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Emotional intelligence and academic performance: A predictive analysis of secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria

Andrew A. Adubale[1], Emmanuela Odilamma Obioma[2]

[1,2] Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, University of Benin, Nigeria
Email: andrew.adubale@uniben.edu

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigated the influence of emotional intelligence on the academic performance of senior secondary school students in Edo State, Nigeria.

Method – A Descriptive survey research design was adopted, and 200 students constituted the sample for the study. The emotional intelligence questionnaire (EIQ) was used to collect data for the study. The data was analyzed using regression analysis.

Result – The findings showed that emotional intelligence significantly influenced the academic performance of the secondary school students. There was a significant difference in emotional intelligence by sex and age among students in their academic performance. Based on the study's findings, it was concluded that emotional intelligence has a significant influence on students' academic performance.

Implication – It was recommended that school counselors should provide skills acquisition training on emotional intelligence and also place an emphasis on strengthening emotional intelligence skills for both sexes.

Originality/Value – This study contributes novel empirical evidence from the Nigerian educational context by demonstrating the significant predictive role of emotional intelligence on academic performance among secondary school students, while uniquely revealing gender and age-related variations that inform targeted counseling interventions for improving educational outcomes in West African learning environments.

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***Corresponding author**: Andrew A. Adubale, andrew.adubale@uniben.edu, Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, University of Benin, P.M.B. 1154, Ugbowo, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Kata Kunci:
Kecerdasan emosional, prestasi akademik, siswa.

Abstract

Tujuan – Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pengaruh kecerdasan emosional terhadap prestasi akademik siswa sekolah menengah atas di Negara Bagian Edo, Nigeria.

Metode – Desain penelitian survei deskriptif digunakan, dengan 200 siswa sebagai sampel penelitian. Kuesioner Kecerdasan Emosional (EIQ) digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis regresi.

Hasil – Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kecerdasan emosional secara signifikan mempengaruhi prestasi akademik siswa sekolah menengah atas. Terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan dalam kecerdasan emosional berdasarkan jenis kelamin dan usia di antara siswa dalam prestasi akademik mereka. Berdasarkan temuan studi ini, disimpulkan bahwa kecerdasan emosional memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap prestasi akademik siswa.

Implikasi – Disarankan agar konselor sekolah memberikan pelatihan pengembangan keterampilan kecerdasan emosional dan juga menekankan pada penguatan keterampilan kecerdasan emosional bagi kedua jenis kelamin.

Orisinalitas/Nilai – Penelitian ini memberikan bukti empiris baru dari konteks pendidikan Nigeria dengan menunjukkan peran prediktif yang signifikan dari kecerdasan emosional terhadap prestasi akademik siswa sekolah menengah, sambil secara unik mengungkap variasi berdasarkan jenis kelamin dan usia yang dapat menjadi dasar intervensi konseling yang ditargetkan untuk meningkatkan hasil pendidikan di lingkungan belajar Afrika Barat.

Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of national development, functioning as an indispensable catalyst for economic growth, technological advancement, and social progress (Chukwuma & Ibe, 2024). No society can achieve sustainable development without substantial investment in human capital, as education fundamentally enhances productivity, creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation capacity. The transformative power of education extends beyond individual benefits to encompass broader societal outcomes, making educational effectiveness a critical determinant of national competitiveness and prosperity (Zapata-Cantu & González, 2021; Nwachukwu, 2024; Kokkinopoulou, 2025).

Within this broader educational framework, academic performance is a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of the educational system and individual learning outcomes. Academic performance, defined as the measurable demonstration of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through formal instruction over a specified period (Braxton, 2023; Narad & Abdullah, 2016), predicts future educational success and reflects current learning effectiveness. This metric not only determines individual career trajectories but also provides insights into the overall health and capacity of educational systems to fulfill national development objectives.

The significance of academic performance becomes particularly pronounced in developing nations like Nigeria, where educational outcomes have a direct impact on national human capital development and economic transformation goals. However, despite substantial investments in education infrastructure and policy reforms, Nigerian secondary education continues to face persistent challenges in achieving optimal learning outcomes, as evidenced by consistently concerning examination results that threaten the nation's aspirations for human capital development.

Empirical evidence reveals a persistent pattern of suboptimal academic performance among Nigerian secondary school students, particularly in standardized assessments. Analysis of West African Examination Council (WAEC) results from 2013-2015 demonstrates this concerning trend: only 36.57% of 1,689,188 candidates in 2013 achieved five credits including Mathematics and English, followed by a decline to 31.28% of 1,692,435 candidates in 2014, with a modest recovery to 38.68% of 1,605,248 candidates in 2015 (West African Examination Council, 2017). This data indicate that approximately two-thirds of students consistently fail to meet basic academic achievement benchmarks, representing a significant challenge to human capital development.

