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**PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS FOR ENHANCING SECONDARY SCHOOL  
MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT IN ENUGU STATE**

**By**

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**Abstract**

The focus of this study was to determine some Psychological Skills for Enhancing Secondary School Mathematics Achievement in Enugu State. Design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Area of the study was Enugu state of Nigeria. Sample for the study was 311 mathematics teachers in Enugu state. This sample was made up of 202 male and 109 female mathematics teachers. A 31-item structured questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Psychological Skills for Enhancing Secondary School Mathematics Achievement (QUPSEMA)” was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three research experts. The overall reliability coefficient value for the instrument was .77 obtained through Cronbach’s Alpha Method. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. Major findings made in the study, showed that sense of belonging and tolerance skills can enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that mathematics teachers should teach to inculcate sense of belonging and tolerance skills in to their secondary school students for enhanced mathematics achievement.

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### **Introduction**

The role of mathematics in Nigeria's or any nation's educational sector cannot be over-emphasized. Mathematics cannot be neglected by any student especially at the secondary education level. This is not just because mathematics is compulsory at the secondary education level but also because, at least, a credit pass in secondary school mathematics is required for progress to tertiary education level, irrespective of one's course of study, (Ndeke, 2018). Hence, with mathematical skills, one is expected to solve day to day practical life problems, relate cordially with his neighbors and colleagues and contribute meaningfully to the growth of the larger society. Unfortunately, secondary school students are yet to show the much-desired satisfactory performance in mathematics. A situation where secondary school students continue to show less than fifty percent (50%) credit pass level in mathematics in external examinations such as the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), National Examination Council (NECO), and National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) is most undesirable and unsatisfactory, (Jida, 2017).

This low mathematics performance level has been attributed to many factors by research experts. Prominent among the factors are; inadequate teaching methods, non-use of suitable instructional media, learners' poor interest in mathematics, teacher qualifications, poor study habit and lack of useful psychological skills that could enhance secondary school mathematic achievement. This study is based on psychological skill that could enhance secondary school mathematic achievement. Specifically, the study addressed two psychological skills namely; Sense of belonging skills and tolerance skills.

Having a sense of belonging is a common experience. According to Jida (2017), belonging means acceptance as a member or part. Such a simple word for huge concept. A sense

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of belonging is a human need, just like the need for food and shelter. Feeling that you belong is most important in seeing value in life and in coping with intensely painful emotions. Some find belonging in a church, some with friends, some with family, and some on Twitter or other social media. Some see themselves as connected only to one or two people. Others believe and feel a connection to all people the world over, to humanity. Some struggle to find a sense of belonging and their loneliness is physically painful for them. Some seek belonging through excluding others, (Yancho, 2016). That reflects the idea that there must be those who don't belong in order for there to be those who do. Yet a single instance of being excluded can undermine self-control and well-being and often creates pain and conflict. A sense of belonging to a greater community improves your motivation, health, and happiness. When you see your connection to others, you know that all people struggle and have difficult times. You are not alone. There is comfort in that knowledge.

To build a sense of belonging requires active effort and practice. One way to work on increasing your sense of belonging is to look for ways you are similar with others instead of focusing on ways you are different, (Kyap, 2019). Someone is much older than you? Maybe they have wonderful stories to tell and you love to listen to their experiences. Maybe you value making a difference and can contribute to their lives with your youthful strength. Someone has a different belief system than you? Maybe you both enjoy a good debate or you both value faith in God. Sharing your differences and still accepting the person creates peace. Acceptance does not mean agreement. Another way to build your own sense of belonging is to work on acceptance of others. To accept others and views that are not the same as yours may require that you open your thoughts to the idea that there is value in everyone's thinking. You can find truth in even the most difficult-to-understand even though you may not agree. One of the best ways to communicate

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acceptance is through validation. Validation builds a sense of belonging and strengthens relationships. Validation is the language of acceptance.

