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STUDENTS' COHESION AND VOICE ENGAGEMENT DYNAMICS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Recent complaints from employers of graduates from Nigerian Universities largely concern their employability. Although, several studies have been conducted on factors responsible for effective teaching and learning in university classrooms, it seems much have not been done on students' cohesion and voice engagement in Nigerian university classrooms, which calls for critical investigation, in order to ensure the achievement of predetermined educational goals at the university level. The researchers, therefore, investigated students' cohesion and voice engagement dynamics in Nigerian universities' classrooms to enhance effectiveness in teaching and learning. Non-experimental design of correlational research was adopted. Multistage sampling procedure was employed to select samples for the study. Two geo-political zones (Northcentral and Southwest) were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Two public universities (one Federal and one State) and seven faculties were randomly selected from each selected geo-political zone. A total of 1,679 undergraduates were selected using proportionate-to-size sampling. Students' Cohesion and Voice Engagement Dynamics Questionnaire (SCVEDQ) designed and validated was used for data collection and its reliability yielded 0.79. Data was analysed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling PLS-SEM. Results indicated that a significant causal relationship exists between students' cohesion and self-esteem $\beta=0.195$, $t=2.017$, $p<0.05$); students' cohesion and self-efficacy ($\beta=0.35$, $t=3.11=2$, $p<0.05$). Voice engagement has a causal linkage with students' self-concept ($\beta=0.54$, $t=5.85$, $p<0.05$) and self-esteem ($\beta=0.72$, $t=10.36$), $p<0.05$). It is recommended that education stakeholders should develop a curriculum that will foster interaction and embrace cohesion and voice engagement among students and lecturers alike.

Key words: Students' cohesion, Voice engagement, Classroom dynamics, Employability.

1. Introduction

Effective instruction is a lifelong process that fosters deep learning as it engenders reflection, development, integration and self-direction. Hardré & Kollmann (2013), posit that in order to achieve sustainable learning, the teaching-learning process at the tertiary level should have the following features: collaborative and social learning, collaborative and team-based learning, and problem-solving instructional activity. Collaborative and social learning on one hand plays significant roles in students' learning and development, promotes personal and peer success (Sambujang, & Yogesh, 2024) while collaborative and team-based learning on the other hand, deepens intellectual development, increases mutual-source, competence, feedback and stimulates meta-cognitive awareness among others (Umesh, Singaravelu, Kalpana, Archana, Ganji, Taranikanti, John, & Saileshkumar, 2023). However, problem-solving instructional activity incorporates problem-based and other related-activities. Hence, there is the need for lecturers to link teaching with learning approaches at appropriate levels of instruction (Churchill, Ferguson, Godinho, Johnson, Keddie, Letts, Mackay, McGill, Moss, Nagel, Nicholson & Vick, 2017; Shamin, Muhammad, Muhammad & Seyd, 2019), devise and implement both individual and group-centred teaching approaches that will promote students' engagement and cohesion to enhance optimal learning (Junaid and Emeke, 2026).

2. Students' Cohesion Dynamics

Thornton, Miller & Perry (2020), identify some aspects of classroom dynamics that a lecturer may work on in order to influence the chemistry of the group, and make it more 'bonded' as: the cohesiveness of the class, variety of interactions within the classroom and the amount of empathy group members have for one another. The cohesiveness of the class implies that groups of students, conscious of what they have in common, are brought together. Here, shared experiences, values, and objectives of the task lie in the hearts of group members. Lecturers can foster this awareness with activities that identify such commonalities, and use them to enhance learning (Brophy & Good, 2017). Variety of interactions within the classroom shows that a classroom that has a flexible approach to how its members communicate with one another is likely to have a more inclusive and

participative climate, while the amount of empathy group members have for one another implies that successful group activities involve members compromise in order to support one another. The significance of this, is the notion of learner cohesion in the teaching context. Cohesion can be more specifically explained as the positive interpersonal relations, the tendency for a group to be in unity while working towards achieving a goal or to satisfy the emotional needs as it brings out self-efficacy, self-concept and self-esteem of members of a group (Veerman & Denessen, 2021).

