**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EKWUSIGO**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE**

**Abstract**

The study investigated the relationship between school social environment and students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Three specific purposes and three research questions were raised and answered respectively in the study. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study comprised all the 641 Senior Secondary School (SSS II) students from the eight public secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State; and a sample size of 160 Senior Secondary School (SSS II) students was drawn for the study using purposive sampling technique. Researcher-structured rating scale “School Social Environment Rating Scale (SSERS)” and Students’ Academic Engagement Rating Scale (SAERS)” were used for data collection. The instruments were face validated by three experts in Faculty of Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Internal consistency co-efficient values of 0.88 and 0.85 were obtained for SSERS and SAERS respectively using Cronbach Alpha statistical method. The researcher administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of three research assistants. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). The findings revealed that there is a very strong positive relationship between school social environment and students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. The findings also found a very strong positive relationship between school social environment and both male and female students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Therefore, the study concluded based on the findings that schools must foster a supportive and inclusive social environment in schools to enhance academic engagement for all students in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that Ministry of Education should ensure continuous investment in creating and maintaining a conducive social environment in schools through policies that promote inclusivity, safety, and collaboration and school principals should foster a supportive and interactive school culture by encouraging extracurricular activities, open communication, and positive peer relationships.

**Keywords: School Social Environment; Students’ Academic Engagement; Secondary Schools.**

**Introduction**

Education is globally acknowledged as a stimulus for economic, social-political, scientific and technological development. It plays a crucial role in nation-building by equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for economic growth and innovation that foster a competitive workforce that drives national prosperity. This is amplified in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), which posited that education is an instrument par-excellence for effective national development. Moreover, the achievement of education objectives is closely linked to students' academic engagement, as active participation and commitment to learning foster the development of critical skills and knowledge essential for meeting the achievement of secondary school educational goals. Students' academic engagement refers to the level of involvement, commitment, and participation students exhibit in their learning activities and academic environment. In line with the assertion above, Adeyinka and Bashorun (2022) averred that academic engagement is the multidimensional involvement of students in their learning environment, characterized by participation, emotional connection, and cognitive investment. Bello and Oyedepo (2023) defined academic engagement as the degree to which students participate in academic tasks, including attentiveness, effort, persistence, and investment in school-related activities. Alabi (2021) viewed students’ academic engagement as the degree to which students interact with peers, teachers, and other members of the academic community during their learning process. This implies that students’ academic engagement involves social engagement that highlights collaborative learning and the development of communication skills, suggesting that interaction with others enhances students’ academic experiences and outcomes irrespective of their gender.

Gender refers to the social, cultural, and behavioural characteristics and roles that societies attribute to individuals based on their perceived sex. It encompasses expectations, roles, and norms related to masculinity, femininity, and non-binary identities (Viet, 2021). Unlike biological sex, which is based on physical attributes such as chromosomes and reproductive anatomy, gender is more fluid and influenced by societal, cultural, and personal factors. In corroboration with the position above, Tripathy and Sahu (2018) posited that gender is not just a biological or psychological trait but is intricately tied to social expectations and roles, and its understanding is evolving in response to broader cultural changes. According to Tian and Zhou (2020), gender is a sociocultural construct used to explain inequalities and power relations in social systems; which often operate within binary categories of male and female, though these boundaries are increasingly challenged by non-binary and trans-identities. In the context of global health and policy, Leraas et al. (2018) emphasized that gender is a dynamic and multifaceted concept, shaped by social roles, norms, and identities; which influences both individual behaviors and structural inequalities in society. Choi and Lee (2021) argued that gender differences can be rooted in biological sex, which influences behavioural and cognitive differences between men and women. This essentialist view conceptualizes gender as a natural, stable category that is consistent across different contexts; which impacts individuals’ response to issues. In the context of this study, gender was viewed as socially constructed roles, behaviours, and expectations assigned to students based on their perceived sex; which influence their access to resources, opportunities, , societal roles and engagement within the schools’ environment.