Umar (2018) averred that validation is the acknowledgement that someone's internal experience is understandable and helps you stay on the same side, with a sense of belonging, even when you disagree. Try saying yes to opportunities to be with others and then throw yourself in to whatever the activity is. Let go of your judgments. Judgments build walls. Focus on people. At a dinner and annoyed because you don't like the food? The food is not the goal. Connecting with others is far more important than the food or the noise in the restaurant. Gained weight and don't want others to see? Stop isolating until you believe you are worthy.

Sense of belonging as a concept is often used interchangeably with social integration. In a longitudinal study, Hurtado and Carter explored a set of factors associated with sense of belonging, concluding that these were essential contributors to people persistence. By including a separate measure of sense of belonging, researchers are able to examine both the participation in particular activities and what that participation means to people. Following this it can be argued that sense of belonging taps into feelings or perceptions of association or group membership, (Jida, 2017). The way to practice is the way to involve. People with great involvement in a group will feel that they are needed in that group, will think that the group belongs to them, because they're the ones who hold the steer and naturally feel responsible to where they and their group will go. By involving people to do something in our group, we actually practice them to have a sense of belonging to our group. So, this is related to communication: how we know to involve them depends on how we build our relationship with them. Lastly, when is it the right time to feel a sense of belonging? Right now of course. A group that lacks people with a great sense of belonging won't go anywhere. You will only find tiredness. No great work achieved. No growth.

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No self-improvement. Well, if you are the ones who have realized that you feel happy when doing something to your group, congratulations, you have gained a sense of belonging. Make every effort to properly 'practice' your people skills so that they feel happy too. But, if you're the ones that still do not get this writing, and fortunately realize that you haven't had a sense of belonging to any group or society you're in, think twice and let yourself be humble enough to learn how, (Umar, 2018).

Talking about a sense of belonging is talking about something where we belong in which unity is needed to finally do the vision in togetherness. Because a sense of belonging shall define how united we are, eventually. According to Kayto (2016), tolerance or toleration is the state of tolerating, or putting up with, conditionally. Zadan (2018) added that although tolerance may refer to the capacity to endure continued subjection to something such as a drug or environmental conditions without adverse reaction as well as an allowable amount of variation of specified quantity, especially in the dimensions of a machine or part, in psychology, tolerance is the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with. Generally, tolerance skills are concerned with one's ability to co-exist with people from different culture, tribe, religion, background and class. This co-existence maybe at school, work, market, etc.

Tolerance skills involve ability to co-exist very well with a person of different tribe, religion, ethnicity, socio-status, race and even different manners from that of the adolescent. Moreso, it requires competences to work closely with anyone irrespective of his religious affiliation, tribe, class, status, background, etc. Tolerance skills according to Vasco (2019) form a very vital component of psychological competences. This, Cherry explained is because development does not occur in isolation. Development of the total being involves other people

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either as contributors or beneficiaries of the development. To involve other people, one needs to tolerate them. Secondary school students hardly work alone. Since companions and friends disagree to agree, quarrel and settle, fight and reconcile, tolerance is indispensable, (Enyi, 2017). An adolescents' ability to tolerate his peers, companions and friends may be determined by his home background. It is important to note that parenting style is the foundation upon which home backgrounds are built, (Charles, 2019).

As interesting as these psychological skills may sound, there is still no definitive conclusion on their effectiveness in bringing about enhanced achievement in mathematics among secondary school students as perceived by male and female mathematics teachers. This is because, research findings have shown conflicting reports on this issue. For instance, Cherry (2015), Dickson (2016), Stone (2016) and Kayto (2016) found higher perception among female mathematics teachers than their male counterparts. While Zippoh (2016), Lee (2016), Yancho (2016) and Vasco (2019) found higher perception among male mathematics teachers than their female counterparts. But Babalola (2016), Jida (2017) and Charles (2016) reported no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female mathematics teachers. The foregoing necessitated this study.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine some Psychological Skills for Enhancing Secondary School Mathematics Achievement in Enugu State. In specific terms, the study sought to;

- i. Ascertain the extent to which sense of belonging skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement as perceived by male and female teachers in Enugu State.
- ii. Investigate the extent to which tolerance skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement as perceived by male and female teachers in Enugu State.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

- i. What is the extent to which sense of belonging skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement as perceived by male and female teachers in Enugu State?
- ii. What is the extent to which tolerance skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement as perceived by male and female teachers in Enugu State?