Forsyth (2010; 2021), defines cohesion as the unity of a group, and so distinguishes between the causes of cohesion, indicators of cohesion, and cohesion itself. Cohesion is also a multifaceted process and can be broken down into four main components: social relations, task relations, perceived unity, and emotions. Forsyth further stressed that members of strongly cohesive groups are more inclined to participate readily and to stay with the group. Similarity of group members has a different influence on group's cohesiveness. In addition, a similar background makes it more likely that students share similar views on various issues, including group objectives, communication methods and the type of desired leadership (Kumar & Kamalanabhan, 2015). In general, higher agreement among members on group rules and norms results in greater trust and less dysfunctional conflict, which in turn, strengthens both emotional and task cohesiveness in higher institutions of learning.

3. Students' Cohesion and Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to a belief about a person's ability to successfully perform a behaviour. Also, Bandura, (2012) in his social cognition theory, posits that human activity is determined by the interplay of two factors: the cognition of the individual and the external environment in which the individual lives. He further emphasized that behaviours are affected by the interaction between the individual and the environment, where consequences are produced. Thus, self-efficacy becomes a person's individual perceptions that may perhaps change one's behaviour, which, in turn, will often determine the outcome in classroom interactions. Academic self-efficacy as an influential factor in improving academic performance has received much attention in educational psychology (Yokoyama, 2019). Academic self-efficacy for a student might refer to his or her perceived belief that a "high cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) will in turn, lead to an expectancy outcome, like induction into a cohesion in the classroom due to his sustained level of effort" (Chang, 2021). Self-efficacy in academics pertains to students' perceived capability to manage his/her learning behaviour, to master academic materials and to fulfill academic expectations (Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003).

Academic self-efficacy is a crucial factor in student success, as it significantly influences students' ability to face difficulties, regulate their own learning, and improve their academic performance (Barrios, Muñoz, Balladares, & Carazas, 2026). A good sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem provides the resilience for creative individuals to persist in pursuing an objective even after being rejected many time. Research has shown that students who have higher levels of academic self-efficacy are more able to withstand difficult schoolwork and the school environment. Meta-analyses of cross-sectional studies suggest that self-efficacy is one of the best indicators of academic performance. Self-efficacy outperformed intellect, academic aptitude tests, and high school GPA as the best predictor of tertiary GPA, according to research by Richardson, Abraham, and Bond (2012). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that students who have low academic self-efficacy are more likely to experience academic stress and are less likely to complete activities (Allari, Atout & Hasan, 2020; Doménech-Betoret, Gómez-Artiga & Lloret-Segura, 2017).

4. Students' Cohesion and Self-Esteem

Another way to help university students achieve academic success is to develop positive self-esteem. Self-esteem seems to affect a student's ability to learn, work in a group and behave in the classroom environment. Self-esteem also seems to affect motivation and cohesion during classroom interactions. While not all students with low self- esteem will perform poorly academically, past studies have shown that low self-esteem can lead to less academic success (Lyons, 2012). Abdul Karim, Mishra, Behera, & Samal, (2026) in their study emphasized the importance of strengthening family bonds and fostering self-esteem as key strategies for enhancing the academic performance of young adult. It is imperative to research the influence of self-esteem on learning and behavior of higher institution students. Literature establishes the fact that self-esteem can affect students' abilities to make and keep friends which also can have an impact on their academic achievement. Due to behavioral problems and the natural tendencies, students compare themselves with others and those with exceptionalities may have low self-esteem from lack of success in school, sports, and friendships (Lyons, 2012).

