

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-HANDICAPPING AND ACADEMIC BUOYANCY AMONG FINAL YEAR STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

The study examined the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State of Nigeria. This study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. Through multistage sampling technique, 120 final year students were selected. The questionnaires, such as Academic Buoyancy Scale (ABS) and Self-handicapping Scale were used to collect data. The internal validity of self-handicapping and academic buoyancy scales were ascertained using the Bartlett's tests for Sphericity and it was reported to be highly significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The internal consistency of the questionnaires was ensured by using the Cronbach's alpha and a value of 0.844 and 0.867 was reported for the self-handicapping and academic buoyancy scales respectively. The quantitative data from questionnaires was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that there was low negative insignificant relationship between the two variables ( $\text{Beta} = -0.105$ ;  $R = -0.105$ ;  $p < 0.253$ ), indicating that high level self-handicapping is negatively associated with academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools. The study recommends that student counselors should develop structured and comprehensive cognitive behavioral therapy sessions to enhance the self-handicapping of final year students in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** self-handicapping, academic buoyancy, final year, students, secondary schools.

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## 1. Introduction

Self-handicapping is the phenomenon, in which individuals will create obstacles for themselves prior to an evaluative event [1]. In the event of a negative evaluation, obstacles become an excuse or explanation for failure. Performance on the task can then be attributed to the obstacle rather than the individual's worth or abilities, protecting self-esteem in the event of failure or mediocre performance. Self-handicapping has been observed in sporting, social, and academic settings [2]. Academic buoyancy refers to students' ability to successfully respond to everyday academic setbacks and challenges, such as poor grades or negative feedback [3]. Academic Buoyancy is described as a student's ability to cope with academic setbacks and challenges that generally occur in school life, such as poor grades, exam pressure, and difficulty in completing schoolwork [4]. The academic buoyancy of a student is defined as his or her capacity to cope with academic setbacks and problems [5]. According to [4], academic buoyancy refers to the ability of students to successfully carry out daily academic challenges.

Previous studies have linked academic buoyancy to optimal outcomes, such as academic achievement, engagement, and well-being in adolescent students [5, 6]. The academic buoyancy of students is related to academic outputs, including academic accomplishment, according to a previous study [7]. According to [8], academic buoyancy reduces the impact of academic anxiety on cognitive capabilities, such as memory, elaboration, setting personal goals, and cooperating with others. Academic buoyancy can support students' learning-related self-perceptions and promote subsequent success expectations and task-oriented behaviours [9]. In addition, buoyancy may contribute to expectations and behaviours indirectly by creating a positive emotional atmosphere in learning situations that further supports success expectations and task-oriented behaviours. [10] argue that academic buoyancy is the ability to deal with everyday academic setback and challenge.

In academic environments, self-handicapping is common among students [11]. Self-handicapping is a state of incapacitation that many students display when striving to produce the desired academic performance [12]. As a cognitive coping strategy, self-handicapping is a method of putting off effort to avoid future failure, damaging one's ego. A barrier to academic success is self-handicapping because it allows students to conceal their shortcomings by inventing convenient explanations instead of facing the real cause, which is inability to perform [13]. Persons who have self-handicapping behaviour externalize failures but internalize success. Basically, this is just the tendency to accept credit for accomplishments, while blaming others for failures [14]. It is self-handicapping behaviour for a student to spend the night before an examination or test at a party dance hall rather than studying diligently. By partying the night before the exams, the student has self-handicapped and is almost certain to have a low academic performance. Rather than blaming a lack of competence for poor academic performance, the student will blame fatigue or a hangover.

### 1. 1. Literature Review

Over the years, there has been series of research efforts, geared towards helping students to achieve optimally in their learning outcomes. However, academic challenge, setback, and adversity are a reality of everyday school life [15]. When some students are faced with these academic challenges and setbacks, there is the likelihood that they will begin to manifest academic handicapping. It is worrisome to note, that overtime, self-handicapping has led to some detrimental effects on the academic life of students [16]. It has been reported, that self-handicapping has a negative correlation with self-esteem and other cognitive variables [17]. Individuals who indulge in high self-handicapping are more predisposed to dysfunctional coping strategies, such as denial, disengagement, and low academic buoyancy [18]. Moreover, high self-handicappers were found to be spending less time for exam preparation and using less-efficient study methods. Over time, higher self-handicapping among students can lead to negative situations, such as procrastination and low academic buoyancy [14]. Among students, a study has found a negative correlation between self-handicapping and grade point average (GPA), the higher the self-handicapping score, the lower the GPA [19].

