



Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Kwara State

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance among secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey of correlation type was adopted for this study. The target population consisted of secondary school students in Kwara State. Respondents were selected from the three senatorial districts of the state using a multi-stage sampling procedure. A sample of 423 students were selected through the use of proportional, purposive and simple random techniques. The instrument used for this study was a researchers-designed questionnaire titled "Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance Questionnaire" (EIAPQ). Data were analysed using percentage, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and Correlation Matrix at a 0.05 significance level. The instrument was subjected to reliability test and a coefficient of 0.84 was obtained. The results revealed that students have low level of emotional intelligence and the level of academic performance was equally low. A significant positive relationship was found between emotional intelligence and academic performance ($R = 0.210$, $p < 0.05$), as well as between emotional intelligence and gender, age, and school type, but not religion. Academic performance also significantly correlated with gender, age, religion, and school type. The study recommended that students should be exposed to skills that can assist them in handling academic challenges in order to improve their performance in core subjects like English and Mathematics.

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INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, education is one of the most significant sectors for investment, serving as a key driver of individual and national progress. It is a fundamental tool for social mobility, political stability, and sustainable national development. Investing in education fosters both academic excellence and economic growth. In today's rapidly evolving world, students must navigate the challenges of globalization, which demands adaptability and resilience. Emotions play a crucial role in academic performance, influencing the choice and effectiveness of learning strategies. Emotional intelligence, which refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, is essential for problem-solving and critical

thinking. It involves identifying emotions, interpreting their significance, and regulating them effectively to enhance learning and overall wellbeing.

Guidance counselors have linked emotional intelligence to various aspects of human behavior, including leadership, social interactions, individual and group performance, change management, and performance assessment (Adegboyega, Adeyemi & Mowaiye-Fagbemi, 2017). According to Bello and Onunkun (2018), emotional intelligence is the ability to enhance emotions and thoughts by reasoning through them. Emotional intelligence encompasses several key competencies and this include self-awareness, this involves the ability to

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recognize, categorize, and differentiate between one's emotions, mood management, this regulates emotions appropriately in response to different situations that ensure well-balanced reactions. Self-motivation talks about the ability to harness emotions and stay focused on goals despite challenges such as impulsivity, procrastination, or self-doubt while empathy entails recognizing emotions, interpreting both verbal and nonverbal cues (Akpan, Isobara, Umana, 2025). Relationship management focuses interpersonal interactions, including negotiations, conflict resolution, and effective communication (Omoniyi & Adelowo, 2014).

Ajayi and Terkula (2023) described emotional intelligence as a combination of interconnected emotional and social competencies, skills, and attributes that influence how individuals perceive and express themselves. In today's world, students must develop emotional intelligence to navigate the various challenges they encounter. It plays a crucial role in helping them excel in demanding academic tasks and integrate effectively into social environments. Moreover, the emotional and physical wellbeing of students significantly impacts their learning process (Goetz, 2003). Mental health-related emotions are often conveyed through speech, highlighting the strong connection between emotional wellbeing and cognitive function.

Ajayi and Nathaniel (2023) emphasized that a student's emotional intelligence and academic performance are strongly influenced by their school environment. According to Adegboyega, Adeyemi, and Mowaiye-Fagbemi (2017), emotional intelligence is closely linked to academic success due to factors such as students' interest, aptitude, and self-esteem. This explains why individuals with high emotional intelligence tend to achieve better academic results. Furthermore, academic success plays a crucial role in shaping a child's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development, which are all essential aspects of human growth (Bello & Onunkun, 2018; Nwankwo & Ursula, 2023). Research also suggests that emotionally intelligent individuals tend to be more effective and

productive in various aspects of life (Godfrey, Kingsley, & Akpan, 2024).

To enhance academic achievement, schools should foster the development of social and emotional intelligence among students. Ncheke, Enejedu, Nneka, and Ogheneruemu (2024) revealed that neglecting emotional intelligence as a critical factor in students' academic success could have severe consequences. Students with well-developed emotional intelligence are more likely to foster positive relationships, coexist harmoniously, and approach the challenges of academic life with confidence. Educators, researchers, and counselors can utilize emotional intelligence assessments to predict students' academic performance based on their test scores. Emotional intelligence encompasses social and emotional competencies that influence an individual's ability to manage emotions, understand others, communicate effectively, and navigate everyday challenges.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Emotional intelligence has become a critical issue of concern among teachers, counselors, and education stakeholders. This growing concern stems from the persistently low academic performance of students in external examinations such as JAMB, NECO, and WAEC. Fadipe and Uwadia (2021) observed that performance in core subjects at the secondary school level has remained poor, warning that without proper counseling, students may face severe academic challenges, potentially leading to school dropout. Statistical data from the West African Examination Council indicate that in 2022, 49,873 students failed English Language, while 43,767 failed Mathematics (Daily Trust, 2022). The continuous decline in academic performance among secondary school students has been linked to deficiencies in emotional intelligence (Omoniyi & Adelowo, 2014). Many students feel a sense of hopelessness regarding their academic progress, attributing their struggles to various factors, including low emotional intelligence (Ajayi & Nathaniel, 2023).



