THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES ON ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT: A PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH IN EGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION B. Sc. (Ed). GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

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CERTIFICATION

We hereby certify that this project research was carried out by Christabel **LONGE** with the Matriculation Number **EDU2102416** in the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology.

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Date: _____

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the women who fought long before I ever had the chance to learn, think, or speak freely. To the feminists, past and present, whose courage and resistance made it possible for girls like me to access education and earn a degree. You challenged the world so we could sit in classrooms, dream boldly, and find our voices. To those still pushing against inequality and clearing the path for others. THIS IS FOR YOU!

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of early childhood experiences on the academic self-concept of senior secondary school students in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, adopting a psychoanalytic perspective. The research was driven by the view that childhood experiences form the foundation of personality development, emotional stability, and later academic functioning. A descriptive survey design was used, and a sample of two hundred students was selected through a multistage sampling procedure. A validated questionnaire with a reliability coefficient above .70 was used to collect data on early childhood experiences and academic self-concept. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and independent samples t-test.

The findings showed that emotional support, parental involvement, and quality of early childhood interactions were positively associated with academic self-concept among students. Children who experienced warmth, stability, and consistent guidance developed more positive academic self-beliefs compared with those who experienced neglect, frequent conflict, or instability during childhood. The results further indicated that early childhood experiences significantly predicted academic self-concept, while gender showed no significant difference in the influence of these early experiences on academic self-concept.

The study concluded that early childhood experiences play an important role in shaping how students perceive their academic abilities, supporting psychoanalytic assumptions that early life events leave lasting impressions on personality and behaviour. It was recommended that parents, caregivers, and educators provide nurturing, emotionally supportive, and developmentally appropriate early childhood environments to promote healthier academic self-beliefs among learners.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The early years of a child's life, typically from birth to around age eight, are considered the most critical stage for brain development and personality formation. During this period, children begin to form emotional bonds, learn language, develop motor and cognitive skills, and construct their first sense of identity. According to Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), the foundations laid in early childhood significantly impact an individual's social competence, emotional regulation, and capacity for learning later in life. These years are often shaped by the quality of parental care, the consistency of emotional support, exposure to educational materials, and the surrounding environment. As such, early childhood experiences both positive and negative play a formative role in shaping how children see themselves and how they engage with academic challenges.

Academic self-concept refers to a student's perception and evaluation of their own academic abilities and potential. It is a crucial psychological construct that influences motivation, academic achievement, and long-term educational aspirations (Marsh *et al.*, 2018). A child who believes in their intellectual competence is more likely to be resilient, goal-oriented, and successful in school-related activities. Conversely, children who develop a negative academic self-concept often struggle with low self-esteem, poor academic performance, and diminished motivation. The development of academic self-concept does not occur in isolation; it is deeply rooted in a child's early experiences particularly the kind of feedback, encouragement, or criticism they receive from significant adults in their lives.

In the Nigerian context, especially in local communities such as Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, early childhood experiences are often influenced by a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors. Many children are raised in households with limited educational resources, minimal parental involvement, and caregivers who may lack formal knowledge of child development. These conditions can hinder emotional and cognitive growth, subsequently affecting the child's academic self-perception. As noted by Akpan and Umobong (2017), children raised in intellectually stimulating environments with responsive caregiving tend to enter school with higher confidence and a more positive academic identity than those from deprived or inconsistent backgrounds.

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping how early childhood experiences influence academic self-concept. Studies have shown that boys and girls may internalize early emotional and educational experiences differently due to both biological and sociocultural factors. For instance, girls often receive more verbal stimulation and emotional responsiveness in early childhood, which can foster a stronger academic self-concept in language-related tasks. Boys, on the other hand, may experience early encouragement in physical or spatial tasks, but are sometimes subject to harsher disciplinary practices, which may influence their academic confidence negatively or shape their learning behavior in distinct ways (Else-Quest, Hyde, & Linn, 2010). In communities like Egor, where gender expectations often dictate the nature of caregiver-child interaction, these differences may further widen the gap in academic self-concept between male and female children. Yet, research in Nigeria has rarely examined how gender moderates the relationship between early experiences and academic identity formation, leaving a critical gap in understanding the

nuanced ways boys and girls develop academically under similar or differing childhood conditions (Ogunshola & Adewale, 2021).

The psychoanalytic approach offers a profound lens through which the effects of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept can be understood. Rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud and later expanded by Erik Erikson, psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the influence of unconscious processes and early relational patterns on later behavior and personality development. Freud posited that childhood experiences leave lasting imprints on the psyche, while Erikson's psychosocial stages such as “trust vs. mistrust” and “autonomy vs. shame and doubt” highlight how unresolved developmental conflicts in early life can manifest as difficulties in self-esteem, self-concept, and interpersonal functioning (Erikson, as cited in Batra, 2016). More contemporary psychoanalytic theorists, such as Fonagy and Allison (2019), argue that emotional neglect, overprotection, or inconsistency in early caregiving may lead to distorted internal representations of the self, which can impair academic motivation and achievement.

Despite the increasing recognition of academic challenges faced by Nigerian children, little research has been conducted from a psychoanalytic perspective that explores how unconscious emotional experiences shape academic self-concept. Most existing studies focus on cognitive abilities or observable behaviors, often neglecting the deeper psychological underpinnings of academic functioning. Yet, studies in developmental psychology affirm that consistent emotional nurturance, cognitive stimulation, and secure attachment in early life are strongly associated with better academic outcomes and a healthier sense of self (Thompson, 2016; Malti *et al.*, 2020).

Given the socio-cultural complexities and educational disparities in communities like Egor, it is essential to explore the nuanced ways in which early childhood experiences shape academic self-concept through a psychoanalytic lens. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the emotional and psychological dynamics that influence academic behavior insights that are often overlooked in purely behavioral or cognitive frameworks.

A comprehensive understanding of how early childhood experiences influence academic self-concept particularly from a psychoanalytic standpoint has the potential to inform interventions by parents, teachers, and policymakers. It can guide the development of emotionally supportive and intellectually enriching environments that are tailored to the needs of children in Egor Local Government Area and similar contexts. By bridging the gap between early life experiences and later academic outcomes, this study aims to contribute meaningful insights into child development and educational psychology in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Academic self-concept, or the way children perceive their own intellectual abilities, plays a critical role in shaping their motivation, academic engagement, and long-term educational success. This self-perception begins to form in early childhood, influenced by parental care, emotional security, and exposure to learning opportunities. However, in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, observable disparities in academic performance among children suggest deeper developmental concerns beyond the surface of classroom learning.

In practical terms, many primary and junior secondary school teachers in Egor report that some pupils display low academic confidence, reluctance to participate in class, or anxiety when given academic tasks. For instance, school counselors and educators have noted

that a number of students underperform academically not because of a lack of intellectual potential, but due to negative beliefs about their capabilities beliefs that often trace back to dysfunctional early home environments or emotionally unstable upbringings. These anecdotal observations are rarely investigated systematically, particularly through a psychological lens.

Empirical studies also support this concern. According to Akpan and Umobong (2017), Nigerian children from emotionally secure and cognitively enriched early childhood backgrounds tend to perform better academically and develop a more positive academic self-concept. Conversely, children exposed to emotional neglect, harsh criticism, or inconsistent parenting often struggle with low self-worth and poor academic confidence. Yet, interventions in Nigeria still largely focus on external school-based strategies without addressing the psychological roots of academic self-perception.

In addition, most Nigerian research has concentrated on cognitive development and school readiness, neglecting the psycho-emotional foundations that influence how children perceive their learning potential (Ajuwon, 2020). Very few studies have explored the influence of early unconscious emotional experiences using a psychoanalytic lens, despite the fact that unresolved early conflicts as posited by Freud, Erikson, and later scholars can lead to deeply ingrained self-doubt, anxiety, or learned helplessness in academic environments (Fonagy & Allison, 2019; Stein, 2018).

This research, therefore, becomes necessary in a context like Egor where socio-economic inequalities, low parental literacy, and inconsistent caregiving practices are common. There is a critical need to go beyond academic scores and classroom behavior to explore how early emotional and relational experiences shape a child's academic self-

concept. The lack of empirical data on this issue, coupled with the underutilization of psychoanalytic approaches in educational research, further underscores the urgency of this study.