Students' self-esteem is not constant, it changes depending on the messages received from others (Schweiger, 2008; Schwager, Wick, Glaeser, Schoenherr, Strauss, & Berger, 2020) as well as self-perceptions of oneself

(Roman, Cuestas & Fenollar, 2008). Those that do compare themselves may also feel that other students think less of them due to their learning challenges which can also lead to a decrease in self-esteem. Reijntjes, Thomaes, Boelen, van der Schoot, Castro & Telch (2011) found that some students felt low self-esteem when others disapproved of them in a cohesive group. It seems to be a circular effect as low self-esteem affects learning, hence, leads to failure in academics and the perception of how others feel about one (Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011). Similarly, Romain, Cuestas & Fenollar (2008), found a strong link between self-esteem and deep processing, as well as effort, and came to the conclusion that high self-esteem is important in learning. In the same vein, Hootstein (2002) suggests that there is a link between self-esteem and academic self-concept while Kort-Butler & Hagewen (2010) on the contrary found that students with low self-concept and those with high self-concept performed basically the same on achievement tests. However, Schwager, et al. (2020) in their study revealed and clarified that improving one's self-esteem and social integration for the promotion of one's well-being.

5. Students' Cohesion and Self-Concept

Self-concept is the sum total of a person's knowledge and understanding of his or herself. The influence of self-concept on students' academic performance has been considered an educationally significant variable that has long engaged the interest of educators and dominated the focus of many studies at the lower level of education (primary and secondary education) but not so at the higher education level (Coleman and Webber, 2007). This interest stems from the belief that students with high or positive self-concept tend to be higher academic achievers than those with low or negative self-concept (Böheim, Knogler, Kosel, & Seidel, 2020). Positive self-concept, for instance, is valued as a goal of education and socialisation and is frequently regarded as a potential facilitator of motivation and the achievement of desired outcome such as academic performance as submited by Shaibu (2025) in his study that enhancing students' self-concept improves academic outcomes. Students who are popular and liked by their peers seem to participate less in classroom activities (Engels, Colpin, Leeuwen, Bijttebier, van den Noortgate, Claes, Goossens, & Verschueren, 2016). Hence, self-concept attracts countless empirical studies in and outside Nigeria. According to Marsh, (2002), Mustapha (2008) and Brass (2008), their studies have agreed with each other's conclusion that self-concept is associated with many positive achievements and social behaviour.

6. Students' Voice Engagement Dynamics

Students' voice engagement in the classroom and lecturers' improved efforts, have sought to reposition university students as actors with situated knowledge that can contribute important insights to the teaching-learning process (Fielding & Moss, 2011). Besides, Mitra (2018), asserted that the term voice engagement is used to refer to those pedagogies in which students have the opportunity to influence decisions that will shape their performance and those of their mates, either in or outside of classroom settings. Whereas, Diep, Zhu, Struyven & Blieck (2016) posited that most curricula and pedagogy seek to change students in some ways: either through the accumulation of new knowledge, shifting of perspectives, or the alteration of behaviours. Hence, students' voice engagement dynamics and programme, position students as the agents of change. In this way, students' voice engagement is about agency. At its core, students' voice is the antithesis of depersonalized, standardised, and homogenized educational experiences because it begins and ends with the thoughts, feelings, visions, and actions of students themselves (Sussman, 2015). Conner, Mitra, Holquist, & Boat (2024), in their study found a strong link between student input, increased academic engagement, better attendance, and improved grades, particularly through "pedagogies of voice" and co-creation. Thus, in this era of digitalization, the practice of elevating students' voice might seem counter-cultural, but given the importance of agency, autonomy, and self-regulation in students' learning, it is really rather commonsensical (Holquist, Mitra, Conner, & Wright, 2023). Lecturers can learn a great deal about their students' learning processes and how best to meet their needs as learners when students share their opinions about what works and what does not in their classes and schools (Conner, 2021)

While trying to acknowledge the pattern of classroom dynamics in Nigerian university classrooms, taking into consideration the global best practices, in respect of university students' perspectives on their academic environments and classroom dynamics, it is imperative to integrate students' cohesion and voice engagement dynamics into the teaching learning process in Nigerian university classrooms. The dynamics of the lecture room has consequently undergone radical changes and addressing such changes requires serious consideration of these because of what both students and their lecturers stand to gain.