These statistics are particularly alarming when considered in the context of Nigeria's developmental aspirations and the crucial role of secondary education in preparing students for tertiary education and skilled employment. The consistently low performance rates suggest systemic issues that extend beyond traditional educational inputs, such as infrastructure, curriculum, or teaching methodologies, pointing to the need for an investigation of underlying psychological and cognitive factors that may influence learning effectiveness.

Numerous factors have been identified as contributing to fluctuations in students' academic performance. Variables like; self-concept, study habit, maturation, family background, peer pressure, child rearing styles, parents' socio-economic status, lack of basic learning facilities, shortage of qualified teaching staff and learning environment among others have been extensively explored as being responsible for poor academic performance (Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2024; Žerak et al., 2024; Li & Qiu, 2018; Li et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence has also been predicated as one of the factors. Emotional intelligence is viewed as the ability to monitor one's own and other people's emotions to discriminate

between different emotions and label them appropriately and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour (Kaczmarska-Krawczak, J., & Stroińska, E., 2024). It incorporates an important aspect of interpersonal relationships, including adaptability, mood, and stress management skills, which have a profound impact on the academic performance of students. The problem of low academic performance of students may be attributed to a low level of emotional intelligence among secondary school students. Students who lack emotional intelligence often face adjustment challenges or struggle to handle the demands of schoolwork effectively. Such a student might be said to have little or no emotional intelligence and may not be capable of attaining personal goals, which include high academic performance. The blend of emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of students' academic performance. Students who demonstrate self-awareness are expected to be aware of their emotions and how they impact others during and after academic activities. In a situation where a student is emotionally unbalanced, they will lack concentration and, as a result, perform poorly in academic work. However, in a situation where they are emotionally stable, the students will perform excellently.

Emotional intelligence, conceptualized as the ability to monitor, discriminate, and appropriately utilize emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, has emerged as a potentially crucial factor in academic success. This construct encompasses self-awareness, emotion regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—competencies that theoretically align with effective learning behaviors and academic adaptation (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence is said to play a vital role in relation to students' academic performance, particularly in relation to their sex and age. Ajai and Imoko (2015) asserted that the sex and age of students play a vital role in their academic performance. Ganai and Mohammad (2013) observed that students' academic achievement is affected by a host of factors, including age and sex of the student. According to Atovigba (2012), some researchers have pointed out that there is no significant gender difference in students' academic performance in various subjects, while others have found a significant difference, with either males or females performing better. Age is a period of human life, measured by years from birth, typically marked by a specific stage or degree of mental and physical development, and involving legal responsibility and capacity. Some researchers also believe that younger students with high emotional intelligence skills tend to perform better academically than older students, regardless of their intelligence quotient, while others believe that older students with high emotional intelligence perform better academically than younger students. Sex is the range of physical, biological, mental, and behavioral characteristics that pertain to and differentiate between the feminine and masculine populations (Mubarok & Karim, 2022). Ganai and Mohammad (2013), in a comparative study on the adjustment and academic performance of college students, found that although male and female students differed significantly in mental health, with males being favoured, they did not show any difference in academic performance. An analysis of emotional intelligence in thousands of men and women revealed that women, on average, are more aware of their emotions, exhibit more empathy, and are more adept at interpersonal interactions. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more self-confident, optimistic, and adaptable. In general, however, far more similarities exist than differences. Some men are as empathetic as the most interpersonally sensitive women are, while some women are just as able to withstand stress as the most emotionally resilient men. Parveen et al. (2012) found that male and female adolescents do not differ significantly in academic achievement, and there is no significant difference between males and females in emotional intelligence.

The study of Sania and Sehrish (2016) and Ranjbar et al. (2017) on the impact of emotional intelligence on the academic performance of business students in Pakistan revealed that the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance was weak. On the contrary, the study of Amalu (2016) revealed that emotional intelligence components (self-awareness, managing emotion, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skills) had a significant combined impact on academic performance.

On the variable of sex, Ali (2016) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, achievement, and sex. There was no significant difference between males and females in terms of emotional intelligence, as measured by the total score of the emotional intelligence scale and its subscales. Similarly, Fili (2016) found no sex (gender) differences in Emotional Intelligence total scores.

Despite extensive research on the determinants of academic performance, significant knowledge gaps persist regarding the role of emotional intelligence in explaining academic outcomes, particularly within the Nigerian secondary education context. While traditional factors such as study habits, parental socioeconomic status, and peer influence have been extensively investigated, the predictive capacity of emotional intelligence—representing students' innate psychological competencies—remains inadequately understood.

