

Enhancing Academic Performance through Social Interaction: A Theoretical Exploration of Social Cognitive Theory

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines the interplay between social interaction and academic performance among Nigerian students through the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory. By analyzing the triadic reciprocity of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors, the study investigates how these SCT constructs influence students' engagement in social interactions and, consequently, their learning outcomes. While emphasizing social interaction as a vital mechanism for knowledge exchange and collaborative learning, the paper also addresses critical challenges in its adoption within Nigeria's higher education context. The findings provide actionable insights for educators and policymakers to optimize social learning environments, balancing the benefits of peer engagement with potential drawbacks. Ultimately, this research contributes to both theoretical discussions on SCT applications in education and practical strategies for enhancing student performance in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Academic Performance, social Interaction, behavior

INTRODUCTION

Modern society recognizes the crucial role of interaction skills in personal, academic, and professional success, leading to significant educational reforms over time (Wang & Yuan, 2024). Social interaction is more than just the exchange of information, it is the foundation of expressing thoughts, sharing knowledge, and making recommendations across various fields. Experts emphasize that no individual can perform effectively in their discipline without strong communication skills (Shao et al. 2024). However, successful interaction allows students to articulate their ideas clearly, ensuring that their message is understood by diverse audiences (Alzubi et al., 2024). In the academic sphere, communication skills play a pivotal role in knowledge-sharing and problem-solving; for instance, students participating in seminars rely on these skills to convey their perspectives and engage in meaningful discussions (Hagenauer et al. 2024). Additionally, the rise of digital communication platforms enables students to seek solutions, collaborate with peers, and enhance their learning capacity through social interaction (Hackl et al., 2022; Lin, 2023). By fostering strong social interaction skills, individuals not only enhance their academic performance but also develop critical thinking, confidence, and adaptability, which are essential for success in an increasingly interconnected world (Wang, et al. 2024).

In the contemporary era, social media has fundamentally reshaped the way students interact, communicate, and engage in academic and social activities. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have introduced new patterns of communication, making interactions more instantaneous and borderless (Tarigan et al., 2023). Traditionally, student interactions were confined to physical spaces such as classrooms, libraries, and campus events (Yaman, 2023). However, with the rise of digital technology, social interactions are no longer restricted by time and space, allowing students to connect, collaborate, and share knowledge beyond geographical boundaries (Maitri et al., 2023). While social media has enhanced access to information and expanded social networks, it also raises critical concerns about its impact on students' academic engagement, mental well-being, and face-to-face communication skills (Ausat et al., 2023). The shift from traditional face-to-face interactions to virtual engagement has altered the way students form relationships, exchange ideas, and build their academic and social identities (Chung & Pan, 2023). Despite the growing influence of digital

communication, in-person interactions remain essential for fostering deeper relationships, cultural exchange, and collective understanding among students (Sherzod & Leonodovna, 2023; Lenard & Silliman, 2025). The challenge, therefore, lies in finding a balance between the benefits of digital connectivity and the importance of face-to-face social interactions in enhancing students' academic and personal development (Oguafor & Nevzat, 2023; Walas-Trębacz et al. 2025).

Background

Academic performance measures the extent to which intended learning outcomes have been attained and is recorded in a student's cumulative grade point average (Hayat et al., 2020; Ibrahim & Aldawsari, 2023). Academic performance among students in Nigeria has remained a critical area of research due to the country's diverse socioeconomic and educational challenges (Kumar et al. 2021). While several factors influence students' academic success, social interaction has emerged as a pivotal determinant (Kocsis & Molnár, 2024; Suleiman et al., 2024; Adamu et al., 2024). Social cognitive theory, proposed by Albert Bandura (1986), underscores the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping human behavior, particularly in academic settings. This theoretical framework suggests that students' interactions with peers, teachers, and their environment significantly influence their learning outcomes (Uzakgiden & Avcı, 2024; Khuhro, 2024). In Nigeria, where educational systems grapple with large classroom sizes, limited teacher-student engagement, and socio-cultural constraints, the application of SCT provides valuable insights into how social interactions can enhance academic performance (Gbenga et al. 2023; Mantey et al. 2024). The traditional emphasis on rote learning and teacher-centered instruction often neglects the social dimensions of learning, limiting students' ability to actively construct knowledge through collaborative engagements (Uzakgiden & Avcı, 2024).