Recent complaints from employers of labor about graduates of Nigerian Universities is that the majority of university graduates are not employable (Okebukola, 2002). The employers claim that the graduates lack paramount skills required in the world of work, as the few considered for employment are not articulated and do

not have team spirit, which suggests an obvious dwindling in the level of students' learning and at the same time query the effectiveness of lecturers handling courses at this level of education and if care is not taken, may have grave consequence on the entire society (Obowu-Adutchay, Mkpae & Onifade, 2013). Although several studies have been carried out on factors responsible for effective teaching and learning in the classroom it seems much work has not been carried out on students' cohesion and voice engagement in Nigerian university classrooms. This calls for critical investigation, in order to ensure the achievement of predetermined educational goals at the university level. The researchers therefore investigated students' cohesion and voice engagement dynamics in Nigerian universities' classrooms with a view to enhance effectiveness in teaching and learning context in higher institutions.

7. Research Questions

Based on the problems identified, the study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the pattern of cohesion dynamics among students in Nigerian university classrooms?
2. What is the magnitude and direction of the relationship between cohesion, voice engagement, self-concept, self-esteem and students' self-efficacy?
3. To what extent does cohesion and voice engagement influence undergraduates':
   i) Self-concept?

ii) Self-esteem?

iii) Self-efficacy?

8. Methodology

9. Design and Sample Participants

This is a non-experimental design of correlational research type. This design was considered because the study only explained the pattern of cohesion and voice engagement among university undergraduates without any form of variable manipulation. The population of the study comprises University undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the sample for the study. Out of six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, two zones (Northcentral and Southwest) were selected using stratified sampling technique. Two universities (one Federal and one State), seven (07) faculties and three (03) departments per faculty were randomly selected from each of the selected geopolitical zones. The undergraduates from the selected universities were sampled using proportionate to size sampling and their sample size was 1,679 students. A total of 48.7% of the respondents were from the North Central while 51.3% were from the Southwest geopolitical zone. Also, 53% of the respondents are males while 47% are females.

10. Instrumentation

The instrument used for the data collection exercise was designed and titled "Students' Cohesion and Voice Engagement Dynamics Questionnaire" (SCVEDQ). The instrument elicits responses on five constructs which are Students' Cohesion (SC = 4 items), Self-Efficacy (SE = 6 items), Self-Concept (SEC = 5 items), Self-Esteem (SEE = 6 items), and Students' Voice Engagement (SVE = 7 items) respectively.

11. Validation of the Instrument

Validation exercise was conducted on 100 student samples after necessary corrections had been made. Factor analysis was established using principal components method to determine the factor structures and loadings. The overall reliability of the instrument was established using the average composite reliability (rho_a) which yielded 0.79. The reliability coefficients of the sub-constructs were established using Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted in Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The coefficients are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability of the Instrument

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
SC	0.827	0.832	0.885	0.658
SE	0.711	0.758	0.809	0.531

SEC	0.706	0.776	0.802	0.630
SEE	0.753	0.801	0.688	0.681
SVE	0.767	0.792	0.701	0.661

From the result in Table 1, the Cronbach alpha reliability and composite reliability coefficients of the constructs range from 0.7 to 0.8 as against the benchmark of 0.70. The AVE which is a measure of construct validity ranges from 0.53 to 0.68 as against the benchmark of 0.5 shows that the items in the instrument measure the construct they were designed to measure. The discriminant validity of the instrument is presented in Table 2 using Fornell Lacker's approach and interpreted based on the intercorrelation coefficients.

Table 2: Validity of the Instrument

Construct	SC	SE	SEC	SEE	SVE
SC	0.811				
SE	0.45	0.656			
SEC	0.408	0.619	0.68		
SEE	0.517	0.482	0.613	0.606	
SVE	0.448	0.379	0.594	0.510	0.579

The underlying principle of Fornell Lacker's approach is that the intercorrelation coefficient of a construct with itself should be greater than its intercorrelation coefficient with other constructs. From the result in Table 2, the intercorrelation coefficient between SC and itself (0.811) is greater than its intercorrelation coefficient between SC and SE (0.45) or other constructs down the column.

