

## Causes, Consequences and Strategies for Reducing Low Self-Esteem Among Secondary School Students in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State

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### Abstract

This study was on the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State. The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey research design. The study was guided by 3 research questions. The sample size for this study was 159 counsellors drawn through accidental sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire titled Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for reducing low self-esteem (CCCSFRLSE). The instrument was developed by the researchers. The instrument was validated by three experts from the faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained for the instrument which was used for this study. The researchers adopted a direct delivery method that was, face to face method of administration for the data collection to ensure a hundred percent return of the copies of the instrument. Data collected was analyzed using the arithmetic mean of which its decision rule is from 2.50 above. The findings of the study were as follows: the finding indicated that the following were the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students: inability to cope academically, harsh criticism from authority figures such as parents or teachers, having trouble keeping up at school, feeling less attractive than the ideal image portrayed in social media, sibling maltreatment and lack of motivation for success and peer pressure while the findings on the consequences were: poor academic achievement, social isolation, feelings of worthlessness, negative self-talk, school dropout and aggressiveness. Moreover, the findings on the counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem were: *helping the victims* to forget the past, use of mindfulness and meditation, reciting positive affirmations on daily bases, journaling and practicing self-hygiene, involving in grounding exercises that quiet negative thoughts, and socializing with people one trusts and feels good about. Among other things the researchers suggested that Government should be funding counselling programs, conferences, workshops and seminar where the strategies for reducing low self-esteem among students would be taught both to the new counsellors, teachers and staff for a collective treatment against the behaviour in secondary schools. And also, Counsellors would be using the medium of P.T.A to be training parents on the causes and consequences of low self-esteem which would help them to guard against and report such acts to counsellors for necessary actions.

**Keywords:** Causes, Consequences, Strategies, low, Self-Esteem

## INTRODUCTION

Secondary school education is very important in the society. A child enters secondary school immediately after the primary schools and at the end it can lead a student into vocational or tertiary education. Attendance of secondary education is compulsory in most countries for students between the ages of 11 and 18. However, Smith, (2013) deduced that secondary school is that stage of education following primary school and it is generally the final stage of compulsory education and also an intermediate between primary and tertiary stage. Parents whose children are in secondary school are of greater expectations that they their wards will be performing well academically but unfortunately some students do perform poorly academically. Researchers, assert that there are some personal factors that can likely cause poor academic performance for a particular student which include: low motivation to learning, health issues, lack of understanding and self-esteem issues (Li, Han, Wang, Sun and Cheng 2018) but this present work is focusing on self-esteem issues from which low self-esteem emanates from.

Alsaleem, Alyousef, Alkaff, Alzaid, Alotaibi and Shaik (2021) opine that self-esteem is an individual's sense of satisfaction with oneself and also, reflects the relationship between personal self-image and ideal self-image. For the above authors, it is a measure of self-assessment because it is considered the most important psychological formula. Also, Mohsen (2017) asserts that self-esteem is the degree to which students feel valuable, satisfied with themselves, and worthy of respect. For Afari, Ward and Khine (2012), self-esteem has 2 types which are specific and global. Global self-esteem for them is more relevant to the psychological aspect, while specific self-esteem (academic) which may be high or low self-esteem is more relevant to behaviour and is a tool for evaluating academic achievements. Behaviour is seen as external changes or activities of living organisms that are functionally mediated by other external phenomena in the present moment (Zeng, Chen, Wang, Zhang and Deng 2019). Behavior is being considered because learners may have specific behaviors toward an object as a whole and also toward specific facets of that object. Behavior can be positive or negative and intensity, as shown by the fact that behaviors are affected.

Burger and Bachmann (2021) opinionate that high self-esteem is the belief that one is worthy of privilege and admiration by others for being unique and special and possessing fantasies of brilliance and beauty but it is not entirely responsible for academic successes and achievements but rather is a result of these or a partial reason for those successes which helps to facilitate perseverance and diligence after failure. On the other hand, Hyseni-Duraku and Hoxha (2018) low self-esteem which is the focus of this study or lack of confidence leaves students doubting their ability to succeed, making them hesitant to engage in learning or take appropriate academic growth risks.

However, some researchers have presented some yardsticks through which people with this problem can be identified. For instance Barbot; Safont-Mottay and Oubrayrie-Roussel (2019), Afari, Ward and Khine (2012) state that persons with low self-esteem do exhibit likely characteristics such as heavy self-criticism and dissatisfaction, feelings of being attacked, chronic indecision and an exaggerated fear of mistakes, excessive will to please and unwillingness to displease any petitioner, perfectionism, which can lead to frustration when perfection is not achieved, neurotic guilt and dwelling on or exaggerating the magnitude of past mistakes. *These characteristics have different consequences on the bearers.*

Some researchers have suggested in different locations that certain factors have been seen as the causes of this low self-esteem among youngsters globally. For instance, xxxxxxBarbot; Safont-

Mottay and Oubrayrie-Roussel (2019) suggested that factors such as genetic factors, physical appearance or weight, mental health issues and socio-economic status are seen to be among the causes of low self-esteem. Also, *Arshad, Zaidi and Mahmood (2015) suggested that* emotional experiences, social stigma, peer pressure or bullying can equally lead to low self-esteem.