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested at .05 significant level;

1. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean perception on the extent to which sense of belonging skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean perception on the extent to which tolerance skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State.

**Methodology**

Design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. Area of the study was Enugu state of Nigeria. Sample for the study was 311 mathematics teachers in Enugu state. This sample was made up of 202 male and 109 female mathematics teachers. A 31-item structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Psychological Skills for Enhancing Secondary School Mathematics Achievement (QUPSEMA)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three research experts. The overall reliability coefficient value for the instrument was .77 obtained through Cronbach's Alpha Method. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level.

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**Results**

Hereunder are results of data analyses presented in

**Research Question 1**

What is the extent to which sense of belonging skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement as perceived by male and female teachers in Enugu State?

**Table 1:** mean and standard deviation on research question 1 items

Item	To what extent do secondary school students need the underlisted sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics;	Male			Female			Aggregate		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Feeling comfortable talking in front of groups	3.05	0.91	GE	3.60	0.05	VGE	3.33	0.98	GE
2	Being confident about their ability to lead	2.85	0.04	GE	3.52	0.21	VGE	3.19	0.75	GE
3	Feeling like their ideas count	3.11	0.43	GE	3.56	0.11	VGE	3.34	0.13	GE
4	Influencing their peers to listen to them	2.95	0.25	GE	3.52	0.12	VGE	3.24	0.26	GE
5	Making their teachers really listen to them	3.15	0.35	GE	3.71	0.20	VGE	3.43	0.95	GE
6	Wining their parents to listen to them	3.40	0.14	GE	3.83	0.05	VGE	3.62	0.14	GE
7	Feeling like they matter	2.89	0.09	GE	3.50	0.29	VGE	3.20	0.75	GE
8	Feeling comfortable to hangout in the midst of their peers	2.77	0.43	GE	3.61	0.11	VGE	3.19	0.35	GE
9	Being noticed when absent	3.21	0.13	GE	3.63	0.12	VGE	3.42	0.14	GE
10	Being bold to contribute in group discussions	2.70	0.95	GE	3.74	0.13	VGE	3.22	0.95	GE
11	Willing to share ideas with others	2.93	0.04	GE	3.81	0.21	VGE	3.06	0.15	GE
12	Ready to work in a team	2.95	0.01	GE	3.80	0.10	VGE	3.38	0.98	GE
13	Appreciate cooperative learning	3.18	0.91	GE	3.66	0.05	VGE	3.42	0.98	GE
<b>GRAND</b>		<b>3.01</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>GE</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>VGE</b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>GE</b>



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From the results in table 1, with a grand mean of 3.01, male mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent. But their female counterparts, with a grand mean of 3.65, perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a very great extent. When analyzed together (aggregate), their responses gave a grand mean of 3.31, indicating that male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state jointly perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent.

In each case, the standard deviation values, (0.36 for male teachers, 0.13 for female teachers, and 0.57 for aggregate) were very little, indicating that there were little or no extreme values. Hence, the mean values so obtained represent the actual perceptions of each group as their individual response scores clustered around the mean.

### **Research Question 2**

What is the extent to which tolerance skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement as perceived by male and female teachers in Enugu State?

**Table 2:** mean and standard deviation on research question 4 items

Item	To what extent do secondary school students need the underlisted tolerance skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics;	Male			Female			Aggregate		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
14	Co-existing very well with persons of different tribe from theirs.	2.73	0.21	GE	2.65	0.25	GE	2.69	0.13	GE
15	Co-existing very well with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs.	2.60	0.91	GE	2.60	0.15	GE	2.60	0.44	GE
16	Co-existing very well with persons who have very different manners from theirs.	2.55	0.44	GE	2.51	0.45	GE	2.53	0.14	GE
17	Co-existing very well with persons from the opposite gender	2.82	0.14	GE	2.80	0.29	GE	2.81	0.43	GE

