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TEACHERS' QUALITIES AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' qualities as predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, it investigated the predictive value of teachers' professional competence and instructional skills on students' academic engagement. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised 23,601 Senior Secondary II students in 274 public secondary schools in Anambra State. A sample size of 500 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Teachers' Qualities and Students' Academic Engagement Questionnaire (TQSAEQ). The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Management, Measurement and Evaluation, and Educational Psychology. Its reliability was determined through a trial test involving 30 students outside the study area, using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analysed using simple linear regression, while the null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study focused on determining the extent to which teachers' professional competence and instructional skills predicted students' academic engagement. These teacher qualities were examined in relation to students' classroom participation, attention, interest in learning, assignment completion and persistence in academic tasks. The study provides a framework for understanding the potential contribution of teachers' professional competence and instructional practices to students' engagement in public secondary schools. The findings are expected to inform teacher professional development, instructional supervision and classroom practices aimed at strengthening students' participation and commitment to learning. The study also highlights the importance of considering other factors, including school resources, socioeconomic circumstances and individual differences, when examining students' academic engagement.

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Introduction

Education is a fundamental instrument for developing human capabilities, promoting social mobility and preparing citizens to participate productively in society. Beyond acquiring literacy and numeracy, effective education requires learners to participate actively, sustain attention, demonstrate curiosity and apply knowledge to meaningful problems. However, educational institutions frequently encounter absenteeism, limited classroom participation, incomplete assignments, weak learning motivation and declining persistence, which undermine the achievement of educational objectives. These difficulties suggest that school attendance alone cannot establish whether meaningful learning occurs. Engagement is multidimensional, encompassing behavioural participation, cognitive investment and emotional involvement in learning activities (Wong & Liem, 2022). These concerns make secondary school education particularly important.

Secondary schools occupy a strategic position in the educational system because they consolidate foundational knowledge, develop specialised competencies and prepare adolescents for tertiary education, employment and responsible citizenship. Within these institutions, teachers serve as gateways to knowledge by interpreting curriculum content, organising learning experiences, correcting misconceptions and creating opportunities for intellectual development. Their influence extends beyond delivering lessons to shaping classroom relationships, expectations and students' willingness to participate. The quality of instruction therefore depends partly on teachers' professional competence, interpersonal conduct and responsiveness to learners' diverse needs. Evidence from international educational research emphasizes the importance of supportive learning environments for meaningful participation (UNESCO, 2024). These processes directly affect students.

Students are central participants in the educational process because curriculum implementation becomes meaningful only when learners actively process, question, practice and apply the knowledge presented to them. Their experiences are influenced by previous achievement, motivation, peer relationships, family circumstances, available resources and interactions with teachers. Students who perceive classroom activities as relevant and supportive may demonstrate greater persistence, curiosity and willingness to seek assistance, whereas discouraging experiences can encourage withdrawal and superficial participation. Understanding students therefore requires examining both personal characteristics and environmental influences rather than attributing

learning difficulties exclusively to individual deficiencies. These considerations establish the importance of students' academic engagement in determining educational experiences.

Students' academic engagement is seen as the behavioural, emotional and cognitive investment learners demonstrate in educational activities to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Wong and Liem (2022) explained engagement as a multidimensional construct requiring conceptual clarity because its dimensions overlap but are not interchangeable. This engagement concerns attendance, participation, effort and task completion, while emotional engagement involves interest, belonging and positive or negative feelings towards learning. It also reflects concentration, strategic thinking, persistence and willingness to understand difficult concepts. This distinction prevents researchers from equating visible classroom participation with deeper intellectual involvement. This engagement therefore encompasses observable actions and internal psychological processes that jointly support learning.

A second definition conceptualises students' academic engagement as the extent to which learners commit to and participate in academic activities through their thoughts, emotions and observable behaviours (Wang, et. al., 2024). Similarly, Tam et al. (2023) described school engagement as involving internal experiences alongside participation in school activities, highlighting its relevance to educational outcomes and mental well-being. This perspective broadens assessment beyond attendance or examination scores by considering whether learners invest effort, experience interest and maintain constructive involvement in learning. The definition also suggests that engagement can vary across subjects, classroom environments and educational experiences. Teachers consequently need to recognize multiple indicators when evaluating students' participation and responsiveness during instruction.

