



SELF-CONCEPT, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AS CORRELATES OF CAREER CHOICE AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY FCT, ABUJA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between self-concept, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research objectives and corresponding hypotheses. Descriptive correlational survey research design was adopted. The population comprised approximately 32,500 Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students in public secondary schools across the FCT. A sample of 381 students was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Self-Concept, Self-Efficacy, Academic Achievement and Career Choice Questionnaire (SSACQ). The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.845. Data collected were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between self-concept and career choice ($r = 0.562, p < 0.05$), indicating that students with higher self-concept tended to demonstrate greater clarity and confidence in their career decisions. Similarly, a significant positive relationship was found between self-efficacy and career choice, showing that students who believe in their abilities are more likely to make informed career choices. In addition, academic achievement was found to have a significant positive relationship with career choice, suggesting that students with higher academic performance tended to exhibit more defined and purposeful career aspirations. The study concludes that self-concept, self-efficacy, and academic achievement are important factors influencing career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja. It is therefore recommended that schools strengthen career guidance and counselling services, promote positive self-beliefs among students, and enhance academic support systems to improve students' capacity to make informed and realistic career decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for shaping human development and advancing societal and economic progress. It does not only involve the transfer of knowledge, but also supports the development of reasoning ability, emotional balance, and readiness for employment and lifelong



productivity. Recent studies in educational psychology have shown that students' academic outcomes are influenced by a combination of intellectual ability, instructional practices, and internal psychological conditions such as self-concept and self-efficacy, which significantly determine learners' engagement, motivation, achievement levels, and eventual career development outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Shen et al., 2022). The adolescent stage represents a crucial period in human development during which individuals begin to form identity structures and make tentative career-related decisions. At this stage, secondary school students actively assess their personal strengths, interests, and future ambitions, which gradually shape their educational direction and occupational preferences (Gati & Saka, 2020; Singh & Agarwal, 2019). In public secondary schools within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, differences in learning environments, availability of instructional resources, and access to professional counselling services create varying conditions that may influence students' academic experiences and career decision processes (Adebayo & Suleiman, 2020).

Self-concept can be understood as the way individuals interpret and evaluate their own abilities, characteristics, and personal value. When students develop a strong and positive perception of themselves, they tend to exhibit higher confidence levels, greater willingness to participate in academic tasks, and stronger motivation toward achievement. On the other hand, a weak or negative self-concept often results in low academic ambition, reduced effort, and poor engagement with learning activities. Research evidence consistently indicates that students' academic self-perception is closely linked to their academic performance and overall educational success (Geng et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2022; Wu & Wang, 2020). Another closely related psychological factor is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully complete academic tasks or accomplish specific goals. This belief system strongly influences how students approach challenges, the amount of effort they invest in learning, and their ability to persist when faced with difficulties. Learners with strong self-efficacy beliefs are generally more resilient, more motivated, and more likely to achieve higher academic results (Zimmerman, 2000; Lopez & Morales, 2020). Such beliefs are developed through successful experiences, constructive feedback, and the ability to manage emotional responses during learning.

Academic achievement refers to the extent to which students successfully meet educational expectations as reflected in their performance in assessments, tests, and examinations. It is not determined solely by intellectual ability but also by emotional stability, motivation, and psychological well-being. Studies have shown that students who maintain positive emotional and motivational states tend to perform better academically (Park & Kim, 2021; Yildirim et al., 2022). Additionally, adaptive learning strategies and resilience in the face of academic challenges contribute significantly to improved performance outcomes



(Martin & Marsh, 2019). The relationship between self-concept, self-efficacy, and academic achievement is dynamic and interdependent. Each of these factors influences the others over time, creating a cycle that shapes students' academic experiences and future aspirations. Research has demonstrated that students who develop strong self-beliefs and positive academic identities are more likely to perform well, which in turn further strengthens their self-perception (Marsh & Craven, 2020). Collectively, these psychological factors play an essential role in shaping academic success and influencing long-term educational and career directions (Shen et al., 2022).

