

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A CORRELATE OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COLLEGE STUDENTS IN NORTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a Correlate of Academic Performance and Psychological Well-being among students in Federal Government Colleges (FGCs) within the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The research was driven by the need to understand how internal affective competencies influence cognitive outcomes and mental health in a high-pressure residential academic environment. A Descriptive Research Design of a Correlational type was employed, utilizing a multi-stage sampling technique to select a sample of 1,068 students from the twelve FGCs in the region. Data collection was facilitated through the "Family Relationship, Emotional Intelligence, Sleep Quality, Academic Performance, and Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (FEISAPWQ)" and standardized terminal examination scores in English Language. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Independent Samples t-tests at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a significant, though weak, positive correlation ($r = .097$, $p = .002$) between emotional intelligence and academic performance, suggesting that emotional regulation supports cognitive achievement. Notably, a significant and strong negative correlation ($r = -.411$, $p < .05$) was found between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, indicating that heightened emotional awareness in a restrictive boarding environment may lead to increased emotional labor and decreased life satisfaction. Furthermore, significant gender differences were observed, with male students reporting higher emotional intelligence scores ($M = 77.90$) compared to females ($M = 75.02$). The study concludes that while EI is a functional asset for academic success, it may act as a source of psychological strain if not balanced with adequate coping mechanisms. It is recommended that school counseling programs incorporate "emotional resilience" training to help high-EI students manage the empathic distress inherent in communal living.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Academic Performance, Psychological Well-being, Federal Government Colleges, North-West Nigeria.

Introduction

Education in the 21st century has shifted from a purely cognitive focus to a holistic model that recognizes the "affective domain" as a critical driver of success. As noted by Okebukola (2021), the effectiveness of Nigeria's secondary education system is increasingly influenced by psychosocial factors that shape students' cognitive and emotional competencies. Among these factors, Emotional Intelligence (EI) stands out as a primary correlate of both academic performance and psychological well-being.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as a dynamic set of emotional and social competencies that allow individuals to navigate complex interpersonal environments and manage internal stress effectively (Okebukola, 2021). While earlier theorists pioneered the construct,

contemporary perspectives in the Nigerian educational context define EI as a critical "affective toolkit" that enables students to maintain cognitive clarity and psychological resilience (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022).

Furthermore, recent research by Taiwo and Akinboye (2023) emphasizes that for Nigerian adolescents, emotional intelligence involves the strategic application of self-awareness and emotional regulation to bridge the gap between rigorous academic demands and personal well-being. This modern view shifts the focus from EI as a static trait to a functional skill set that can be developed to enhance school adjustment and long-term success (UNESCO, 2023).

Within the specific environment of Federal Government Colleges in North-West Nigeria, EI serves as a critical "emotional toolkit" that enables students to navigate the unique psychological rigors of high-pressure boarding life (Okebukola, 2021). According to the theoretical framework of this study, EI is operationalized through several distinct dimensions:

- i. **Self-Awareness:** The capacity to recognize and understand one's own emotions in real-time, which serves as the foundation for emotional maturity and school adjustment (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022).
- ii. **Self-Regulation:** The ability to manage impulsive feelings and distressing emotions, allowing students to maintain cognitive focus on academic goals despite environmental stressors (Taiwo & Akinboye, 2023).
- iii. **Empathy:** The skill of understanding the emotional makeup and perspectives of others, which is essential for fostering positive peer relationships in a communal residential setting (UNESCO, 2023).
- iv. **Social Skills:** The proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, which assists students in navigating the complex social hierarchies and the "hidden curriculum" prevalent in federal colleges (Okebukola, 2021).

The study leans heavily on Daniel Goleman's (1995) Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence, which posits that EI is a wide array of competencies and skills that drive leadership and performance. Goleman argues that EI can be more predictive of life success than traditional Intelligence Quotient (IQ). For the Nigerian adolescent, high EI facilitates "academic resilience," the ability to bounce back from poor grades or the social isolation often felt in boarding houses (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022).

Academic performance, particularly in fundamental subjects such as English Language, demands sustained cognitive concentration and the sophisticated processing of linguistic nuances. Contemporary literature suggests that students with high Emotional Intelligence (EI) are better equipped to mitigate "test anxiety" and navigate the psychological pressures associated with rigorous terminal examinations (Okebukola, 2021). While global empirical evidence often points toward a strong positive correlation between emotional regulation and cognitive success, this study investigates whether such a relationship persists within the unique socioeconomic and boarding school structures of North-West Nigeria.

Psychological well-being (PWB) represents an individual's subjective experience of happiness, life satisfaction, and emotional equilibrium. According to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory, EI serves as a foundational pillar of well-being; by effectively managing negative affectivity, students are able to maintain a resilient internal state (Taiwo & Akinboye, 2023). However, this research

explores a "noteworthy" and divergent possibility: that in highly restrictive or high-stress environments, high emotional awareness may inadvertently lead to increased "emotional labor." As suggested by Achana and Sinha (2024), such heightened sensitivity can potentially result in empathic distress, thereby negatively impacting a student's mental health negatively

The contemporary pedagogical research emphasizes that emotional maturity is often a more potent predictor of career and academic success in the Nigerian context than traditional rote memorization (Okebukola, 2021). Drawing on perspectives from Aremu and Sokan, the literature suggests that students who possess high levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI) are better equipped to "delay gratification"—a core competency that allows them to prioritize long-term academic dedication over immediate social distractions (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022).