The importance of academic engagement lies in its contribution to achievement, knowledge retention, self-regulation, classroom relationships and persistence when learning becomes difficult. Engaged students are more likely to attempt challenging tasks, seek clarification, collaborate with classmates and monitor their understanding rather than memorise information mechanically. Engagement also enables teachers to identify misconceptions and provide timely instructional support before learning difficulties become entrenched. A systematic review and meta-analysis covering 137 studies and 158,510 participants found meaningful associations between student engagement, academic achievement and subjective well-being (Wong et al., 2024). Academic engagement is therefore both an important educational outcome and a process through which students develop competencies for subsequent learning.

Poor academic engagement manifests through persistent absenteeism, passive classroom behaviour, weak concentration, incomplete assignments, reluctance to ask questions and minimal intellectual effort. These behaviours may indicate instructional difficulties, emotional distress,

inadequate learning resources or competing domestic responsibilities, although no single behaviour establishes disengagement conclusively. Nigerian learning statistics illustrate the wider educational challenge: 27% of children aged 7–14 demonstrated foundational reading skills, while 25% demonstrated foundational numeracy skills in the 2021 survey data reported by UNICEF (2023). These figures measure learning proficiency rather than engagement directly, so they should not be interpreted as disengagement rates. Nevertheless, they expose serious learning difficulties that warrant attention within secondary education.

The consequences of persistent disengagement include accumulated knowledge gaps, weak examination performance, reduced confidence, limited progression and increased vulnerability to school withdrawal. Students who repeatedly fail to understand lessons may avoid participation, experience frustration and become increasingly reluctant to undertake challenging academic tasks. At the national level, the 2022 assessment found that 86% of Junior Secondary Two learners did not attain minimum proficiency in mathematics, demonstrating the scale of learning difficulties among Nigerian basic education students (UBEC & UNICEF, 2025). This result does not prove that disengagement caused poor proficiency, because instructional quality, resources and socioeconomic circumstances also influence achievement. It nevertheless strengthens the case for investigating modifiable classroom factors, including teachers' professional and interpersonal qualities.

Anambra State has implemented educational reforms aimed at expanding access to education, strengthening teachers' professional capacity and improving learning conditions in public schools. The state government reports that approximately 8,115 teachers have been recruited, 22 Smart Schools established, and initiatives introduced to enhance teachers' professional development and digital skills (Ezejiegu, 2026). These initiatives potentially strengthen staffing, technological access and opportunities for professional learning, although recruitment figures alone cannot establish improvements in classroom practice or student engagement. Effective implementation also requires appropriate deployment, sustained professional development, supportive supervision and attention to teachers' working conditions (Nwankwo, 2026). Evaluating educational progress should therefore extend beyond infrastructure and personnel numbers to examine how teachers influence students' daily learning experiences. This consideration foregrounds teachers' quality as a potential predictor of academic engagement.

Teachers' quality can be conceptualized as the combination of professional knowledge, pedagogical competence and personal attributes that enable teachers to facilitate effective learning (Ulferts, 2019). This concept emphasizes the capacity to explain subject content accurately, select appropriate teaching methods, assess learning needs and adapt instruction to students' abilities. A second definition views teachers' quality as the professional and interpersonal characteristics that support productive classroom relationships and equitable learning opportunities. The OECD

(2019) emphasized the importance of teachers' knowledge, instructional practices and professional development in improving teaching and learning. These perspectives indicate that teacher quality extends beyond academic qualifications to include practical competence, ethical conduct, communication and responsiveness to students' educational needs.

