

IMPACT OF BULLYING ON THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines how experiences of bullying impact children's emotions behaviour. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all primary school pupils in Ondo State. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study. A self-constructed questionnaire entitled 'Impact of Bullying on the Emotional Development of Primary School Pupils Questionnaire' (IBEDPSPQ) was used for data collection. Face and content validities were employed to validate the instrument while Test retest estimating reliability was used to establish the consistency of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that there was prevalence of domestic violence among primary school pupils in Ondo State. The finding revealed a negative and significant correlation between bullying and emotional developments of primary school pupils in Ondo State ($r = -.528, p < 0.05$). Finding further revealed a significant difference in the emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils in Ondo North of Ondo State ($t=0.310, p > 0.05$). It was concluded that there was prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo. It was also concluded that emotional disturbed has impact on emotional development. It is recommended that effective anti-bullying policies and emotional support programmes can help ensure that all primary school pupils develop positive relationships necessary for success in school and life.

Keywords: Bullying, emotional development, prevalence, primary school pupils

Introduction

Emotional development seems to be very important during the formative stage (childhood and early adolescence) because it appear to shapes how a person understands themselves, relates to others, and handles challenges in life. It appears that emotional development during the childhood lays the foundation for a balanced personality, healthy relationships, and lifelong well-being. It is important to acknowledge that some children, especially in the school environment intentionally intimidate, humiliate another student, causing physical, social, or psychological pain. This behaviour or action happen more than once or has the potential to be repeated over time. This behaviour is likely to disrupt the emotional development of any child, if not properly controlled.

Emotional development refers to the gradual process through which a person learns to recognize, understand, express, and manage their emotions, as well as to respond appropriately to the emotions of others (Cindy et al., 2024). It is a critical part of overall human development, alongside physical, cognitive, and social development. Emotional development begins with the ability to identify feelings in oneself and others (Tirtayanti et al., 2017). This involves learning appropriate ways to express emotions, whether through words, actions, or facial expressions. Expressing emotions helps in communication and social interaction. As children grow, they start to understand why they feel certain emotions and how these feelings can influence their behaviour and the behaviour of others. As

opined by Fadeyi (2025) emotional development includes developing empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others which is crucial for forming healthy relationships. Emotional growth affects cognitive skills, social skills, moral understanding, and mental health. Well-developed emotional skills help children adapt to challenges and succeed in life. Emotional development is about learning to feel, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and respond sensitively to others' feelings (Fadeyi, 2025).

Bullying is a widespread problem in primary schools and it seems to pose a serious threat to the emotional development of young pupils. Bullying has become a pressing concern in schools across the world, particularly in Ondo State. In primary schools, where children are in the early stages of emotional and social development, negative peer interactions such as repeated negative actions such as teasing, name-calling, exclusion, or physical harm usually occurred, which can cause emotional pain to the victim. The emotional development of primary school pupils involves forming a sense of self-worth, learning to regulate feelings, and building healthy relationships with others (Fadeyi, 2025). During the primary school years, children are still developing their emotional skills, self-confidence, and social relationships. Experiences of bullying at this stage can disrupt healthy emotional growth and affect how children understand and manage their feelings. When these processes are disrupted by bullying, the consequences may extend beyond the school environment and affect a child's overall well-being.

Pupils who experience bullying often suffer from fear, sadness, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Cindy et al., 2024). These emotional challenges may make it difficult for them to participate actively in school activities or form positive relationships with peers. In some cases, prolonged exposure to bullying can lead to emotional withdrawal and behavioral problems. As emotional development is closely linked to academic performance and overall well-being, the impact of bullying extends beyond the playground and classroom. These emotional responses can interfere with their ability to focus on learning, participate in class activities, and interact positively with peers. Over time, repeated exposure to bullying may result in long-term emotional difficulties, such as social withdrawal, trust issues, and negative self-image (Tirtayanti et al., 2017).

This study therefore seeks to examine how bullying affects the emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State. Understanding the effects of bullying on the emotional development of primary school pupils is essential for creating safe and supportive learning environments. By identifying the emotional consequences of bullying, educational stakeholders can work together to implement effective prevention strategies and provide appropriate support for affected children. This study therefore focuses on examining the prevalence of bullying and how it influences the emotional development of pupils in Ondo State.

