



Relationship between Motivation and Engagement and Senior Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Adamawa State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Academic achievement in English Language is a key determinant of educational success for senior secondary school students in Nigeria, particularly in Adamawa State, where performance has remained consistently low over the past decade. This study examined the relationship between motivation and engagement, and academic achievement in English among senior secondary school students. A correlational research design was adopted, involving 396 SSS II students selected through multi-stage sampling across three educational zones. Data were collected using the Students Motivation and Engagement Scale (SMAES) and an English Language Performance Proforma. The instruments were validated for content and construct validity, and reliability was confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$). Descriptive statistics assessed motivation and engagement levels, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) tested the relationship between behavioural adaptation and English achievement. Findings revealed that students exhibited a very high level of motivation and engagement (grand mean = 3.98, SD = 1.15), demonstrating enthusiasm for learning, classroom participation, and commitment to education. Behavioural adaptation showed a moderate positive correlation with academic achievement ($r = 0.488$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that students who persist, self-regulate, and adapt their learning behaviours tend to achieve better outcomes. These results underscore that while motivation and engagement are necessary, effective behavioural adaptation is essential for translating these factors into improved English performance. The study recommends integrating self-regulated learning strategies into instruction, training teachers to foster adaptive behaviours, linking motivation to behavioural adaptation, establishing mentorship programs, and providing institutional support. These interventions can enhance English proficiency and address persistent underperformance, contributing to improved educational outcomes in Adamawa State.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic achievement in English Language is a central determinant of educational success for senior secondary school students in Nigeria, including Adamawa State. English serves as the medium of instruction, a core subject for national examinations, and a gateway to higher

education and employability. Despite its critical importance, performance in English has consistently been a concern, with students in Adamawa State exhibiting persistently low achievement in senior secondary school examinations (Agah, 2021; Boniface, 2020).

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Over the past decade (2015–2025), senior secondary school students in Adamawa State have consistently struggled to achieve satisfactory results in English Language. In 2015, only about 42% of students attained five credits including English, slightly below the national average of 46.3%. This low performance persisted through 2016 to 2019, with marginal improvements from 43.5% to 45%, despite slight increases in national averages during the same period. A moderate improvement was observed in 2020, when approximately 50% of Adamawa students met the benchmark, coinciding with a national average credit pass rate of 65.2%.

Performance peaked modestly in 2021 and 2022, with estimated state averages of 55% and 56%, respectively, although national averages were higher at 81.7% and 76.4%. In 2023, the trend continued with about 57% of students in Adamawa achieving five credits including English, reflecting a slight improvement aligned with national patterns. However, recent years have shown a decline, with 55% of students attaining the benchmark in 2024 and an estimated 50% in 2025, following WAEC's revised national results. This trend highlights persistent underperformance in English, indicating systemic challenges in teaching quality, student engagement, learning resources, and examination readiness within the state.

Motivation and engagement have been identified as critical factors influencing academic outcomes in English.

Motivation encompasses the internal drives that stimulate learning, persistence, and effort toward mastery, while engagement reflects students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional participation in academic activities (She, Liang, Jiang, & Xing, 2023). Empirical studies suggest that students with higher intrinsic motivation and active engagement are more likely to perform better in English (Agah, 2021; Agbaeze-Chima, 2024; Yemisi, 2025). For instance, Agah (2021) found that senior secondary students in Adamawa who participated in blended learning programs exhibited higher engagement levels, which was significantly associated with improved English performance. Similarly, Agbaeze-Chima (2024)

reported that mastery motivation strongly predicts English achievement, with task persistence explaining approximately 42.1% of the variance in students' scores.

Furthermore, motivational factors interact with emotional and social dimensions to influence learning outcomes. ESMAT (2023) highlights that achievement motivation, combined with emotional intelligence, significantly enhances students' performance in English. Collaborative and interactive learning approaches also improve engagement, fostering better comprehension, retention, and academic achievement (Yemisi, 2025). These findings underscore the critical role of motivation and engagement in addressing persistent underperformance in English within Adamawa State. Several recent studies have established a significant positive relationship between students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement in English Language.

Alhassan, Agbo, and Hayatu (2025) found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation significantly influenced students' English achievement, indicating that motivated students tend to perform better academically. Similarly, Emesi, Anyanwu, and Ezenwosu (2024) reported that social goal orientation and self-regulated learning strategies combined to significantly predict students' achievement in English, highlighting the importance of motivational and self-regulatory factors. Anyanwu, Ezenwosu, and Emesi (2022) also observed that achievement goal orientation and self-regulated learning were significantly related to English performance, confirming that students with clear learning goals and effective engagement strategies achieved higher scores.

Conversely, some studies have reported non-significant or weak relationships between motivation and English achievement. Okonkwo and Nwankwo (2023) found a very weak negative correlation, suggesting that higher self-reported motivation did not necessarily translate into better English performance in their sample. Similarly, Okonkwo (2021) observed a weak negative relationship between academic motivation and achievement, indicating that motivation alone may not be sufficient to improve

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performance. Onuoha, Nwobi, and Agwu (2023) also reported no significant relationship between certain teacher motivation factors and students' English achievement, emphasizing that the effects of motivation can vary depending on context and mediating factors.