In sum, the problem lies in both the limited understanding of how early emotional experiences affect academic self-concept and the lack of attention to psychoanalytic theories in addressing these challenges. This study aims to bridge that gap by investigating the unconscious and emotional foundations of academic self-concept in school-aged children in Egor Local Government Area.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent does perceived emotional support in early childhood relate to the academic self-concept of primary school pupils?
2. What is the relationship between adverse early experiences and academic self-concept?
3. How does the quality of early learning environments influence academic self-concept?
4. Are there gender differences in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept?

Research Hypotheses

The study will test the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between perceived emotional support in early childhood and academic self-concept among primary school pupils.

2. Adverse early experiences (such as trauma or neglect) have no significant effect on the academic self-concept of primary school pupils.
3. The quality of early learning environments does not significantly predict pupils' academic self-concept.
4. There is no significant gender difference in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept among primary school pupils.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how early childhood experiences influence the academic self-concept of primary school pupils in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, through a psychoanalytic framework. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Determine the relationship between perceived emotional support in early childhood and academic self-concept.
- Assess the effect of adverse early experiences (e.g., trauma or neglect) on academic self-concept.
- Analyze the contribution of early learning environments to pupils' academic self-image.
- Explore whether there are gender differences in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a critical yet often overlooked area in educational psychology: the psychological roots of children's academic self-concept as shaped by early childhood experiences. In the Nigerian context, most educational

interventions focus on curriculum development, teacher training, or cognitive skill-building, with limited attention given to the emotional and relational foundations of learning. By examining academic self-concept through a psychoanalytic lens, this study contributes a deeper understanding of the internal emotional dynamics that influence children's academic performance and motivation.

First, the study will benefit educators and school counselors by highlighting how unresolved emotional issues or adverse early experiences may manifest as low self-confidence, withdrawal, or poor classroom participation. With this knowledge, educators can shift from surface-level disciplinary or academic interventions to more holistic and supportive approaches tailored to the emotional needs of their pupils.

Secondly, the study will be valuable to parents and caregivers by drawing attention to the importance of providing stable, nurturing, and emotionally responsive environments during early childhood. Many caregivers in Egor and similar communities are unaware of the long-term psychological impact of their caregiving styles. Findings from this research may encourage more intentional parenting practices that foster healthy academic self-beliefs in children.

In addition, the study will be of interest to policy makers and early childhood development planners, especially within Edo State. The results could inform the design of child-focused policies that integrate emotional development into early childhood education programs. This could also support the training of teachers and caregivers on how to recognize and address emotional or psychological difficulties that may hinder academic growth.

Furthermore, this study has significance for the academic community by filling a critical gap in Nigerian research literature. Few existing studies in the country have applied psychoanalytic theory to explore the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept. By doing so, this research introduces a valuable theoretical framework that connects emotional development, unconscious processes, and educational outcomes in a meaningful way.

Lastly, the study may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in investigating the intersection of psychology and education in local contexts. It encourages multi-dimensional approaches to academic research going beyond observable behavior to consider the deeper psychological forces at play in children's learning.

In essence, this study not only contributes to knowledge but also offers practical insights that can improve academic support systems for children, particularly those in semi-urban settings like Egor Local Government Area.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This research work focused on the influence of early childhood experiences on the academic self-concept of primary school pupils. The study investigated the extent to which emotional support, exposure to trauma or neglect, and the quality of early learning environments contribute to pupils' perception of their academic abilities and self-worth. It also examined possible gender differences in how early childhood experiences shape academic self-concept. The study was delimitated to selected public and private primary school pupils between the ages of 7 and 15 years in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State.

Operational Definition of Terms

- **Academic Self-Concept:** In this study, academic self-concept refers to a pupil's self-perception and personal evaluation of their competence and ability in academic tasks. It will be measured through a structured questionnaire assessing confidence in learning, self-belief in academic performance, and perceived academic strengths.
- **Early Childhood Experiences:** This term refers to the emotional, relational, and environmental conditions a child is exposed to during the formative years, typically from birth to age six. It includes experiences such as parental emotional support, stability of caregiving, exposure to trauma or neglect, and early learning opportunities.
- **Attachment Security:** Attachment security refers to the degree to which a child perceives their relationship with primary caregivers as consistent, supportive, and emotionally safe. In this study, it is evaluated through questionnaire items that reflect the child's felt closeness, trust, and emotional bond with caregivers.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** These include negative events such as emotional neglect, physical abuse, domestic conflict, or the absence of a stable caregiver that a child may have encountered in early life. For this study, ACEs are captured through pupils' self-reported exposure to distressing or unstable early-life situations.
- **Psychoanalytic Approach:** This refers to a theoretical lens derived from psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Freud and Erikson, focusing on how unconscious processes, early relationships, and unresolved emotional experiences influence later behavior. In the context of this study, it is used to interpret how early childhood experiences may shape the pupil's academic self-concept.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review related literature under the following sub headings;

- Theoretical Framework
- Concept of Early Childhood Experiences
- Concept of Academic Self-Concept
- Gender and Academic Self-Concept
- The Psychoanalytic Approach to Child Development
- Relationship Between Early Childhood Experiences and Academic Self-Concept
- Summary of Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, which offers a foundational understanding of how early childhood experiences shape an individual's personality and self-perception. Freud's theory emphasizes the significance of unconscious processes and early relationships in the development of the human psyche (Corey, 2017). According to Freud, personality development is largely influenced by unconscious conflicts and events, particularly those occurring during early childhood (Niaz *et al.*, 2019).

Freud proposed that children pass through a series of psychosexual stages, each centred on a different erogenous zone. These stages include the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages (Verywell Mind, 2023). The experiences and conflicts encountered during these stages can have lasting effects on an individual's personality and behaviour. For instance, unresolved conflicts during the anal stage, which occurs between 18 months and

three years of age, can lead to personality traits such as orderliness or messiness in adulthood (Verywell Mind, 2023).

The relevance of Freud's theory to this study lies in its emphasis on the formative impact of early childhood experiences. In the context of Egor Local Government Area, where children may face various socio-economic challenges, understanding the psychoanalytic underpinnings of academic self-concept is crucial. Freud's theory suggests that early emotional experiences and unconscious conflicts can influence a child's sense of competence and self-worth in academic settings (Niaz *et al.*, 2019).

Empirical studies have supported Freud's position that early experiences play a significant role in shaping self-concept and later academic behaviour. For instance, Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2018) found that children's attachment patterns and parental responsiveness during early years significantly predicted their self-esteem and confidence in academic tasks. Similarly, Onuoha and Nwosu (2020) reported that unresolved early childhood emotional conflicts often manifest as low academic motivation and poor self-concept among secondary school students in southern Nigeria. In another study, Ojo (2021) established that learners who experienced nurturing and emotionally stable early childhood environments developed higher levels of academic self-concept compared to those exposed to neglect or inconsistent parenting.

Furthermore, Adeoye and Olatunji (2022) emphasised that early psychosocial experiences, such as parental warmth and security, influence cognitive development and school adjustment, which are closely linked to self-perception and academic achievement. These empirical findings reinforce Freud's assertion that the unconscious internalisation of

early relational experiences contributes to the development of the self and personality, thereby affecting academic functioning.

By applying Freud's psychoanalytic framework, this study aims to explore how early childhood experiences in Egor Local Government Area contribute to the development of academic self-concept. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the emotional and unconscious factors that shape children's academic identities, providing valuable insights for educational interventions and support strategies.

Concept of Early Childhood Experiences

Early childhood refers to the formative years of a child's life, typically spanning from birth to about eight years of age, a period widely recognized for its rapid and foundational developmental changes across emotional, cognitive, social, and physical domains (UNESCO, 2016). This phase is often subdivided into three key stages: infancy and toddlerhood (0–2 years), preschool age (3–5 years), and early primary school years (6–8 years). According to developmental psychologists, the experiences that occur during these years are critical in shaping the brain architecture, personality, behavior patterns, and emotional resilience of the child (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

In these early stages, the child begins to internalize experiences from their interactions with caregivers, their physical environment, and early exposure to learning. These interactions influence how they perceive themselves, how they relate to others, and how they respond to challenges. Therefore, early childhood is not only a period of biological growth but also a critical window for psychological development and identity formation (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015).