On the consequences of low self-esteem, *Moir, Yielder, Sanson and Chen (2018) reported* that the condition leads to psychosocial weakness and lack of self-confidence, creating problems and risky behaviors for the person. Also, Nguyen, Wright, Dedding, Pham and Bunders (2019) opine that low self-esteem can lead to a terminal condition resulting to death, murder, food disorder, suicide, drug abuse and other chronic diseases. Moreover, Alsaleem, Alyousef, Alkaff, Alzaid, Alotaibi, Shaik (2021) suggested that school dropouts, rapping, stealing, kidnapping, abortion and unwanted pregnancy are seen to be among some of the problems of low self-esteem. *Mete (2021) also*, adds that low self-esteem leads to depression and anxiety, eating disorders, violence and low achievement in education and other endeavours.

However, in the process of seeking for the possible ways for reducing low self-esteem Acosta-Gonzaga (2023) suggests that the use of self-management technique on the victims can be effective in reducing low self-esteem. Some researchers like *Jaaffar; Ibrahim, Rajadurai, Jegathee, Sohail and Sadiq (2019) in their work suggested that helping the victims* to forget the past and stopping worrying about the future through the use of mindfulness and meditation, reciting of positive affirmations on daily bases, journaling and practicing of self-hygiene can go a long way in reducing low self-esteem.

On the other hand, use of stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing, involving in physical activity like exercising and yoga, grounding exercises that quiet negative thoughts and socializing with people one trusts and feels good about can equally help in reducing low self-esteem (Saleh, Mohammed, Faisal, Ahmed, Abdullah, Fadhah and Bassam (2023). From this work so far, one can discover that education, development, growth and satisfaction in the life of the victims of low self-esteem can be very difficult if nothing is done towards reducing this problem.

This indicates that there is an urgent need to holistically identify the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for eliminating low self-esteem among students. This is why the present researchers embark on this topic to identify the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for reducing the problem among secondary school students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A person that sees himself as capable of succeeding in a worth-while activity is the one that have confidence in himself and it is such a confidence that is known as self-esteem which can be high or low. Students with high self-esteem often do very well in their academic performances than those with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem has been identified as one of the personal factors that causes poor academic performances among secondary school students. The effects of low self-esteem are so profound that the condition will not be overlooked. Low self-esteem can leave a student doubting his ability to succeed in his studies causing one to be hesitant to engage in learning or taking appropriate academic growth risks. Low self-esteem also, impacts behaviour causing withdrawal and risky behaviour. A learner with low self-esteem can be having difficulty towards accepting compliments. He can see himself as not being capable of engaging in any academic activities and succeed. And instead of doing well academically, he performs poorly thereby lagging behind where others are moving forward. This is not only in academics because it can come across all the aspects of one's life. This situation cannot be over looked since this

attitude can impact progress, development and growth for the student and can even lead to frustration in life. Therefore, something needs to be done quickly to reduce this problem among the secondary school students who are the future hope of tomorrow. This is why the researchers embark on this topic: causes, consequences and counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students.

### Research Objectives

The main objective of this work was to determine the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study identified the following:

1. The causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students
2. The consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students
3. The counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students

### Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students?
2. What are the consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students?
3. What are the counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students?

### Methods

This study was carried out in Anambra State and the research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey design. The study is guided by three research questions. The sample size for this study is 159 counsellors drawn through convenience sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for reducing low self-esteem (CCCSFRLSE). The instrument was developed by the researchers. The instrument it was validated by three experts from the faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained for the instrument and used for the study. The researchers adopted a direct delivery method that is, face to face method of administration for the data collection to ensure 100% return of the copies of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using the arithmetic mean with a decision rule of 2.50 and above as acceptable, while values below 2.50 were regarded as unacceptable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research Question 1:** What are the causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students?

