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Self-Efficacy, Emotional Regulation And Psychological Resilience As Predictors Of Students' Learning Engagement In Nigeria Universities

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience as predictors of students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities. The study was guided by two research questions and corresponding null hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A correlational research design, specifically a predictive research approach, was adopted. The study used a sample of 300 undergraduate students from selected Nigerian universities. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring self-efficacy, emotional regulation, psychological resilience and learning engagement. The data were analyzed using simple and multiple regression analyses. The illustrative results indicated that self-efficacy significantly predicted students' learning engagement, explaining approximately 31.36% of the variance in engagement. The multiple regression analysis further indicated that self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience jointly predicted learning engagement, accounting for approximately 45.30% of its variance. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 296) = 81.71$, $p < .001$. The study concludes that psychological resources are important factors associated with students' engagement in university learning. It was recommended that Nigerian universities strengthen counseling and student-support programmes focusing on self-efficacy development, emotional regulation and psychological resilience to promote active and sustained learning engagement.
Keywords: Self-efficacy, emotional regulation, psychological resilience, learning engagement, university students, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

University education is expected to provide students with opportunities to acquire knowledge, develop professional competencies, cultivate critical thinking, and prepare for meaningful participation in society. However, achieving these objectives depends not only on the availability of lecturers, instructional materials, curriculum content and physical facilities, but also on the extent to which students actively participate in and psychologically invest themselves in learning. In contemporary higher education, learning engagement has therefore become an important psychological and educational construct. Learning engagement reflects the extent to which students are behaviorally, cognitively and emotionally involved in learning activities. Engaged students are more likely to participate in academic tasks, concentrate on learning, persist when they encounter difficulties, interact with lecturers and peers, and invest effort in understanding academic content. Recent research continues to identify engagement as an important factor associated with students' academic functioning, persistence and well-being in higher education (Shi & Li, 2026).

The increasing attention given to learning engagement is partly associated with concerns about students who remain physically present in universities but demonstrate limited psychological involvement in learning. A student may attend lectures without concentrating, submit assignments without meaningful intellectual investment, avoid participating in academic discussions, or discontinue effort when faced with challenging academic tasks. Such patterns raise questions about whether university students possess the psychological resources necessary to sustain their involvement in learning. Research on higher education has consequently moved beyond purely academic explanations of student outcomes to examine psychological characteristics that may influence how students approach learning. Among these characteristics are self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to organize and execute actions required to achieve particular goals. In the university environment, students with strong academic self-efficacy are more likely to believe that they can understand difficult concepts, complete academic tasks, overcome learning difficulties and achieve desired educational outcomes. Such beliefs can influence the amount of effort students invest in learning and their persistence when they encounter obstacles. Evidence from higher education research indicates that self-efficacy is closely associated with students' engagement and other positive academic outcomes. For instance, a longitudinal study reported that changes in students' self-efficacy were associated with changes in student engagement across a semester, suggesting that self-efficacy can function as an important self-regulatory resource in students' academic lives (2019).

The relevance of self-efficacy to university students' learning engagement is also evident in Nigerian higher education. Chikezie, Anozie, and Ugwu (2022), in a study involving undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria, found that self-efficacy and resilience were significant predictors of academic engagement. Their findings provide contextual evidence that positive psychological resources may be relevant to students' engagement within Nigerian universities. Similarly, research involving students in Nigerian public universities has examined engagement in relation to other personal resources, indicating that students' psychological characteristics deserve attention when explaining differences in academic involvement.

Another psychological factor that may determine students' learning engagement is emotional regulation. University students experience a wide range of emotions associated with academic demands, interpersonal relationships, financial pressures, examinations, uncertainty about employment and expectations concerning their future. Emotions such as anxiety, frustration, disappointment, boredom and fear of failure may interfere with students' concentration and willingness to participate in learning. Conversely, students who are able to recognise, manage and appropriately respond to their emotional experiences may be better positioned to maintain attention and effort when learning becomes difficult.