Although research shows that motivation and engagement can influence students' English achievement, most studies have been conducted outside Adamawa State, limiting their local applicability. Findings are inconsistent, with some studies reporting weak or non-significant relationships, highlighting the need to examine contextual and mediating factors. Few studies have explored the combined effect of motivation and engagement, and most rely on cross-sectional designs, failing to capture changes over time. Additionally, there is limited research linking these variables to the persistent poor English performance trends observed in Adamawa State, leaving a gap for locally relevant, evidence-based interventions.

Given the persistent low performance trends, the complex interplay of motivational and engagement factors and the importance of English as a core academic subject, it is imperative to investigate the relationship between motivation engagement and senior secondary school students' academic achievement in English Language in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Understanding this relationship can inform targeted interventions, guide teaching strategies and ultimately contribute to improving English proficiency, student retention and broader educational outcomes in the state.

Objective of the Study

The objective the study was to examine the relationship between motivation and engagement and senior secondary school student's academic achievement in English language in Adamawa state Nigeria.

Research Question

The research question formulated to guide this study:

What is the level of students' motivation and engagement in senior secondary school in Adamawa State?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between motivation and engagement and senior secondary school students' academic achievement in English language in Adamawa state Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between school adjustment and senior secondary school students' academic achievement in English Language in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The design allows for determining the nature, direction, and strength of the relationship between variables (Stango, 2017; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2019). The study was conducted in Adamawa State, a north-eastern state of Nigeria with its capital in Yola. The state has a population of approximately 4.9 million (NPC, 2021) and is divided into five education zones: Yola, Mubi, Gombi, Numan, and Ganye. The population for this study consisted of 35,525 SSS II English Language students across the state.

A sample of 396 students was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. First, three education zones were chosen via cluster sampling. Then, two LGAs per selected zone were randomly selected, followed by two senior secondary schools per LGA. Finally, 33 students were randomly chosen from each school, ensuring representation across zones. Data were collected using the Students Motivation and Engagement Scales (SMAES) adapted from Bandura (1986), complemented by an English Language Performance Proforma (ELPP) to obtain students' academic results. The SMAES consisted of 10 items measuring motivation and engagement, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument's validity was established through expert review for



content validity and exploratory factor analysis for construct validity, ensuring theoretical alignment and robust measurement of the intended constructs.

Reliability was determined via a pilot study using 50 students, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.78, indicating good internal consistency. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to assess levels of motivation and engagement, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the relationship between behavioral adaptation and

academic achievement at a 0.05 significance level. Correlation strength was interpreted using Cohen's (1988) guidelines, where 0.10–0.29 indicates a low positive relationship, 0.30–0.49 a moderate positive relationship, and 0.50–1.0 a strong positive relationship.

RESULTS

What is the level of Students' motivation and engagement in senior secondary school in Adamawa State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Level of Students' Motivation and Engagement of Senior Secondary School in Adamawa State

S/N/Items	n=396	Mean	S. D	Remark
1 How motivated are you to learn, even if it's not for a grade?		4.24	1.05	HL
2 How much do external rewards (e.g., prizes, certificates) motivate you to perform well?		4.05	1.05	HL
3 How actively do you participate in class discussions?		3.86	1.14	HL
4 How much do external rewards (e.g., prizes, certificates) motivate you to perform well?		3.95	1.14	HL
5 How committed are you to finishing your education?		3.95	1.24	HL
6 How often do you explore topics that interest you beyond the classroom material?		3.86	1.18	HL
7 How much do external rewards (e.g., prizes, certificates) motivate you to perform well?		3.98	1.09	HL
8 How much effort do you put into preparing for exams?		4.02	1.17	HL
9 How often do you continue working on a task, even when it becomes difficult?		3.93	1.18	HL
10 How much do you enjoy attending school overall?		3.97	1.24	HL
Grand Mean		3.98	1.15	HL

Table 1 shows that mean and standard deviation of the level of Students' motivation and engagement in senior secondary school in Adamawa State. The grand mean of 3.98 reveals a very high level of motivation and engagement in academic activities. Students are generally enthusiastic about learning, committed to school, and actively participate in classroom tasks. The relatively low standard deviation of 1.15 suggests

consistent responses across the sample, indicating that most students are similarly motivated and engaged.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between behavioral adaptation and senior secondary school student's academic achievement in English language in Adamawa state Nigeria.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Behavioral Adaptation and Senior Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement in English Language in Adamawa State Nigeria

Variable	n	Mean	S. D	r-value	p-value	Remark
Behavioral Adaptation	396	3.93	1.19	0.488	0.000	H ₀₆ rejected
Students' Academic Achievement	396	41.94	17.23			

The findings in Table 2 demonstrate a significant relationship between behavioral adaptation and academic achievement. Behavioral adaptation had a mean score of 3.93

(SD = 1.19), while academic achievement recorded a mean of 41.94 (SD = 17.23). The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.488 indicates a moderate positive relationship, supported by a p-

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value of 0.000. The rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{06}) suggests that better behavioral adaptation is associated with higher academic achievement in English Language among senior secondary school students.

