept of the participants. The research was carried out in the Onitsha Education Zone of Anambra State, situated in the South East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. This specific geographical area was chosen due to the observable prevalence of negative self-concepts among students, potentially impeding their learning capabilities. Recognizing the significance of these formative years, where negative experiences can have enduring consequences, the study aimed to investigate and address the challenges related to students' self-concept in this region. The focus on negative self-concepts aligns with the understanding that such experiences during crucial developmental stages may have long-term repercussions on a student's educational journey and life trajectory.

## 4. SAMPLING DESIGN

The study's sample consisted of 108 students carefully chosen from a larger population of 988 students. This population

specifically included students with low academic self-concept. The selection process involved assessing the extent of their low self-concept, determined by their pre-test scores obtained through the administration of a questionnaire. The pre-test scores played a crucial role in identifying and selecting participants based on the degree of their low academic self-concept, ensuring that the sample represented individuals facing challenges in this particular aspect.

The data collection for this study utilized the Academic Self-concept Survey (ASS), a psychometric survey instrument designed and validated to gauge students' self-concept concerning various aspects, including peer interaction, academics, thought processes, school, and home. The reliability of the instrument was assessed through Cronbach's alphas, revealing a commendable high reliability coefficient of 0.84. This indicates that the ASS reliably measures the intended constructs consistently, contributing to the robustness and validity of the study's findings.

## 5. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

The researcher secured approval from the schools' management by providing a consent letter. Subsequently, the experimental training sessions occurred at the two selected schools. Collaborating with the guidance counsellors, the researcher conducted an eight-week training program for both the treatment and control groups. The treatment sessions were conducted in the school's counselling centres, with specific days and times established and maintained throughout the intervention. Each training session, lasting 45 minutes, adhered to the scheduled counselling periods as outlined by the schools.

In the experimental groups, participants were trained in assertiveness technique, while the control group received conventional group counselling. This training regimen continued for eight weeks. Following the completion of the treatment period, the Academic Self-Concept Survey (ASS) was readministered to all participants in both the experimental and control groups. The resulting scores, constituting the post-test data, were then collated and subjected to statistical analysis along with the earlier collected pre-test scores. This comprehensive process aimed to assess the impact of the interventions on participants' academic self-concepts.

## 6. CONTROL OF EXTRANEIOUS VARIABLES

The researcher implemented measures to control potential extraneous variables, including participant mood, location, discrimination, method, and time of day. Failure to control these factors adequately could have introduced contamination to the study and potentially interfered with the accuracy of the findings.

## 7. STATISTICAL DESIGN

The scoring of the completed instruments was carried out in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Academic Self-concept Survey (ASS) manual. The research question was addressed through statistical mean calculations, while the null hypotheses underwent testing via Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). A treatment technique for a group was deemed "effective" if its post-test mean score fell below the norm of



70.27; otherwise, it was considered "not effective." Regarding the null hypotheses, rejection occurred when the p-value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, while acceptance took place when the p-value exceeded the specified level of significance.

## 8. RESULTS

The data analysed are presented as follows:

### Research Question 1

What is the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving the low academic self-concept of secondary school students, in comparison with those who underwent conventional counselling, as measured by their pre-test and post-test scores?

**Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Academic self-concept mean scores of students Treated with Assertiveness technique and those treated with conventional counselling (Norm= 72.50)**

Source of variation	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gained mean	Remark
Assertiveness	34	65.56	93.26	27.7	Effective
Control	30	63.23	70.47	7.24	

Table 1 reveals that the students with low academic self-concept, who were treated with Assertiveness technique, had pre-test mean score of 65.56 and post-test mean score of 93.26 with gained mean 27.7 in their Academic self-concept enhancement treatment, while those in the control group who received conventional counselling had pre-test mean score of 63.23 and post-test mean score of 70.47 with gained mean of 10.53. Therefore, with post-test mean score of 93.26 which is

above the norm of 72.50, Assertiveness technique is effective in enhancing Academic self-concepts of secondary school students.

### Research Question 2

What is the difference in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving low academic self-concept among male and female secondary school students, assessed?

**Table 2: Pretest and Posttest low academic self-concepts mean scores of male and female students treated with assertiveness training technique**

Source of Variation	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Lost Mean	Remark
Male	13	66.77	93.54	26.77	
Female	21	64.81	93.10	28.29	More Effective

Table 2 reveals that the male students treated with assertiveness training technique had pretest mean score of 66.77 and posttest mean score of 93.54 with gained mean 26.77 in their low academic self-concepts, while the female students treated with assertiveness training technique had pretest mean score of 64.81 and posttest mean score of 93.10 with gained mean 28.29. With gained mean score of 28.29 for females which is greater than gained mean score of 26.77 for males, assertiveness training technique is more effective in enhancing female secondary school students' low academic self-concepts.

## Testing the Null Hypotheses

### Null Hypothesis 1

There is significant difference in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving the low academic self-concept of secondary school students, in comparison with those who underwent conventional counselling, as measured by their pre-test and post-test scores.

**Table 3: ANCOVA on the effect of modelling technique on low academic self-concept of secondary school students compared with those treated with conventional counselling**

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	Cal. F	Pvalue	P ≤ 0.05
Corrected Model	3068.405	2	1534.203			
Intercept	2717.255	1	2717.255			
Pretest	46.198	1	46.198			
Treatment methods	2733.541	1	2733.541	60.97	0.000	S
Error	2645.143	59	44.833			
Total	379808.000	62				
Corrected Total	5713.548	61				

Table 3 indicates that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 61df denominator, the calculated F is 60.97 with Pvalue of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of modeling technique on the low academic self-concept of secondary school students is significant.