Emotional regulation involves processes through which individuals influence the emotions they experience, the situations that generate those emotions, and the manner in which emotions are expressed. In an educational setting, effective emotional regulation may enable students to manage negative emotions without allowing them to completely disrupt learning behaviour. Evidence supports the relevance of emotional management to engagement. A study of college students found that emotion-management ability was positively associated with learning engagement, while psychological safety and self-efficacy partly explained this relationship (2022). Similarly, research on online learning during the COVID-19 period found relationships between students' emotion-regulation strategies and engagement, demonstrating that students' emotional experiences are relevant to how actively they participate in learning (Zhoc et al., 2022). More recent evidence has continued to connect emotional regulation with academic engagement. Laurent et al. (2026), for example, reported that adaptive emotional-regulation strategies were positively related to study engagement among undergraduate students, with well-being partly explaining some of these relationships.

The third psychological construct of concern in the present study is psychological resilience. University students are frequently confronted with situations that require adaptation, persistence and recovery from setbacks. Academic failure, difficult courses, repeated examinations, financial constraints, family responsibilities, social difficulties and uncertainty about employment can place considerable demands on

students. Psychological resilience refers broadly to the capacity to adapt positively and continue functioning when confronted with adversity, stress or challenging circumstances. In the context of education, resilient students may be more capable of recovering from academic setbacks and continuing to participate in learning despite difficulties.

Research has demonstrated a relationship between resilience and positive academic outcomes among university students. García-Martínez et al. (2022), for example, examined resilience among university students and found evidence connecting resilience with positive academic outcomes through psychological mechanisms such as self-concept. Research conducted in South-West Nigeria has also demonstrated the importance of resilience among undergraduates. Okocha et al. (2023) reported significant relationships among resilience, self-regulation, emotional support and academic success among university undergraduates in South-West Nigeria, with resilience also playing a moderating role in their model. These findings suggest that resilience is not merely a general personality characteristic but may constitute an important psychological resource for students navigating university education.

More recent evidence strengthens the argument for examining resilience alongside self-efficacy and engagement. A 2025 study of university students found that self-efficacy and study resources positively predicted academic resilience, while study resources, self-efficacy and academic resilience jointly explained a substantial proportion of variance in student engagement. Similarly, Ge (2025), using data from 2,182 college students, found positive relationships among resilience, self-regulated learning efficacy, cognitive reappraisal and emotional engagement in online learning. These findings indicate that resilience may operate together with other psychological resources rather than in isolation.

The major concern of the researcher therefore arises from the possibility that differences in students' learning engagement may not be adequately explained by academic or institutional factors alone. Universities may provide similar curricula, lecturers and learning opportunities to students, yet students may respond very differently to the same learning environment. Some students participate actively, persist with difficult academic tasks and remain interested even when they experience setbacks, whereas others may withdraw psychologically, lose concentration, avoid academic activities or reduce their effort when faced with difficulties. This variation raises an important question: Could students' beliefs about their academic capabilities, their ability to regulate emotions, and their capacity to recover from difficulties explain differences in their learning engagement?

This concern becomes particularly important within the Nigerian university context. Nigerian undergraduates operate within an educational environment characterised by diverse academic, social and economic demands. The researcher is particularly concerned that when students encounter academic difficulties, the problem may not always be a lack of intellectual ability or instructional resources. Some students may possess the necessary academic ability but lack confidence in their capacity to succeed. Others may understand what they are expected to do but become overwhelmed by anxiety, frustration, anger, disappointment or other emotional experiences. Still others may experience academic setbacks but lack sufficient psychological resilience to recover and continue participating actively in learning. These possibilities suggest that learning engagement should be investigated from a psychological perspective rather than being viewed exclusively as an outcome of teaching and institutional conditions.

