

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL SKILLS INTERVENTION ON STUDENTS' SENSE OF SELF OF UPPER BASIC EDUCATION IN GOMBE METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

Fatima Bala Sani

Department Of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education Gombe State University, Gombe – Nigeria
Sani.Fb@Gsu.Edu.Ng
08038895352

&

Roseline Walu (Ph.D)

Department Of Educational Foundations, Faculty Of Education
University Of Jos, Nigeria
Walu@Unijos.Edu.Ng
08069177257

&

Prof. Matthew N. Sule (Ph.D)

Department Of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education University Of Jos, Nigeria
Sulenshim@Gmail.Com
08035962108

Abstract

This study investigated the effects of social skills intervention on students' sense of self in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design, specifically the non-equivalent pretest–posttest control group design. The population comprised 9,950 Upper Basic students (5,072 males and 4,878 females) from 24 coeducational schools in Gombe Metropolis. A sample of 134 Upper Basic II students was selected from two coeducational schools using simple random sampling. Within this sample, 64 students (26 males and 38 females) formed the experimental group, while 70 students (28 males and 42 females) constituted the control group. Data were collected using the Sense of Self Scale (SSS). Content and construct validity were established and a reliability coefficient of 0.925 confirmed internal consistency. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and t-test were employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that social skills intervention had a significant positive effect on students' sense of self. The study concludes that social skills intervention is a vital and effective strategy for strengthening students' sense of self, which serves as the foundation for their overall growth and development. By cultivating self-confidence, self-awareness, and a positive self-concept, such interventions empower learners to engage more meaningfully with their school environment. This demonstrates that social skills intervention, when systematically integrated into the school system, can significantly enhance students' sense of self and foster holistic development. It is therefore recommended that schools embed social skills intervention programs into the curriculum to nurture a strong sense of self and promote holistic growth.

Keywords: effects, Sense of self, upper basic II students, social skills intervention, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental instrument for individual and societal development. Beyond the transmission of academic knowledge, schools serve as important agents of socialization where learners acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, and interpersonal competencies necessary for effective participation in society. Through interactions with teachers, peers, and the broader school environment, students develop communication skills, self-confidence, resilience, and a positive sense of identity that support both academic achievement and psychosocial well-being. Consequently, schools are expected to promote students' holistic development by fostering their cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioural growth through supportive learning experiences (Edinyang, Ele, & Odey, 2024). Many students, however, encounter personal, social, and environmental challenges that hinder the development of a healthy sense of self. Factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage, cultural diversity, gender stereotypes, ineffective teaching practices, bullying, discrimination, and negative peer relationships may adversely affect students' self-concept, confidence, and emotional well-being. These challenges often reduce students' engagement in learning activities, limit positive social interactions, and weaken their ability to cope with academic and personal demands. Consequently, there is an increasing recognition of the need for schools to implement interventions that strengthen students' social and emotional competencies and promote positive self-development (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2023).

Sense of self is a multidimensional construct that encompasses self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. These interrelated dimensions collectively influence how individuals perceive, evaluate, and understand themselves and how they interact with their social environment (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Self-awareness refers to an individual's ability to recognize personal emotions, strengths, limitations, and values, thereby promoting informed decision-making and self-regulation. Self-acceptance involves acknowledging and embracing one's strengths and weaknesses while maintaining a positive attitude towards oneself, which contributes to psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995). Self-esteem reflects an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth and competence and influences confidence, motivation, and social adjustment (Rosenberg, 1965).

A well-developed sense of self is essential for students' academic success, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. Students who possess a positive sense of self are more likely to demonstrate confidence in their abilities, participate actively in learning, establish healthy interpersonal relationships, and cope effectively with academic and social challenges. In contrast, students with a fragile sense of self often exhibit low confidence, poor social adjustment, reduced motivation, and disengagement from school activities. These outcomes underscore the importance of creating school environments and implementing interventions that strengthen students' self-perceptions and support their holistic development (UNICEF, 2023; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019).

Social skills intervention is a structured educational approach designed to develop learners' interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, including effective communication, empathy, cooperation, emotional regulation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. By equipping students with these essential competencies, such interventions enable them to establish positive relationships, manage social interactions appropriately, and respond constructively

to academic and personal challenges. Evidence from school-based intervention studies consistently demonstrates that social skills interventions improve students' social competence, emotional well-being, self-awareness, self-management, and academic engagement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Lawrence & Falaye, 2020; Mertens, Deković, Leijten, Van Londen, & Reitz, 2020; Cipriano et al., 2023).