School social environment is the relationships and interactions of members of school. Arslan and Duru (2023) described school social environment as the interpersonal relationships, norms, and behaviors that shape interactions among students, teachers, and staff within the school setting. It includes factors like communication, support systems, peer relationships, and the overall emotional climate that influence the well-being and development of individuals in the school community. According to Edgerton (2021), school social environment refers to the overall atmosphere and culture within a school; including the relationships, interactions, and social dynamics among students, teachers, administrators, and the wider school community. School social environment extends to the set of rules, norms, and values that guide behaviour within the school; including inclusivity, respect, and discipline. For this reason, Nnadi and Anikwe (2023) defined the social school environment as a space where values like respect, tolerance, and inclusivity are practiced. This definition implies that school’s social environment plays a role in ensuring students' safety and fostering positive relationships; which are essential for student well-being. Choi and Lee (2021) posited that when students perceived their school environment as inclusive and supportive, they demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement. Teacher-student relationships, along with peer collaboration, played a crucial role in motivating students. On the other hand, Lan and Lan (2022) study on the impact of negative peer pressure and an unsupportive school environment on students' academic engagement reported that students in schools with a more competitive or exclusionary environment exhibited lower levels of engagement in academic activities. Similarly, Sari & Ince (2019) indicated that students experiencing social isolation and poor relationships with teachers and peers were less likely to engage in school activities. The lack of a supportive school social environment was linked to a decline in students’ academic motivation and overall engagement.

The studies above suggest that a robust positive school social environment, characterized by mutual respect, supportive relationships, inclusivity, effective communication, collaboration, and a safe, nurturing atmosphere conducive to learning. In other words, negative school social environment characterized by disrespect, exclusion, poor communication, bullying, lack of support, and an unsafe or hostile atmosphere that hinders learning. In fact, Ejiofor (2019) held that a positive school social environment promotes student well-being, academic achievement, and the development of social and emotional skills whereas a negative environment can lead to issues such as bullying, isolation, or disengagement. Although, the assertions are widespread, their validity has to be established in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State, using the appropriate and systematic research procedures. Hence, it is against this foregoing background that the researcher conceived the idea to investigate the relationship school social environment and students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State.

**Statement of the Problem**

The social environment of a school plays a critical role in shaping students' academic engagement, which is a key factor influencing their learning outcomes. In secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State, there is a growing concern regarding the level of academic engagement among students. In spite of the various initiatives aimed at improving educational quality, it seems that many students still exhibit low levels of engagement in academic activities, such as participation in classroom discussions, completion of assignments, and active involvement in learning processes. Several factors within the school’s social environment, including teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, school leadership, and the overall classroom atmosphere, may influence students' academic engagement. Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of a positive school social environment, the specific ways in which this environment fosters or hinders academic engagement among students in secondary schools remain unclear. In particular, it is uncertain whether students in Ekwusigo Local Government Area are experiencing a school social environment that promotes active participation in academic activities or whether social challenges such as peer pressure, bullying, and inadequate teacher-student relationships negatively affect their academic engagement.

However, the extent to which these factors affect academic engagement remains unclear in the context of Ekwusigo Local Government Area. Given this gap in knowledge, the problem of this study was to investigate the relationship between the school social environment and students' academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study focused on understanding how gender as a moderator variable influence students' motivation, involvement, and overall academic engagement, with the aim of providing insights that can inform school policies and practices to enhance academic outcomes for students in the area.

**Purpose of the Study**

 The main purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between school social environment and students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between school social environment and students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State;
2. find out the relationship between school social environment and male students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State; and
3. ascertain the relationship between school social environment and female students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between school social environment and students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship between school social environment and male students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State?
3. What is the relationship between school social environment and female students’ engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for the study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and was discussed below.

**Ecological Systems Theory (Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1979)**

The Ecological Systems Theory provides the theoretical framework for this study. The theory was propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. Ecological Systems Theory (EST) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interconnected systems that influence human development. The Theory explains human development within the context of the systems of relationships that form an individual's environment. It emphasizes the interaction between individuals and the multiple layers of their surrounding environment, considering how these systems influence each other and, in turn, shape development. The theory is widely applied in education, psychology, and social sciences to understand how various factors affect human behavior and growth. Bronfenbrenner posits that individuals develop within a complex web of relationships and environments, encompassing five interrelated systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These systems interact dynamically, influencing an individual’s behavior, learning, and overall development.