Career choice involves the process through which individuals select academic paths and occupational fields based on their interests, values, abilities, and future goals. The theory of self-efficacy explains that individuals are more likely to pursue careers they believe they are capable of succeeding in, while avoiding those they perceive as beyond their ability (Taylor & Betz, 1983). In the same way, students' academic self-concept contributes to the formation of career aspirations by shaping what they consider realistic and achievable (Zhang & Liu, 2021). However, career decision-making is not influenced by psychological factors alone. External forces such as parental expectations, peer influence, socioeconomic background, and availability of career guidance services also play a major role in shaping students' choices (Adebayo & Suleiman, 2020). When students' self-perception aligns with their academic motivation, they are more likely to make clearer and more confident career decisions (Singh & Agarwal, 2019). In the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, disparities in educational quality, access to learning resources and counselling support continue to create differences in students' academic preparedness and career decision-making capacity. These inequalities make it important to examine how psychological factors such as self-concept and self-efficacy, together with academic achievement, jointly influence students' career choices.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Making appropriate career decisions continues to pose a serious challenge among secondary school students in Nigeria. A significant number of learners select career paths without adequate understanding of their academic abilities, personal interests, and strengths. This often leads to poor alignment between students and their chosen professions, resulting in dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and reduced effectiveness in future occupational roles. Although schools provide guidance and counselling services, organize career talks, and involve parents in decision-making processes, many students still make uninformed or unsuitable career choices. This suggests that existing support systems may not sufficiently address the psychological and academic foundations that influence how students choose their future careers.



Key factors such as academic self-concept, self-efficacy, and academic performance are central to how students evaluate themselves and the career options they consider realistic. In the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, these challenges may be intensified by differences in school quality, unequal access to counselling services, and varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, students often rely on external opinions such as parental expectations, peer influence, or perceived social prestige of occupations rather than objective self-evaluation and academic evidence. While previous research has explored self-concept, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and career choice, many of these studies have treated the variables independently. There is still limited empirical evidence examining how these factors interact simultaneously to influence career decision-making among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This creates a gap in knowledge that limits the development of comprehensive interventions for improving career guidance practices.

Therefore, this study investigates the combined relationship among academic self-concept, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the extent to which academic self-concept, self-efficacy, and academic achievement are associated with career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine how students' self-concept relates to their career decision-making among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.
2. Determine the extent of association between self-efficacy and career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.
3. Assess the relationship between academic achievement and students' career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What type of relationship exists between self-concept and career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja?



2. How does self-efficacy relate to career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja?
3. In what way does academic achievement relate to career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja?

HYPOTHESES

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

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between academic achievement and career choice among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive correlational survey design was adopted for this study. The design was considered appropriate because it facilitates the examination of relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment or introducing experimental treatments. It is particularly suitable for investigating naturally occurring psychological and educational characteristics within school settings and for determining the nature and strength of associations among variables of interest.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in public secondary schools within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The target population comprised Senior Secondary School Two (SS II) students. According to the FCT Ministry of Education (2026), there were approximately 32,500 SS II students enrolled in public secondary schools across the six Area Councils of the FCT. A sample of 381 students was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

A multistage sampling procedure was employed. At the first stage, cluster sampling was used to group

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the population into the six Area Councils of the FCT (AMAC, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali, and Abaji), which served as the study clusters. At the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select 25 public secondary schools from the Area Councils based on criteria such as school size and availability of SS II students. At the third stage, the sample of 381 students was proportionately allocated to the selected schools according to their SS II student population. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select the required number of students from each selected school. This sampling procedure ensured adequate geographical coverage, proportional representation, and equal opportunity for eligible students to participate in the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Self-Concept, Self-Efficacy, Academic Achievement and Career Choice Questionnaire (SSACQ). The instrument comprised 70 items, including 10 items each on self-concept, self-efficacy, and career choice measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1), and a 40-item academic achievement test consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions each in English Language and Mathematics developed in line with the approved secondary school curriculum.

The subscales of self-concept, self-efficacy, and career choice of the adapted instrument were adapted from Rosenberg (1965), Bandura (1997), and Taylor and Betz (1983), with original reliability coefficients ranging from 0.77–0.88, 0.76–0.90, and 0.97, respectively. The instruments were adapted to suit the Nigerian secondary school context while preserving their conceptual foundations. Face and content validity were established by two experts in Guidance and Counselling at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, and a pilot study involving 30 SS II students in Suleja, Niger State produced a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.845, confirming the instrument's reliability. Ethical approval and permission were obtained from the relevant authorities before data collection, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Procedure for Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a period of three weeks with the assistance of two trained research assistants. The instruments were administered during regular school hours and retrieved immediately after completion to ensure a high response rate and minimize missing data. The questionnaire included sections on demographic characteristics as well as measures of self-concept, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and career choice.



Procedure for Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and study variables. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the hypotheses and determine the direction and magnitude of the relationships among self-concept, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and career choice. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The methodological procedures adopted in this study provided a rigorous framework for examining the relationships among the variables under investigation. The use of a descriptive correlational design, stratified random sampling, validated instruments, pilot testing, and appropriate statistical analyses enhanced the credibility, dependability, and generalizability of the findings.

RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Table 1: Test of Relationship between Self-Concept and Career choice Among Senior Secondary School Students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-Cal	p-value	Decision
Self-concept	381	3.42	0.81	0.562	0.000	Reject H ₀
Career choice	381	3.65	0.76			

The results in Table 1 indicate that there is a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between self-concept and career choice among Senior Secondary School students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja ($r = 0.562$, $p < 0.05$). Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that students with higher self-concept tend to make more positive and informed career choices.

H₀2: There is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

**Table 2: Test of Relationship Between Self Efficacy and Career Choice Among Senior Secondary School Students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-Cal	p-value	Decision
Self-efficacy	381	3.51	0.79	0.49	0.000	Reject H_0
Career choice	381	3.65	0.76			

Table 2 indicates that there is a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and career choice among Senior Secondary School students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.05$). Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to make positive and informed career choices.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between Academic Achievement and career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Table 3: Test of Relationship between Academic Achievement and Career Choice among Senior Secondary School Students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-Cal	p-value	Decision
Acad. Achievement	381	3.58	0.74	0.53	0.000	Reject H_0
Career choice	381	3.65	0.76			

Table 3 indicates that there is a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and career choice among Senior Secondary School students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja ($r = 0.534$, $p < 0.05$). Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that students with higher academic achievement are more likely to make positive and informed career choices.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that self-concept, self-efficacy, and academic achievement each had a positive and statistically significant relationship with career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Although all the relationships were significant, their magnitudes were moderate, suggesting that career choice is influenced by multiple interacting factors rather than by any single variable. Specifically, the first hypothesis showed a moderate positive relationship between self-concept and career choice ($r = 0.562$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that students with a



more favourable perception of themselves were more likely to demonstrate confidence and clarity in their career aspirations. This finding agrees with existing literature in vocational psychology, which identifies self-concept as a fundamental factor in career identity development. Previous studies have reported that adolescents with stronger academic and personal self-concepts are more likely to engage in career exploration and purposeful educational planning (Geng et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2022). Similarly, Marsh and Craven (2020) argued that positive self-beliefs strengthen motivation and engagement, thereby contributing to clearer occupational aspirations. The finding also supports self-concept theory, which emphasizes that individuals' perceptions of their competence influence their motivation and behavioural direction. Nevertheless, the moderate correlation suggests that self-concept operates alongside other influences, including parental expectations, peer influence, and school-based career guidance, rather than serving as the sole determinant of career choice.

The findings further established a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and career choice ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that students who possessed stronger confidence in their ability to perform academic tasks and overcome challenges were more likely to make purposeful and informed career decisions. The finding is consistent with the assumptions of Social Cognitive Career Theory, which identifies self-efficacy as a key determinant of career interests, goal setting, and career decision-making. It also corroborates previous empirical studies, which reported that self-efficacy enhances persistence in career exploration and enables students to respond more effectively to academic and vocational challenges (Lopez & Morales, 2020; Zimmerman, 2020). Shen et al. (2022) further observed that self-efficacy promotes career adaptability during adolescence, a developmental period characterized by increasing vocational uncertainty. Similarly, the third hypothesis revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and career choice ($r = 0.534$, $p < 0.05$). Students with better academic performance tended to demonstrate more realistic and well-defined career aspirations. This finding is in agreement with Park and Kim (2021) and Yildirim et al. (2022), who reported that academic success enhances students' awareness of their abilities and expands their educational and occupational opportunities. Martin and Marsh (2019) likewise maintained that achievement-oriented behaviours positively influence long-term educational and vocational outcomes. However, the moderate relationships observed for both self-efficacy and academic achievement indicate that these variables alone do not fully explain students' career choices, as socioeconomic conditions, access to career information, family background, and personal interests continue to shape career decisions.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that self-concept, self-efficacy, and academic achievement are significant



predictors of career choice among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Students with more positive self-perceptions, stronger beliefs in their abilities, and higher academic achievement were more likely to make informed and purposeful career choices. Although these relationships were moderate, the findings indicate that career choice is influenced by the combined effects of psychological and environmental factors. The study therefore highlights the importance of strengthening students' self-concept, self-efficacy, academic engagement, and career guidance services to support effective career decision-making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Schools should implement guidance and counselling programmes, mentoring, leadership activities, and other school-based interventions that strengthen students' self-concept and confidence to support informed career choices.
2. Teachers should adopt practical, learner-centred approaches such as project-based learning, career simulations, and skill-development activities to enhance students' self-efficacy and confidence in making career decisions.
3. Schools should improve students' academic achievement through effective teaching, remedial programmes, and academic counselling, while helping students align their academic strengths and subject choices with suitable career opportunities.

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