12. Data Analytical

Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics tools such as graph and PLS-SEM. The outer and inner model PLS-SEM was built based on the number of constructs considered in the study. The Bootstrapping procedure was used for instrument validation (establishing the reliability and validity of the instrument) while the path algorithm was used to estimate the direct and indirect effects of the constructs. All statistical significance was assessed using 95% confidence intervals.

13. Results of Cohesion Dynamics among Students in Nigerian University Classrooms

The pattern of cohesion dynamics was assessed among the sample undergraduates, the result was presented graphically in Figure 1.

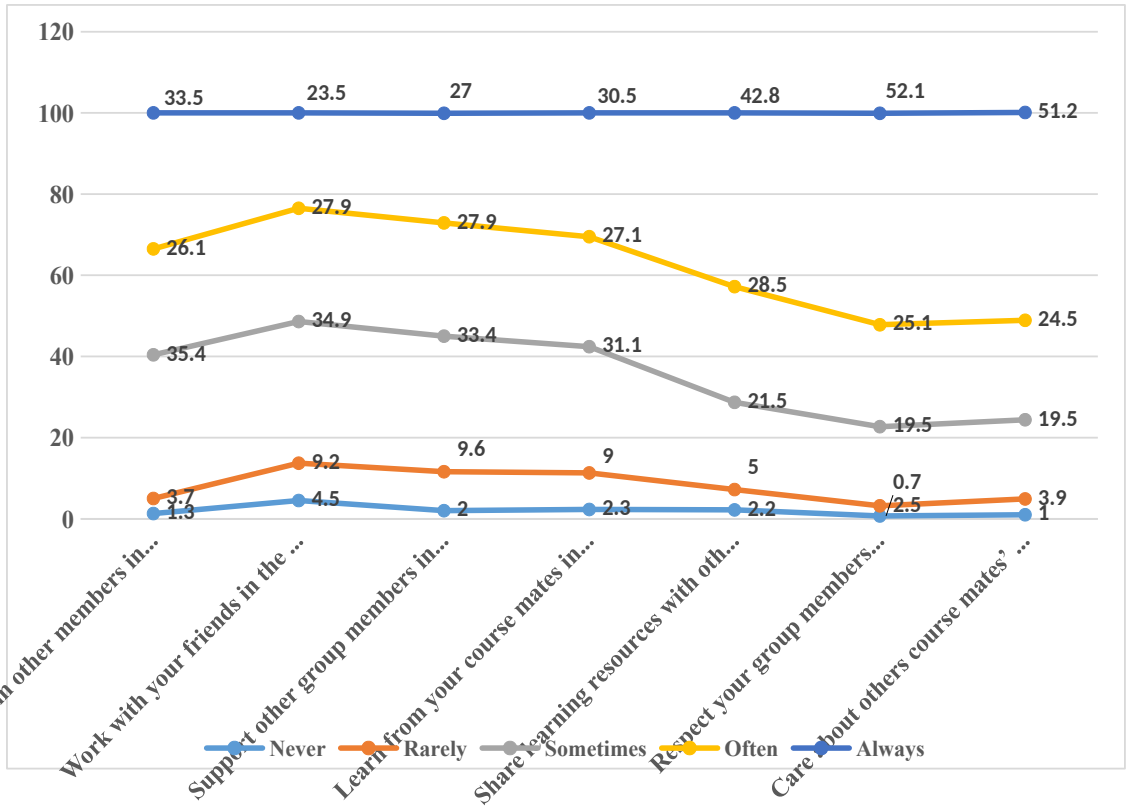

Figure 1: Pattern of Students Cohesion among Nigerian University Students

From the result in Figure 1, inference can be made that most of the students show a high level of cohesion as their interactions depict, they always learn from other members of the group and care about others' learning progress.

Results on the pattern of relationship between cohesion, voice engagement, self-concept, self-esteem and students' self-efficacy

The result in Table 3 shows the pattern of linear relationship among the variables in the study.