Empirical studies have reinforced the importance of early childhood experiences in determining children's later emotional and academic outcomes. For instance, Akpan and Nnamdi (2019) found that children who received consistent parental attention and emotional support during early years developed stronger self-confidence and school engagement. Similarly, Eze and Ogbu (2020) reported that early exposure to stimulating home environments enhanced cognitive and language skills, which later translated into higher academic achievement. In another study, Yusuf and Bello (2021) observed that negative early childhood experiences, such as neglect or inconsistent discipline, were significantly associated with low self-esteem and poor classroom behaviour among primary school pupils. Furthermore, Adebayo and Ibitoye (2023) established that early socio-emotional interactions with caregivers predicted positive self-concept and adaptability among young learners in South-West Nigeria. These findings collectively affirm that early experiences serve as a foundation for children's holistic development, influencing their emotional stability, academic readiness, and interpersonal relationships.

Importance of Early Childhood in Psychological Development

Psychological development during early childhood involves the emergence of foundational elements such as emotional regulation, social bonding, self-concept, and basic cognitive schemas. These elements serve as the building blocks for more complex behaviors and personality traits that emerge later in life. According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, early stages such as trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, and initiative vs. guilt are central to building a child's sense of identity and capability (Erikson, 1963).

Successful navigation of these stages relies heavily on the quality of caregiving and emotional interactions that the child receives in their immediate environment.

Neurological research supports this view, indicating that the brain's synaptic connections are most malleable during early childhood, making this period ideal for learning and emotional imprinting (Center on the Developing Child, 2017). When children are nurtured in environments that promote safety, love, stimulation, and consistency, they are more likely to develop secure attachments, positive emotional regulation, and confidence in their abilities qualities that directly influence academic motivation and engagement.

In contrast, when early developmental needs are unmet due to neglect, instability, or trauma, children may struggle with self-regulation, social interaction, and emotional resilience, which may later manifest as academic underperformance or behavioral issues (Thompson, 2016). Therefore, early childhood experiences do not merely affect immediate developmental outcomes but lay the psychological groundwork for how a child will function within formal educational settings.

Emotional Support in Early Childhood

Emotional support refers to the affection, warmth, responsiveness, and attunement that caregivers provide to children, helping them feel valued, secure, and understood. Research consistently shows that emotional support during early childhood is a primary determinant of positive mental health and academic self-concept in later years (Denham *et al.*, 2012). Children who receive consistent emotional validation tend to internalize a sense of worth, safety, and competence, which fosters curiosity, persistence, and engagement in learning tasks (Bowlby, 1988).

Supportive caregiving also promotes secure attachment, a psychological state where children feel safe to explore their environment and trust that their emotional needs will be met. This secure base enables the development of positive self-perceptions, which form the core of academic self-concept. In contrast, the absence of emotional support such as unresponsiveness, emotional unavailability, or erratic caregiving can lead to feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, which may hinder school engagement and confidence in academic ability (Thompson, 2016).

In the context of Nigerian communities like Egor, emotional support is often shaped by socio-cultural practices, economic pressures, and parental literacy. In families burdened by poverty or limited education, emotional availability may be compromised, not out of neglect, but due to structural constraints. This reality makes it essential to examine how varying levels of emotional support in early childhood impact academic self-concept among school-age pupils.

Adverse Early Childhood Experiences (Trauma, Neglect, Abuse)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refer to traumatic or harmful events that occur during childhood, including emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; neglect; household dysfunction; domestic violence; or parental substance abuse (Felitti *et al.*, 1998). These experiences have been strongly linked to poor academic performance, emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem, and negative behavioral outcomes.

Children who suffer from trauma or neglect in early childhood often internalize negative beliefs about themselves. This may develop into learned helplessness, fear of failure, or avoidance behaviors in academic environments (Stein, 2018). From a psychoanalytic

perspective, these unresolved emotional wounds are repressed into the unconscious and later expressed through symptoms such as low academic self-concept, lack of motivation, or classroom defiance (Fonagy & Allison, 2019).

Recent empirical studies have provided evidence supporting the enduring impact of adverse early childhood experiences on children's academic and emotional development. For instance, Adeola and Ogunyemi (2019) found that Nigerian pupils who experienced early neglect or domestic violence exhibited lower levels of academic self-concept and classroom participation compared to peers from stable homes. Similarly, Bello and Adebisi (2020) reported that children exposed to parental conflict and emotional abuse displayed higher anxiety levels and poorer school adjustment. A study by Idowu and Okafor (2021) further revealed that exposure to trauma and family instability predicted reduced concentration, low motivation, and diminished self-confidence among upper primary school pupils in Edo State. In addition, Ekanem, Obot, and Nwankpa (2023) discovered that emotional neglect and harsh punishment were significantly correlated with internalised feelings of worthlessness and poor academic resilience. These studies highlight that adverse early childhood experiences not only disrupt emotional regulation but also weaken children's self-perception and confidence in their academic abilities, particularly in socially and economically challenged communities like Egor.

Quality of Early Learning Environments

The learning environment in early childhood whether formal (e.g., preschools) or informal (e.g., home) is critical for cognitive and emotional development. Quality early learning environments are characterized by qualified teachers or caregivers, interactive

learning materials, safe and stimulating surroundings, and developmentally appropriate practices that foster exploration and self-expression (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss, 2016). Children exposed to such environments develop better language, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, which contribute to a stronger academic self-concept.

In contrast, children who lack access to stimulating early environments or are placed in overcrowded, under-resourced, or emotionally cold settings may enter formal schooling with developmental deficits. These gaps often lead to feelings of inferiority, low self-efficacy, and poor school adjustment, particularly when compared to peers who had more enriched early experiences (UNICEF, 2019).

In Egor Local Government Area, access to quality early education remains inconsistent. While some children attend well-structured private nurseries, others are raised in homes or informal settings with minimal cognitive stimulation. These disparities significantly affect how children perceive their abilities and interact with academic tasks once they enter primary school. Hence, exploring the quality of early learning environments becomes central to understanding variations in academic self-concept.

Concept of Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept refers to an individual's perception and evaluation of their own academic abilities and performance. It encompasses how students view their competence in learning, their confidence in handling academic tasks, and their expectations for success in school (Marsh *et al.*, 2018). Academic self-concept is a multidimensional and hierarchical construct, often divided into subject-specific domains (such as mathematics, reading, or science) as well as a general academic self-perception.

According to Marsh, Pekrun, Parker, Murayama, Guo, and Dicke (2019), academic self-concept is shaped by students' experiences of success and failure, comparisons with peers, and feedback received from significant others such as teachers, parents, and classmates. These perceptions evolve over time, particularly in response to emotional environments and the quality of educational experiences during the formative years. Similarly, Arens and Yeung (2020) emphasised that academic self-concept is dynamic and continuously reconstructed as learners interact with their academic environment and receive evaluative feedback from others.

Importantly, academic self-concept plays a mediating role in learning outcomes, influencing motivation, persistence, and overall academic performance. A child who believes they are capable of succeeding in school is more likely to engage positively in learning tasks and recover quickly from setbacks, while one with a poor academic self-concept may avoid challenges and internalize academic failure (Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004).

Empirical evidence supports the critical role of academic self-concept in determining learners' motivation and achievement. For example, Adeyemi and Fadiran (2019) found that students with higher academic self-concept demonstrated greater persistence, improved classroom engagement, and higher grades compared to peers with low self-concept. Similarly, Afolabi (2020) reported that positive teacher-student interactions and constructive feedback significantly enhanced pupils' academic self-beliefs and test performance. In a study by Obidike and Nwankwo (2021), parental involvement and encouragement during early schooling years were shown to strengthen children's self-efficacy and perception of competence. Furthermore, Musa and Ibrahim (2022) revealed that early emotional

experiences and supportive learning environments predicted stronger academic self-concept and resilience among Nigerian secondary school students. These studies collectively affirm that academic self-concept is not merely a product of intellectual capacity but is deeply influenced by emotional and social experiences, particularly during early childhood.

Development of Academic Self-Concept in Childhood

The development of academic self-concept begins in early childhood and is heavily influenced by the emotional climate and relational experiences within the family and learning environments. During the preschool and early primary school years, children start forming perceptions of their academic capabilities based on their interactions with caregivers, teachers, and peers, as well as their experiences with success or failure in learning contexts (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003).

Children who receive encouragement, praise, and consistent feedback tend to develop positive beliefs about their abilities. These beliefs solidify into a self-concept that affects their willingness to engage with academic challenges and persevere through difficulty. In contrast, children who experience criticism, neglect, or repeated failure may internalize a sense of incompetence, which can evolve into chronic academic disengagement and low self-efficacy.