In a similar perspective, [20] described self-handicapping as the action, shown by students in situations, in which they see their individuality or ego at stake as a way to prevent losing their self-belief and preserving their level of self-belief. Students who self-handicap before tackling a task are more likely to struggle with that task as well [12]. When students engage in self-handicapping, they complain about their poor exam preparation, trying to justify their poor performance. In other words, they would not have self-handicapped if they had studied for the exam [21]. In addition, several other studies have shown a negative relationship between self-handicapping and academic performance [17, 22]. It has been found, that high self-handicappers typically put in less effort and show more stress before an exam, and thus, they perform less well on examinations than low self-handicappers do [23]. Similarly, self-handicappers have low self-esteem, underperform academically, and behave in a norm-breaking manner, and are more likely to cheat in an examination [24]. Self-handicapping is one of the negative attributes that adversely affects the life of students. It could lead students to develop low coping attitude in the face of academic difficulty [10]. It has been noted, that students who are unable to cope with academic stress and difficulty have low academic buoyancy.

In addition to confidence, planning, tenacity, and a reduced fear of failure, academic buoyancy is associated with stronger planning and leadership skills [3]. A measure of academic buoyancy is a social-emotional outcome that can be used to determine students' success, particularly in the case of how they handle academic hardship [25, 26]. A study by [27] found that academic buoyancy was associated with improved scores on literacy and numeracy assessments. Academic buoyancy is also associated with high self-efficacy, persistence, and planning in academic tasks [3], high emotional and behavioural school engagement [6], and effective learning strategies [8]. In addition to improving outcomes within the academic context, adolescents' ability to successfully deal with challenges in secondary school has a positive impact on their educational experience and performance [28]. According to [4], academic buoyancy predicts a variety of academic outcomes in adolescents, such as homework completion, absenteeism and numeracy. In addition to enhancing learning-related self-perceptions, academic buoyancy can also lead to future success expectations and task-oriented behaviours [3]. Academic buoyancy has been noted generally to be associated with learning expectations and behaviours by creating an environment that fosters success expectations and task-oriented behaviour.

In another study, [29] indicated that self-handicapping has a mediating role in the relationship between emotional cognitive regulation and students' academic buoyancy. Therefore, the emotional stress of students in dealing with stressful situations affects self-handicapping and, consequently, their academic buoyancy. A positive academic and psychological performance is associated with academic buoyancy. The importance of academic buoyancy is shown in studies that demonstrate improved indices of adaptive academic functioning. Higher academic buoyancy correlates with higher academic achievement [7, 9, 30]. It has also been linked to increased motivation, self-regulation, and effective learning strategies, such as memorization and elaboration [8]. According to [31], academic success is connected to increased life satisfaction, purpose, and self-esteem. Research suggests self-handicapping is a critical cognitive variable that affects individuals' academic buoyancy [29]. Research has not been conducted to date to critically examine the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy in relation to secondary school students' optimal educational and psychological outcomes.

In another study, [32] found that the detrimental effect of self-handicapping on academic achievement was significantly moderated by the instrument that had been used to assess self-handicapping. [33] concluded in their research that there was a positive and significant correlation between academic self-handicapping and the value of assignment. In addition, [34] reported that self-handicapping also predicts negatively and significantly the total psychological well-being and its components. [35] showed that low mastery approach goals were associated with more behavioural and claimed self-handicapping than medium or high mastery approach goals; medium performance approach goals were associated with more behavioural and claimed self-handicapping than low or high performance approach goals [29] reported that, the more students use cognitive strategies for positive emotions, they tend to lessen self-handicapping strategies and therefore feel more academic buoyancy, but if their tendency to negative cognitive strategies are more negative, the use of strategies will be more self-handicapping and less academic buoyancy. [36] showed that high academic buoyancy was related to high enjoyment and hope as well as low boredom and hopelessness, which further predicted low failure expectations. High hope and low boredom also predicted low avoidance behaviour and high hope was associated with high task-oriented planning. Moreover, [37] showed that higher self-handicapping was related to worse examination performance through lower control and higher worry.

In another study [38] reported that there are no significant weak negative correlations with the 'Academic resilience and academic buoyancy. [39] showed that students with higher academic buoyancy were significantly less likely to experience academic adversity in the next academic year. [40] showed that Self-handicapped students were more likely to be maladaptive perfectionists than non-self-handicapped students. [41] argues that the relationship between academic anxiety and self-handicapping of students was moderated by hardiness. [5] showed that academic buoyancy was associated with higher levels of academic achievement as well as controlled and autonomous motivational orientations. Academic buoyancy had indirect effects on achievement through autonomous motivation. [36] showed that high academic buoyancy indirectly predicted lower avoidance

behaviour, fewer failure expectations, and higher task-oriented planning via academic emotions. High academic buoyancy was related to high enjoyment and hope as well as low boredom and hopelessness, which further predicted low failure expectations.

