

EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

ALOKAN Funmilola Bosede

&

AKINWUMI Tosin Faith

Department of Guidance and Counselling

Faculty of Education,

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Email:alokanfunmilola@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between emotional abuse and academic performance. A descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study. The population for this study comprised all Senior Secondary School Two (SSII) students in public schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 1,350 students drawn from 18 schools through multistage sampling procedure. A questionnaire tagged 'Child Abuse Experiences among Students (CAEAS) was used to collect data from the students. Another instruments tagged Proforma Form was used to collect scores of students from the schools' Registrars. Expert judgments were used to ensure face and content validity. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability, and a reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained. Data collected were analysed by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result revealed that there is a significant inverse relationship between emotional abuse and academic performance. Based on this finding, it was recommended that parents and teachers, should relate to children/students with love and affection, so that they can maximize their academic potentials.

Keywords: Emotional, abuse, academic, performance, relationship.

Introduction

The glory of every learner lies in the quality of his or her performance. Performance here is used to refer to that which is accomplished. In the same vein, academic performance simply means what a student achieved based on his or her academic aspirations. It also describes how well a student has accomplished in both short-term and long-term educational goals. Academic performance, according to Udida, Ukwai and Ogodo (2012), is the process of determining the degree to which students have accomplished the specified goals. It refers to a student's performance in tests, course work and examinations, which is typically based on already predetermined criteria.

According to Sibanda, Iwu and Benedict (2015), students regular study habits, punctuality at school, and level of motivation are the main determinants of students' academic success. Also, parents' socio-economic level and the school environment are significant factors that affect students' academic performance. Despite the wide range of factors that affect students' academic performance, child abuse remains and continues to be a significant one. The term 'child abuse' refers to any behaviour that harms a child. Actions might be verbal or physical, but inaction in this context refers to neglect. Alok and Olatunji (2014) defined child abuse as any unjust, severe or violent treatment of a child in a physical, sexual or emotional manner.

Akinade (2021) defined child abuse as deliberate negative and unfair actions or inactions, attitudes or dealings perpetrated against children (individuals who are below 18 years) by some older people. These adults may be their step brothers or sisters, parents or stepparents, teachers, guardians, masters or mistresses. Common examples of child abuse include sexual abuse, physical abuse, structural or institutional abuse, child labour, neglect and emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is the focus of this study.

Emotional abuse is commonly defined as systematic attacks on a child's emotional well-being and sense of self-worth or a pattern of behaviour by parents or caregivers that can seriously interfere with a child's cognitive, emotional, psychological or social development. Emotional abuse of a child is maltreatment which results in impaired psychological growth and development, it involves words, actions and indifference. This form of abuse may occur with or without physical abuse, but there is often an overlap (ResearchGate, 2025).

Child emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of well-being. This includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectation on a child beyond his or her capacity. Expectations that do not consider a child's need and feelings do more harm than good. The end result is a damaged ego of the child (Healthline.com, 2025). Other examples of child emotional abuse are verbal abuse; penalizing a child for positive, normal behaviour (smiling, mobility, exploration, vocalization, manipulation of objects); discouraging caregiver; penalizing a child for demonstrating signs of positive self-esteem; penalizing a child for using interpersonal skills needed for adequate performance in school and

among peer groups. In addition, frequently exposing children to family violence; and unwillingness or inability to provide affection or stimulation for the child in the course of daily care may also result in emotional abuse (National Institute of Health, 2025).

Emotional abuse is the core of all forms of abuse and the long term effects of child abuse and neglect in general stem mainly from the emotional aspects of abuse. Actually, it is the psychological aspect of most abusive behaviours that defines them as abusive. Think of a child breaking his or her arm. If the arm is broken while riding a bicycle and trying to jump a ramp, the child would heal and recover psychologically, perhaps strengthening his or her character and learning valuable life-lessons in the process, by overcoming obstacles with the support of his or her caregivers and friends. If the same injury occurred because a parent twisted the child's arm behind his or her back in a rage or threw the child down the stairs, the child would heal physically, but may never heal psychologically. On sexual abuse, think of a child being examined by a doctor, doctors touch children's genitals routinely in physical examination without damaging children in any way. However, think of the same contact from a sexualized older acquaintance. It is clear that the damage from fondling the child is psychological and emotional.