Similarly, studies indicate that students who engage in peer discussions, group learning, and mentorship programs exhibit improved comprehension and retention rates compared to those in isolated learning environments (Zhang et al., 2024; Ajobi et al. 2024; Salmon-Letelier & Garnett Russell, 2025). Additionally, social interactions in Nigerian schools are influenced by cultural norms, economic disparities, and infrastructural limitations, all of which shape students' academic experiences (Sumida & Kawata, 2021; Salmon-Letelier & Russell, 2025). For instance, a study found that students from urban areas, who have greater access to diverse social learning environments, tend to perform better academically than their rural counterparts with limited social exposure (Sumida & Kawata, 2021; Suleiman et al., 2024; Mohammadpour & Yon, 2024). This disparity highlights the importance of structured peer-learning programs and community-driven academic support systems in bridging the gap in educational achievement (Rehman et al. 2025). By leveraging the principles of social cognitive theory, Nigerian educators and policymakers can foster an interactive learning environment that promotes collaborative engagement, critical thinking, and knowledge-sharing among students. Integrating social learning strategies, such as peer tutoring, interactive discussions, and mentorship, could significantly enhance academic performance and overall cognitive development (Ilmiani et al. 2021; Odunlami et al. 2024). Thus, understanding the interplay between social interaction and learning in the Nigerian context is essential for devising effective educational interventions that optimize student success.

The Situation

Persistent issues in the educational system have caused Nigerian students' academic performance on the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) to vary significantly over the last ten years. Math and English were among the five subjects in which almost 81.7% of applicants received credit passes in 2021. Nevertheless, this success rate fell to 76.36% in 2022, more than 5% lower than that year (The Nigerian Voice, 2022). As the twenty-first century goes on, educational institutions are under more and more pressure to give students the fundamental abilities they need to succeed in their chosen fields, especially communication ability. The National Research Council (2013) highlights how crucial it is to acquire 21st-century abilities to satisfy modern needs. As a result, many countries have addressed these issues by incorporating social interaction mechanisms into their educational programs. However, Nigerian students frequently face challenges in efficiently and successfully growing their social networks, which limits their capacity to participate fully in interactive educational settings (Kasumu, 2022; Ivwighren & Oghiagbepha, 2024).

This ongoing drop in academic achievement emphasizes the necessity of creative approaches that encourage

pupils to interact socially and communicate effectively. Educational organizations can better educate students under the changing needs of contemporary society by improving these competencies (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2024). Despite numerous global studies on students' academic performance, there remains a significant gap in literature concerning Nigerian students. While extensive global research exists on factors influencing academic performance, Nigerian-specific studies remain limited, particularly in addressing contemporary educational challenges. Recent literature highlights unique contextual barriers, such as persistent strikes in public universities (Suleiman et al., 2024), digital exclusion in e-learning adoption (Igbinoia & Aiyebilehin, 2023), and the psychosocial impacts of insecurity on Northern Nigerian students (Okocha & Dogo, 2023). Few studies holistically examine how these intersecting crises, infrastructural deficits, intermittent education service delivery, and trauma collectively undermine learning outcomes. Further, Irogbo et al. (2023) highlight a significant neglect of geopolitical variations in Nigerian educational research, with most performance studies disproportionately focused on urban institutions in the South.