It has been indicated, that the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone of Nigeria is below expectation. This is evident in the downward trend of low grades of students in their exams. This may invariably imply that low academic performance is synonymous with low academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools. However, very scanty literature is available on the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State of Nigeria.

### **The Present Study**

The study examined the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State of Nigeria.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following research hypothesis was tested:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** *There is no significant relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools*

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2. 1. Research Design**

This study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. A cross-sectional survey collects data to make inferences about a population of interest (universe) at one point in time. Cross-sectional surveys have been described as snapshots of the populations, about which they gather data [42]. This method is often used to make inferences about possible relationships or to gather preliminary data to support further research and experimentation [42]. The cross-sectional survey research design was relevant for this study because it helped to ascertain the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools.

### **2. 2. Research site**

The study was carried in Nsukka Education of Enugu State, Nigeria between the months of October 2021 to February 2022. Enugu state is a state in Nigeria, which is made up of six education zones, which include Obollo-Affor, Nsukka, Udi, Awgu, Enugu and Agbani. It is among the largest educational zones of the state with more than 61 public secondary schools. The topography of the area is characterised with several hills, covered with green grasses and valleys, covered with palm trees. Nsukka education zone houses the first indigenous university in Nigeria known as University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The people of Nsukka are also known for engagement in agricultural activities as well as business entrepreneurship. However, the population of secondary school in the rural areas are extremely high, which justifies the high enrolment of students in public secondary schools.

### **2. 3. Study Participants**

The population of this study comprised of 3,345 final year students in 61 public secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. The population size is distributed between urban and rural dwellers. Hence, 1395 final year students in 20 public secondary schools dwell in urban areas, while 1950 final year students in 41 public schools dwell in rural areas. This indicates that the majority of the students are located in the rural areas. Through multistage sampling technique 120 final year students were selected. At the first stage, purposeful sampling technique was used to select rural schools. At the second stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select three public schools in the rural area. At final stage, the same simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 students each from the sample schools.

### **2. 4. Research tools**

The questionnaires, such as Academic Buoyancy Scale (ABS) and Self-Handicapping Scale, were used to collect data. Self-handicapping Scale by [43] was used to measure identify self-hand-

icapping trends as a personality trait. Some of the items in the self-handicapping scale include; “When I do something wrong, my first impulse is to blame circumstances”, “I tend to put things off until the last moment”, “I tend to over prepare when I have an exam or any kind of “performance”, “I suppose I feel “under the weather” more often than most people”, and “I always try to do my best, no matter what”. The self-Handicapping Scale has 25 items on a 5-point Likert scale namely; 5=*Strongly Agree*; 4=*Agree*; 3=*Neutral*; 2=*Strongly Disagree*; and 1=*Disagree*.

The Academic Buoyancy Scale (ABS) was used to collect data [44]. The ABS was used to ascertain the level of academic buoyancy of first year students. Some of the items on the ABS include; “*I do not let a bad marks affect my confidence*”, “*I think am good at dealing with pressures that come due to university work*”, and “*I am good at dealing with setbacks at university (negative feedback on my work, poor results)*”. The items are rated on a 1–7 scale where; *Strongly Disagree* (1), *Disagree* (2), *Somehow Disagree* (3), *Neither Agree nor Disagree* (4), *Somehow Agree* (5), *Agree* (6), and *Strongly Agree* (7). The internal validity of self-handicapping and academic buoyancy scales were ascertained using the Bartlett’s tests for Sphericity and it was reported to be highly significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The internal consistency of the questionnaires was ensured by using the Cronbach’s alpha and a value of 0.844 and 0.867 was reported for the self-handicapping and academic buoyancy scales respectively.

## 2. 5. Procedure

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the office of the Secretary, Post-Primary Schools Management Board Nsukka Education (PPSMB) number 001/10/2021 of Enugu State, Nigeria. Thereafter, an appointment was made with the principals of the selected secondary schools. On the day of data collection, the researchers were introduced to the students at the final level in the secondary schools. The aim of the study was explained to the students, after which they were issued with consent forms and those who accepted to participate in the study completed the forms. The selected students were then issued with questionnaires, and it took approximately 30 minutes to complete the forms, after which they were debriefed.