Statement of the Problem

Bullying has become a significant issue in schools worldwide, and Nigeria is no exception. Primary school pupils, being in the formative stage of their emotional and social development, are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of bullying. Experiences such as verbal abuse, physical aggression, and social exclusion can severely affect a child's ability to recognize, express, and manage emotions effectively. In Ondo State, primary school pupils may face bullying in various forms, yet there is limited research focusing specifically on how these experiences influence their emotional development. Unaddressed bullying can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and poor interpersonal skills, which can hinder both academic performance and social growth. Therefore, it becomes crucial to investigate the impact of bullying on the emotional

development of primary school pupils in Ondo State to understand the scope of the problem, identify affected areas of emotional growth, and inform interventions that can foster safe and supportive learning environments.

Objectives to the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the impact of bullying on the emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the prevalence and forms of bullying experienced by primary school pupils in Ondo State.
2. Examine how bullying affects the emotional development of pupils.
3. Investigate whether the emotional impact of bullying differs based on gender or age of pupils.

Research Questions

Based on the problem of this study, the following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. What is the prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria?
2. How does bullying affect the emotional development of primary school pupils?

Hypotheses

There is no significant relationship between bullying and emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State.

There is no significant difference in the emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils.

Literature Review

Concept of Bullying and Emotional Development

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance (Adewuyi, 2023). This behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. Fadeyi (2025) maintained that bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once. He emphasized that bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen travelling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the Internet (Ubom, et al., 2025). Bullying profoundly harms primary pupils' emotional development, causing anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, fear, and isolation, which stunts social skills and can lead to long-term mental health issues, poor academic focus, and withdrawal from activities, and even self-harm, creating a cycle of negative emotions and insecurity that impacts their ability to form healthy relationships and trust other (Olalekan & Adewunmi 2025).

The researcher observed that several studies have been carried out on bullying in Nigeria with the view of providing solution to the emotional trauma. However, the existing body of literature consistently neglects the impact of bullying on children's emotional development in Ondo State. Several studies (Oluwamumibor et al., 2025; Ubom, et al., 2025; Okeke, et al., 2024; Tukesova, 2023;) have focus on bully as it affected academic performance without acknowledge the developmental process of children.

Mercy, et al., (2019) examined prevalence of bullying behavior on academic performance among students in Integrated Public Secondary Schools in Kitui County, Kenya. The study reported a high prevalence of bullying among students and found a negative correlation with academic performance. The study failed to acknowledge that emotional and social development of pupils contribute greatly and shape the academic performance of students. The researchers did not consider gender as influences academic performance.

Oluwamumibor et al., (2025) focus on bullying academic performance: A study of selected secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria. The study focused on the bullying and academic performance: A Study of Selected Secondary Schools in Lagos, Nigeria. The study only look at the academic performance of pupil without addressing salient factor that may hinder such performance. The study failed to acknowledge that brilliant students may perform poorly in academic perform when subjected to emotional trauma like bullying with may invariably negatively affect the mental health. Gisela (2023) examined bullying as determinant of academic performance. A Case Study for the Community of Madrid Using Administrative Data. The results indicate that bullying has a negative correlation with all the competencies evaluated and that bullying can affect students with low or high academic achievement in different ways, depending on what competency is evaluated.

Okeke, et al (2024) investigated perceived impact of bullying on academic performance of High School Learners. The findings of the study revealed that: increased anger, rage, jealousy, urge to be in control, attention seeking and family dynamics among others are the causes of bullying among students. The finding also found that bullying among high school students can affect their academic performance negatively. The study did not consider other factors that could distort the academic performance of students. Ubom, et al. (2025) examined the impact of bullying on academic performance of Senior Secondary School Science Students in North Central, Nigeria. Findings revealed that unbullied students significantly outperformed bullied students academically. Males were identified as the predominant perpetrators, while females were the primary victims. The researchers only rely on academic performance without necessarily consider emotional trauma that may likely affect hinder such performance.

Heseena (2025) investigated influence of bully on the student's academic performance. The researcher only emphasize on how teachers and parents could help students who experience bullying without recognised emotional development of students. Tukesova (2021) focuses on the relationship between bullying and student's academic performance. The research found a minimal negative reaction to bullying and its effects on their studies by the majority of students. The researcher failed to consider other factors that may hinder academic performance. Garcia (2019) investigated bullying and academic performance in Home Technology. The study also focuses on academic performance without putting consideration in other factors that enhance performance.