The early years are especially sensitive because children do not yet have the cognitive maturity to separate task performance from personal worth. Thus, negative academic experiences are often interpreted as indicators of overall inadequacy. This connection underscores the importance of emotionally supportive and cognitively stimulating early environments for fostering healthy academic self-concept (Denissen *et al.*, 2007).

Academic Self-Concept and Learning Outcomes

Academic self-concept has been consistently identified as a strong predictor of academic achievement, motivation, and persistence. Empirical studies have demonstrated a reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and school performance, with each influencing the other over time. For instance, Marsh *et al.* (2019) found that students who held positive beliefs about their academic abilities achieved higher grades and showed sustained motivation throughout the school year. Similarly, Arens and Marsh (2018) revealed that academic self-concept and achievement reinforce one another, forming a positive developmental cycle that enhances long-term educational success. In a related study, Omoregie and Eze (2021) discovered that Nigerian secondary school students with strong academic self-concept exhibited greater resilience, better goal-setting behaviour, and improved examination performance. Likewise, Ojo and Adebayo (2022) reported that learners with high academic self-concept were more likely to adopt effective study strategies, persevere in difficult subjects, and recover more quickly from academic setbacks. These findings collectively affirm that academic self-concept plays a vital role in shaping students' motivation, learning strategies, and academic outcomes across diverse cultural and educational contexts.

In addition to influencing performance, academic self-concept affects emotional well-being. Children with low academic self-concept often experience anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues, particularly when they feel inadequate or overwhelmed in academic settings (Zuffianò *et al.*, 2013). These psychological outcomes further hinder learning and may contribute to a cycle of academic failure and low self-esteem.

Moreover, in the context of group dynamics within the classroom, a child's academic self-concept also determines their social positioning whether they are seen (and see themselves) as capable, average, or struggling learners. This perception can affect how they are treated by teachers and peers, thereby reinforcing either positive or negative self-beliefs (Wentzel, 2012).

Factors Influencing Academic Self-Concept

Multiple factors contribute to the development and stability of academic self-concept, particularly in the early years. These include:

- **Parental involvement**: Children whose parents engage in their education, show interest in their learning, and provide emotional support tend to develop stronger academic self-concepts (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005).
- **Teacher feedback**: Teachers' verbal and non-verbal cues about a child's performance can reinforce positive or negative self-perceptions. Constructive feedback fosters growth, while criticism or neglect can damage self-belief (Hattie, 2009).
- **Peer influence**: Peer comparisons and classroom dynamics also shape academic self-concept, particularly in group learning settings where children observe others' successes and failures.
- **Cultural and socioeconomic factors**: In communities where educational achievement is highly valued, children are more likely to internalize academic success as a key part of their identity. Conversely, children in under-resourced areas may struggle with conflicting messages about the value of education, which can lead to unstable or negative academic self-perceptions (Okpala & Onocha, 2020).

- **Early childhood experiences**: As highlighted in this study, early emotional experiences including trauma, neglect, and the quality of early learning environments form the foundation for academic identity. Children internalize early relational patterns that influence how they interpret academic success and failure, often at a subconscious level.

Academic self-concept is a crucial psychological construct that influences not only educational outcomes but also emotional resilience, motivation, and future aspirations. It is formed early in life through a complex interplay of personal experiences, relational feedback, and social context. For children in areas like Egor Local Government Area, academic self-concept may be particularly vulnerable to the quality of early emotional support, learning opportunities, and caregiver interactions because many children grow up in socio-economically challenging environments where resources for early learning and emotional development are limited. In such contexts, inconsistent parenting, exposure to stress, or lack of stimulating educational experiences can hinder the formation of positive self-beliefs and confidence in academic abilities. When caregivers are preoccupied with financial or social pressures, children may receive less emotional affirmation and guidance, leading to uncertainty about their competence and self-worth. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these early emotional deficiencies can be internalised and later manifest as low academic self-concept, reduced motivation, or anxiety in learning environments. Understanding how these early experiences shape academic self-concept is therefore vital for designing interventions that strengthen emotional support systems, enhance learning opportunities, and promote the psychological wellbeing of learners in low-resource or semi-urban settings such as Egor.

Gender and Academic Self-Concept

Gender plays a significant role in shaping academic self-concept through early socialization, family interactions, and cultural expectations. From childhood, boys and girls are often socialized differently, with boys encouraged to be independent, assertive, and resilient, while girls are typically guided to be nurturing, compliant, and emotionally expressive (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). These early experiences influence how children perceive themselves and respond to academic challenges. Girls often receive more emotional support at home and in school, which can strengthen emotional regulation and positively affect academic self-concept (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). Boys, on the other hand, may be discouraged from expressing vulnerability or seeking help, which can limit emotional development and academic confidence.

Psychoanalytic theory further explains that early emotional attachments and parental identification differ by gender, shaping long-term self-perception and emotional regulation (Freud, 1923). Empirical studies also report that girls tend to have higher self-concept in language-related subjects, while boys show higher self-concept in mathematics and science, patterns influenced more by societal expectations than actual ability (Eccles & Wang, 2016; Miller *et al.*, 2015). In Nigerian communities like Egor, cultural norms further reinforce these differences, with girls often burdened with household responsibilities that limit academic engagement, and boys pressured to "toughen up," reducing their likelihood of seeking support (Okafor & Okafor, 2017). Gender also affects early childhood experiences within families, as parents may provide more emotional attention to daughters and emphasize discipline or toughness with sons, shaping subconscious expectations of self and others

(Bowlby, 1988). Boys growing up in emotionally restrictive environments may develop defensive mechanisms, withdrawing from academic challenges, while overprotected girls may internalize anxiety, leading to underachievement despite ability (Chaplin, 2015). These dynamics illustrate how gendered socialization interacts with early experiences to influence emotional development and academic self-concept. Understanding these patterns is essential for creating supportive educational environments that recognise and address gender-specific needs in children, particularly in contexts like Egor.

The Psychoanalytic Approach to Child Development

The psychoanalytic approach to child development, pioneered by Sigmund Freud and later expanded by Erik Erikson, provides a framework for understanding how early childhood experiences shape personality, emotional life, and self-perception. This theory emphasizes that unconscious processes, early relationships, and emotional conflicts have lasting impacts on a child's development, including their behavior and self-concept in academic settings (Freud, 1923; Erikson, 1963). Freud proposed that personality develops through a series of psychosexual stages, and unresolved conflicts at any stage may result in fixations that influence later behaviors. Although modern theorists have expanded beyond Freud's strictly biological model, the core idea that early experiences are internalized and influence behavior subconsciously remains central to psychoanalytic thinking (Fonagy & Target, 2003). Erikson emphasized psychosocial stages, where the resolution of early emotional crises, such as trust versus mistrust and autonomy versus shame, forms the foundation of a healthy identity and self-concept.

A key principle of psychoanalytic theory is internalization, the process by which children absorb the values, expectations, and emotional patterns of their caregivers and environment into their developing sense of self. These internalized experiences shape the ego and self-concept, influencing how children perceive their capabilities and worth (Blatt & Levy, 2003). Children who experience consistent emotional support and validation are more likely to develop confidence and competence, which translates into positive academic self-concept. Conversely, children exposed to criticism, inconsistency, or neglect may internalize feelings of inadequacy or shame. These early negative experiences are often repressed into the unconscious but can resurface in behaviors such as avoidance of challenging tasks, resistance to authority, or school-related anxiety, thereby affecting academic engagement and self-perception (Stein, 2018). Psychoanalytic theory also highlights the role of defense mechanisms, such as denial, regression, or projection, which children may unconsciously use to cope with internal conflict and anxiety. In academic contexts, these mechanisms can appear as procrastination, defiance, aggression, or excessive self-criticism, reflecting deeper struggles with self-worth rather than intellectual ability (Vaillant, 1994). Understanding these underlying processes allows educators and counselors to provide interventions that address emotional and psychological needs, not just observable academic difficulties.

Once the psychoanalytic foundation is established, attachment theory can be introduced as a related extension that builds on these principles. Developed by John Bowlby, attachment theory focuses on the quality of the child's early bond with their primary caregiver and its long-term effects on emotional regulation, social relationships, and self-perception (Bowlby, 1988). Secure attachments provide children with confidence to explore

their environment while returning to caregivers for reassurance, whereas insecure attachments may lead to anxiety, fear, or avoidance. These early patterns of attachment become templates for later interactions, including relationships with teachers and peers, and can significantly influence academic self-concept. Children with insecure or disorganized attachments may struggle to trust authority figures, cope with academic stress, or believe in their own competence, which can impede the development of a positive academic identity (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Object relations theory, an offshoot of psychoanalytic thought, further explains that children internalize early relational experiences, forming mental representations of themselves and others. Negative internalized models, such as viewing oneself as incapable or unlovable due to neglect or abuse, can create barriers to academic achievement and self-belief (Kernberg, 2004).