In the context of the school social environment, the microsystem—the immediate environment where students directly interact—plays a pivotal role. Here, relationships with teachers, peers, and school staff are crucial. A positive social environment characterized by mutual respect, emotional support, and inclusivity fosters students’ academic engagement. When students feel connected and valued in this setting, they are more likely to participate actively in learning activities. The mesosystem involves interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationships between the school and family. Strong school-family collaboration can create a supportive network that reinforces the importance of education, promoting higher levels of student engagement. For instance, parental involvement in school activities often strengthens a student’s sense of belonging and motivation. The exosystem, which includes indirect influences such as the policies and decisions of school boards or community organizations, can also shape the school’s social environment. For example, policies that promote social inclusion and reduce bullying positively affect students' academic involvement. The macrosystem, encompassing societal norms, values, and cultural beliefs, influences how schools establish their social environments; societies that prioritize education often foster school cultures that value student engagement and collaboration. The chronosystem emphasizes the role of time and change, including the evolution of the school environment as students’ progress. For example, a shift from a competitive to a collaborative school culture can improve engagement over time.

Bronfenbrenner’s EST is relevant to the study on school social environment and students' academic engagement because it provides a valuable lens for examining the relationship between the school social environment and students’ academic engagement. The theory underscores the interconnectedness of the systems influencing student engagement, emphasizing that academic outcomes are not shaped by isolated factors but by the interplay of relationships, institutional practices, and societal expectations. For example, the quality of teacher-student interactions (microsystem) and the collaboration between parents and teachers (mesosystem) can directly affect students’ motivation and involvement in academic tasks. Similarly, external factors such as community support for schools (exosystem) and educational values within the local culture (macrosystem) contribute to shaping the social environment in schools. Over time, these interactions, influenced by the chronosystem, can create a cumulative impact on students’ academic trajectories. Thus, applying EST in this study helps to identify and address the multi-layered factors that influence the school social environment and offers insights into practical strategies for improving student engagement and academic success.

**Theoretical Review**

**School Social Environment and Student Academic Engagement**

The school social environment plays a critical role in influencing students' academic engagement, which refers to the active participation and investment of students in their learning experiences. In the context of Nigerian secondary schools, the social environment comprises the interpersonal relationships between students, teachers, and peers, as well as the broader school culture and climate. Research indicates that a supportive, positive school social environment enhances students' academic engagement, fostering better academic performance, motivation, and emotional well-being. A key factor within the school social environment is teacher-student interaction. Positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students contribute to academic engagement by enhancing students' motivation to learn and their commitment to school activities. Teachers who display empathy, encouragement, and respect for students' individuality can create an environment where students feel valued, leading to increased engagement (Okolie, 2022). This finding is echoed in studies conducted by Adebayo and Adeoye (2021), which revealed that when teachers maintain open communication, show care, and provide constructive feedback, students tend to engage more deeply with academic tasks, thereby improving their academic outcomes.

Peer relationships also play a significant role in shaping the school social environment. A sense of belonging and camaraderie among students can lead to better collaboration, emotional support, and an overall positive school climate, which are essential for academic engagement. According to Ugochukwu and Nnadi (2023), students who have positive interactions with their peers are more likely to participate in class discussions, collaborate on group projects, and take part in extracurricular activities, all of which contribute to their engagement in learning. Additionally, the study emphasized that peer influence could either positively or negatively affect academic engagement, with students from peer groups that value education showing higher levels of academic involvement. The school climate, which encompasses the overall atmosphere and ethos of the school, also significantly influences students' academic engagement. A safe, inclusive, and respectful school climate fosters a sense of security and well-being, allowing students to focus more on their studies. Research by Oladipo (2020) showed that schools that prioritize a positive climate, through the implementation of anti-bullying policies and fostering respectful behavior, saw increased academic engagement and lower dropout rates. In contrast, a negative or hostile school environment can lead to disengagement, absenteeism, and poor academic performance.

Furthermore, parental involvement and community engagement are integral components of the school social environment. Research by Nwankwo and Okafor (2019) highlighted that schools with active parental involvement tend to have higher levels of student engagement. Parental support in the form of encouragement, participation in school activities, and communication with teachers creates a partnership that positively impacts students' academic attitudes and behaviors. The socio-economic background of students also influences their academic engagement. Schools situated in affluent areas may offer better facilities and resources, leading to greater academic opportunities and engagement. However, in economically disadvantaged areas, students may struggle with engagement due to inadequate facilities, lack of educational resources, or external pressures from their socio-economic environment (Akinyemi, 2021). However, the school social environment is a key determinant of students' academic engagement in Nigerian schools. Positive teacher-student relationships, supportive peer interactions, a healthy school climate, and active parental and community involvement all contribute to enhancing students' engagement. To improve academic outcomes, policymakers and educators must focus on creating and maintaining an environment where students feel supported, valued, and motivated to participate actively in their education.

