

Teachers' Motivational Strategies and Students' Classroom Engagement in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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Abstract:

The study investigated teachers' motivational strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational research design. Four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study consisted of all the 7,179 senior secondary school teachers in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample for the study comprised 350 teachers. The Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size. A stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The instrument for the study was a researcher-developed instrument titled Teachers' Motivational Strategies and Students' Classroom Engagement Scale (TMSSCES). The instrument comprised two sections: A and B. The first section was used to generate teachers' responses on their use of motivational strategies, which consisted of 20 item statements. The second section was used to evaluate students' enjoyment which consisted of 15 item statements. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The test-retest technique was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient $r = 0.91$ was established for teachers' motivational strategies, while a reliability coefficient $r = 0.82$ was established for the students' engagement scale. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that positive reinforcement, interactive teaching methods, teacher-student relationship strategies and use of instructional materials were significantly and positively related to students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Consequently, the researcher recommended, among other things, that teachers should adopt consistent and meaningful positive reinforcement strategies, such as praise, constructive feedback, and recognition of effort to encourage desirable learning behaviours,

while ensuring that such reinforcement is balanced and focused on promoting students' intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement.

Keywords: Teacher's motivational strategies, classroom engagement, positive reinforcement, interactive teaching methods, and teacher-student relationship.

Introduction

Learning in formal educational settings is a structured and purposeful process that requires learners to be actively involved in instructional activities that promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values. Such involvement goes beyond passive listening and includes participation in discussions, problem-solving tasks, collaborative learning, and reflective thinking. When learners are actively engaged, they are better able to process information, connect new knowledge with prior experiences, and apply what they have learned in meaningful ways. Schunk and DiBenedetto explained that active engagement enhances deeper understanding and retention of knowledge, as students become co-constructors of knowledge rather than mere recipients. Aremu noted that active participation in classroom activities improves students' comprehension and academic achievement. Effective learning in formal education, therefore, depends largely on the extent to which students are meaningfully involved in classroom activities [1], [2].

Students' classroom engagement refers to the degree to which learners are actively involved in academic activities through behavioural participation, emotional connection, and cognitive investment. It reflects how students interact with instructional content, teachers, and peers in ways that promote meaningful learning. When students are effectively engaged, they are more likely to process information deeply, retain knowledge, and apply learned concepts. Students' classroom engagement is fundamental to achieving both lesson objectives and the broader goals of any educational programme. Skinner et al. argued that engaged students demonstrate higher academic achievement and are more responsive to instructional strategies [3]. Visible learning occurs when students are actively involved and motivated. Okeke found that students' active engagement in classroom activities significantly predicts improved learning outcomes in secondary schools. This result shows that engagement is acknowledged as an important factor in the success of teaching and learning processes.

In recent years, students' classroom engagement has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse in public secondary schools, where challenges such as low participation, poor attention, and declining academic interest are frequently reported [4]. These issues are linked to ineffective teaching methods, lack of motivation, and unfavourable learning environments. These debilitating factors hinder students' willingness to participate actively in classroom activities. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020) observed that disengagement can lead to poor academic outcomes, increased absenteeism, and higher dropout rates [5]. Oladipo also reported that poor classroom engagement among secondary school students is associated with low academic performance and negative attitudes towards schooling. It is therefore, imperative for educators and policymakers to focus on strategies that can enhance student engagement as a means of improving educational quality and outcomes in our public secondary schools.

The level of students' engagement in the classroom is significantly influenced by external factors within the learning environment. Among these external factors, teachers' motivational strategies play a significant role. Teachers' motivational strategies is defined as the intentional actions, techniques, and instructional approaches employed by teachers to arouse, direct, and sustain students' interest in learning [6]. These strategies are rooted in the understanding that students learn better when they are psychologically and emotionally stimulated to participate in academic tasks. Such strategies include how teachers present content, encourage participation, manage the classroom climate, and support students' individual learning needs. When teachers deliberately apply motivational techniques, they create an enabling environment that promotes curiosity, persistence,

and active involvement in learning activities. Eccles and Wigfield argued that motivation-driven teaching enhances students' willingness to engage and improves overall academic outcomes. Teachers who adopt effective motivational practices tend to record higher levels of student participation and achievement in secondary schools.

One important motivating strategy teachers employ in encouraging students' engagement in the learning experience is positive reinforcement. In educational psychology, positive reinforcement involves the use of praise, rewards, and recognition to encourage desirable learning behaviours. When students receive acknowledgement for their efforts and achievements, they develop a sense of competence and are more inclined to participate actively in classroom tasks. Positive reinforcement also helps to reduce anxiety and build confidence, thereby creating a classroom atmosphere that supports engagement. Slavin explained that reinforcement strategies increase students' attention, task completion, and persistence [7], [8]. Students who are consistently reinforced by their teachers are likely to demonstrate high level of classroom participation and improved academic performance.