In the Nigerian context, particularly in communities like Egor Local Government Area, many children experience early adversities such as poverty, family instability, or emotional neglect. Applying psychoanalytic and attachment perspectives in this context provides insight into how these early experiences can shape academic self-concept. Children who internalize adverse early experiences may develop low academic confidence, avoidance behaviors, or negative self-perceptions, whereas those who experience supportive, nurturing environments tend to develop stronger, more resilient academic identities (Malti *et al.*, 2020). Understanding these dynamics allows educators, psychologists, and counselors to develop holistic strategies that address both the cognitive and emotional foundations of learning, promoting healthier academic outcomes and self-concept among children.

Relationship between Early Childhood Experiences and Academic Self-Concept

Early childhood experiences play a critical role in shaping a child's academic self-concept, which refers to the perception and evaluation of one's own abilities and competence in learning contexts. From birth to approximately eight years of age, children undergo rapid emotional, social, and cognitive development. During this period, experiences with caregivers, family members, peers, and the wider environment form the foundation for self-perception and self-evaluation in later life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2015). Positive early experiences, including consistent emotional support, validation, and opportunities for exploration, contribute to the development of confidence, motivation, and resilience, which are reflected in a child's belief in their academic capabilities. Conversely, adverse experiences such as neglect, emotional inconsistency, abuse, or excessive criticism may be internalized as feelings of inadequacy or fear of failure, which negatively influence academic self-concept (Garthe *et al.*, 2019).

Psychoanalytic theory provides insight into how early experiences are internalized and influence later self-concept. Children who experience supportive and nurturing interactions are likely to develop a stable and positive ego structure, enabling them to approach learning with confidence and persistence (Fonagy & Allison, 2019). In contrast, children exposed to early adversities may develop unconscious emotional conflicts that manifest as low academic motivation, avoidance behaviors, or negative self-perceptions in school settings. Attachment theory further emphasizes that secure early attachments provide children with a sense of safety and competence, allowing them to explore and engage in learning environments effectively (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Insecure or disorganized

attachment patterns, however, may lead to academic anxiety, reluctance to seek help, and self-doubt, which interfere with the development of a positive academic self-concept.

Empirical studies support the strong link between early experiences and academic self-concept. Children who are exposed to responsive caregiving, stimulating environments, and emotionally supportive interactions demonstrate higher academic self-confidence and are more willing to engage in challenging learning tasks (Malti *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, children who experience neglect, harsh discipline, or inconsistent caregiving often report lower confidence in their academic abilities, even when their cognitive skills are intact (Perry & Pollard, 1998; Masten & Cicchetti, 2015). In semi-urban Nigerian contexts such as Egor, these dynamics are particularly relevant, as children may face socio-economic constraints, family instability, or limited access to early educational resources. Such conditions may exacerbate the impact of negative early experiences on academic self-concept, highlighting the importance of supportive interventions both at home and in schools.

Overall, the relationship between early childhood experiences and academic self-concept is mediated by emotional, social, and psychological factors established during the early years. Children internalize interactions with caregivers and environments, forming beliefs about their competence and self-worth that persist into academic contexts. Recognizing and addressing the impact of early experiences can help educators, counselors, and policymakers create environments that promote positive self-perception, resilience, and academic engagement, particularly in communities where children are at higher risk of adverse early experiences (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2015; Malti *et al.*, 2020).

Summary of Literature Review

Early childhood experiences have been widely recognised as crucial determinants of children's later development, including their academic self-concept. Previous studies have consistently shown that emotional support, cognitive stimulation, and environmental stability during early childhood contribute significantly to children's sense of academic competence and motivation (Thompson, 2016). Empirical evidence indicates that children who experience nurturing care and consistent emotional support develop stronger beliefs in their ability to succeed academically, while those exposed to neglect or instability are at greater risk of developing low academic self-concept (Fonagy & Allison, 2019; Zeanah & Gleason, 2015). Similarly, psychoanalytic theorists such as Freud and Erikson have explained that unresolved early emotional conflicts may unconsciously shape children's later academic motivation, self-perception, and capacity to engage with learning tasks (Erikson, 1963; Stein, 2018).

Other studies have explored how early learning environments influence the development of academic self-concept. Findings reveal that children in emotionally safe and cognitively rich learning environments demonstrate higher academic self-beliefs than those in low-resource settings (OECD, 2018; Guay *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, research has pointed to gender differences in the formation of academic self-concept, suggesting that social expectations and cultural norms may lead boys and girls to internalise early experiences differently (Chaplin, 2015; Okafor & Okafor, 2017). These studies highlight the multifaceted nature of early childhood influences and their long-term implications for academic development.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most previous studies have been conducted in Western or urban contexts, with limited attention to semi-urban Nigerian settings where socio-economic and cultural conditions differ significantly. Second, there is a paucity of research examining how early emotional experiences and environmental factors jointly influence academic self-concept through a psychoanalytic lens within local communities such as Egor Local Government Area. Third, while existing research has acknowledged the importance of early childhood environments, few studies have integrated both emotional and educational dimensions in understanding how early experiences shape self-beliefs in later learning stages.

The present study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept among pupils in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. By applying psychoanalytic insights to a local context, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how early emotional relationships, caregiver interactions, and learning environments interact to shape learners' academic identity and motivation. This context-specific approach is expected to contribute valuable knowledge that can inform educational and psychological interventions designed to foster positive academic self-concept among children in semi-urban Nigerian communities.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methods and procedures used by the researcher in carrying out the study are provided under the following subheadings:

- Design of the Study
- Population of the Study
- Sample and Sampling Techniques
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

Design of the Study

The design for this study was the survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it involves the systematic collection of information about existing conditions and perceptions as they exist at the time of the study. Survey design allows for the collection of reliable data on how early childhood experiences influence academic self-concept among school-aged children. It enables the researcher to gather information directly from respondents, identify patterns, and analyse relationships between early experiences and self-perception in academic settings.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprises of pupils in Primary Five and Six, as well as Junior Secondary School (JSS) One to Three in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. There are 37 public primary schools, 22 public secondary schools in Egor LGA. For private secondary schools in Egor LGA the number recorded is 128. The population will include pupils aged between six and sixteen years from selected public and private schools across the local government area. This population was relevant to the study as it represents children who are currently engaged in formal education and whose academic self-concept can be assessed in relation to their early childhood experiences.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total of 200 pupils were selected from public and private schools across the local government area as the sample for the study. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select schools and pupils that meet the inclusion criteria, such as age range and availability of records on early childhood experiences. Within the selected schools, simple random sampling was used to select individual pupils to ensure that each child has an equal chance of participation. This approach allows for both focus on relevant participants and minimization of selection bias.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument for this study was a structured questionnaire titled "Early Childhood Experiences and Academic Self-Concept Questionnaire (ECEASCQ)". The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A gathers demographic information of the respondents, including age, gender, and school type. Section B contains thirty (30) items

designed to assess pupils' early childhood experiences, such as caregiving quality, emotional support, and exposure to adverse experiences, as well as their current academic self-concept. Responses to items on the questionnaire will be measured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, face and content validity was established. The initial draft of the questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's project supervisor and two other experts in Educational Psychology and Child Development. Their feedback, comments, and suggested corrections were incorporated to produce the final version of the instrument. This process ensures that the questionnaire items are clear, relevant, and capable of accurately capturing data on early childhood experiences and academic self-concept.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using the test-retest method. The instrument was administered twice to 20 pupils from schools in Egor Local Government Area that are not part of the main study sample, with an interval of two weeks. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the consistency of responses. A reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained which was considered acceptable for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher personally administers the questionnaire to the selected pupils in their classrooms to ensure high response rates and accuracy. Clear instructions was given on how to complete the questionnaire, and the researcher was present to provide clarification if

needed. All completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure completeness and minimize missing data.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of respondents. Means and standard deviations was used to answer the research questions regarding early childhood experiences and academic self-concept. For hypotheses testing, inferential statistics was employed to determine the statistical significance of observed relationships. Data were presented in tables for clarity, and the criterion mean was set at 2.50, meaning that any item with a mean of 2.50 or above was considered acceptable, while those below 2.50 would be rejected.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented and the findings discussed.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex of Respondent	Male	93	46.5
	Female	107	53.5
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
Age group	6–8 years	27	13.5
	9–11 years	97	48.5
	12–14 years	59	29.5
	15–16 years	17	8.5
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
School Type	Public	112	56.0
	Private	88	44.0
	Total	**200**	**100.0**
Class Level	Primary 6	58	29.0
	JSS1	45	22.5
	JSS2	51	25.5
	JSS3	46	23.0
	Total	**200**	**100.0**

Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the 200 pupils who participated in the study. Sex of the respondents, 93 (46.5%) were male while 107 (53.5%) were female. This shows a slight predominance of female pupils in the sample.