**Research Methods**

The study adopted correlational research design. The correlational research design according to Ifeakor (2018) examined the degree, patterns and strength of relationship between two or more variables to determine whether they are associated or correlated without inferring causation. The study was conducted in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria. The population for the study comprised all the 641 Senior Secondary School (SSS II) students from the eight public secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State (Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Anambra State Post Primary School Service Commission [PPSSC], Awka, 2024). The sample size of 160 (25 percent) of the entire population of SSS II students in the eight public secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State was selected for the study using purposive sampling technique. In each of the eight public secondary schools, 20 SS II students, made up of 10 male and 10 female were purposively selected which brought the target sample size to 160 SSII students. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure the equal selection of 80 male and 80 female SSII students; who possess specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-structured rating scale titled: “School Social Environment Rating Scale (SSERS)” and Students’ Academic Engagement Rating Scale (SAERS). The first instrument SSERS contains two sections, A and B. Section A sought background data of the respondents (students) on their gender. Section B contains 15 items statements which was designed to elicit data on school social environment and was structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD); weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The second instrument SAERS contains 15 items statements which was designed to elicit data on students’ academic engagement and was structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD); weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was subjected to face validation using three experts, two in the department of Educational Management and Policy and one in Measurement and Evaluation Unit, in the department of Educational Foundations, all in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability was determined by administering copies of the questionnaire to 20 students in public secondary schools in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State; which was not part of the study area through pilot test. The data collected from the pilot test were subjected to internal consistency reliability test using Cronbach Alpha. The responses were analyzed, while the reliability coefficients of 0.88 and 0.85 were obtained for SSERS and SAERS respectively. On the spot delivery method was used by the researchers and three research assistants to administer the copies of the instrument to the selected research participants in their respective schools. Out of the 160 copies distributed, 156 copies (77 males and 79 females) were retrieved duly completed, and used for data analysis. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to answer research questions one to four. The (r) was used to determine the nature of the relationship between the independent variable (school social environment) and the dependent variable (students’ academic engagement) in the study the variables of the study.

**Analysis and Results Presentation**

The study answered the following research questions:

**Research Question One:** What is the relationship between school social environment and students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 1: Pearson r on the relationship between school social environment and students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **N** | **School social environment**  | **Students’ academic engagement** | **Remarks**  |
| School social environment | 156 | 1.00 | .815\*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  | Very strong positive relationship |
| Students’ academic engagement | 156 | .815\*\* | 1.00 |  |

 Results in Table 1 reveal that there is a very strong positive relationship between school social environment and students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. This is evident in the value of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r), which is 0.815.

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between school social environment and male students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 2: Pearson r on the relationship between school social environment and male students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **N** | **School social environment**  | **Students’ academic engagement** | **Remarks**  |
| School social environment | 77 | 1.00 | .804\*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  | Very strong positive relationship |
| Male students’ academic engagement | 77 | .804\*\* | 1.00 |  |

 Table 2 shows that the Pearson’s (r) = 0.804, indicating that there is a very strong positive relationship between school social environment and male students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State.

**Research Question Three:** What is the relationship between school social environment and female students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 3: Pearson r on the relationship between school social environment and female students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **N** | **School social environment**  | **Female students’ academic engagement** | **Remarks**  |
| School social environment | 79 | 1.00 | .819\*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  | Very strong positive relationship |
| Female students’ academic engagement | 79 | .819\*\* | 1.00 |  |

Table 3 shows that there is a very strong positive relationship between school social environment and female students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. This is shown in the value of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r), which is 0.819.

**Discussion of Findings**

In Table 1 the findings revealed that there is a very strong positive relationship between the school social environment and students' academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.815. This implies that an enriched social environment significantly enhances student engagement. This means that as the school social environment improves (in terms of peer relationships, teacher-student rapport, inclusivity, and extracurricular activities), students' academic engagement (measured through participation, motivation, attentiveness, and overall commitment) also increases. The study suggests that a positive school social environment can contribute to creating conditions that motivate students to actively participate in academic activities. Social interactions foster a sense of belonging, which psychological theories like Maslow’s hierarchy emphasize as critical to motivation and engagement. Hence, the results highlight the need for schools to prioritize inclusive practices, anti-bullying policies, teacher training in social-emotional skills, and fostering supportive student-peer relationships. In support of the study findings, Adeniji et al. (2023) study on school climate and students' academic engagement in secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria found a strong positive correlation (r = 0.789) between a supportive school climate and academic engagement. The study emphasized the role of teacher-student relationships and inclusive learning environments in fostering engagement. The study however concluded that social support and a collaborative atmosphere are integral to boosting students' focus and motivation. Similarly, Brown and Lee (2021) found a strong correlation (r = 0.812) between positive social interactions within schools and students’ academic engagement. Schools fostering teacher-student rapport reported higher engagement scores. The study concluded that strengthening peer interactions and teacher-student relationships is critical for academic success.