Table 3: Result of Pattern of Relationship between Cohesion, Voice engagement, Self-concept, Self-esteem, and Students' Self-efficacy

Construct	SC	SE	SEC	SEE	SVE
SC	1				
SE	.267**	1			
SEC	.265**	.588**	1		
SEE	.371**	.385**	.409**	1	
SVE	.234*	0.016	.323**	.343**	1

Pearson product moment correlation was used to estimate the magnitude and the direction of relationship among the variables in the study. The result revealed that students' cohesion has positive and significant relationships with SE (r=0.267, p<0.05), SEC (r=0.265, p<0.05) and SEE (r=0.37, p<0.05). The result further revealed that Students' Voice Engagement SVE has a positive and significant relationship with SEC (r=0.323, p<0.05) and SEE (r=0.34, p<0.05) but was significantly related with SE (r=0.016, p>0.05). The result implies that increase in voice engagement and cohesion among students will lead to corresponding increase in students' self-esteem and self-concept.

Results on the Causal Relationship between Voice Engagement, Students' Cohesion, Interest, Self-Efficacy, and Self-esteem

The result presented in Figure 2 shows the estimates of the outer and inner models of the construct in the study. The model has the Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.051 as against the benchmark of 0.05 and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.87 as against the benchmark of 0.90 which implies that the constructs in the model accounted for 87.0% of the total variance in the model.

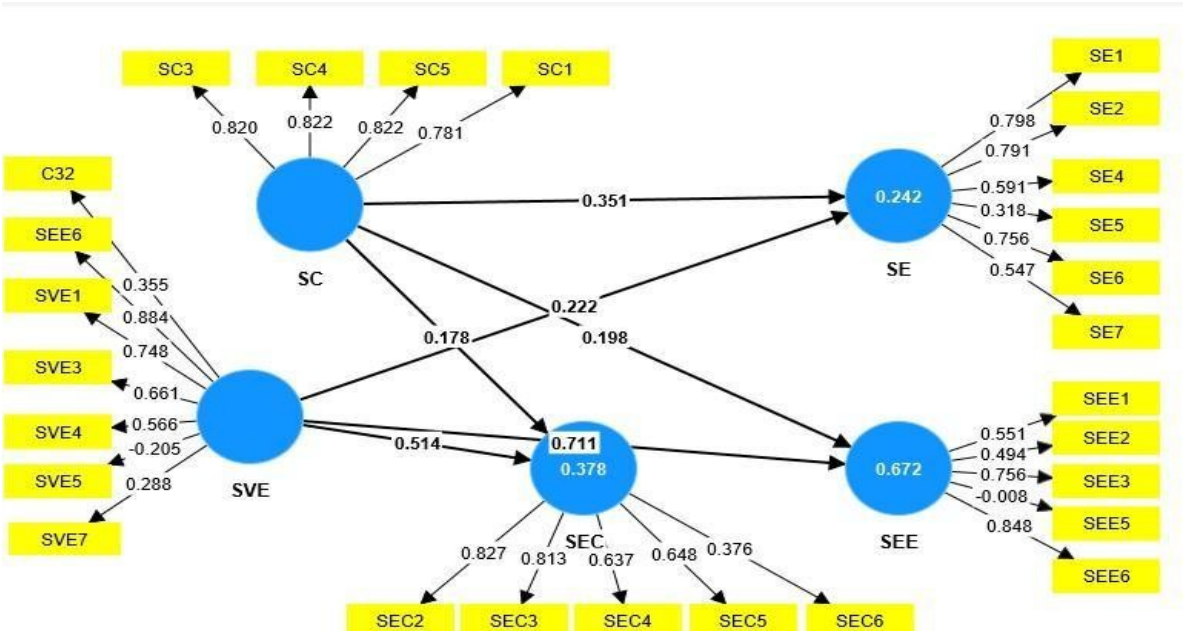

Figure 2: Outer and Inner PLS-SEM Model for the Relationship between Cohesion, Voice Engagement and Self-concept, Self-esteem, and Self-efficacy