This knowledge gap is particularly problematic given the persistent underachievement patterns in Nigerian secondary schools and the theoretical relevance of emotional competencies for learning effectiveness. The absence of comprehensive, contextually relevant research investigating how emotional intelligence predicts academic performance across different demographic subgroups limits the development of evidence-based interventions and the formulation of educational policies.

Furthermore, existing international research presents contradictory findings regarding the relationships between emotional intelligence and academic performance, with cultural and contextual factors potentially explaining these inconsistencies. Without systematic investigation within the Nigerian context, educational stakeholders lack an empirical foundation for integrating emotional intelligence development into academic improvement strategies.

Therefore, this study addresses the critical need to investigate the predictive strength of emotional intelligence on academic performance among secondary school students in Edo State, with a particular focus on demographic variations by age and gender. This investigation will contribute to the theoretical understanding while providing practical insights for the development of educational interventions.

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State.
2. Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students by sex in Edo State.
3. Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students by age in Edo State.

Research Method

A survey research design was adopted for this study. This was to enable the researchers to report the findings as observed. The participants in the study comprised 200 senior secondary school one (SSS1)

students from a population of 2000 senior secondary school one (SSS1) students in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select the participants. First, five (5) public secondary schools were randomly selected from the 12 public schools in Egor Local Government Area. Next, a stratified sampling technique was used in each school to obtain the required sample size, stratified by sex (male and female). Below is the table of distribution of the sample of the study.

The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EIQ) was adopted for this research. This was adapted from the London Leadership Academy (2021). This questionnaire originally contains fifty (50) items, with scale response options of 'Always applies to me' (5), 'Applies half the time' (3), and 'Does not apply to me at all' (1). The modified version comprises 20 items relevant to students' performance and was selected by the researcher to measure the five sub-scales of emotional intelligence. Items 1-4 measured self-awareness, items 5-8 measured self-regulation, items 9-12 measured social skills, items 13-16 measured empathy, while items 17-20 measured motivation. The instrument used a four-point Likert scale, where Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 for all positive worded items, and the reverse for all negative worded items. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's Alpha statistics. The reliability coefficient value of 0.698 was obtained.

Results and Discussions

Hypothesis 1: Emotional intelligence (self-awareness, emotion management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills) will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State.

Table 1 Multiple linear regressions of emotional intelligence on academic performance of secondary school students

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1218.212	5	243.642	2.562	0.028
	Residual	21681.788	228	95.096		
	Total	22900.000	233			

Table 1 presents the results of a multiple linear regression analysis examining the relationship between emotional intelligence (encompassing self-awareness, emotion management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills) and academic performance. From the table F= 2.562, P-Value = .028. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the F-Value is significant (.028 < .05). Therefore, the null hypothesis that says "emotional intelligence (self-awareness, managing emotion, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skills) will not significantly influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State" is rejected. This implies that their emotional intelligence has a significant impact on their academic performance. Based on this, we need to determine if the skills of emotional intelligence, individually or collectively, predict academic performance as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Model summary of multiple regressions of emotional intelligence on academic performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.231	0.053	0.032	9.75

Table 2 shows that emotional intelligence (self-awareness, managing emotion, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skills) collectively predicted academic performance. The R-squared value of 0.053 indicates that the variables jointly account for a 5.3% (0.053 multiplied by 100) change in the value of academic performance. Though it may be necessary to see the magnitude of the individual variable contribution to the dependent variable

Table 3. Multiple regression coefficient values of emotional intelligence on academic performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig. (P-Value)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	35.361	4.291		8.242	0.000
	Self-Awareness	0.041	0.339	0.010	0.122	0.903
	Managing Emotion	0.242	0.327	0.058	0.738	0.461
	Motivating Oneself	0.487	0.367	0.113	1.325	0.186
	Empathy	0.290	0.363	0.070	0.799	0.425
	Social Skills	0.142	0.350	0.037	0.405	0.686

Table 3 shows the coefficient values of the various independent variables. From this table, it can be seen that none of the variables are significant individually, although they are significant when considered jointly. However, motivating oneself appears to be the highest contributor (.487), while self-awareness is the least significant contributor (.041), judging by their "Beta" values.

Hypothesis 2: Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students by sex in Edo State.

Table 4. Multiple linear regressions of emotional intelligence on academic performance of secondary school students by sex

Sex	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P-Value)
Male	1	Regression	165.676	1	165.676	1.597	0.209
		Residual	11514.198	111	103.732		
		Total	11679.874	112			
Female	1	Regression	1351.336	1	1351.336	16.322	0.000
		Residual	9852.280	119	82.792		
		Total	11203.617	120			

Table 4 presents the multiple linear regression analysis of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, emotion management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills) on academic performance by sex. From the table, for males; F= 1.597, P-Value = .209 while for females: F = 16.322, P-Value = .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05 the F-Value is not significant for males (.209 > .05) but it is significant for the females (.000 <.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis that says "There will be no significant sex difference in the influence of emotional intelligence on academic performance of secondary school

students in Edo State" is rejected. This implies that the influence of emotional intelligence on academic performance differs for male and female students.