Furthermore, while global literature emphasizes technology-enhanced learning, Nigerian adaptations remain insufficiently theorized, as existing frameworks seldom account for inconsistent electricity, low digital literacy, and cultural resistance to pedagogical shifts (Nwawube et al. 2023). This gap underscores the necessity for localized, multi-dimensional studies to guide context-relevant interventions in Nigeria's declining educational sector. While existing research has explored various determinants of academic success, few studies have specifically examined contemporary measures to sustain and improve performance among Nigerian learners, particularly in preparation for final examinations (Nkrumah, 2017; Oshowole, 2024). This gap has prompted further investigations into the factors influencing academic outcomes in Nigeria. Previous studies have produced mixed findings on the key drivers of student performance. For instance, studies found a significant positive correlation between students' academic achievement and the emotional intelligence of their instructors, suggesting that teachers' interpersonal skills play a crucial role in learning outcomes (Oladipo & Daskareem, 2013; Effandi et al., 2023; Shengyao et al., 2024).

Conversely, other researchers have highlighted systemic challenges, such as the negative impact of ineffective university management on academic performance (Al-Tameemi et al., 2023; Kassaw & Demareva, 2023; Sibuyi et al., 2024). These contrasting findings underscore the need for more localized research to address the unique educational challenges faced by Nigerian students. Given Nigeria's evolving educational landscape marked by curriculum changes, technological integration, and socio-economic disparities, there is a pressing need for updated studies that assess current academic readiness and institutional support systems.

Hindrances to Social Interaction Among Students in Nigeria

The growing technological divide in Nigeria presents a significant barrier to effective student interaction and academic performance (Ajonbadi et al., 2023). This gap manifests in unequal access to digital tools and varying levels of technological proficiency among students (Oladokun et al. 2024). Many students in Nigeria face challenges in adopting digital communication platforms due to financial constraints, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate technical skills (Ugwu et al. 2024). As a result, while some students seamlessly navigate online learning environments, others struggle to participate fully, creating disparities in information access and collaborative opportunities (Akpen et al. 2024). This imbalance disrupts knowledge sharing, limits peer-to-peer learning, and ultimately hinders academic achievement. Furthermore, the underutilization of digital tools in educational settings leads to incompetence in content delivery and delays in critical information dissemination, further compromising students' learning outcomes and institutional performance.

Social interaction among students in Nigeria is hindered by a combination of socioeconomic, cultural, infrastructural, and psychological factors (Ajayi, 2024). Similarly, overcrowded classrooms and large student-to-teacher ratios limit meaningful peer engagement, as students often struggle to receive individualized attention or participate in interactive learning (Alaribe et al. 2024). Additionally, socio-economic disparities create unequal access to educational resources, extracurricular activities, and digital tools, further widening the gap between students from affluent backgrounds and those in underprivileged communities (Oboko & Egemba, 2024). In rural areas, limited access to technology and high data costs thwart students from engaging in online learning platforms, reducing opportunities for collaboration beyond the classroom (Alam, 2024). Moreover, rigid teacher-centered instructional methods discourage student-to-student engagement, fostering passive learning

rather than interactive discussions and group-based problem-solving (Woods & Copur-Gencturk, 2024).

Another important factor limiting social connection among Nigerian students is cultural and psychological barriers (Hashim et al. 2022). Ethnic barriers, religious prohibitions, and gender segregation in conservative areas sometimes impede cross-group connections, which lowers the likelihood of varied peer learning experiences (Kanmodi et al., 2024). Since students from diverse linguistic origins may find it difficult to communicate successfully, language barriers can contribute to social fragmentation (Jarrar & Nweke, 2025). Furthermore, a lot of students struggle with social anxiety, low self-esteem, or fear of being judged by their peers, which makes them reluctant to participate in group discussions or extracurricular activities (Kanmodi et al., 2024; Aluko, 2024). This problem is made worse by the lack of organised mentorship programs, student organisations, and secure areas for group study. Without these, students are unable to develop the strong interpersonal and communication skills necessary for both academic and personal development. A cultural shift towards inclusive and interactive learning settings, increased investment in digital and physical learning infrastructure, and systemic changes to education policy are all necessary to address these issues.