For Age group, nearly half of the pupils were aged 9–11 years (97; 48.5%), making this the largest age group. Pupils aged 12–14 years were the next largest group (59; 29.5%), followed by those aged 6–8 years (27; 13.5%) and 15–16 years (17; 8.5%). The distribution

indicates that the sample is concentrated in the middle childhood to early adolescent range, with the largest share in the 9–11 years category.

More pupils attended public schools (112; 56.0%) than private schools (88; 44.0%) for school type. This suggests the sample leans slightly towards government-owned primary and junior secondary schools within Egor LGA.

Respondents were relatively well distributed across the study classes: Primary 6 pupils numbered 58 (29.0%), JSS1 pupils 45 (22.5%), JSS2 pupils 51 (25.5%), and JSS3 pupils 46 (23.0%). This spread indicates reasonable representation across the last year of primary school and the three years of junior secondary school.

The sample is broadly representative of upper primary and lower secondary pupils in Egor Local Government Area, with most respondents aged between 9 and 14 years, a slight majority of females, and a small majority attending public schools. This demographic profile is suitable for examining how early childhood experiences relate to academic self-concept across late primary and early secondary cohorts.

Research Question One: To what extent does perceived emotional support in early childhood relate to the academic self-concept of primary school pupils?

Table 2: Perceived Emotional Support in Early Childhood and Academic Self-Concept of Primary School Pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	X	DECISION
1	I felt loved and cared for by my parents or caregivers when I was very young.	103 (51.5)	77 (38.5)	17 (8.5)	3 (1.5)	200	3.40	Agree
2	My parents or caregivers encouraged me when I tried new activities as a child.	116 (58.0)	68 (34.0)	10 (5.0)	6 (3.0)	200	3.47	Agree
3	I could share my feelings with my parents or caregivers without fear.	109 (54.5)	76 (38.0)	11 (5.5)	4 (2.0)	200	3.45	Agree
4	I received praise or recognition for my achievements as a young child.	121 (60.5)	61 (30.5)	15 (7.5)	3 (1.5)	200	3.50	Agree
5	I felt emotionally supported by adults in my early childhood.	100 (50.0)	80 (40.0)	15 (7.5)	5 (2.5)	200	3.38	Agree

Decision rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree, Mean < 2.50 = Disagree.

Table 2 presents respondents' perception of emotional support received in early childhood and its relationship with academic self-concept. Findings indicate that pupils agreed that they felt loved and cared for by their parents or caregivers ($\bar{X}$ = 3.40). Similarly, parents' encouragement when pupils tried new activities was affirmed ($\bar{X}$ = 3.47). Pupils also agreed that they could share their feelings with caregivers without fear ($\bar{X}$ = 3.45), and that they received praise or recognition for their achievements during early childhood ($\bar{X}$ = 3.50). Emotional support from adults in early childhood was also rated positively ($\bar{X}$ = 3.38).

The results suggest that perceived emotional support in early childhood is generally high among the respondents. This indicates that the emotional care, encouragement,

recognition, and support provided by parents and caregivers are likely to have a positive influence on pupils' academic self-concept, fostering confidence and motivation in learning contexts.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between adverse early experiences and academic self-concept?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation showing the relationship between adverse early experiences and academic self-concept of primary school pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	X	DECISION
1	I experienced frequent neglect or lack of attention from caregivers as a child.	12 (6.0)	26 (13.0)	88 (44.0)	74 (37.0)	200	1.88	Disagree
2	I witnessed or experienced harsh discipline during my early childhood.	8 (4.0)	23 (11.5)	98 (49.0)	71 (35.5)	200	1.84	Disagree
3	I often felt afraid or unsafe at home when I was young.	5 (2.5)	19 (9.5)	97 (48.5)	79 (39.5)	200	1.75	Disagree
4	I had conflicts or tension in my family that affected me emotionally as a child.	5 (2.5)	23 (11.5)	92 (46.0)	80 (40.0)	200	1.77	Disagree
5	I experienced emotional or physical hardship during my early years.	9 (4.5)	11 (5.5)	92 (46.0)	88 (44.0)	200	1.71	Disagree
6	I feel confident in my academic abilities regardless of my gender.	109 (54.5)	70 (35.0)	16 (8.0)	5 (2.5)	200	3.42	Agree
7	I think I am treated differently in school or at home.	111 (55.5)	67 (33.5)	11 (5.5)	11 (5.5)	200	3.39	Agree
8	Adults expect me to perform very well academically	121 (60.5)	65 (32.5)	10 (5.0)	4 (2.0)	200	3.52	Agree
9	I did not have the opportunities to learn when I was young	112 (56.0)	67 (33.5)	13 (6.5)	8 (4.0)	200	3.42	Agree
10	I feel my academic self-confidence is linked to the way I was raised	111 (55.5)	66 (33.0)	18 (9.0)	5 (2.5)	200	3.42	Agree

Decision rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree, Mean < 2.50 = Disagree.

Table 3 presents respondents' experiences of adverse early childhood events and their academic self-concept. Findings show that pupils disagreed that they experienced frequent neglect or lack of attention from caregivers ($\bar{X}$ = 1.88), harsh discipline ($\bar{X}$ = 1.84), fear or feeling unsafe at home ($\bar{X}$ = 1.75), family conflicts ($\bar{X}$ = 1.77), and emotional or physical hardship ($\bar{X}$ = 1.71).

Conversely, pupils agreed that they feel confident in their academic abilities regardless of gender ($\bar{X}$ = 3.42), perceive differences in treatment at school or home ($\bar{X}$ = 3.39), and acknowledge that adults expect them to perform very well academically ($\bar{X}$ = 3.52). They also reported that they had opportunities to learn ($\bar{X}$ = 3.42) and that their academic self-confidence is linked to how they were raised ($\bar{X}$ = 3.42).

The results suggest that while overt adverse experiences such as neglect or emotional hardship were not prevalent among the pupils, positive early experiences and expectations from adults are strongly associated with pupils' academic self-concept. This indicates that supportive environments and encouragement during early years play a critical role in shaping pupils' confidence and self-perception in learning.

Research Question Three: How does the quality of early learning environments influence academic self-concept?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation showing the influence of quality of early learning environments on academic self-concept of primary school pupils

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	X	DECISION
1	I had access to books, educational toys, or learning materials as a young child.	113 (56.5)	65 (32.5)	19 (9.5)	3 (1.5)	200	3.44	Agree
2	Adults encouraged me to ask questions and explore new ideas in early childhood.	101 (50.5)	84 (42.0)	11 (5.5)	4 (2.0)	200	3.41	Agree
3	My early school environment was supportive and helped me learn effectively.	113 (56.5)	66 (33.0)	14 (7.0)	7 (3.5)	200	3.43	Agree
4	I received guidance from teachers or caregivers that helped me develop learning skills.	110 (55.0)	69 (34.5)	12 (6.0)	9 (4.5)	200	3.40	Agree
5	I felt motivated and confident to learn in my early school years.	119 (59.5)	60 (30.0)	14 (7.0)	7 (3.5)	200	3.46	Agree

Decision rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree, Mean < 2.50 = Disagree.

Table 4 presents respondents' assessment of the quality of early learning environments and its influence on their academic self-concept. Findings indicate that pupils agreed that they had access to books, educational toys, or learning materials as children ($\bar{X}$ = 3.44). Similarly, pupils agreed that adults encouraged them to ask questions and explore ideas ($\bar{X}$ = 3.41), and that their early school environment was supportive and helped them learn effectively ($\bar{X}$ = 3.43).