Interactive teaching methods and the use of instructional materials are also vital components of teachers' motivational strategies that enhance students' engagement. Interactive methods such as group discussions, peer teaching, and problem-solving activities actively involve students in the learning process and encourage them to think critically and collaboratively. In addition, the use of instructional materials, such as charts, models, videos, and digital tools makes learning more concrete, interesting, and relatable. These approaches help to capture students' attention and sustain their interest throughout the lesson [9]. Prince observed that classrooms that utilise interactive pedagogies and diverse instructional resources tend to promote deeper understanding and higher engagement among learners. Ibrahim reported that the integration of instructional materials enhances students' comprehension and active participation in classroom activities.

Another important component is the teacher–student relationship strategy. In classroom settings, teacher–student relationship strategy involves establishing a positive, respectful, and supportive interaction between teachers and students. When teachers show care, fairness, and approachability, students feel valued and are more willing to engage in learning activities. A strong teacher–student relationship fosters a sense of belonging and emotional security, which are essential for sustained engagement. Roorda et al. revealed that supportive classroom relationships positively influence students' motivation, behaviour, and academic success [10]. Yusuf found that students who reported positive relationships with their teachers were more attentive, participative, and academically motivated. Effective application of positive reinforcement, interactive teaching methods, use of instructional materials, and strong teacher–student relationships can increase the level of students' classroom engagement among secondary school students.

Therefore, in this contemporary society where education plays a major role in socio-economic development, enhancing students' classroom engagement is vital for producing competent and well-rounded graduates [11], [12]. Teachers, as fundamental facilitators of learning, must be equipped with effective motivational strategies that can cater to the diverse needs of students. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the relationship between teachers' motivational strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing importance of effective teaching practices in enhancing learning outcomes, there is concern about the level of students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Classroom observations by the researcher suggest that many students display low attention span during lessons, minimal participation in classroom activities, and a general lack of enthusiasm towards academic tasks. In several cases, students appear disengaged, preferring to engage in unrelated conversations, absenteeism, or passive listening rather than active involvement in learning processes [13]. This situation raises serious concerns, as classroom engagement is expected to be the foundation of meaningful learning and academic success.

The researcher further observes that this persistent disengagement may be linked to the nature of teachers' motivational strategies employed in the classroom. In many public secondary schools, some teachers still rely heavily on traditional lecture-based methods with limited use of reinforcement, interaction, or instructional materials that could stimulate students' interest. In addition, the quality of teacher–student relationships in some classrooms appears weak, with minimal encouragement, limited feedback, and little emotional support for learners. These conditions tend to reduce students' willingness to participate actively in lessons, thereby affecting their engagement levels. Consequently, the classroom environment in some schools does not appear sufficiently stimulating to sustain students' interest and active involvement in learning activities [14].

Given these observed challenges, there is a clear need to investigate how teachers' motivational strategies influence students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Although educational stakeholders consistently emphasise the importance of student engagement for academic success, there is still limited empirical clarity on how specific motivational strategies such as positive reinforcement, interactive teaching, teacher–student relationships, and the use of instructional materials contribute to improving engagement levels in the study area. This gap in knowledge justifies the need for the present study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to examine the relationship between teachers' motivational strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The specific objectives were to:

1. Investigate the relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State
2. Examine the relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State
3. Determine the relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State
4. Establish the relationship between use of instructional materials and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?
4. What is the relationship between use of instructional materials and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State
2. There is no significant relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State
3. There is no significant relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State

4. There is no significant relationship between use of instructional materials and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. Four research questions and four corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study consisted of all the 7,179 senior secondary school teachers in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample for the study was made up of 350 teachers. The Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size. A stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The instrument for the study was a researcher-developed instrument titled Teachers' Motivational Strategies and Students' Classroom Engagement Scale (TMSSCES). The instrument comprised two sections: A and B. The first section was used to generate teachers' responses on their use of motivational strategies, which consisted of 20 item statements. The second section was used to evaluate students' enjoyment which consisted of 15 item statements. The TMSSCES was constructed in a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) =4 points, Agree (A) =2 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 point. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation. The test-retest technique was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient $r = 0.91$ was established for teachers' motivational strategies, while a reliability coefficient $r = 0.82$ was established for the students' engagement scale using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 1. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Positive Reinforcement and Students' Classroom Engagement in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

		Positive Reinforcement	Students' Classroom Engagement
Positive Reinforcement	Pearson Correlation	1	.495**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	350	350
Students' Classroom Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.495**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	350	350

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 presents the results of a relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .495, which indicates a moderate positive relationship between positive reinforcement and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This implies that as scores for positive reinforcement increase, students' classroom engagement tends to decrease. This result is statistically significant as the p-value of .000 is less than 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies that positive reinforcement was

significantly related to students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State [15].