Numerous studies have explored the relationship between academic achievement, locus of control, and emotional intelligence. For instance, Bello and Onunkun (2018) investigated the impact of emotional intelligence training and rational emotive behavior therapy on academic dishonesty and study habits among secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that neither emotional intelligence training nor rational emotive behavior therapy had a significant effect on students' tendencies toward academic dishonesty or issues with study habits. Similarly, Ijoko and Enyi (2023) examined the role of emotional intelligence, attitudes, and perceptions in substance abuse among secondary school students in the Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Their study found that emotional intelligence, attitudes, perceptions collectively and positively contributed to substance abuse among students in the area.

In Anambra State, Nwankwo and Ursula (2023) explored the relationship between parent-child interactions and emotional intelligence as predictors of psychosocial adjustment among in-school going adolescents. Their findings indicated that both emotional intelligence and the quality of parent-child relationships significantly influenced adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has specifically examined the relationship between academic achievement and emotional intelligence among secondary school students in Kwara State. To address this gap, the present study explores the connection between emotional intelligence and academic performance among secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The Purpose of this study was to examine the correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement among secondary school students in Kwara State. The study examined whether the variables of age, gender, religion, and school type among secondary school students in Kwara State might be used to predict emotional intelligence and academic success.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the conduct of the study:

1. What is the level of emotional intelligence of secondary school students in Kwara State?
2. What is the level of academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions the following hypotheses were drawn:

1. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State.
2. Gender, age, religion and school type will not significantly predict the emotional intelligence of secondary school students in Kwara State.
3. Gender, age, religion and school type will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey of research design with a correlational approach. A correlational analysis was chosen to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement among secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study population comprised 235,652 students from 649 secondary schools across Kwara State as documented by the Kwara State Ministry of Education (2023).

The target population consisted of secondary school students selected from the three senatorial districts of the state, based on the Research Advisor (2006) recommendations, a sample size of 383 respondents was deemed appropriate for a population of this magnitude. However, to account for potential attrition, the researchers increased the sample size by 10.5%, resulting in a total of 423 participants. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select

respondents, utilizing various sampling strategies at different stages to ensure a representative sample for the study.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Sampled from each Senatorial District of Kwara State

Senatorial Districts	No. of LGs	Selected LGs	Number of Selected Schools	Number of Sampled Students
Kwara North	6	3	8	158
Kwara Central	4	2	8	107
Kwara South	6	3	8	158
Total	16	8	24	423

At the first stage, eight (8) Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected using proportional sampling from the three senatorial districts of Kwara State: Kwara North, Kwara Central, and Kwara South. Kwara South and Kwara North each have six LGAs, while Kwara Central has four LGAs. The Local Government Areas were picked in ratio 3:3:2 (that is Kwara South - $6/16 * 8 = 3$; Kwara North - $6/16 * 8 = 3$ and Kwara Central - $4/16 * 8 = 2$). This method ensured a fair representation of students across the three senatorial districts.

At the second stage, purposive sampling was used in selecting eight (8) secondary schools that have the largest population of students from each of the Local Government Areas selected in Kwara Senatorial Districts. At the third stage, simple random sampling was used to select one hundred and fifty-eight students from Local Governments in Kwara North and Kwara South, while one hundred and seven students were sampled from Kwara Central. Therefore, a total number of four hundred and twenty-one respondents were selected from the three (3) Senatorial Districts in Kwara State.

The instrument used for this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance Questionnaire" (EIAPQ). The questionnaire was structured into three sections: A, B, and C. Section A gathered demographic information about the respondents, including gender, age, religion, and school type. Section B comprised 20 items designed to assess students' emotional intelligence using a four-point Likert scale, with response options: Strongly Agree,

Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Section C was a pro forma that focused on academic performance, containing standardized questions on Mathematics and English Language. To ensure content and face validity, the emotional intelligence scale was reviewed by three experts from University of Ilorin. The Academic Performance Questionnaire, which contained standardized Mathematics and English Language questions, was validated by four experts from the Departments of English and Mathematics.

Furthermore, Section B (Emotional Intelligence Scale) was subjected to test-retest reliability to determine its consistency. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained, indicating a high level of reliability. In Section B, percentage and frequency distribution were used to assess the emotional intelligence levels of secondary school students. The maximum possible score for respondents was 80, while the minimum possible score was 20, resulting in a range of 60 (80 - 20). The midpoint of the range was 30 (i.e., $60 \div 2$), and the cut-off score was determined as $80 - 30 = 50$. Students who scored below 50 were categorized as having low emotional intelligence, while those who scored 50 and above were classified as having high emotional intelligence.