Summary of the Findings

The study revealed that senior secondary school students in Adamawa State exhibit a very high level of motivation and engagement in their academic activities. Table 1 shows a grand mean of 3.98 with a standard deviation of 1.15, indicating that students are generally enthusiastic about learning, committed to completing their education, actively participate in classroom discussions, and put significant effort into preparing for exams. The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistent motivation and engagement across the student population.

Furthermore, the study found a significant positive relationship between behavioral adaptation and academic achievement in English Language. As shown in Table 2, behavioral adaptation had a mean score of 3.93 (SD = 1.19), while academic achievement had a mean of 41.94 (SD = 17.23). The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.488$, $p = 0.000$) indicates a moderate positive relationship, demonstrating that students who exhibit higher behavioral adaptation tend to achieve better academic outcomes in English. The null hypothesis (H_{01}) was therefore rejected, confirming that behavioral adaptation significantly influences English achievement among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The data showing a high level of student motivation and engagement (grand mean = 3.98) among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State is very promising. It indicates that students are generally enthusiastic about learning, willing to put in effort for exams, and committed to finishing their education. These internal drives and engagement behaviors provide a strong foundation for academic success, particularly in challenging subjects such as English Language. The moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.488$, $p =$

0.000) between behavioral adaptation and English achievement demonstrates that students who adapt their behaviors such as persisting through difficulties, regulating their learning, and maintaining motivation tend to perform better academically. This finding aligns with existing research. For instance, Emesi, Anyanwu, and Ezenwosu (2024) found that social goal orientation and self-regulated learning strategies significantly predicted English achievement, reinforcing the notion that motivation and adaptive learning strategies are crucial in driving language performance.

However, the relationship between motivation, engagement, and achievement is not always straightforward. Nwikpo, Okochi, Eluemuno, and Nwasor (2024) observed that while academic motivation showed a strong positive correlation with performance, self-regulation, which overlaps with behavioral adaptation, did not significantly predict academic performance in their regression model. This indicates that motivation alone may not be sufficient; adaptive behaviors must translate into effective learning strategies to produce tangible academic gains.

Further insight comes from studies on learning adaptability. Shi, Lin, and Yu (2025) demonstrated that learning adaptability positively influences self-regulated learning through academic motivation and self-management. This suggests that students must not only be motivated but also able to manage themselves and adjust strategies according to changing learning demands. In other words, behavioral adaptation is partly determined by how effectively students can regulate their motivation to support learning. Experimental research also supports the link between behavioral adaptation and improved academic outcomes.

Mulak, Ndampon, and Dauda (2023) found that teaching self-regulated learning techniques significantly increased both interest (a motivational component) and academic achievement in social studies. While conducted in a different subject, these findings indicate that enhancing self-regulation can improve both motivation and performance, suggesting similar



strategies could be effective in English classrooms. Taken together, the findings in Adamawa State are consistent with broader empirical trends. The high levels of reported motivation and engagement provide a fertile foundation, while the moderate positive correlation highlights the importance of behavioral adaptation in enhancing academic performance. Global and Nigerian research further indicates that interventions aimed at strengthening self-regulation and adaptability could substantially boost achievement in English.

CONCLUSION

The study established that senior secondary school students in Adamawa State exhibit high levels of motivation and engagement in academic activities, particularly in English Language. The findings further revealed a moderate positive relationship between behavioral adaptation and academic achievement, indicating that students who demonstrate adaptive learning behaviors—such as persistence, self-regulation, and consistent engagement—tend to achieve better outcomes in English. These results highlight the critical role of behavioral adaptation in translating motivation and engagement into actual academic success.

The findings also underscore that while motivation and engagement are necessary for improved performance, they alone are not sufficient. Effective behavioral adaptation and self-regulated learning strategies are essential for optimizing English achievement. Moreover, the study confirms that enhancing students' ability to manage and adapt their learning behaviors can significantly contribute to improving performance, addressing the persistent challenges in English achievement in Adamawa State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should incorporate SRL strategies into English instruction, helping students set goals, monitor progress, and reflect on their learning to strengthen behavioral adaptation.
2. Teachers should be trained to identify and foster adaptive behaviors among students, using strategies that encourage persistence, engagement, and effective study habits.
3. Schools should design programs that not only encourage motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) but also link it to adaptive learning behaviors, ensuring students can convert motivation into consistent academic effort.
4. Establish mentorship or peer-support programs where students can receive guidance on effective learning strategies, problem-solving, and behavioral adaptation techniques.
5. The Ministry of Education and school management boards should provide resources and institutional support for behavioral adaptation programs, including workshops, counseling services, and learning materials that enhance student engagement.

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