Pupils also reported agreement regarding receiving guidance from teachers or caregivers that helped develop learning skills ($\bar{X}$ = 3.40) and feeling motivated and confident to learn in their early school years ($\bar{X}$ = 3.46).

The results suggest that the quality of early learning environments in terms of resources, guidance, and encouragement is positively associated with pupils' academic self-concept. High mean values across all items indicate that supportive early learning settings foster motivation, confidence, and effective learning among primary school pupils.

Research Question Four: Are there gender differences in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept?

Table 5: T-test showing gender differences in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept

S/N	Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1	Academic Self-Concept	Male	93	3.4086	0.34251	0.03552
2	Academic Self-Concept	Female	107	3.4486	0.32371	0.03129

Independent Samples Test

Variables	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Academic Self-Concept	F = 0.112, Sig. = 0.738	t = -0.848	198	0.397	-0.040

***Decision rule**: If Sig. (2-tailed) ≥ 0.05, there is no significant difference; if Sig. < 0.05, there is a significant difference.*

Table 5 presents the mean scores of academic self-concept among male and female pupils in the study. Male pupils had a mean score of 3.4086, while female pupils had a slightly higher mean score of 3.4486. The standard deviations show that the variability of responses was similar for both groups.

The independent samples t-test results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female pupils regarding academic self-concept (t = -0.848, df =

198, p = 0.397). The p-value is greater than the 0.05 significance threshold, suggesting that gender does not significantly influence how early childhood experiences affect academic self-concept among primary school pupils.

The effect size (Cohen's d = 0.33) is small, further supporting the conclusion that any difference between male and female pupils is negligible.

This suggests that both male and female pupils are similarly influenced by their early childhood experiences in shaping their academic self-concept.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between perceived emotional support and academic self-concept.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics and Relationship between Perceived Emotional Support and Academic Self-Concept

Variables	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**1**	**2**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**N**
Perceived Emotional Support	3.4390	0.31042	1	0.006	0.931	200
Academic Self-Concept	3.4300	0.33234	0.006	1	0.931	200

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation between perceived emotional support and academic self-concept among primary school pupils. The mean score for perceived emotional support was 3.439, while the mean score for academic self-concept was 3.430.

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.006) shows a very weak positive relationship between perceived emotional support and academic self-concept. The relationship is not statistically significant (p = 0.931), as the significance value is greater than 0.05.

This indicates that perceived emotional support in early childhood does not significantly influence the academic self-concept of pupils in this study. Pupils' academic self-concept appears independent of the level of emotional support they perceived in early childhood.

Hypothesis Two: Adverse early experiences have no significant effect on academic self-concept.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics and Relationship between Adverse Early Experiences and Academic Self-Concept

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Adverse Early Experiences	1.7880	0.33228	1	0.003	0.963	200
Academic Self-Concept	3.4300	0.33234	0.003	1	0.963	200

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation between adverse early experiences and academic self-concept among primary school pupils. The mean score for adverse early experiences was 1.788, indicating that pupils generally reported low levels of negative experiences in early childhood, while the mean score for academic self-concept was 3.430.

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.003) indicates a negligible positive relationship between adverse early experiences and academic self-concept. The relationship is not statistically significant (p = 0.963), as the p-value is greater than 0.05.

This finding suggests that adverse early experiences do not significantly affect pupils' academic self-concept in this study. Pupils' confidence and perception of their academic abilities appear largely independent of negative experiences in early childhood.

Hypothesis Three: The quality of early learning environments does not significantly predict pupils' academic self-concept.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics and Relationship between Quality of Early Learning Environments and Academic Self-Concept

Variables	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**1**	**2**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**N**
Early Learning Environment	3.4260	0.35149	1	0.002	0.979	200
Academic Self-Concept	3.4300	0.33234	0.002	1	0.979	200

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation between the quality of early learning environments and academic self-concept of primary school pupils. The mean score for early learning environment was 3.426, indicating that pupils generally perceived their early learning environments as positive and supportive. The mean score for academic self-concept was 3.430.

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.002) shows a negligible positive relationship between early learning environments and academic self-concept. This relationship is not statistically significant (p = 0.979), as the p-value is greater than 0.05.

This result suggests that, within this study, the quality of early learning environments does not significantly predict pupils' academic self-concept. Pupils' perception of their academic abilities appears largely independent of the perceived quality of learning resources, support, and guidance during early childhood.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant gender difference in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept.

Table 9: Independent Samples t-Test Showing Gender Differences in Academic Self-Concept

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	93	3.4086	0.34251	0.03552
Female	107	3.4486	0.32371	0.03129

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.
Academic Self-Concept	0.112	0.738

t-Test for Equality of Means	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Equal variances assumed	-0.848	198	0.397	-0.04000	0.04715	-0.13298 to 0.05298
Equal variances not assumed	-0.845	190.594	0.399	-0.04000	0.04734	-0.13337 to 0.05338

Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval
	0.33258	-0.120 to -0.398

Table 9 presents the t-test analysis of gender differences in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept among primary school pupils. Male pupils

had a mean academic self-concept score of 3.4086, while female pupils had a slightly higher mean of 3.4486.

Levene's test indicates that the assumption of equal variances is met ($F = 0.112$, $p = 0.738$). The t-test for equality of means shows that the difference between male and female pupils is not statistically significant ($t = -0.848$, $p = 0.397$), as the p-value is greater than 0.05. The mean difference of -0.040 falls within the 95% confidence interval (-0.133 to 0.053), indicating no meaningful difference.

The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.333$) is small, further confirming that gender does not significantly influence academic self-concept in this sample.

This result supports the null hypothesis, suggesting that there is no significant gender difference in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept among pupils in Egor Local Government Area.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One examined the extent to which perceived emotional support in early childhood relates to the academic self-concept of primary school pupils. The findings showed consistently high mean scores across all items, indicating that most pupils felt loved, encouraged, recognised, and emotionally supported during their early years. This suggests that emotional warmth and caregiver responsiveness were strong features in their childhood experiences. Such support contributes to a secure sense of self, which helps children approach learning with confidence. This aligns with the findings of Boadu and Opoku (2021), who reported that emotional responsiveness from caregivers strengthens children's confidence and enhances their belief in their academic abilities. Similarly, Musa and

Adebayo (2020) found that children who receive praise and emotional validation tend to develop stronger school-related self-concepts. Therefore, the present study suggests that emotional support during early childhood contributes positively to how pupils perceive their academic abilities, especially in learning environments where encouragement and care are consistently present.

Research Question Two investigated the relationship between adverse early experiences and academic self-concept. The findings revealed that pupils generally disagreed with statements suggesting neglect, harsh discipline, emotional insecurity, or family tension. This indicates that most pupils did not experience significant adverse events during early childhood. In contrast, they strongly agreed that they had confidence in their academic abilities and that expectations from adults shaped their self-beliefs. These findings suggest that in the absence of severe negative experiences, academic self-concept is more strongly influenced by positive interactions and expectations from caregivers. This supports the findings of Adeola and Fashanu (2019), who observed that children without severe childhood adversity tend to develop healthier academic identities. It also agrees with the conclusion of Uwah and Ebong (2021), who stated that positive expectations from adults and supportive learning contexts play a more dominant role in shaping school-related confidence when negative experiences are minimal. This study therefore shows that pupils' academic self-concept is more closely linked to supportive experiences than to adverse events in early childhood.

Research Question Three focused on how the quality of early learning environments influences academic self-concept. Pupils indicated high agreement across all items, showing

that they generally had access to learning materials, supportive adults, guidance, and motivating school environments in early childhood. These elements are important because early learning settings provide the foundation for curiosity, exploration, and confidence in learning. This finding agrees with the study of Joseph and Daniels (2022), who found that enriched early learning environments stimulate children's motivation and shape their confidence in academic tasks. It also corresponds with the findings of Akanbi and Yusuf (2020), who reported that structured guidance and availability of learning resources in early childhood significantly improve children's academic self-belief. The present study therefore suggests that positive early learning environments play a crucial role in developing strong academic self-concept among primary school pupils, as supportive school experiences help them build confidence in their learning abilities.

Research Question Four examined whether gender differences exist in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept. The t-test results showed no statistically significant difference between male and female pupils. Although female pupils had a slightly higher mean score, the difference was not meaningful. This indicates that both boys and girls develop their academic self-concept in similar ways when exposed to comparable early childhood experiences. This aligns with the findings of Danladi and Jimoh (2022), who reported no meaningful gender differences in academic self-concept among children with similar learning histories. It also supports the conclusion of Okolie and Eze (2021), who found that gender plays a minimal role when early experiences are generally positive and supportive across households and schools. Thus, this study suggests that gender

does not significantly influence how early childhood experiences shape academic self-concept in primary school pupils.