Olalekan Adewunmi (2025) investigated bullying behaviour among primary school pupils: Prevalence and Management in Ibadan. The researchers reported a high prevalence of bullying behaviour among the pupils in the LGA. The finding also revealed that there was no significant difference between public and private school teachers in their perception of the prevalence of bullying behaviour among primary school pupils. There was no significant difference between public and private school teachers in the methods and strategies adopted to manage bullying behaviour among primary school pupils. The study focus on teachers' perception without considering the students who are the main victim of bullying. Tirtayanti, et al., (2017) investigated the association between

emotional development and bullying behaviour in children at the Elementary School. The study found a significant association between emotional developments and parenting with bullying behaviour, but no significant correlation between peer influence and bullying behaviour.

It is important to look beyond intelligent as major determinant of academic performance. Emotional development seem to contribute to academic performance by improving focus, motivation, behaviour, relationships, and coping skills. When primary school pupils are emotionally supported, they are more likely to succeed academically. Poor emotional control can lead to distractions and disruptive behaviour, which lowers academic performance. Existing body of literature consistently neglects the impact of emotional disturbed on children's academic performance for decades. This study, therefore investigated impact of bullying on the emotional development of primary school Pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised 1350 children drawn from primary schools in Ondo State. Ondo State is already stratified into three senatorial districts including: Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo South Senatorial District and Ondo central. Each senatorial district of Ondo State has six Local Government Area. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted to select 1350 respondents. The first stage involved simple random sampling technique to select three (3) local government area from the each senatorial district, making nine (9). The second phase involved the selection of five (5) secondary schools from each of the selected local government area, making forty-five (45) secondary schools. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to select thirty pupils (15 boys and 15 girls) from the selected secondary schools, bringing it a total of One thousand three hundred and fifty respondents (1,350).

A self-constructed questionnaire entitled 'Impact of Bullying on the Emotional Development of Primary School Pupils Questionnaire' (IBEDPSPQ) was used for data collection. Face and content validities were employed to validate the instrument. Test retest estimating reliability was used to establish the consistency of the instrument. Two expert in the field of Test and Measurement assisted to ensure the accuracy of the instrument. Test-retest method of estimating reliability was conducted to ascertain the consistency of the instrument. Data collected from this pilot study were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The reliability coefficient value of 0.66 was obtained. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire with a help of research assistance. Data collected were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the research questions were subjected to mean, and standard deviation while the hypotheses were subjected to correlation matrix at 0.05 level of significance. The results are presented in Tables 1 to 3.

Results

Research Question One: What is the prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria?

In answering this research question, score of respondents to the questionnaire items on bullying were computed and subjected to descriptive statistics involving means and standard deviation. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria

488	36.2%	High Prevalence
701	51.9%	Moderate Prevalence
161	11.9%	Low Prevalence

Data generated in Table 1 showed the frequency count and simple percentage of prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo State. Using simple percentage as a medium of talking decision. 51.9% of primary school pupils reported a moderate prevalence of bullying, 36.2% reported high prevalence of bullying while 11.9% reported low prevalence of bullying.

Research Question Two: How does bullying impact the emotional development of primary school pupils?

In answering this research question, score of respondents to the questionnaire items on impact of bullying on emotional development of primary school pupils were computed and subjected to descriptive statistics involving mean score. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Impact the bullying on emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria

SN	Statement	Mean
1	When I am bullied, I feel sad	3.09
2	Bullying makes me feel scared at school	3.08
3	When other children bully me, I feel lonely	3.07
4	Being bullied makes it hard for me to feel happy	3.10
5	Bullying makes me feel angry.	3.08
6	When I am bullied, I feel like crying	3.09
7	Being bullied makes me feel bad about myself	3.10
8	Bullying makes me feel worried a lot of the time	2.89
9	When I am bullied, I feel less confident.	2.77
10	Being bullied affects how I feel about going to school	3.09
	Average Mean	3.04

Data presented in Table 2 showed the impact of bullying on emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria. Primary school pupils reported that being bullied makes them felt bad about themselves and made them felt unhappy with highest mean score ($\bar{x}=3.10$). Primary school pupils reported that they felt bad, felt like crying and affect the feeling about the school when bullied with same mean score ($\bar{x}=3.09$). Primary school pupils further reported that bullying made them felt scared at school and made them felt angry with mean score ($\bar{x}=3.08$). It was also reported that bullying made felt lonely with mean score ($\bar{x}=3.07$). It was least reported by primary school pupils that bullying made felt less confident ($\bar{x}=2.77$).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Bullying has no significant relationship with emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State.