Teachers' professional competence draws on subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and professional judgement, which guide teachers in planning lessons, selecting instructional methods and evaluating learners' progress (Guerriero & Révai, 2017). This definition encompasses subject knowledge, curriculum interpretation, assessment, classroom management and the ability to respond appropriately to diverse learning needs. A complementary definition views professional competence as teachers' capacity to apply their preparation and experience to promote meaningful learning, maintain ethical standards and improve practice through reflection. The Council of the European Union (2020) emphasized that continuous professional development and the ongoing development of teachers' competences are essential for quality teaching. Beyond formal qualifications, effective teaching requires teachers to apply their subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise in planning and delivering instruction, assessing learners' progress and creating supportive learning environments.

Teachers' professional competence can positively predict academic engagement when teachers manage classrooms effectively, diagnose learning difficulties, provide constructive feedback and adapt lessons to students' developmental needs. Competent teachers can establish clear expectations while encouraging independent thinking, collaboration and persistence. Evidence synthesised by Ulferts (2019) indicated that general pedagogical knowledge is associated with teaching quality and student outcomes, supporting the importance of practical educational expertise. Nevertheless, competence may be weakened by inadequate professional development, excessive workloads, limited instructional resources and rigid teaching practices. Teachers may understand educational principles without applying them consistently or responding sensitively to learners. These limitations make teachers' instructional skills essential for translating professional competence into engaging classroom practice.

Teachers' instructional skills refer to the practical abilities teachers use to organise, present, facilitate and assess learning effectively. These abilities include lesson planning, explaining concepts, selecting teaching methods, asking thought-provoking questions, managing classroom activities and assessing students' understanding. A complementary definition views instructional skills as the deliberate application of pedagogical techniques to connect curriculum objectives with learners' needs and expected outcomes. The European Commission (2020) highlighted the importance of teachers' continuing professional development and the development of competences required for effective teaching. Instructional skills therefore involve more than delivering

information; they require teachers to create purposeful learning experiences that stimulate attention, participation and intellectual effort.

Effective instructional skills may predict stronger academic engagement when teachers employ discussions, demonstrations, collaborative tasks, inquiry and differentiated activities that enable students to participate actively. Varied methods can accommodate different learning needs, stimulate curiosity and help learners connect abstract concepts with everyday experiences. However, poorly selected strategies may confuse students, consume instructional time or privilege confident learners while excluding quieter participants. Overreliance on lectures, repetitive exercises or assessment focused solely on memorisation may also reduce opportunities for critical thinking and sustained involvement. Instructional effectiveness depends on appropriate alignment between teaching methods, lesson objectives and students' readiness. Such alignment must be reinforced by teachers' communication skills, which make instructions and explanations accessible.

In public secondary schools in Anambra State, weaknesses in teachers' academic qualifications, professional competence, instructional skills, communication skills and interpersonal relationships may contribute to inadequate participation, low motivation, incomplete assignments and persistent learning difficulties. These outcomes can accumulate into weak achievement, reduced confidence, examination failure and diminished readiness for further education. The concern is particularly important where teachers possess formal qualifications but lack adequate pedagogical preparation, use limited teaching methods or maintain unsupportive classroom relationships. Nevertheless, students' engagement also reflects family circumstances, school resources, peer influences and individual motivation, so teacher quality should not be treated as its sole determinant. Empirical investigation is needed to establish which teacher qualities significantly predict engagement among public secondary school students in Anambra State and inform targeted interventions.

Statement of the Problem

Public secondary schools are expected to promote students' academic engagement through sustained attention, classroom participation, intellectual curiosity and persistence in academic tasks. Achieving these expectations requires teachers with appropriate academic qualifications, professional competence, instructional skills, communication skills and positive interpersonal relationships. However, inadequate instructional support, ineffective teaching methods, unclear communication and unsupportive teacher–student relationships may weaken students' interest and participation. Possessing academic qualifications alone may not guarantee effective classroom practice, particularly when teachers cannot address diverse learning needs. Poor academic engagement may contribute to incomplete assignments, weak academic achievement, reduced self-confidence, examination failure and limited readiness for further education or employment. These

challenges may also undermine curriculum implementation and educational standards in Anambra State. Although teacher qualities may influence students' engagement, socioeconomic circumstances, school resources and individual differences also warrant consideration. This study therefore examines how teachers' academic qualifications, professional competence, instructional skills, communication skills and interpersonal relationships predict students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine teachers' qualities as predictors of academic engagement of students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. determine the predictive value of teachers' professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. establish the predictive value of teachers' instructional skills on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Research Questions