After the model has been developed and the estimation was done, items that are negatively correlated or had extremely low factor loadings were deleted, and the model was re-estimated through the path algorithm. To establish the causal relationship in the model, the bootstrapping method was used, and the estimated path coefficients were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Estimate of Path Coefficients in the Model

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
SC -> SE	0.351	0.36	0.113	3.118	0.002
SC -> SEC	0.178	0.169	0.097	1.822	0.068
SC -> SEE	0.198	0.195	0.098	2.017	0.044
SVE -> SE	0.222	0.234	0.13	1.703	0.089
SVE -> SEC	0.514	0.538	0.088	5.854	0.00
SVE -> SEE	0.711	0.721	0.069	10.365	0.00

The result in Table 4 revealed that student cohesion (SC) has significant causal effects on student self-efficacy (SE) (β=0.35, t=3.11=2, p<0.05), and Students' self-esteem (SEE) (β=0.195, t=2.017, p<0.05) whereas the causal effect of students' cohesion is not significant on students' self-concept (SEC) (β=0.17, t=1.82, p<0.05). Also, the causal effect of students' voice engagement (SVE) was significant on SEC (β=0.54, t=5.85, p<0.05) and SEE (β=0.72, t=10.36), p<0.05) whereas it was not significant on SE (β=0.234, t=1.703, p>0.05). This implies that students' cohesion significantly influences students' self-esteem and self-efficacy but cannot influence self-concept whereas students' voice cohesion influences self-esteem and self-concept but cannot influence self-efficacy.

14. Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that cohesion among undergraduates is necessary to develop self-efficacy and self-esteem. This is probably because interaction among students could foster the courage to relate with others outside their comfort zone and also skill transfer. This result aligns with the report of Lyons (2012) who submitted that absence of cohesion will not only lead to poor academic performance, but low self-esteem can also lead to less academic success. Also, Harmer (2007), reported that group' cohesion promotes unitary and encourages similar attitudes to progress so that the individual would eventually be immune to laziness and a feeling of alienation from peers while Abdul Karim, Mishra, Behera, & Samal, (2026) emphasized the importance of strengthening family bonds and fostering self-esteem as key strategies for enhancing the academic performance of young adult. However, the influence of cohesion was not significant on students' self-concept probably because undergraduates' cohesion in the study areas was associated with bullying and other suppressing practice. This contradicts the findings of Mustapha (2008) that positive cohesion is associated with many positive achievements and social behavior.

The result also shows that students' voice engagement influences students' self-esteem and self-concept but not self-efficacy in the study area. The result could be because most of the interaction patterns among students are in forms of voice engagement. Therefore, there is a high likelihood of self-esteem and self-concept which may not necessarily translate to self-efficacy. This result aligns with the finding of Sternke (2010) who reported that the development of self-concept mainly occurs through constant interactions between students' innate personal attributes, their physical and social environment, which graduate into their voice engagement dynamics in the classroom teaching and learning process (Engels, Colpin, Leeuwen, Bijttebier, van den Noortgate, Claes, Goossens, & Verschueren, 2016). The fact that voice engagement could lead to the development of self-esteem and self-concept support the report of Fielding (2006) that voice is the antithesis of depersonalized, standardised, and homogenized educational experiences because it begins and ends with the thoughts, feelings, visions, and actions of students themselves and the report of Conner, Mitra, Holquist, & Boat (2024), that found a strong link between student input, increased academic engagement, better attendance, and improved grades, particularly through "pedagogies of voice" and co-creation.

15. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that student's interaction in forms of cohesion and voice engagement can lead to holistic development of the whole individual that is technically equipped (self-efficacious), adequately informed (self-conceptions) and emotionally balanced (self-esteemed). The effects of cohesion and voice engagement have causal linkages with personality of students which could enhance their learning and give them orientation in their future career. Therefore, education stakeholders should develop curriculum in such a way that will foster interaction and embrace cohesion and voice engagement among learners, and learner-learning facilitators alike. Innovative teaching that embraces collaborative learning among learners should be fostered among learners by teachers.

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