In case of verbal attacks, anytime a child is the recipient of verbal abuse, it chips away at his emotional foundation- sometimes it is just a scratch and other times, it is whole chunk of self-worth that falls off. It is the intention, severity and follow-up reactions of a parent that determines whether or not the child feels emotionally supported or whether the reason have caused the child's self-esteem and value to be whittled away. Some parents speak

destructive phrases to a child in order to set limits. It is not the need to set limits with children that causes problems; it is the repeated disregard for a child's feelings and needs, in favour of demanding obedience and compliance with parental requests which can stunt emotional intelligence and development. Child emotional abuse is a silent epidemic, easily overlooked and the effects can be hidden in all sorts of behavioural labels, but it is possibly one of the most damaging forms of abuse.

While the definition of emotional abuse is often complex and not very clear, professionals agree that for most parents, occasional negative attitudes or actions are not considered emotional abuse. Even the best of parents have occasions when they have momentarily 'lost control' and said hurtful things to their children, failed to give them the attention they wanted or unintentionally scared them. What is truly harmful, according to National Institute of Health (2025b), is the persistent chronic pattern that "erodes and corrodes a child". Many experts concur that emotional abuse is typically not an isolated incident. Repeated unreasonable criticism towards a child can have serious emotional consequences and long-term repercussions. According to Grossman, Spinazzola, Zucker and Hopper (2017), emotional abuse can impair a child's self-image, self-esteem and interfere with his ability to function adequately in society and form healthy, intimate relationships. It can also interfere with a child's ability to succeed academically.

Statement of the Problem

Over decades, the performance of students in their academic endeavours has been a major issue gaining the attention of researchers across the world. This is not far-fetched from the fact that, so many developmental variables are

attached to it. Observations have shown that students' academic performance has not been what it used to be. School leavers do not have needed skills to occupy jobs. Industries have claimed that most Nigerian graduates are unemployable. It is worth noting that the academic performance of secondary school students in Ekiti State does not greatly differ from what is happening across the country. It is no gainsaying that many researchers have attempted to link dwindling academic performance to various factors, such as school environment, teachers' qualification, parenting styles, socioeconomic background of students and host of others.

It is a thing of note that teachers, who labour on the secondary school students by teaching them, often abuse them emotionally. This act becomes counter-productive in the teaching/ learning process (Aluede, Ojugo & Okoza, 2012). The consequences of emotional abuse can be serious and long-term. Many studies conclude that psycho-pathological symptoms are more likely to develop in emotionally abused children. These students may experience a lifelong pattern of depression, estrangement, anxiety, low self-esteem, inappropriate or troubled relationships (Alokan, 2009). All these consequences of child emotional abuse may likely be related to attainment of success.

The results of studies of child emotional abuse have potentially far-reaching implication for education policy. In view of all these, evidence of the impact of emotional abuse on academic performance, among senior secondary school students in Ekiti State is needed to establish evidence of effects on schooling attainment in the general education population and on economic outcome in adulthood. To this end, the following hypothesis was generated.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested
There is no significant relationship between emotional abuse and academic performance of Senior Secondary School Students in Ekiti State.

Methodology

The researchers used descriptive research design of survey type. The plan of study involved the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. The target population for this study was made up of all senior secondary two (SS2) students in public senior secondary schools in Ekiti State during 2020/2021 academic session.