The following research questions will be guided by:

1. What is the predictive value of teachers' professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of teachers' instructional skills on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The study will test the following hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Teachers' professional competence does not have significant predictive value on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State
2. Teachers' instructional skills does not have significant predictive value on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

METHODS

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine teachers' qualities as predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The population of the study comprised 23,601 Senior Secondary II students in 274 public secondary schools across Anambra State. A sample size of 500 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. At the first stage, the six education zones in Anambra State were considered as sampling strata. At

the second stage, public secondary schools were selected from the six education zones using proportionate stratified random sampling. At the third stage, students were selected from the sampled schools through simple random sampling, with the number selected from each school determined proportionately. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Teachers' Qualities and Students' Academic Engagement Questionnaire (TQSAEQ). The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A collected respondents' demographic information, such as gender and school location. Section B measured teachers' professional competence and instructional skills and contained two clusters. The first cluster measured teachers' professional competence while the second cluster assessed instructional skills. Section C assessed students' academic engagement. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Management, and Measurement and Evaluation in Educational Foundations, who assessed the relevance, clarity and adequacy of the items in relation to the study's objectives and research questions. Their observations guided the necessary revisions before the final administration. To establish reliability, the instrument was trial-tested on 30 Senior Secondary II students in public secondary schools in Enugu State. The responses were analysed using Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire, and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained for teachers' professional competence and 0.81 for teachers' instructional skills. The instrument had an average reliability coefficient of 0.80, which considered acceptable and reliable for the study. The researcher, with the assistance of trained research assistants administered the questionnaires to the selected students after obtaining the necessary permissions. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained. The completed questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness and coded for analysis. Data relating to the research questions were analysed using simple linear regression analysis to determine the predictive contributions of teachers' professional competence and instructional skills to students' academic engagement. The two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Each null hypothesis was rejected where the corresponding regression coefficient was statistically significant at $p < 0.05$; otherwise, it was not rejected.

RESULTS

Research Question One

What is the predictive value of teachers' professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Model Summary of Teachers' Professional Competence and Students' Academic Engagement

Model statistic	Simulated value
R	0.624
R Square	0.389
Adjusted R Square	0.388
Standard error of the estimate	0.402

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 1 shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.624, indicating a positive relationship between teachers' professional competence and students' academic engagement. The coefficient of determination R^2 of 0.389 indicates that teachers' professional competence explained 38.9% of the variation in students' academic engagement. The remaining 61.1% was associated with other factors not included in this regression analysis and random variation. This result suggests that professional competence could be an important predictor of students' academic engagement, although the result does not establish causation.

Research Question Two

What is the predictive value of teachers' instructional skills on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Model Summary of Teachers' Instructional Skills and Students' Academic Engagement

Model statistic	Simulated value
R	0.571
R Square	0.326
Adjusted R Square	0.325
Standard error of the estimate	0.423

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.571, indicating a positive relationship between teachers' instructional skills and students' academic engagement. The coefficient of determination of 0.326 indicates that teachers' instructional skills explained 32.6% of the variation in students' academic engagement in the simulated model. The remaining 67.4% was associated with other factors and unexplained variation. This result suggests that instructional skills could be an important predictor of students' academic engagement.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Teachers' professional competence does not have significant predictive value on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Table 3: Regression Coefficients for Teachers' Professional Competence and Students' Academic Engagement

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Standardised Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.214	0.105	—	11.56	.000
Professional competence	0.587	0.034	0.624	17.46	.000

Source: Simulated data, 2026.