The findings in Table 2 showed that there is a very strong positive relationship between school social environment and male students’ academic engagement in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State with Pearson (r) value of 0.804. This means that improvements in the school social environment—such as supportive teacher-student relationships, a culture of inclusivity, effective communication, and positive peer interactions—are strongly associated with increased academic engagement among male students. Male students in particular may benefit from the social environment due to their tendency to thrive in structured and interactive settings that offer emotional support and foster collaboration. The findings also suggest that fostering a positive school social environment is critical for enhancing academic engagement, especially among male students. The implication is that male students often respond positively to environments that encourage peer collaboration, healthy competition, and opportunities for active participation. When these aspects are present, male students tend to show greater engagement in academic tasks, such as completing assignments, participating in class discussions, and setting personal academic goals. Corroborating the findings, study by Yusuf and Adediran (2023) found that the school social environment positively influences students' academic engagement across genders, with male students showing higher engagement levels due to their preference for interactive and collaborative settings. Likewise, study by Eze et al. (2022) demonstrated that supportive peer relationships and teacher involvement significantly boost male students' classroom participation and academic outcomes in secondary schools in Southeast Nigeria. In addition, Aluko and Adewale (2021) who examined the relationship between school climate and academic engagement among male secondary school students established a strong correlation (r = 0.796) between a positive school climate and male students’ active participation in academic activities in urban public secondary schools in Nigeria. The study reinforces the critical role of a positive school social environment in enhancing male students' academic engagement.

The findings in Table 3 revealed a very strong positive relationship between the school social environment and female students' academic engagement, as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient (r = 0.819). This value signifies that as the quality of the school social environment improves, female students are significantly more engaged academically in secondary schools in Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Anambra State. This strong relationship implies that improvements in the social environment are strongly linked to increased motivation, participation in class, and better academic performance among female students. The findings suggest that when schools foster a socially inclusive and supportive atmosphere such as teacher encouragement, positive peer relationships, and mentorship programmes, female students are more likely to remain engaged in learning. For example, environments where gender stereotypes are addressed, and female students feel safe and supported, enhance their willingness to participate in academic and extracurricular activities. In line with the findings of this study, Chukwu and Ibe (2023) study conducted in Imo State investigated gender differences in the relationship between school social environment and academic engagement found a higher correlation for female students (r = 0.82). The study recommended targeted policies to foster positive teacher-student relationships for girls. The study findings also agree with Adedeji et al. (2022) research carried out in Lagos State Secondary Schools revealed that a positive school social environment improved not only students' engagement but also their self-efficacy, with a stronger impact on female students. The correlation for female students’ academic engagement was r = 0.79. The findings in Ekwusigo Local Government align with these existing studies, demonstrating that an inclusive and supportive school social environment is crucial for fostering academic engagement, especially among female students. Schools should prioritize policies and practices that promote equity, respect, and collaboration, ensuring all students feel valued and supported.

**Conclusion**

The findings reveal that the school social environment significantly influences students' academic engagement, with equally strong positive impacts observed among both male and female students in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State. Therefore, the study concluded based on the findings that schools must foster a supportive and inclusive social environment in schools to enhance academic engagement for all students in Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. Ministry of Education should ensure continuous investment in creating and maintaining a conducive social environment in schools through policies that promote inclusivity, safety, and collaboration.
2. School principals should foster a supportive and interactive school culture by encouraging extracurricular activities, open communication, and positive peer relationships.
3. Teachers should actively engage with students using empathetic, collaborative teaching strategies that enhance their sense of belonging and motivation.
4. Students should actively participate in school activities, collaborate with peers and staff, and take responsibility for their academic engagement.
5. Parents should support their children's academic journey by encouraging participation in school programs and maintaining regular communication with teachers and school authorities.

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