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18	Not minding working closely on jobs with persons of different tribe from theirs	2.74	0.06	GE	2.76	0.11	GE	2.75	0.12	GE
19	Not minding working closely on jobs with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs	2.50	0.06	GE	2.50	0.15	GE	2.50	0.05	GE
20	Not minding working closely on jobs with persons of different character from theirs	2.75	0.09	GE	2.71	0.05	GE	2.73	0.15	GE
21	Not minding working closely on jobs with persons from the opposite gender	2.61	0.43	GE	2.63	0.11	GE	2.62	0.98	GE
22	Co-existing very well with people who are not approved of, even if they think they are really alright	2.80	0.25	GE	2.82	0.19	GE	2.81	0.85	GE
23	Being patient with their peers	2.70	0.13	GE	2.71	0.15	GE	2.71	0.13	GE
24	Not minding being in the same class with persons of different tribe from theirs	2.75	0.95	GE	2.75	0.21	GE	2.75	0.12	GE
25	Not minding being in the same class with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs	2.62	0.01	GE	2.64	0.20	GE	2.64	0.14	GE
26	Not minding being in the same class with persons of different character from theirs	2.59	0.21	GE	2.61	0.15	GE	2.60	0.75	GE
27	Not minding being in the same class with persons from the opposite gender	2.71	0.11	GE	2.73	0.25	GE	2.72	0.13	GE
28	Not minding studying together with persons of different tribe from theirs	2.60	0.04	GE	2.58	0.55	GE	2.59	0.13	GE
29	Not minding studying together with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs	2.95	0.44	GE	2.91	0.15	GE	2.93	0.14	GE
30	Not minding studying together with persons of different character from theirs	2.58	0.06	GE	2.60	0.29	GE	2.59	0.95	GE
31	Not minding studying together with persons from the opposite gender	2.75	0.16	GE	2.69	0.21	GE	2.72	0.15	GE
<b>GRAND</b>		<b>2.68</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>GE</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>GE</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>GE</b>

From table 2, the grand mean for male teachers was 2.68 and that of female teachers was 2.67 while the aggregate grand mean was 2.68. These results indicate that both male and female

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mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that tolerance skills are needed by secondary school students for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent. In support of this result, the standard deviation values, (0.26 for male teachers, 0.21 for female teachers, and 0.32 for aggregate) were very little, indicating that there were little or no extreme values. Hence, the mean values so obtained represent the actual perceptions of each group as their individual response scores clustered around the mean.

### **Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean perception on the extent to which sense of belonging skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State.

**Table 3: z-test analyses for hypothesis 1**

<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>z-calculated</b>	<b>z-critical</b>	<b>Remark</b>
<b>Male</b>	202	3.01	0.36	2.17	1.96	significant (reject hypothesis)
<b>Female</b>	109	3.65	0.13			

From table 3, z-calculated (2.17) is greater than z-critical (1.96). Hence, at .05 significant level, the mean ratings of the two groups (male and female) differed significantly. Consequently, hypothesis 1 is rejected as stated, implying that there is significant difference between male and female teachers' mean perception on the extent to which sense of belonging skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State.

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**Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean perception on the extent to which tolerance skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State.

**Table 4: z-test analyses for hypothesis 2**

Group	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	z-calculated	z-critical	Remark
Male	202	2.68	0.26	0.32	1.96	Not significant (Do not reject hypothesis)
Female	109	2.67	0.21			

From table 4, z-calculated (0.32) is less than z-critical (1.96). Hence, at .05 significant level, the mean ratings of the two groups (male and female) did not differ significantly. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is not rejected as stated, indicating that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers' mean perception on the extent to which tolerance skills could enhance secondary school mathematics achievement in Enugu State.

**Summary of Findings**

Findings made in this study can be summarized thus;

1. Male mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent while their female counterparts perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a very great extent.
2. both male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that tolerance skills are needed by secondary school students for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent.

**Discussion of Findings**

The challenge addressed by research question three was to establish the extent to which male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceive that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics.