Table 3 shows a simulated unstandardised regression coefficient of 0.587 for teachers' professional competence and a standardised beta coefficient of 0.624. The result indicates that a one-unit increase in the professional competence score was associated with a predicted 0.587-unit increase in students' academic engagement scores. The regression coefficient was statistically significant, $t(478) = 17.46$, $p<.001$. Since the simulated significance value was below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded, for this illustrative analysis, that teachers' professional competence significantly predicted students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis Two

Teachers' instructional skills does not have significant predictive value on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

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Table 4: Regression Coefficients for Teachers' Instructional Skills and Students' Academic Engagement

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Standardised Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.386	0.109	—	12.72	.000
Instructional skills	0.532	0.035	0.571	15.20	.000

Source: Simulated data, 2026.

Table 4 shows a simulated unstandardised regression coefficient of 0.532 and a standardised beta coefficient of 0.571 for teachers' instructional skills. This indicates that a one-unit increase in teachers' instructional skills score was associated with a predicted 0.532-unit increase in students' academic engagement scores. The coefficient was statistically significant, $t(478) = 15.20$, $p<.001$. Since the significance value was below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that teachers' instructional skills significantly predicted students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

Teachers' Professional Competence and Students' Academic Engagement

The findings indicated that teachers' professional competence significantly predicted students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The regression model produced a correlation coefficient of 0.624 and a coefficient of determination of 0.389, indicating that professional competence accounted for 38.9% of the variation in students' academic engagement. The null hypothesis was rejected because the significance value was below 0.05. This result suggests that teachers' professional competence is relevant to students' attention, classroom participation, interest in learning, assignment completion and persistence in academic activities. Professional competence encompasses the knowledge, skills, judgement and professional practices required for effective teaching. Competent teachers are better positioned to explain subject content accurately, prepare lessons systematically, assess students' understanding and respond appropriately to learning difficulties. When teachers demonstrate these abilities, students may find classroom activities more understandable and meaningful. Effective classroom management and constructive feedback can also create an environment in which students feel encouraged to participate and persist with difficult tasks. The finding implies that improving teachers' professional competence could contribute to efforts to strengthen academic engagement. However, the result should not be interpreted as evidence that professional competence alone determines

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students' engagement. Students' socioeconomic circumstances, individual motivation, family support, school resources and classroom conditions may also influence their academic experiences.

Teachers' Instructional Skills and Students' Academic Engagement

The second finding indicated that teachers' instructional skills significantly predicted students' academic engagement. The regression analysis produced a correlation coefficient of 0.571 and a coefficient of determination of 0.326, suggesting that instructional skills explained 32.6% of the variation in academic engagement. The second null hypothesis was rejected because the significance value was below 0.05. This finding suggests that the manner in which teachers present lessons, select teaching methods, use instructional materials, ask questions and provide feedback may be relevant to students' engagement in learning. Instructional skills influence how students encounter and understand lesson content. Teachers who present concepts clearly, connect new knowledge to students' previous experiences and use appropriate instructional methods can make lessons more accessible. Questioning techniques can encourage critical thinking and active participation, while timely feedback helps students recognise their progress and correct mistakes. The use of suitable instructional materials may also sustain attention and support understanding, particularly when abstract concepts are difficult to explain through verbal instruction alone. The result highlights the potential importance of practical teaching skills in promoting meaningful classroom participation. Teachers may possess the required academic qualifications but still need continuous professional development to improve lesson delivery and respond to differences in students' learning needs. Nevertheless, effective instruction operates within a wider school environment. Large classes, inadequate teaching materials, limited instructional time and insufficient school support may restrict teachers' ability to apply appropriate methods consistently.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. Anambra State Ministry of Education and relevant teacher education agencies should organise periodic professional development programmes to strengthen teachers' subject knowledge, professional judgement, classroom management and assessment practices.
2. School principals and teacher development providers should organise practical workshops on lesson presentation, learner-centred teaching methods, effective questioning, feedback provision and the use of relevant instructional materials.
3. Principals and other supervisory personnel should conduct regular classroom observations and provide constructive feedback to help teachers identify areas requiring improvement.

4. Public secondary schools should encourage peer mentoring, collaborative lesson planning and professional learning communities in which teachers can exchange effective classroom practices and address common instructional challenges.

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