Hypothesis One tested whether perceived emotional support significantly relates to academic self-concept. The correlation coefficient was extremely weak and not statistically significant. This implies that although pupils reported high emotional support, it did not directly predict their academic self-concept in this study. This agrees with the findings of Omotayo and Adekanbi (2020), who reported that emotional support alone may not strongly determine academic self-belief when other factors such as school environment and peer interactions are present. The results therefore support the null hypothesis that perceived emotional support does not significantly influence academic self-concept.

Hypothesis Two tested whether adverse early experiences significantly affect academic self-concept. The correlation result was negligible and not significant, suggesting that adverse experiences did not predict pupils' academic self-concept. One possible explanation is that reported levels of adversity were very low among respondents, reducing the ability to establish a meaningful statistical relationship. This aligns with the findings of Bassey and Akpan (2019), who reported weak associations between mild adverse experiences and academic confidence when positive school experiences are strong. This study therefore upholds the null hypothesis that adverse early experiences do not significantly affect academic self-concept in this sample.

Hypothesis Three examined whether the quality of early learning environments significantly predicts academic self-concept. The findings showed a negligible and non-significant relationship, indicating that while pupils rated their early learning environments

positively, this did not strongly predict their academic self-concept statistically. This finding aligns with the results of Olatunji and Bamidele (2021), who found that early learning environments have weaker direct effects when later school experiences and family expectations are strong predictors of academic confidence. The present study therefore supports the null hypothesis that early learning environments do not significantly predict academic self-concept among these pupils.

Hypothesis Four tested whether gender differences exist in the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept. The t-test results showed no significant difference between boys and girls. This agrees with the earlier findings from Research Question Four and confirms that gender does not influence how early experiences shape academic self-beliefs in this study. This supports the conclusion of Adebayo and Nwankwo (2020), who found that gender differences in academic self-concept are often minimal in supportive childhood environments. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations arising from the findings of the study.

Summary

This study investigated the influence of early childhood experiences on academic self-concept among primary school pupils in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Four research questions guided the study, and four corresponding hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population consisted of all primary school pupils in Egor Local Government Area, while a total of 200 pupils were selected through a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure emotional support, adverse early experiences, early learning environments, and academic self-concept. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's Alpha, which showed high internal consistency across all scales. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics including the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the independent samples t-test were used to test the hypotheses with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The major findings of the study are summarised as follows:

1. The result on perceived emotional support showed that emotional support does not significantly influence academic self-concept among the pupils. Although the

descriptive statistics showed that pupils reported a relatively high level of emotional support, the correlation coefficient revealed a very weak and non-significant relationship ($r = 0.006$, $p = 0.931$). This implies that pupils' feelings of being supported emotionally by caregivers do not directly reflect in how they perceive their academic abilities.

2. The result on adverse early experiences revealed that negative early childhood experiences do not significantly relate to academic self-concept. The correlation analysis showed a weak and non-significant relationship between adverse experiences and academic self-concept ($r = 0.003$, $p = 0.963$). This suggests that despite the presence of some unpleasant early experiences, these did not have a measurable effect on how pupils view their academic competencies.
3. The findings also showed that the quality of the early learning environment does not significantly influence academic self-concept. Pupils reported moderately positive early learning conditions; however, the correlation result indicated a non-significant relationship with academic self-concept ($r = 0.002$, $p = 0.979$). This outcome suggests that variations in early classroom stimulation, teacher responsiveness, and learning materials did not directly affect pupils' academic self-beliefs.
4. The analysis of gender differences revealed that male and female pupils do not differ significantly in academic self-concept. The independent samples t-test result ($t = -0.848$, $p = 0.397$) showed no significant difference between male and female pupils. Although female pupils had a slightly higher mean academic self-concept score, this difference was not statistically meaningful.

In summary, the findings of this study showed that emotional support, adverse early experiences, and the quality of early learning environments did not significantly predict academic self-concept among primary school pupils. The result further showed that gender does not significantly influence academic self-concept. The combined evidence suggests that academic self-concept in this population is shaped by factors outside the early childhood experiences examined in this study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that early childhood experiences, including emotional support, adverse early experiences, and the quality of early learning environments, do not significantly influence academic self-concept among primary school pupils in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Although literature often highlights early childhood as a critical foundation for later development, the present findings suggest that pupils' academic self-beliefs are shaped more by present school experiences, peer interactions, current academic performance, and personal motivation rather than by early experiences alone.

The results also showed that gender does not play a significant role in how pupils perceive their academic competence. This indicates that both male and female pupils develop similar levels of academic self-concept irrespective of their early childhood backgrounds.

The study concludes that academic self-concept is a multidimensional construct influenced by several interacting factors, many of which may be more immediate rather than rooted in early childhood. The findings imply that interventions targeted at strengthening

pupils' academic self-concept should focus more on their current learning environments, teacher support, academic reinforcement, and ongoing psychological development.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should provide continuous academic encouragement and positive feedback to pupils, as present academic experiences appear to play a stronger role in shaping academic self-concept than early childhood events.
2. Teachers should adopt supportive instructional practices that build confidence, including praise for effort, constructive feedback, and inclusive classroom activities that allow pupils to experience small academic successes.
3. Guidance counsellors should develop programmes aimed at strengthening self-belief, motivation, and academic confidence among pupils, since these factors are more likely to influence academic self-concept.
4. Parents and caregivers should continue to provide emotional and academic support beyond early childhood, as ongoing encouragement contributes meaningfully to children's developing sense of academic ability.
5. Schools should create safe, stimulating, and engaging classroom environments where pupils feel valued, capable, and supported in their academic tasks.
6. Educational stakeholders should organise periodic workshops for teachers on strategies for enhancing pupils' self-concept, including communication skills, reinforcement strategies, and confidence-building instructional methods.

7. Further research should examine other psychological, social, or school-based factors that may influence academic self-concept, such as peer relationships, teacher-pupil interaction, parental involvement, and socio-economic status.
8. Researchers should also explore longitudinal studies that trace the development of academic self-concept over time to determine how early childhood experiences interact with later experiences to influence academic beliefs.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY (EECP)

To be responded by primary and junior secondary school pupils in Egor Local Government Area

This study is on *"The Influence of Early Childhood Experiences on Academic Self-Concept: A Psychoanalytic Approach in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State"*. Please complete the structured questionnaire by ticking the relevant box or filling the blank spaces. If you have any questions, please ask before you start. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality and used only for research purposes.

SECTION A: BIODATA

Instruction: Please tick [√] where appropriate.

1. Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ]
2. Age: 6-8 years [ ] 9-11 years [ ] 12-14 years [ ] 15-16 years [ ]
3. School Type: Public [ ] Private [ ]
4. Class Level: Primary 6 [ ] JSS1 [ ] JSS2 [ ] JSS3 [ ]

SECTION B: KINDLY TICK (√) THE OPTION THAT IS APPLICABLE TO YOU

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1	I felt loved and cared for by my parents or caregivers when I was very young.				
2	My parents or caregivers encouraged me when I tried new activities as a child.				
3	I could share my feelings with my parents or caregivers without fear.				

4	I received praise or recognition for my achievements as a young child.				
5	I felt emotionally supported by adults in my early childhood.				

ADVERSE EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
6	I experienced frequent neglect or lack of attention from caregivers as a child.				
7	I witnessed or experienced harsh discipline during my early childhood.				
8	I often felt afraid or unsafe at home when I was young.				
9	I had conflicts or tension in my family that affected me emotionally as a child.				
10	I experienced emotional or physical hardship during my early years.				
11	I feel confident in my academic abilities regardless of my gender.				
12	I think I am treated differently in school or at home.				
13	Adults expect me to perform very well academically				
14	I did not have the opportunities to learn when I was young				
15	I feel my academic self-confidence is linked to the way I was raised				

QUALITY OF EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
16	I had access to books, educational toys, or learning materials as a young child.				
17	Adults encouraged me to ask questions and explore new ideas in early childhood.				
18	My early school environment was supportive and helped me learn effectively.				
19	I received guidance from teachers or caregivers that helped me develop learning skills.				
20	I felt motivated and confident to learn in my early school years.				

APPENDIX B

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	20	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	20	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.747	20