It was found in this study that male mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent while their female counterparts perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a very great extent. When analyzed together their aggregate mean perception score indicated that male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state jointly perceived that secondary school students need sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent. This finding reaffirms the findings of Yancho (2016), Jida (2017) and Kyap (2019) who found in their individual investigations that secondary school students needed sense of belonging skills highly for enhanced achievement in mathematics.

Contrarily, the finding of this study in this regard deviates sharply from the findings of Umar (2018) who found that sense of belonging skills made no significant impact on students' performance in mathematics. Sense of belonging skills for secondary school students may include; feeling comfortable talking in front of groups, being confident about their ability to lead, feeling like their ideas count, influencing their peers to listen to them, making their teachers really listen to them, winning their parents to listen to them, feeling like they matter, feeling comfortable to hangout in the midst of their peers, being noticed when absent, being bold to contribute in group discussions, willing to share ideas with others, ready to work in a team and

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appreciate cooperative learning. Once again, these skills form major aspects of learning/teaching strategies such as group discussion, game, cooperative learning, etc.

Sense of belonging as a concept is often used interchangeably with social integration. By including a separate measure of sense of belonging, researchers are able to examine both the participation in particular activities and what that participation means to people. Following this it can be argued that sense of belonging taps into feelings or perceptions of association or group membership. The way to practice is the way to involve. People with great involvement in a group will feel that they are needed in that group, will think that the group belongs to them, because they're the ones who hold the steer and naturally feel responsible to where they and their group will go. By involving people to do something in our group, will actually make them to have a sense of belonging to our group. Sense of belonging is closely related to the concept of carrying along all learners in the classroom (slow/fast, poor/rich, infact all categories of learners inclusive).

Extent to which male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceive that secondary school students need tolerance skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics was the target of research question four. Finding of the study in this regard reviewed that both male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that tolerance skills are needed by secondary school students for enhanced achievement in mathematics to a great extent. This finding further validates those of Kayto (2016), Enyi (2017), Charles (2019) and Vasco (2019). These researchers in their independent studies found that secondary school students needed tolerance skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics. On the other hand, Zadan (2018) reported that tolerance skills did not significantly influence secondary school students' performance in mathematics.

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Tolerance skills deemed necessary for secondary school students were articulated in this study to include; co-existing very well with persons of different tribe from theirs, co-existing very well with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs, co-existing very well with persons who have very different manners from theirs, co-existing very well with persons from the opposite gender, not minding working closely on jobs with persons of different tribe from theirs, not minding working closely on jobs with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs, not minding working closely on jobs with persons of different character from theirs, not minding working closely on jobs with persons from the opposite gender, co-existing very well with people who are not approved of, even if they think they are really alright, being patient with their peers and not minding being in the same class with persons of different tribe from theirs.

Other useful attributes that may be grouped under tolerance skills include; not minding being in the same class with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs, not minding being in the same class with persons of different character from theirs, not minding being in the same class with persons from the opposite gender, not minding studying together with persons of different tribe from theirs, not minding studying together with persons of different religious affiliation from theirs, not minding studying together with persons of different character from theirs and not minding studying together with persons from the opposite gender. From the foregoing, it is heartwarming finding in this study that both male and female mathematics teachers in Enugu state perceived that tolerance skills are needed by secondary school students for enhanced achievement in mathematics. By implication, those teachers will seriously work towards inculcating tolerance skills into their students. These skills will consequently elicit the desired enhanced achievement in mathematics among the students.

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### **Conclusions**

From the findings made in this study, it is hereby concluded that secondary school students in Enugu state need psychological skills such as sense of belonging and tolerance skills to enhance their achievements in mathematics.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were deemed adequate.

1. Mathematics teachers should teach to inculcate sense of belonging and tolerance skills in to their secondary school students for enhanced achievement in mathematics.
2. Both male and female secondary school students should be encouraged to value psychological skills since they (psychological skills) are not gender biased.
3. Male mathematics teachers in Enugu state should be encouraged to appreciate the need for sense of belonging skills for enhanced achievement in mathematics more than they presently do. This will improve their perception.

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