Within the Nigerian educational context, many students continue to experience social and environmental challenges that may hinder the development of a positive sense of self. These challenges include socioeconomic inequalities, bullying, peer victimization, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate school facilities, and limited access to psychosocial support services. In Gombe Metropolis, such conditions may be exacerbated by increasing school enrolment, limited educational resources, and diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, all of which can influence students' self-perceptions, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. The Gombe State Situation Analysis (2021–2022) indicates that approximately one-third of school-age children in the state are out of school, placing additional pressure on the existing educational system and creating learning environments that may not adequately support students' psychosocial development. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) emphasizes that inequalities in access to quality education and supportive learning environments continue to affect children's educational experiences and well-being in Nigeria. These realities underscore the need for school-based interventions that promote students' social competence and strengthen their sense of self.

Against this background, the present study examined the effects of social skills intervention on the sense of self among Public Upper Basic School students in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated whether participation in a structured social skills intervention significantly improved students' self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. By generating empirical evidence on the effectiveness of social skills intervention within the Nigerian educational context, the study is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on students' psychosocial development and provide practical implications for teachers, school counsellors, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to promote students' holistic development through school-based interventions.

Statement of the Problem

A positive sense of self is fundamental to students' academic success, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. Students with a healthy sense of self are more likely to demonstrate confidence, resilience, positive interpersonal relationships, and active engagement in learning. Conversely, students with poor self-awareness, low self-acceptance, and diminished self-esteem are at greater risk of social maladjustment, emotional difficulties, and poor educational outcomes. Schools are therefore expected to provide supportive learning environments that foster students' psychosocial development alongside academic achievement.

In Gombe Metropolis, however, many Public Upper Basic School students are exposed to conditions that may undermine the development of a positive sense of self. Overcrowded classrooms, bullying, peer victimization, inadequate supervision, limited psychosocial support services, and socioeconomic challenges may negatively influence students' confidence, social relationships, and emotional well-being. According to the Gombe State

Situation Analysis (2021–2022), approximately one-third of school-age children in the state are out of school, thereby placing additional pressure on existing educational facilities and contributing to overcrowded learning environments. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) reported that inequalities in access to quality education and supportive school environments continue to affect children's learning experiences and well-being in Nigeria.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that school-based social skills and related psychosocial interventions improve students' interpersonal competence, emotional regulation, and psychological functioning (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Lawrence & Falaye, 2020; Mertens, Deković, Leijten, Van Londen, & Reitz, 2020; Cipriano et al., 2023), empirical evidence on whether such interventions enhance the sense of self of Public Upper Basic School students in Gombe Metropolis remains limited. Most available studies have focused on academic achievement, behavioural outcomes, or general social competence, with relatively little attention given to the dimensions of sense of self, namely self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-esteem, within this population. This gap in the literature provided the rationale for the present study, which examined the effects of social skills intervention on the sense of self among Public Upper Basic School students in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria. The study sought to generate empirical evidence that could inform educational practice and support the integration of social skills interventions into school programmes aimed at promoting students' psychosocial development.

Aim and Objectives

This study examined the effects of social skills intervention on students' sense of self in Gombe metropolis, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include:

1. Ascertain the sense of self mean scores of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups
2. Ascertain the sense of self mean scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the sense of self mean scores of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups?
2. What is the sense of self mean scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the sense of self mean scores of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference in the sense of self mean scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Research Design, Population and Sample

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the non-equivalent pretest–posttest control group design. The population of the study comprised 9,950 students

(5,072 males and 4,878 females) enrolled in 24 upper basic coeducational schools in Gombe Metropolis during the 2024/2025 academic session. These schools share uniform characteristics in terms of student enrolment requirements and teacher recruitment standards, as they are all government-owned institutions. The choice of Upper Basic II students was deliberate. Upper Basic I students were excluded because they are newly admitted and still adjusting to the academic, social, and psychological demands of the level, which could confound the measurement of sense of self. Upper Basic III students were also excluded because they are preparing for transition into senior secondary school, where external examinations and future academic pathways dominate their focus, potentially interfering with the intervention. By contrast, Upper Basic II students represent the most stable and appropriate group for assessing the effects of social skills intervention on sense of self. They are sufficiently familiar with the demands of the level, yet not distracted by imminent transitions, making them the ideal population for the study.

The sample for the study consisted of 134 Upper Basic II students drawn from two coeducational schools in Gombe Metropolis during the 2024/2025 academic session. Each school was purposively assigned to represent one study condition, with school S serving as the experimental group (E) and school C serving as the control group (C). The experimental group comprised 64 participants (26 males and 38 females) drawn from school S, while the control group comprised 70 participants (28 males and 42 females) drawn from school C. This design ensured comparability between groups while maintaining clear distinctions in the intervention and non-intervention conditions.

Research Instrument

The Sense of Self Scale (SSS) was adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1979 and revised in 2006. The original RSES consisted of 10 items designed to measure global self-esteem. To ensure that the instrument was relevant and effective for this study, several modifications were made. First, the title was changed from Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to Sense of Self Scale (SSS) to reflect the broader focus on students' sense of self rather than self-esteem alone. Second, the number of items was expanded from 10 to 12, with the additional items adapted to capture aspects of self-concept more suitable for Upper Basic II students.