In testing this hypothesis, score of respondents to the questionnaire items on bullying alongside with emotional development were computed and subjected to inferential statistics involving PPMC. The result is further presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Relationship between bullying and emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State.

Variables	N	DF	r-cal	P-value	Decision
Bullying	1350	1348	-.528**	0.000	Accepted
Emotional Development	1350				

Table 2 showed the relationship between bullying and emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State. The result showed that there was negative and significant correlation between bullying and emotional developments of primary school pupils in Ondo State ($r = -.528, p < 0.05$). By implication bullying had negative correlation with emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State. The hypothesis was rejected since independent variables correlated significantly with dependent variable at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils.

In testing this hypothesis, score of respondents to the questionnaire items on emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils were computed and subjected to inferential statistics involving t-test analysis. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
T-test analysis showing the mean difference in the emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils in Ondo North of Ondo State.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	Sig
Female	675	12.5	5.403	1348	0.310	0.360
Male	675	6.7	2.345			

Table 4 showed the mean scores and standard deviation of emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils in Ondo State. The table indicated that female pupils reported a higher mean score and standard deviation of ($\bar{x} = 12.5, SD = 5.403$) compare to their male counterparts with mean score and standard deviation ($\bar{x} = 6.7, SD = 2.345$) respectively. The t value 0.310 at degree of freedom of 1348 was not significant at $p > 0.05$. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in the emotional impact of bullying between male and female pupils in Ondo North of Ondo State.

Discussion of Findings

Finding from research question 1 revealed the prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo State. Finding indicated a high prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils, this finding agreed with the finding of Olalekan (2025) who reported a high prevalence of bullying in the

school environment. Students use bullying behaviours (teasing, exclusion, hitting, name-calling) instead of peaceful ways to express anger or frustration. Many children do not yet understand the harm their actions caused and thinking bullying is “just playing” or joking.

Finding from research question 2 revealed the impact of bullying on the emotional development of primary school pupils. The result indicated that bullying made them feel bad about themselves and made them feel unhappy. This finding agreed with the assertion of Tirtayanti, et al., (2017) who found significant association between emotional development and bullying behaviour in children at the elementary school. There is a strong relationship between emotional development and bullying because emotional skills shape behaviour, empathy, self-control, and social interaction. Promoting emotional development in primary schools can significantly reduce bullying.

Finding from hypothesis 1 indicated that there was negative correlation between bullying and emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State. The finding was in line with the finding of Ubom, et al. (2025) who observed a significant difference in academic performance of students who are bullied.

Finding from hypothesis 2 indicated that the similarity in the finding could be attributed to the fact that female students are often more affected by emotional disturbance than male students due to a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors Ubom, et al. (2025). Females respond to emotional disturbance more than their female counterpart. They maintained that emotional distress is more noticeable and reported among female students, while males may hide or suppress emotions. This does not mean all females are more emotionally disturbed, but research shows they may be more emotionally sensitive or expressive.

Conclusion

Bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo State significantly undermines the emotional development of affected children. It was concluded that there was prevalence of bullying among primary school pupils in Ondo. It was also concluded that emotional disturbance has impact on emotional development. It was further concluded that female students respond to emotional disturbance more than male counterpart. Addressing bullying is therefore essential not only to protect pupils' physical safety but also to support their healthy emotional growth and academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study on impact of bullying on the emotional development of primary school pupils in Ondo State, Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Effective anti-bullying policies and emotional support programmes can help ensure that all primary school pupils develop positive relationships necessary for success in school and life.
2. The Ondo State Ministry of Education should enforce clear and effective anti-bullying policies in all primary schools.
3. Schools management should integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum to help pupils develop empathy, self-control, emotional regulation, and conflict-resolution skills

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