Multistage sampling procedure was used to draw out the sample. To this end, the sample for this study was selected in stages. At the first stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select three Local Government Areas from the three Senatorial Districts in Ekiti State (Ekiti North, Ekiti South and Ekiti Central)

At the second stage, simple random sampling technique was used to choose two public senior secondary schools from each Local Government Area. This resulted in a total of eighteen schools. At the third stage, 75 students were drawn from each school using stratified random sampling technique, which separates the students into males and females. A total of 1,350 students were chosen as sample for this study.

Two self-designed questionnaires were used to collect data for this study. The first questionnaire was titled 'Child Abuse Experiences Among Students' (CAEAS), it consisted 40 items on child abuse experiences, including child emotional abuse experiences. The second questionnaire was a kind of proforma

to collect data on academic performance of the students. It includes columns for the overall average scores of the students for the last two terms, which were used as predictors of academic performance.

The methods used in validating the instruments were face and content validity. Experts' judgments were used to determine both. A reliability test was also conducted on 20 students, who were not part of the sample. The scores obtained from two administration of the questionnaire at two weeks interval were correlated by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained. The instrument was found to be suitable for data collection. Copies of the first questionnaire on child abuse and emotional abuse were distributed by the researchers to a sample of 1,350 students in eighteen schools. Researchers' presence during administration enhanced better understanding of the items in the instrument. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion by the researchers. The researchers also went with the ProformaForm to the Registrars in these schools, to collect data on academic performance of the students.

The data generated were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Testing of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between emotional abuse and academic performance of Senior Secondary School students in Ekiti State.

In testing this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Summary of Emotional Abuse and Academic Performance

Variable	N	X	SD	r _{cal}	r _{table}
Emotional Abuse	1350	57.25	12.79	0.105	0.001
Academic Performance	1350	18.06	5.03		

P<0.05

The table shows that the mean total score of emotional abuse is 57.25 with standard deviation of 12.79 while the mean total score of academic performance is 18.06 with standard deviation of 5.03. Since r-calculated (0.105) is greater than r-table (0.001), the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant inverse relationship between emotional abuse and academic performance of Senior Secondary School students in Ekiti State.

This result shows that students' academic performance declines as emotional abuse grows. The probable explanation for this result is that a child who is maltreated emotionally has the tendency to think a lot and have his attention drifted away from the work at school. When a child is emotionally abused, he would find it difficult to concentrate in class and the child's level of assimilation would be affected, thus finding it hard to understand whatever he is being taught. This would make the child a passive listener and also a passive participant in the class which would culminate into poor academic performance. This finding is in line with Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) who reported that emotionally abused children receive lower grades. In the same vein, Aluede, Ojugo and Okoza (2012) and Yakubu, Idoko and Afolabi (2021) also found an association between child emotional abuse and lower academic performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence from this study has led the researchers to conclude that child emotional abuse negatively affects academic performance.

All children/students need acceptance, love, encouragement, discipline, consistency, stability and positive attention. Caregivers, including parents and teachers should not call a child bad names or attach bad labels to a child. Names such as 'stupid', 'lazy', 'idiot' or phrase like 'good for nothing', 'you will never amount to anything', 'if only you could be more like your brother' and 'you can never do anything right' tear at child's self-esteem, which in turn affects academic performance. Caregivers should address the behaviour that needs correction and use appropriate discipline techniques. They should be sure to discuss the behaviour and the reason for the discipline, both before and immediately after the discipline. Caregivers should always compliment a child when he accomplishes even a small task or when a good behaviour is seen.

It would be a good thing if the effects of emotional abuse on students' academic performance could receive attention in education policy forums. The finding of this study reveals that educators should be more aware that past or continuing emotional abuse could negatively affect a students' attention span and attitude to classwork; and consequently his academic performance. Greater awareness of emotional abuse could lead teachers to respond more effectively to students who appear to be inattentive, have poor motivation and perform inconsistently on assignments. It is recommended that parents should always relate to their children with love and affection and provide for their needs.

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