### Null Hypothesis 2

The differences in the effect of assertiveness techniques on improving low academic self-concept among male and female secondary school students, assessed through their gained mean scores is not significant.



**Table 10: ANCOVA on the effective of assertiveness training technique in enhancing academic self-concept of male and female secondary school students**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Pvalue	Decision
Corrected Model	88.105	2	44.052			
Intercept	573.905	1	573.905			
PRETEST	.256	1	.256			
GENDER	84.912	1	84.912	1.328	.258	NS
Error	1982.513	31	63.952			
Total	297813.000	34				
Corrected Total	2070.618	33				

Table 10 shows that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 33df denominator, the calculated F is 1.328 with Pvalue of 0.258 which is greater than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. The differences in the effects of assertiveness training technique in enhancing academic self-concept of male and female secondary school students when compared using their pre-test and post-test mean scores is not significant.

## 9. DISCUSSION

Findings of this study were discussed as follows:

### The effect of assertiveness technique in enhancing Academic self-concepts of secondary school students

The findings of the study revealed the effectiveness of assertiveness techniques in elevating the academic self-concept of secondary school students. Those exposed to assertiveness therapy demonstrated an enhancement in their academic self-concept, as evidenced by a post-test mean score exceeding the norm of the measuring instrument. Additionally, a significant difference was observed when comparing the impact of assertiveness technique with conventional counselling on secondary school students' academic self-concept. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by Makinde and Akinteye (2013), who found assertiveness training to be efficacious in boosting adolescents' self-esteem. Similar support comes from related studies by Agbakwuru and Ugwueze (2014), Anyamene, Nwokolo, and Ezeani (2016), and Okeiye, Okereke, and Nwoga (2015), highlighting the positive effects of assertiveness training on self-esteem and resilience in respondents.

The success of assertiveness training in enhancing academic self-concept may stem from several factors. First, assertiveness is integral to self-concept; as assertiveness increases, so does self-concept. Furthermore, assertiveness training is grounded in the recognition of one's inherent worth and the accompanying rights, motivating participants to assert themselves confidently in academics. Another contributing factor may be the improvement in communication skills through assertive behaviours. Successful communication likely leads to positive evaluations from others, positively influencing the participants' self-concept. This aligns with Burnett's (1999) observations regarding a cycle of non-assertive behaviour hindering academic self-concept, with assertiveness breaking this cycle by garnering positive responses and improving self-evaluation.

The positive impact of assertiveness training may also be attributed to the notion that academic self-concept is shaped by a student's self-perception developed through academic endeavours and interactions. If students struggle with low academic self-concept, assertiveness becomes crucial for successful coping. The study's assertiveness therapy aimed to alter students' self-perception, fostering increased assertiveness, adequate expression of emotions and thoughts, and a further boost in self-confidence. As students apply assertiveness skills across various aspects of their lives, including social, academic, and personal spheres, they cultivate a stronger belief in their potential for achieving success.

### The effect of assertiveness technique in enhancing Academic self-concepts of male and female secondary school students

The findings of the study highlight the effectiveness of assertiveness training in improving the low academic self-concepts of female secondary school students. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the effectiveness of assertiveness training between male and female students. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by Anyamene, Nwokolo, and Ezeani (2016) and Makinde and Akinteye (2013), whose related studies found no significant gender-based differences in the impact of assertiveness training on students' low self-esteem. Okeiye, Okereke and Nwoga (2015) also supported these findings, reporting no statistically significant differences in the effects of assertiveness therapy on male and female students participating in assertiveness training programs.

One possible explanation for these findings is the early development of assertiveness skills during children's educational programs. In these early stages, students are encouraged to express opinions and assert their personal rights, fostering empowerment and autonomy. Students practice assertiveness skills through demonstrations, role-playing, and classroom experiences, receiving support, guidance, and feedback from teachers, counsellors, and other significant figures in the school environment.

Additionally, the nature of the experimental training provided to participants might contribute to the lack of gender-specific effects. The training focused on building assertive behaviour without a gender dimension, emphasizing the importance of feeling positive about oneself in relation to academic pursuits. The study suggests that the similarities observed in the



assertiveness development between female and male learners indicate a shared need for self-directed behaviours in the quest to improve academic self-concept. Learning to be assertive in an academic context involves managing interactions, situations, and activities in school, serving as an essential skill for students aspiring to achieve academic success regardless of gender.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are made:

This study presented compelling evidence suggesting that the academic self-concept of secondary school students can experience improvement through the application of assertiveness techniques. However, despite these findings, the study concludes that assertiveness techniques do not yield a significant impact on the academic self-concept of both male and female secondary school students. While the study provides evidence of the potential positive impact of assertiveness techniques on the academic self-concept of secondary school students, there is lack of a significant overall effect for both genders. Further research and exploration of specific factors influencing the effectiveness of assertiveness techniques in different contexts may shed light on the complex relationship between assertiveness training and academic self-concept.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Considering the observed improvement in the academic self-concept of secondary school students through assertiveness techniques, it is recommended guidance counsellors working in secondary schools should utilise the technique and explore a more diverse range of assertiveness training methods.
2. Despite the overall non-significant impact on both male and female students, it is recommended to explore potential gender-specific nuances in response to assertiveness techniques. This could involve adapting assertiveness training content or delivery methods to better address the unique challenges and preferences of each gender. A gender-sensitive approach might reveal distinctions in how male and female students internalize assertiveness skills, leading to more targeted and effective interventions.

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