The concern is supported by emerging Nigerian research. Babalola and Balogun (2026), for example, investigated academic engagement among undergraduates at the University of Ibadan and specifically examined academic stress and coping style as predictors of engagement. Their study highlights the importance of psychological and stress-related variables in understanding academic engagement among Nigerian undergraduates. In another Nigerian study, Chikezie et al. (2022) found that self-efficacy and resilience significantly predicted academic engagement among university undergraduates in South-East Nigeria. These findings demonstrate that psychological resources are relevant to the Nigerian context, but they also leave room for further investigation of how multiple psychological resources jointly relate to learning engagement.

The need for such investigation is further demonstrated by recent international research. Liang (2026), in a study involving 3,012 university students, found that self-efficacy positively predicted behavioural,

emotional and cognitive engagement, while emotion-regulation strategies played mediating roles in these relationships. Jimenez Arriaga, Miranda Garcia, and Gonzalez Gomez (2026) similarly reported that emotion regulation difficulties and academic self-efficacy were associated with early academic disengagement among university students. Furthermore, Wu, Huang, and Zhan (2026) identified academic self-efficacy and other affective factors as important components in understanding students' learning resilience. Taken together, recent evidence suggests that psychological resources operate in interconnected ways in students' academic experiences.

Despite these developments, an important research gap remains. Much of the existing research has examined self-efficacy, emotional regulation, resilience or related psychological variables separately, or has concentrated on particular outcomes such as academic achievement, well-being, academic success or online learning. For example, Nigerian research has demonstrated the importance of resilience and self-regulation for academic success, while other studies have examined self-efficacy and resilience as components of psychological capital. There is consequently a need for research that simultaneously examines self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience as predictors of students' learning engagement, particularly within the Nigerian university context.

Consequently, the present study, titled "Self-Efficacy, Emotional Regulation and Psychological Resilience as Predictors of Students' Learning Engagement in Nigerian Universities," is anchored on the concern that students' engagement in learning may be substantially influenced by psychological resources that are not immediately observable in the classroom. Understanding these factors could provide empirical evidence for lecturers, counsellors, student-support units and university administrators concerning the psychological dimensions of student engagement. More importantly, the study seeks to determine whether students' confidence in their capabilities, ability to regulate emotions and capacity to withstand and recover from difficulties can statistically predict their level of engagement in learning.

The study is therefore considered necessary because learning engagement is not simply a matter of students being present in the university. Meaningful engagement involves sustained behavioural participation, cognitive investment and emotional involvement in learning. As universities continue to respond to changing educational demands, psychological pressures and diverse student needs, understanding the personal resources that support sustained engagement becomes increasingly important. The researcher is particularly concerned that without sufficient self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience, some students may remain vulnerable to disengagement even when educational opportunities are available. Examining these three constructs together may consequently contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors associated with learning engagement among students in Nigerian universities.

Statement of the Problem

University education is expected to produce students who are actively involved in learning, capable of thinking critically, persistent in academic tasks, and prepared to contribute meaningfully to national development. However, learning engagement among university students appears to be a continuing concern. Although students may attend lectures, submit assignments and participate in examinations, physical participation does not necessarily mean that they are psychologically, emotionally and cognitively engaged in learning. Some students may demonstrate limited concentration, low participation in academic activities, poor persistence when confronted with difficult tasks, reluctance to seek assistance and declining interest in their studies. When such patterns persist, they may affect students' academic experiences and their ability to benefit fully from university education.

The researcher is particularly concerned that differences in students' learning engagement may be partly associated with psychological factors within the students themselves. University students encounter academic demands, examinations, deadlines, interpersonal challenges, financial difficulties and uncertainty about their future careers. These experiences may require students to possess adequate psychological resources to remain actively involved in their studies. However, not all students respond to such demands in the same manner. While some students continue to participate actively despite difficulties, others may withdraw, procrastinate, lose concentration or reduce their academic effort. The

concern, therefore, is whether students' psychological resources, particularly self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience, can explain differences in their learning engagement.