Regarding academic performance, the test was divided into two sections: English Language and Mathematics. Performance was categorized as follows: 0 – 39 marks was seen as low academic performance, 40 – 69 marks was grouped as average academic performance while 70 – 100 marks is high academic performance. In order to evaluate the academic performance of senior secondary school students, forty questions



were randomly selected from the 2023 standardised Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (NECO) in Mathematics and English Language. Twenty questions were chosen for each of the two core subjects.

RESULTS

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents Indicating the Level of Emotional Intelligence of Secondary School Students in Kwara State?

Level of Emotional Intelligence	Frequency	Percentage
Low	211	49.9
Moderate	113	26.7
High	99	23.4
Total	423	100.0

Table 2 showed that 211 (49.9%) of the respondents had low level of academic performance, 113 (26.7%) of the respondents had moderate level of academic performance, while 99 (23.4%) of the respondents had high level of academic performance. This implied that there

In line with the formulated research hypotheses, the results of this study were presented.

Research Question 1:

What is the level of emotional intelligence of secondary school students in Kwara State?

were more respondents who had low academic performance.

Research Question 2:

What is the level of academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State?

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Indicating the Level of Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Kwara State?

Level of Academic Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Low	208	49.2
Moderate	114	26.9
High	101	23.9
Total	423	100.0

Table 3 indicated that 208 (49.2%) of the respondents had low level of academic performance, 114 (26.9%) of the respondents had moderate level of academic performance, while 101 (23.9%) of the respondents had high level of academic performance. This implied that there were more respondents had low academic performance.

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State.

Table 4: Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Kwara State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. r - value	p. value
Emotional Intelligence	423	62.01	7.84	421	0.210	.001
Academic Performance	423	36.16	10.72			

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 4 indicated that the computed r -value was 0.210, with a corresponding p -value of 0.01, which was below the significance level of 0.05. Given that the estimated p -value was lower than the predetermined alpha level of 0.05, it may be concluded that there is a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and academic

achievement among secondary school students in Kwara State.

Hypothesis 2:

Gender, age, religion and school type will not significantly predict the emotional intelligence of secondary school students in Kwara State

Table 5: Summary of Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between the Independent and Moderating Variables of the Respondents

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional Intelligence	1.000				
Gender	.298	1.000			
Age	.246	.217	1.000		
Religion	.067	.057	.176	1.000	
School Type	.101	.035	.027	.212	1.000

The findings from Table 5 indicate that there is a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and the respondent's gender ($r = 0.298$, $p < 0.05$), age ($r = 0.246$, $p < 0.05$), religion ($r = 0.067$, $p > 0.05$), and school type ($r = 0.101$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that the gender, age, and school type of the participants were significantly associated with the emotional intelligence of secondary school students in Nigeria. However, there was no significant

association between religion and emotional intelligence among secondary school students. Consequently, the idea was disproven.

Hypothesis 3:

Gender, age, religion and school type will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State.

Table 6: Summary of Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between the Independent and Moderating Variables of the Respondents

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Academic Performance	1.000				
Gender	.273	1.000			
Age	.143	.217	1.000		
Religion	.100	.057	.176	1.000	
School Type	.167	.035	.027	.212	1.000

The results from Table 6 showed that academic performance had significant relationship with respondent's gender ($r = 0.273$, $p < 0.05$); age ($r = 0.143$, $p < 0.05$); religion ($r = 0.100$, $p < 0.05$); and school type ($r = 0.167$, $p < 0.05$). This implied that gender, age, religion and school type of the respondents had significant relationship with regards to academic performance of undergraduates in Nigeria. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that the majority of secondary school students in Kwara State exhibited a low level of emotional intelligence. These results align with the study conducted by Nwankwo and Ursula (2023), which demonstrated that low emotional intelligence significantly influences students' academic achievement and self-awareness skills. Furthermore, the study affirmed that high emotional intelligence is associated with



significant academic success, while low emotional intelligence corresponds with lower academic performance. This outcome may be attributed to the positive effects of high emotional intelligence, such as enhanced social behavior, parental support, healthy family and peer relationships, and improved academic performance. Conversely, low emotional intelligence tends to produce opposing effects, leading to challenges in both academic and social development.