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 2. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation of Interactive Teaching Methods and Students' Classroom Engagement in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

		Interactive Teaching Methods	Students' Classroom Engagement
Interactive Teaching Methods	Pearson Correlation	1	.715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	350	350
Students' Classroom Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.715**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	350	350

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 presents the results of a relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .716, which indicates a strong positive relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This implies that as scores of interactive teaching methods increase, students' classroom engagement tends to increase proportionately. This result is statistically significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result implies that interactive teaching methods were significantly related to students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State

Table 3. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Teacher–Student Relationship Strategies and Students' Classroom Engagement in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

		Teacher–Student Relationship Strategies	Students' Classroom Engagement
Teacher–Student Relationship Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.537**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	350	350
Students' Classroom Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.537**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	350	350

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 presents the results of a relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .537, which indicates a moderate positive relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This implies that as scores of teacher–student relationship strategies increase, there is corresponding increase in students’ classroom engagement. This result is statistically significant, as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that teacher–student relationship strategies was significantly related to students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between use of instructional materials and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant relationship between use of instructional materials and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4. Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation of Use of Instructional Materials and Students’ Classroom Engagement in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

		Use of Instructional Materials	Students’ Classroom Engagement
Use of Instructional Materials	Pearson Correlation	1	.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	350	350
Students’ Classroom Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.348**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	350	350

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 presents the results of a relationship between use of instructional materials and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .348, which indicates a weak positive relationship between use of instructional materials and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This result is statistically significant as the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This result indicates that use of instructional materials and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion of Results

Table 1 examined the relationship between positive reinforcement and students’ classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The results revealed a moderate positive correlation. This result indicates that increases in teachers’ use of positive reinforcement are associated with corresponding increases in students’ engagement in classroom activities. This result agrees with the principles of behaviourist learning theory, which emphasise that reinforced behaviours are more likely to be repeated. The result is consistent with Akinwale and Oluwatayo, who reported that praise, rewards, and recognition significantly improved students’ attentiveness and participation in secondary schools. Similarly, Yusuf and Bello found that positive reinforcement strategies enhanced learners’ motivation and sustained engagement during lessons. However, the result contrasts with the Adeyemi, who observed that excessive reliance on extrinsic rewards could

reduce intrinsic motivation over time, thereby weakening deep engagement.

Table 2 focused on the relationship between interactive teaching methods and students' classroom engagement, which yielded a strong positive correlation. This indicates that the use of participatory and learner-centred instructional strategies significantly enhances students' active involvement in classroom learning. This result is in agreement with Okoro and Chukwu, who found that interactive teaching approaches significantly improved students' cognitive and behavioural engagement in secondary schools in South-East Nigeria. Eze and Nwankwo also reported that classrooms characterised by collaborative learning and teacher–student interaction recorded higher levels of student participation and academic interest. Conversely, Ibrahim noted that in overcrowded classrooms, interactive methods may be less effective due to limited teacher control and time constraints.

Table 3 presented the relationship between teacher–student relationship strategies and students' classroom engagement, with a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that supportive, respectful, and trusting relationships between teachers and students contribute significantly to improved engagement levels. This result agrees with the findings of Nwafor and Okeke, who established that positive teacher–student relationships significantly predicted students' classroom participation and commitment to learning tasks [16]. Olatunji also found that students who perceived their teachers as approachable and supportive demonstrated higher levels of engagement and academic persistence. However, the finding contradicts the study by Salami, which reported no significant relationship between teacher–student rapport and engagement in highly exam-oriented school environments, where instructional pressure overshadowed relational factors.

Table 4 investigated the relationship between the use of instructional materials and students' classroom engagement, which revealed a weak but significant positive correlation. This implies that although instructional materials contribute to engagement, their influence is relatively limited compared to other variables examined in the study [17], [18]. This result is in line with Adegboye and Lawal, who found that instructional materials improved students' understanding but had only a moderate effect on active participation. Similarly, Musa and Abdullahi reported that while visual and audio aids enhanced students' interest, their impact depended largely on the teacher's skill in utilising them. On the other hand, Ekanem observed a strong relationship between instructional materials and engagement, particularly in science subjects where practical demonstrations are essential. The disparity in findings may be attributed to differences in subject areas, resource availability, and teachers' competencies.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between teachers' motivational strategies and students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State, using a correlational design. The findings revealed that all the motivational strategies investigated: positive reinforcement, interactive teaching methods, teacher–student relationship strategies, and the use of instructional materials had significant positive relationships with students' classroom engagement. Based on these results, it can be concluded that teachers' motivational strategies play a crucial role in promoting students' classroom engagement in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The study affirms that a holistic approach, combining engaging teaching methods, meaningful reinforcement, positive relationships, and appropriate instructional resources is necessary for enhancing students' active participation and learning outcomes.

Based on the results, it was recommended as follows

Teachers should adopt consistent and meaningful positive reinforcement strategies, such as praise, constructive feedback, and recognition of effort to encourage desirable learning behaviours, while ensuring that such reinforcement is balanced and focused on promoting students' intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement. Teachers should prioritise the use of interactive and learner-centred teaching methods, including group discussions, collaborative tasks, and problem-solving activities, as these approaches actively involve students in the learning process and significantly enhance their participation and interest in classroom activities. Teachers should deliberately cultivate warm, respectful, and supportive relationships with students by showing empathy, fairness, and approachability, as this creates a safe and inclusive classroom environment that motivates students to engage more confidently and meaningfully in learning. Teachers should ensure the effective and creative use of relevant instructional materials—such as visual aids, real-life objects, and digital resources—to complement their teaching, thereby making lessons more concrete, stimulating, and capable of capturing students' attention and interest.

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