Theoretical underpinning

This study is based on Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1989), which holds that learning happens in a social setting through active engagement between people, their environment, and their actions. The importance of observational learning is emphasized by SCT, where students gain knowledge and skills through interacting with teachers, peers, and their larger learning environment (Li et al. 2024; Zhang et al. 2024). SCT emphasises the dynamic interaction of environmental influences (like classroom environments and social networks), behavioural patterns (study habits and levels of engagement), and personal factors (motivation and cognitive ability) that all affect academic performance (Bandura, 1989; Uzakgiden & Avcı, 2024). SCT has significantly influenced research in psychology, education, and communication, demonstrating that a student's ability to acquire and apply knowledge is strongly linked to social interactions and external influences (Vankov & Wang, 2024; Azpilicueta et al. 2024). Within the academic context, this means that students learn more effectively when they engage in collaborative discussions, group learning activities, and peer mentoring (Khuhro, 2024).

Positive social interactions, exposure to diverse perspectives, and access to supportive learning communities enhance knowledge retention, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Mohammadzadeh & Alizadeh, 2024).

On the contrary, limited social engagement, restrictive learning environments, and negative peer influences can hinder academic growth (Hijriyah et al. 2024). By applying SCT to Nigerian students' academic performance, this research explores how structured social interactions, mentorship programs, and technology-enhanced collaborative learning can improve student outcomes and foster a more interactive educational experience. SCT underscores the importance of refining teaching methodologies to create a more engaging and effective learning environment that fosters higher academic performance (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). Educators, administrators, and policymakers should prioritize instructional strategies that not only deliver content but also inspire students through interactive and student-centered learning approaches (Almulla & Al-Rahmi, 2023). Similarly, studies suggest that the integration of diverse educational methods, comprising self-regulation, classroom management, smaller class sizes, a strong school community, and a balanced mix of lecturer- and student-centered instruction, significantly impacts students' academic performance (Ganyaupfu, 2013; Widodo & Astuti, 2024).

Additionally, elements like instructional competency, teacher-student interaction, Nigerian student assessments, and technology integration are critical to improving student academic performance. However, educational systems are widely recognized as one of the most influential determinants of student success (Owoye & Yara, 2011; Sellami et al., 2023). A well-structured academic environment, supported by efficient teaching strategies and institutional resources, contributes to students' overall achievement. Furthermore, studies highlight that student satisfaction and performance are directly linked to the quality of their educational setting, including the availability of essential academic infrastructures such as well-equipped classrooms, libraries, digital resources, and research facilities (Karemera, 2003; Ling et al., 2024). These factors collectively shape the learning experience, reinforcing the idea that a supportive and resourceful academic environment is vital for optimal

student success.

SCT explains how personal factors, social interactions, and the learning environment influence student performance (Gerald et al., 2023). In Nigeria, students frequently learn by observing their peers and teachers, with self-efficacy playing a crucial role in academic success (Saadu, 2023). Supportive environments and positive peer influence enhance motivation and engagement (Mensah et al., 2023; Dalimunthe et al., 2024). However, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited resources can hinder these processes (Isah et al., 2023). Thus, SCT provides a valuable perspective for understanding and improving student outcomes in Nigeria (Wali & Kanaba, 2023).

Theoretical Contribution of Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory combines several communication principles, such as information richness, media synchronicity, diffusion of concepts, and social exchange, all of which are important in determining how students learn (Bandura, 1989; Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Zhang et al. 2024). This theory offers a thorough framework for comprehending how students acquire and enhance intellectual skills through social interactions and environmental influences. Channel Expansion Theory further complements SCT by highlighting that communication efficiency relies on acquaintance with the medium, demonstrating that students' exposure to several means of communication, such as face-to-face conversations, interactive lectures, and online environments, improves their educational experiences (Passarelli et al., 2020). SCT holds that learning takes place through imitation, observation, and engagement within a social environment, meaning that students' engagement with peers, teachers, and online educational resources significantly affects each other's academic performance.