**Table 1**

#### Mean ratings of respondents on the causes of low self-esteem

S/N	ITEMS	X	REMARKS
	Causes of low self-esteem are:		
1	Inability to cope academically	3.52	Agreed

2	Harsh criticism from authority figures such as parents or teachers	3.34	Agreed
3	Having trouble keeping up at school	3.37	Agreed
4	Feeling less attractive than the ideal image portrayed in social media	3.40	Agreed
5	Sibling maltreatment	3.47	Agreed
6	Lack of motivation for success and peer pressure.	3.45	Agreed

In Table 1, all the items in (1 to 6) above obtained the mean ratings that is above the criterion mean of 2.50 which indicated that the respondents agreed that all the items in 1-6 above were causes of low self-esteem among the public secondary school students. The following items were therefore the causes of low self-esteem among students: inability to cope academically, harsh criticism from authority figures such as parents or teachers, having trouble keeping up at school, feeling less attractive than the ideal image portrayed in social media, sibling maltreatment and lack of motivation for success and peer pressure.

## Question 2

What are the consequences of low self-esteem among secondary school students?

**Table 2 Mean ratings of respondents on the consequences of low self-esteem**

S/N	ITEMS	X	REMARKS
	Perceived consequences of low self-esteem are:		
1	poor academic achievement	3.45	Agreed
2	social isolation	3.40	Agreed
3	feelings of worthlessness	3.51	Agreed
4	negative self-talk	3.47	Agreed
5	school dropout	3.34	Agreed
6	Aggressiveness	3.45	Agreed

Table 2 above, showed that the counsellors agreed that all the items in (1 to 6) above were the consequences of low self-esteem because each obtained the mean rating that is above the criterion

mean of 2.50. The following items were therefore the consequences of low self-esteem among public secondary school students: poor academic achievement, social isolation, feelings of worthlessness, negative self-talk, school dropout and aggressiveness.

### Research Question 3

What are the counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students?

**Table 3**

#### Mean ratings of respondents on counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem

S/N	ITEMS	X	REMARKS
	Counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem are:		
1	<i>helping the victims to forget the past</i>	3.64	Agreed
2	reciting positive affirmations on daily bases	3.51	Agreed
3	use of mindfulness and meditation	3.47	Agreed
4	grounding exercises that quiet negative thoughts	3.37	Agreed
5	journaling and practicing self-hygiene	3.65	Agreed
6	socializing with people one trusts and feels good about	3.45	Agreed

Table 3 above indicated that the counsellors accepted all the items in the table as the perceived strategies for reducing low self-esteem because each of the items obtained the mean ratings above the criterion mean of 2.50. The following items were therefore the counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students: *helping the victims* to forget the past, use of mindfulness and meditation, reciting positive affirmations on daily bases, journaling and practicing self-hygiene, involving in grounding exercises that quiet negative thoughts, and socializing with people one trusts and feels good about.

### Discussion of the Findings

The first research question of this study was posed to determine the counsellors' perceived causes of low self-esteem among secondary school students. However, from the analysis of the data obtained in table1 above, especially numbers 1 to 3: inability to cope academically, harsh criticism from authority figures such as parents or teachers and having trouble keeping up at school gave support to the studies of Barbot; Safont-Mottay and Oubrayrie-Roussel (2019) who identified that harsh criticism from authority figures such as parents or teachers, having trouble keeping up at school, and feeling less attractive than the ideal image portrayed in social media were among the

causes of low self-esteem. Also, the above findings on the causes of low self-esteem from numbers 3 to 6 were in line with the findings of Jaaffar, Ibrahim, Rajadurai, Jegathee, Sohail and Sadiq (2019) whose study showed the causes of low self-esteem to include the following: feeling less attractive than the ideal image portrayed in social media, sibling maltreatment and lack of motivation for success and peer pressure.

Moreover, the findings of this study under the research question 2 revealed that the consequences of low self-esteem includes poor academic achievement, social isolation, feeling of worthlessness, negative self-talk, school dropout and aggressiveness. These findings collaborated with the findings of Choi and Park (2021) and that of Wang, Wang, Gaskin and Hawk (2017) who identified in their work specifically that poor academic achievement, social isolation, feelings of worthlessness, negative self-talk, school dropout and aggressiveness are among the consequences of low self-esteem.

Furthermore, the findings of this study identified the following factors as the counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students: *helping the victims* to forget the past, use of mindfulness and meditation, reciting positive affirmations on daily bases, journaling and practicing self-hygiene, involving in grounding exercises that quiet negative thoughts and socializing with people one trusts and feels good about. These findings were in support of the findings of American Psychological Association (2021), Thomas, Liu and Umberson (2017) and Jaaffar; Ibrahim; Rajadurai, Jegathee, Sohail and Sadiq (2019) which showed that the following factors can help towards reducing low self-esteem: letting go of the past and stopping worrying about the future, use of mindfulness and meditation, reciting positive affirmations daily, journaling and practicing self-hygiene, utilizing stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing and grounding exercises that quiet negative thoughts.

## Conclusion

Having identified the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for reducing low self-esteem, the researchers agreed that if guidance counsellors can put these strategies at work, they can be helpful in reducing low self-esteem among secondary school students.

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