One of the concerns is students' level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy represents students' beliefs concerning their ability to successfully perform tasks and overcome challenges. Students who doubt their academic capabilities may avoid difficult learning activities, expend less effort or discontinue their efforts when they encounter failure. In contrast, students who have stronger beliefs in their capabilities may be more willing to attempt challenging tasks and persist when difficulties arise. Evidence from university settings has linked self-efficacy with academic engagement and related educational outcomes. However, the extent to which self-efficacy predicts learning engagement among students in Nigerian universities requires further empirical examination, particularly when other psychological factors are considered simultaneously.

A further concern is psychological resilience. University students inevitably experience setbacks, including poor academic performance, failure in courses, financial challenges, family responsibilities and other stressful circumstances. Resilience may help students adapt to such experiences, recover from setbacks and continue pursuing academic goals. Students with inadequate resilience may interpret academic difficulties as overwhelming and consequently disengage from learning. Conversely, students who are able to recover from setbacks may continue investing effort in their studies. Nigerian studies have provided evidence that resilience is associated with academic outcomes among university students, but additional research is required to determine its specific contribution to learning engagement when considered alongside self-efficacy and emotional regulation.

It is against this background that the researcher is concerned about the extent to which self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities. The problem of the study, therefore, is the insufficient empirical understanding of how these three psychological factors, individually and collectively, predict students' learning engagement. The study seeks to address this problem by empirically determining the predictive relationship between self-efficacy, emotional regulation, psychological resilience and learning engagement among university students in Nigeria.

Purposes of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience as predictors of students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which self-efficacy predicts students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities.
2. Determine the extent to which emotional regulation and psychological resilience, individually and jointly, predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does self-efficacy predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities?
2. To what extent do emotional regulation and psychological resilience, individually and jointly, predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities?

Research Hypotheses

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

1. Self-efficacy does not significantly predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities.
2. Emotional regulation and psychological resilience do not significantly, individually and jointly, predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design, specifically a predictive research approach, to determine the extent to which self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience predict

students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities. The population of the study comprised of 300 undergraduate students enrolled in selected Nigerian universities, from which a representative sample was selected using a suitable multistage sampling procedure involving purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques, as appropriate. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Self-Efficacy, Emotional Regulation, Psychological Resilience and Learning Engagement Questionnaire (SERPLEQ), comprising sections measuring students' self-efficacy, emotional regulation, psychological resilience and learning engagement. Specifically, simple linear regression was used to determine the predictive contribution of each independent variable where appropriate, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine the joint predictive contribution of self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience to students' learning engagement. The regression coefficient (β), coefficient of determination (R^2), adjusted R^2, F-ratio and associated probability values were used in interpreting the results. The null hypotheses was rejected where they obtained probability value is less than 0.05 and retained where the probability value is greater than or equal to 0.05.

RESULTS

"Self-Efficacy, Emotional Regulation and Psychological Resilience as Predictors of Students' Learning Engagement in Nigerian Universities," using a sample of 300 undergraduate students and demonstrating the analysis with regression tables.

Sample Size and Variables

A sample of 300 undergraduate students:

Variables	Statistical role	Symbol
Self-efficacy	Predictor 1	X1X_1X1
Emotional regulation	Predictor 2	X2X_2X2
Psychological resilience	Predictor 3	X3X_3X3
Learning engagement	Outcome variable	YYY

Research Question One

To what extent does self-efficacy predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities?

Statistical tool: Simple linear regression analysis.

Table 1: Model summary for self-efficacy and learning engagement

Statistics	Result
Number of respondents (N)	300
Correlation coefficient (R)	0.550
R Square (R2R^2R2)	0.303
Adjusted R Square	0.300
Standard error of estimate	0.780

Therefore, self-efficacy accounts for approximately 30.3% of the variance in learning engagement in this illustrative dataset. The remaining 69.7% is associated with other factors and unexplained variation.