This study affirmed that the academic performance of secondary school students in Kwara State was generally low. This decline may be attributed to factors such as negative peer influence, bullying, and social dynamics within the school environment. These challenges are enough to divert students' attention from their academic responsibilities and this can adversely affect their performance. This corroborates the findings of Adegboyega, Adeyemi, and Mowaiye-Fagbemi (2017), they confirmed that secondary school students' performance in some major subjects like English and mathematics are generally low. An analysis of the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results from 2005 to 2012 indicated a noticeable decline in students' performance in external examinations. According to the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) reports, the percentage of candidates who obtained five or more credit passes, including English Language and Mathematics (the minimum requirement for university admission in Nigeria) were as follows in 2005 – 27.53%, 2006 – 15.56%, 2007 – 25.54%, 2008 – 13.76%, 2009 – 25.99%, 2010 – 24.94%, 2011 – 30.99%, 2012 – 25.76%. These statistics underscored the persistent decline in academic performance among secondary school students in Kwara State over the years (DailyTrust, 2022).

A significant correlation was found between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of secondary school students in Kwara State. These results align with Alufohai (2016), who established a connection between emotional intelligence, academic behavior, and school performance. Similarly, Bello and Onunkun (2018) asserted that emotional intelligence serves as a strong predictor of academic success.

Furthermore, Lawal and Muhammed (2024) emphasized that adolescents with low emotional intelligence are more likely to experience various social pressures such as low self-esteem and truancy. These challenges often result in conflicts and poor academic performance. The study equally affirmed that students with high emotional intelligence are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards schooling, which in turn enhances their academic success. Conversely, low emotional intelligence is associated with negative attitudes toward education, leading to poor academic performance. The persistent decline in academic achievement among secondary school students has been linked to low emotional intelligence (Akpan, Isobara, Umana, 2025).

Gender, age, and school type had a significant relationship with emotional intelligence among secondary school students in Nigeria. However, religion showed no significant correlation with emotional intelligence. The outcome of this study is in line with the study of (Uzonwanne, 2016) who suggested that emotional intelligence is shaped by various personal and environmental factors, such as upbringing, age, life experiences, and personality traits, rather than religious affiliation. This discovery aligns with the study by Oriaku, Ugwu, Adirika, and Maduka (2020), they found that there are differences in how male and female students manage emotional intelligence in an academic setting. Additionally, a study conducted by Nwankwo and Ursula (2023) in southeastern Nigeria identified a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and gender. The study indicated that female students scored higher in emotional intelligence than their male counterparts, suggesting that females generally exhibit stronger emotional and interpersonal skills.

The findings from Hypothesis Six revealed that gender, age, religion, and school type had a significant relationship with academic performance among undergraduates in Nigeria. Consequently, the hypothesis was rejected. This result suggests that differences in demographic factors and school characteristics, such as available resources, teaching quality, curriculum



structure, and school culture, may contribute to variations in students' academic achievements (Nwankwo & Ursula 2023). According to Bolu-Steve, Uyanne and Kayode (2023) students who enrolled in well-equipped institutions with supportive learning environments are more likely to perform better academically than those in unfriendly school environment.

Uzonwanne (2016) explained age is a strong predictor of emotional intelligence and locus of control among Nigerian secondary school students. However, irrespective of age, adolescents who face persistent criticism from peers and teachers due to poor academic performance may develop limited cognitive potential and they might experience psychological distress both at school and home. Such students often struggle emotionally either defending their actions or seeking validation from teachers and classmates. Additionally, other factors can significantly influence academic performance, either positively or negatively. Students with anxiety, low self-esteem, or a lack of confidence tend to exhibit lower emotional intelligence irrespective of the religion they profess. This in turn affects their academic success. Addressing these psychological barriers through emotional support and structured interventions can help enhance students' overall performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study findings, a significant correlation was observed between emotional intelligence and academic performance among secondary school students in Kwara State, Nigeria. The majority of these students exhibited low levels of both emotional intelligence and academic performance. Demographic factors such as gender, age, and school type were found to have significant relationships with emotional intelligence, while religion did not show a significant correlation. Interestingly, all examined demographic factors (gender, age, religion, and school type) demonstrated significant relationships with academic performance among undergraduates in Nigeria. These results highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in academic success and suggest that various

demographic factors play crucial roles in both emotional intelligence and academic performance within the Nigerian educational context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the following recommendations were made:

1. Secondary school students should be exposed to skills that can enhance emotional intelligence. This will assist them to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal capabilities in regulating their emotions.
2. Students should be taught some salient strategies on how to handle academic challenges.
3. The guidance counsellors should be working closely with students to assist them to improve their emotional intelligence and this will help to enhance their academic performance in Kwara State.
4. Counsellors should create an enabling environment where students can explore and express their emotions.
5. Regardless of gender, age, religion, or school type the counsellor should teach students on emotional regulation and communication skills.
6. School should provide adequate strategies to improve academic performance which aimed at addressing disparities, promoting equity, and creating inclusive learning environments that support the success of all students. This will go a long way in improving students' academic performance in Kwara state regardless of gender, age, religion, or school type.

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