The SSS consisted of two sections: Section A elicited respondents' biodata, including school code and gender, while Section B comprised the 12 adapted items assessing students' sense of self. The response options were measured using a five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The language and wording of the items were simplified and adjusted to ensure clarity, age-appropriateness, and ease of understanding among Upper Basic II students. These modifications enabled the SSS to capture the unique aspects of students' sense of self within the context of upper basic education in Gombe metropolis, Nigeria.

The instruments were validated through expert review and factor analysis, with a high concordance coefficient of 0.847 and a satisfactory KMO of .843 and Bartlett's test results confirming that all items were valid, reliable, and measured a single construct in line with recommended standards. The reliability of the Sense of Self Scale (SSS) was confirmed through internal consistency estimates, yielding an index of .925, which exceeds the

benchmark of 0.60–0.90 as suggested by Ugodulunwa (2020), thereby establishing the instrument as highly reliable for the study.

Procedure

The researcher obtained an introduction letter from the University of Jos to access the selected schools, secured permission from administrators and engaged Social Studies teachers to assist with the study. Two research assistants were trained one in embedding social skills into lessons for the experimental group and the other in conventional teaching methods. Pre-tests using the Sense of Self Scale (SSS) which established baseline data. Over six weeks, both groups participated in 12 sessions: the experimental group received Social Studies lessons enriched with social skills, while the control group followed traditional instruction. Attendance registers ensured punctuality and post-tests using the same instruments allowed for outcome comparison. Scoring procedures were clearly defined, with SSS rated on 5-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and t-test were employed to test the formulated hypotheses at a 0.05 alpha level of significance. Specifically, ANCOVA was applied in testing Hypothesis 1 and the t-test was used to test Hypothesis 2, as it facilitated the comparison of gender differences.

RESULTS

Research Question One

What are the sense of self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups?

Table 1

Pre-test and Post-test Sense of Self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II Students in the Experimental and Control groups

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain	$\bar{x}$ -Gain difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental	64	27.47	8.21	44.34	7.84	16.87	12.81
Control	70	27.70	9.12	31.76	11.48	4.06	

Table 1 presents the Mean Scores for the sense of self of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups. The experimental group obtained a pre-test Mean Score of 27.47 with a standard deviation of 8.21 and a post-test Mean Score of 44.34 with a standard deviation of 7.84, yielding a Mean Gain of 16.87 after exposure to social skills intervention. The control group had a pre-test Mean Score of 27.70 with a standard deviation of 9.12 and a post-test Mean Score of 31.76 with a standard deviation of 11.48, yielding a Mean Gain of 4.06. The result indicated that students in the experimental group had a higher Mean Gain score after exposure to social skills intervention than those in the control group who were not given

the treatment. The Mean Gain difference was 12.81 in favour of the experimental group. This means that the social skills intervention increased the students' sense of self.

Research Question Two

What are the sense of self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group?

Table 2

The Post-test Sense of Self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II Students Based on Gender in the Experimental Group

Gender	N	Mean	SD	$\bar{x}$ - difference
Male	38	45.82	3.09	3.67
Female	26	42.15	11.51	

Table 2 reveals the post-test sense of self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group. The result for the experimental group shows that the posttest school adjustment Mean Score for males ($\bar{x}$ =45.82, SD = 3.09) while that of female students ($\bar{x}$ =42.15, SD = 11.51) with a Mean Gain difference of 3.67, indicating that male and female sense of self Mean Scores are almost the same after exposure to social skills intervention.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the sense of self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups.

Table 3

ANCOVA Result on Pretest and Posttest Sense of Self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Corrected Model	10688.408	2	5344.204	91.908	.000	.584	
Intercept	12441.619	1	12441.619	213.967	.000	.620	
Sense of Self Pretest	7410.769	1	7410.769	127.448	.000	.493	
Group	3360.172	1	3360.172	57.787	.000	.306	
Error	7617.301	131	58.147				
Total	210209.000	134					
Corrected Total	18305.709	133					

a. R Squared = .584 (Adjusted R Squared = .578)

The data were analysed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to determine whether significant differences existed in the pretest and post-test school adjustment Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students in the experimental and control groups. Table 8 shows that F (1, 131)

=57.787, $P < 0.05$. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there was a significant effect of social skills intervention on students' sense of self in the experimental group. The result further reveals an adjusted R-squared value of .578, which means that 57.8 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable, which is students' sense of self, is explained by variation in the treatment of social skills intervention, while the remaining is due to other factors not included in this study. Hence, it can be said that social skills intervention does improve students' sense of self.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the sense of self Mean Score of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group.