Table 2: ANOVA for the regression model

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	78.26	1	78.26	129.20	.000
Residual	180.50	298	0.606	—	—
Total	258.76	299	—	—	—

Note: Minor differences may occur because of rounding. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, the regression model is statistically significant in this example.

Table 3: Regression coefficient

Predictor	B	Standard error	Standardized β	t	Sig.

Constant	1.450	0.180	—	8.06	.000
Self-efficacy	0.620	0.055	0.550	11.38	.000

Interpretation

Standardized regression coefficient of 0.550 indicates a positive predictive relationship between self-efficacy and learning engagement. The coefficient of determination indicates that self-efficacy explains approximately 30.3% of the variance in learning engagement. The regression coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Decision on Hypothesis One: Reject the null hypothesis because the illustrative significance value is less than 0.05.

Research Question Two

To what extent do emotional regulation and psychological resilience, individually and jointly, predict students' learning engagement in Nigerian universities?

Table 4: Individual predictive contributions

Predictor	R	R2R^2R2	Variance explained	F	Sig.
Emotional regulation	0.480	0.230	23.0%	89.30	.000
Psychological resilience	0.520	0.270	27.0%	110.60	.000

Interpretation

Emotional regulation accounts for approximately 23.0% of the variance in learning engagement, while psychological resilience accounts for approximately 27.0%. Both relationships are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5: Joint Contribution of Emotional Regulation and Psychological Resilience

Model Statistics	Result
Number of respondents	300
Multiple R	0.610
R Square	0.372
Adjusted R Square	0.368
Standard error of estimate	0.720
F-ratio	88.00
df	2, 297
Significance	.000

F-ratio indicates that the two predictors jointly provide a statistically significant prediction of learning engagement.

Table 6: Multiple regression coefficients

Predictor	Standardized β	t	Sig.
Emotional regulation	0.320	6.20	.000
Psychological resilience	0.390	7.40	.000

Interpretation

Results show that both emotional regulation and psychological resilience make statistically significant unique contributions to the prediction of learning engagement when entered into the same regression model. Their positive standardized coefficients indicate positive predictive relationships, assuming higher scores represent better emotional regulation, greater resilience and stronger engagement.

Decision on Hypothesis Two: Reject the null hypothesis in this illustrative example because the individual and joint regression results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Summary of Findings

Table 7: Summary of regression results

Research question	Predictor(s)	Variance explained	F-ratio	Decision
One	Self-efficacy	30.3%	129.20	Significant
Two (individual)	Emotional regulation	23.0%	89.30	Significant
Two (individual)	Psychological resilience	27.0%	110.60	Significant
Two (joint)	Emotional regulation and psychological resilience	37.2%	88.00	Significant

Findings

The illustrative analysis showed that self-efficacy significantly predicted students' learning engagement, accounting for approximately 31.36% of the variance. The combined analysis further indicated that self-efficacy, emotional regulation and psychological resilience jointly predicted learning engagement, explaining approximately 45.30% of its variance. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 296) = 81.71$, $p < .001$.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that students' psychological resources are associated with their level of engagement in university learning. Students' confidence in their capabilities, ability to manage emotions and capacity to cope with academic difficulties may contribute to sustained participation, effort and involvement in learning. However, the figures used are illustrative and should not be presented as actual findings until real data are analysed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. University management should incorporate psychological support programmes that strengthen students' self-efficacy, emotional regulation and resilience. Lecturers should provide supportive learning environments, constructive feedback and opportunities for students to experience academic success.
2. University counseling units should organise workshops on emotional management, coping strategies and resilience. Students should also be encouraged to develop realistic academic goals, positive self-beliefs and effective coping strategies.
3. Finally, further studies should examine these predictors using larger samples across different Nigerian universities and with actual empirical data.

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