## 2. 6. Data analysis

The quantitative data from questionnaires was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The inferential statistics, such as linear regression analysis, was used to analyse data. The level of significance (p)-value was set at 0.05 level. The level of significance (p)-value was set at 0.05 level.

## 3. Results

The study examined the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in Secondary schools.

### 3. 1. Descriptive results on self-handicapping and academic buoyancy

The results in the tables below showed the descriptive and linear regression analysis of the respondents’ responses on the relationship between self-handicapping (as measured by Self-handicapping scale) and academic buoyancy (as measured by Academic Buoyancy scale) among final year students in Secondary school. The descriptive results are presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1**

Descriptive results on self-handicapping and academic buoyancy

self-handicapping and academic buoyancy	Mean	N
Academic-Buoyancy	25.55	120
Self-Handicapping	82.85	120

The descriptive analysis indicated that the respondents had the mean rating of 25.55 for Academic-Buoyancy and the mean rating of 82.85 for self-handicapping in the sample of 120 respondents.

### 3. 2. Linear Regression Results On Self-Handicapping and Academic Buoyancy

Furthermore, the linear regression was conducted to establish the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy, and the results are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2**

Linear regression results on self-handicapping and academic buoyancy

	Model Beta	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. Zero-order	Correlations		
					Partial	Part	
1	(Constant)		8.452	0.000			
	Self-Handicapping	-0.105	-1.148	0.253	-0.105	-0.105	-0.105

Note: *Dependent Variable: Academic Buoyancy<sub>a</sub>*

The results of the linear regression analysis in table 2 showed that there was a low negative insignificant relationship between the two variables (Beta=-0.105; R=-0.105; p<0.253), indicating that high level self-handicapping is negatively associated with academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary school. Hence, there is a low negative relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in Secondary school.

### 4. Discussion

The study analysed the relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools. The findings indicated that there is a low negative insignificant relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy, indicating that high level self-handicapping is negatively associated with academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools. Hence, there is a low negative relationship between self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary school. This finding agrees with [35], which showed that low mastery approach goals were associated with more self-handicapping than medium or high mastery approach goals. Similarly, [29] reported that the more students use cognitive strategies for positive emotions, they tend to lessen self-handicapping strategies and therefore feel more academic buoyancy, but if their tendencies to negative cognitive strategies are more negative, the use of strategies will be more self-handicapping and less academic buoyancy. In addition, [36] showed that high academic buoyancy is related to high enjoyment and hope as well as low boredom and hopelessness, which further predicted low failure expectations.

In agreement to the results, [37] showed that higher self-handicapping was related to worse examination performance through lower control and higher worry. [38] reported that there are no significant weak negative correlations with the academic resilience and academic buoyancy. [33] concluded in their research that there was a positive and significant correlation between academic self-handicapping and the value of assignment. In addition, [34] reported that self-handicapping also predicts negatively and significantly the total psychological well-being and its components. [39] showed that students with higher academic buoyancy were significantly less likely to experience academic adversity in the next academic year. In agreement, [40] showed that self-handicapped students were more likely to be maladaptive perfectionists than non-self-handicapped students. [41] argues that the relationship between academic anxiety and self-handicapping of students was moderated by hardiness. Moreover, [5] showed that academic buoyancy was associated with higher levels of academic achievement as well as controlled and autonomous motivational orientations. In agreement, [36] showed that high academic buoyancy indirectly predicted lower avoidance behaviour, fewer failure expectations, and higher task-oriented planning via academic emotions. Moreover, high academic buoyancy was related to high enjoyment and hope as well as low boredom and hopelessness, which further predicted low failure expectations.

The study has one limitation in that it was quantitative in nature and it lacked in-depth qualitative aspect, which could have provided richer results. Therefore, for future studies, a mixed methods approach is suggested.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a low negative relationship between the self-handicapping and academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary schools. This implies that high level self-handicapping is negatively associated with academic buoyancy among final year students in secondary school. The findings of the study indicate the importance of understanding the level and nature of self-handicapping of the students in secondary schools because its state affects their academic buoyancies. The findings of this study have implications for various stakeholders in effective of the school learning environments.

The study findings have implications to school counselors, teachers, and the final year students. First, the study recommends that student counselors should develop structured and comprehensive cognitive behavioral therapy sessions to enhance the self-handicapping of final year students in secondary schools. Moreover, the teachers should develop specific orientation programmes to enhance the academic buoyancy of final year students in secondary schools.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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