The application of Social Cognitive Theory in Nigerian education emphasises the value of creating student-centered learning settings that support group projects, peer mentoring, and interactive teaching strategies. According to research, one of the main factors influencing student achievement is a well-organized learning environment that is enhanced by efficient teaching techniques, technology tools, and institutional support (Owoye & Yara, 2011; Sellami et al., 2023). Furthermore, Karemera (2003) emphasises the clear correlation between the accessibility of efficient educational settings, libraries, digital learning resources, and other essential facilities and student satisfaction and academic success. Policymakers and educators can create strategies that improve active learning, engagement, and motivation by incorporating SCT into the Nigerian educational system. This would guarantee that students are not just passive consumers of knowledge but also actively engaged in their educational experience. This method improves student performance at all educational levels by encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and general academic success.

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Challenges of Social Cognitive Theory

Although social cognitive theory offers a solid foundation for comprehending learning processes, there are many obstacles to applying it to the academic achievement of Nigerian students. A significant drawback of the theory is its presumption of equal access to opportunities for observational learning, which frequently does not hold given Nigeria's diverse educational system (Ayanwale et al. 2023; Zhou et al. 2023). Inadequate infrastructure, congestion, and resource disparities prevent minority students, especially those in rural areas, from having access to interactive classroom environments, advanced learning tools, or high-quality role models (Nouah et al. 2023). Furthermore, SCT's focus on the development of self-efficacy may ignore structural obstacles that significantly affect disadvantaged kids' confidence in their academic ability, such as poverty, a lack of proper teacher preparation, and cultural biases (Mensah et al., 2023). Additionally, by emphasising individual cognitive

processes, the theory tends to downplay the influence of larger institutional and socioeconomic limitations that influence educational attainment in Nigeria.

Another challenge lies in implementing SCT's principles within Nigeria's predominantly teacher-centered education system (Mbonambi et al. 2023). The theory's core concepts of modeling, reciprocal learning, and self-regulation require interactive pedagogies and well-equipped learning spaces, which are often unavailable in underfunded schools (Alloph & Msonge, 2023). Furthermore, Nigeria's digital divide limits students' ability to benefit from technology-mediated learning experiences that SCT considers vital for modern education (Yonas et al. 2023). While the theory effectively explains how learning occurs through social observation and practice, its prescriptive solutions may be challenging to implement without addressing Nigeria's unique contextual barriers, including unstable electricity, limited internet access, and cultural attitudes toward collaborative learning methods. These practical constraints highlight the need for contextual adaptations of SCT to make it more relevant and actionable in improving Nigerian students' academic performance.

Furthermore, the collectivist nature of Nigerian society presents both opportunities and challenges for applying SCT in educational settings (Enyiaz, 2022). While the theory aligns well with communal learning approaches common in Nigerian culture, it may underestimate the influence of hierarchical teacher-student relationships that discourage the peer-to-peer interactions central to observational learning (Yusuf, 2022). Traditional educational practices often prioritize rote memorization over the collaborative, experiential learning emphasized by SCT, creating a mismatch between theory and classroom realities (Wang, 2022; Alam, 2024). Additionally, socioeconomic pressures on students to achieve immediate academic results may limit opportunities for the gradual self-efficacy development and skill mastery that SCT advocates. These cultural and practical considerations suggest that while SCT offers valuable insights, its implementation in Nigeria requires careful adaptation to local educational norms, resource limitations, and societal expectations about learning processes and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

To effectively implement SCT in Nigeria's education system, a multi-pronged approach must address both structural and pedagogical challenges. The federal and state governments should first bridge the digital divide by deploying sponsored tablets with offline educational content and establishing solar-powered ICT centers in underserved communities while concurrently distributing at least 15% of education budgets to modernize classrooms into collaborative learning spaces that facilitate observational learning. Teacher training programs need comprehensive reform to integrate SCT principles, including consistent peer modeling demonstrations and structured efficacy-building exercises that help students set and achieve incremental academic goals. At the community level, schools should form SCT parent-teacher committees to harmonize home-school strengthening strategies, equipping parents with techniques to nurture growth mindsets. To ensure sustainability, these interventions must be coupled with robust monitoring systems that track progress through standardized test performance, classroom engagement metrics, and quarterly impact assessments, creating a feedback loop for continuous improvement in applying SCT to Nigeria's unique educational context.

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