Table 4

Summary of t-test Analysis of School Adjustment Mean Scores of Upper Basic II Students Based on Gender in the Experimental Group

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Df	T	P – Value
Male	38	45.84	3.09	62	1.884	0.064
Female	26	42.25	11.51			

Table 4 shows the post-test sense of self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group. A p-value of 0.064 was obtained, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance; hence, the null hypothesis is retained. This implies that there is no significant difference between the post-test sense of self Mean Scores of Upper Basic II students based on gender in the experimental group.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study established that social skills intervention had a significant effect on students' sense of self in Gombe Metropolis. Before the intervention, students generally exhibited low self-esteem, poor self-awareness, and fragile identities. However, exposure to deliberate training in empathy, communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution fostered greater self-expression, confidence, and identity development. Students in the experimental group reported feeling more valuable, competent, and proud of their abilities, suggesting that structured social interaction can transform how learners perceive themselves.

This finding aligns with Johnson, Strayer, and Coplan (2020), who observed that individuals with poor social skills often struggle with isolation and diminished self-esteem, while structured social interaction enhances self-perception. Similarly, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachanet (2019) highlighted that social and emotional learning experiences facilitate identity formation and self-expression. The present study corroborates these insights, as students affirmed that they could express themselves assertively, adapt to diverse social environments, and manage difficult emotions in healthy ways.

The hypothesis test confirmed that social skills intervention significantly improved students' sense of self, with 57.8% of the variation explained by the treatment. This outcome is consistent

with Adams and Proctor (2018), who found that individuals with higher levels of social skills tend to have more positive self-concepts and higher self-esteem. Supporting evidence from Mohamed and Shehata (2023) also showed that social skills significantly influence happiness and self-esteem. In contrast, Obadofin, Abodunrin, and Akinwale (2022) reported no significant difference between Social Skills Training and Self-Efficacy Therapy in reducing aggressive behaviours, underscoring that outcomes may vary depending on research design, variables, and populations studied.

Gender analysis revealed no significant difference in sense of self between male and female students after the intervention. This concurs with Siti and Effy (2022), who found no gender-based variations in social support, social skills, and adjustment. However, contrasting findings by Jiya (2022) and Adepegba (2023) reported gender differences in social personality and prosocial behaviour, respectively. Such discrepancies may be attributed to contextual, methodological, and population differences. In the present study, the absence of gender disparities suggests that the intervention was inclusive, providing equal opportunities for both male and female students to strengthen their self-concept.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social skills intervention is a powerful tool for enhancing students' sense of self. By equipping learners with interpersonal and emotional competencies, the intervention nurtures self-confidence, resilience, and positive identity formation. These improvements not only foster personal growth but also contribute to students' ability to engage meaningfully in academic and social contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Curriculum planners should design frameworks and guidelines that explicitly integrate social skills into classroom activities, making identity development and self-expression a natural outcome of academic learning. This will help students not only master subject content but also build confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of self.
2. Government and teacher training institutions should mandate continuous professional development programs that prepare teachers to deliver social skills interventions effectively. Workshops and courses should equip teachers with strategies to foster self-esteem, assertiveness, and self-awareness among learners, thereby strengthening their identity formation.
3. Schools and policymakers should adopt social skills training as an inclusive strategy that benefits all learners. Administrators should create supportive school climates that encourage interventions promoting self-worth, belonging, and resilience. Providing resources and monitoring systems will ensure teachers can implement learner-centred pedagogy that nurtures students' self-concept.
4. Teachers should adopt instructional strategies that embed social skills into classroom practice. Activities should simultaneously deliver subject content and foster self-expression, confidence, and identity development. Special emphasis should be placed on vulnerable learners with low self-esteem to help them cope better with school pressures and strengthen their sense of self.
5. Governments, schools, and parents should develop frameworks that encourage collaboration between schools, parents, and communities. Parents and guardians

should reinforce social skills at home by encouraging communication, empathy and cooperation in family interactions. Such partnerships will extend the benefits of interventions beyond the classroom, helping students sustain resilience and positive self-concept.

6. Students should actively engage in learner-centred activities such as group projects, peer discussions, and role plays. By participating fully, they will cultivate self-expression, confidence and interpersonal skills, enabling them to develop a stronger sense of self and adapt effectively to diverse social environments.

7.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, social skills intervention had a significant effect on students' sense of self in Gombe Metropolis. Before the intervention, students generally exhibited low self-esteem, poor self-awareness, and fragile identities. However, deliberate training in empathy, communication, tolerance, cooperation, problem solving and conflict resolution fostered greater self-expression, confidence, and identity development. Students in the experimental group reported feeling more valuable, competent, and proud of their abilities, demonstrating that structured social interaction can transform how learners perceive themselves. Importantly, no significant gender differences were observed, indicating that the intervention was inclusive and equally beneficial to both male and female students.

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