Hypothesis 3: Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict the academic performance of secondary school students by age in Edo State.

Table 5. Multiple linear regressions of emotional intelligence on academic performance of secondary school students by age

Age	Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P-Value)
13-15yrs	1	Regression	181.671	1	181.671	2.048	0.156
		Residual	7719.065	87	88.725		
		Total	7900.736	88			
16yrs and above	1	Regression	962.955	1	962.955	9.905	0.002
		Residual	13902.294	143	97.219		
		Total	14865.249	144			

Table 5 presents the multiple linear regression analysis of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, emotion management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills) on academic performance by age. From the table, 13-15yrs; F= 2.048, P-Value = .156 while 16yrs and above F = 9.905, P-Value = .002. Testing at an alpha level of .05 the F-Value for age bracket 13-15yrs is not significant (.156 >.05)**. In contrast,** that of age bracket 16yrs and above is significant (.002>.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis that says "There will be no significant age difference in the influence of emotional intelligence on academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State" is rejected. This implies that the influence of emotional intelligence on academic performance differs for respondents in the age brackets 13-15 years and 16 years and above.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that emotional intelligence predicted the academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State. The analysis further examined whether the variables of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, emotion management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills) individually or collectively predicted academic performance. It was revealed that self-awareness, emotional management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills collectively predicted academic performance, but none of these factors were individually significant. The finding can be attributed to the students' ability to prioritize their academic tasks, motivate themselves, and accurately perceive their emotional state (Komarudin et al., 2022). This likely enhanced their self-understanding, allowing them to apply the knowledge in their academic pursuits. The finding aligns with Amalu's (2016) study on emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic performance among secondary school students in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. The study's results showed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Ranjbar et al. (2017) on the relationship between academic performance and emotional intelligence in Iranian students, which showed a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and academic performance among Iranian students.

Besides, emotional intelligence was found to predict the academic performance of students by sex (for male and female students), with the females having better academic performance. This finding may

be attributed to the better social skills of female students and their greater ability to manage their emotions effectively compared to males. This corroborates the finding of AL-Qadri and Zhao (2021), who reported statistically significant differences among respondents according to gender. The finding also revealed a significant age difference in the predictive strength of emotional intelligence on the academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State. According to the study, the predictive strength of emotional intelligence on academic performance varied by age bracket: 13-15 years and 16 years and above. No significant difference was observed among students within the 13-15 year age bracket; however, a notable significant difference was revealed for students aged 16 years and above. The prediction of emotional intelligence on academic performance by age may be due to older students' ability to understand their own emotions and the emotions of others more effectively. It may also be due to the students' maturational level as they are preparing for higher academic tests in higher institutions. The finding is in agreement with the study by Al-Qadri and Zhao (2021), which found a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement across all variables, including students' age.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that emotional intelligence significantly predicts students' academic performance. There was also a significant difference by sex and age in the influence of emotional intelligence on the academic performance of secondary school students in Edo State. These findings make several significant contributions to existing theoretical frameworks in educational psychology and research on emotional intelligence. First, the results provide a strong model of emotional-social intelligence, which posits that emotional competencies directly influence academic and life success through enhanced adaptation and coping mechanisms. The significant predictive relationship observed in this study aligns with the theoretical proposition that students with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage academic stress, maintain motivation, and navigate social dynamics that influence learning environments.

Second, the findings of the emotional intelligence framework demonstrate its applicability within the Sub-Saharan African educational context. The significant predictive relationships observed challenge earlier assertions by some researchers, who questioned the cross-cultural validity of emotional intelligence constructs. Our results suggest that core emotional competencies transcend cultural boundaries, while potentially manifesting through culturally specific mechanisms.

The gender and age interaction effects contribute to theoretical understanding by supporting the developmental model of emotional intelligence. The differential predictive patterns across demographic groups suggest that emotional intelligence operates through distinct pathways depending on developmental stage and gender-related socialization processes. This finding challenges the assumption of universal emotional intelligence effects and supports more nuanced, contextualized theoretical models.

It was therefore recommended that school counsellors should organize seminars and symposia on emotional intelligence in their respective schools. They should be mindful of the emotional intelligence skills at different age levels to maximize the benefit for students. Teachers need to develop a greater awareness and understanding of the other variables interacting in the learning environment that can predict the academic performance of students, such as teaching styles for different age groups.

Additionally, curriculum developers should consider integrating emotional intelligence as a course into the secondary school curriculum.

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