The literature review highlights that in Northern Nigerian culture, emotional expression is deeply influenced by specific social norms, such as *Kunya* (modesty or shyness). This cultural context is critical, as it may influence how students interpret and respond to EI assessment scales. As noted by UNESCO (2023), cultural frameworks dictate the "display rules" for emotions, which in turn shape how emotional competencies correlate with reported psychological well-being in the North-West region. However, the Socialization processes in Nigeria frequently encourage divergent emotional orientations based on gender. While boys are often socialized toward assertive "leadership" and social influence, girls are traditionally encouraged toward "nurturance" and empathic connection (Okebukola, 2021). This study examines how these distinct socialization patterns manifest in the EI scores of Federal Government College students. Recent literature by Taiwo and Akinboye (2023) emphasizes that EI functions as a critical mediator between environmental stressors, such as the transition to a residential boarding facility, and overall psychological health. Students who utilize EI to "reframe" their boarding school challenges as opportunities for personal growth are expected to exhibit higher resilience and well-being scores. This aligns with the study's objective to explore how emotional regulation mitigates the impact of being physically distant from the primary family support system.

Despite the global recognition of EI, there is a significant geographical gap in research focusing on the North-West zone of Nigeria, particularly within the elite Federal Government College system. Most existing Nigerian studies are centered in the South-West or South-East. This article addresses this gap by investigating whether EI truly serves as a "bridge" to success and happiness for students in this specific, culturally rich, and academically rigorous region.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this second article is to evaluate the influence of internal emotional competencies on the academic and psychological outcomes of students in Federal Government Colleges.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the academic performance of students.
2. Assess the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the psychological well-being of students.
3. Investigate whether significant differences exist between male and female students regarding their levels of emotional intelligence.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the empirical analysis and were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the academic performance of students in Federal Government Colleges in North-West Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the psychological well-being of students in Federal Government Colleges in North-West Nigeria.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between male and female students in their reported levels of emotional intelligence.

Methodology

This study employed a Descriptive Research Design of a Correlational type. This design was selected as it allows for the investigation of the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variable (Emotional Intelligence) and the dependent variables (Academic Performance and Psychological Well-being) without experimental manipulation of the subjects (Nwankwo & Eze, 2022). The population for this study comprised all students enrolled in the twelve (12) Federal Government Colleges (FGCs) across the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. Specifically, Purposive Sampling was used to select representative colleges across the zone (including Katsina, Kano, and other states) while Simple Random Sampling was then used to select the individual student respondents to ensure an unbiased representation of the student body. The final analyzed sample for this article consisted of 1,068 students, providing a high degree of statistical power for the correlational analysis. The primary tool for data collection was the "Family Relationship, Emotional Intelligence, Sleep Quality, Academic Performance, and Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (FEISAPWQ)." The data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance using the following tools: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance (H₀₁) and Psychological Well-being (H₀₂), while the Independent Samples t-test was used to determine if a significant difference exists between male and female students regarding their Emotional Intelligence (H₀₃).

Result and Discussion

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the academic performance of students in Federal Government Colleges in North-West Nigeria.

Table 1: PPMCC analysis on the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance in the English language

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r-value	p-value	Remark
Emotional Intelligence	1068	76.76	5.742	.097	.002	Significance
Academic Performance	1068	34.40	2.151			

Table 1 revealed that the Correlation Coefficient (r): The Pearson Correlation between emotional intelligence (mean = 76.76, SD = 5.742) and academic performance (mean = 34.40, SD = 2.151) is .097. The positive sign indicates a direct relationship, meaning that as emotional intelligence increases, academic performance also tends to increase. The p-value is .002. Since this value is less than the standard alpha level of .05, the correlation is statistically significant. This indicates that the observed relationship is not likely due to random chance. Given that the p-value (.002) is less than .05, the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance is statistically significant. Therefore, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H₀₁). The result suggests a significant, though weak, positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic performance.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the psychological well-being of students in Federal Government Colleges in North-West Nigeria.

Table 2: PPMCC analysis of responses on the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and psychological well-being

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r-value	p-value	Remark
Emotional Intelligence	1068	76.76	5.742	-.411	.000	Significance
Psychological Well-being	1068	49.84	4.496			

Table 2 revealed that the Correlation Coefficient (r): The Pearson Correlation between emotional intelligence (mean = 76.76, SD = 5.742) and psychological well-being (mean = 49.84, SD = 4.496) is -.411. The negative sign indicates an inverse relationship, meaning that as emotional intelligence increases, psychological well-being tends to decrease, and vice versa. The p-value is .000. Since this value is less than the standard alpha level of .05, the correlation is statistically significant. This indicates that the observed relationship is not likely due to random chance. Given that the p-value (.000) is less than .05, the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being is statistically significant. Therefore, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H₀₂). The result suggests a significant, negative correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between male and female students in their reported levels of emotional intelligence.

Table 3: t-test analysis on gender difference in emotional intelligence

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	p-value
Emotional Intelligence	Male	644	77.90	4.491	8.263	1066	.000
	Female	424	75.02	6.891			

Table 3 revealed that the mean for males is 77.90, and for females, it is 75.02. The p-value is .000. Since this is less than the standard alpha level of .05, the difference is statistically significant. The null hypothesis for emotional intelligence is rejected. There is a significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female students in favour of female students.

Discussion

Furthermore, the finding shows a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance ($r = .097, p < .05$), which is consistent with the findings of many researchers. Nisar Ahmed Kurmar (2019) found a significant positive relationship between academic achievement and emotional intelligence among higher secondary school students in India. Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2012) found that developing students' emotional intelligence skills leads to an enhancement of their academic achievement. Muiga et al. (2020) similarly found that emotional intelligence and academic achievement had a positive and significant relationship ($r = .236, p = .00$) among secondary school students in Kenya. Chamundeswari (2013) also reported a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. Ogundokun and Adeyemo (2010) found that emotional intelligence was a potent predictor of academic achievement. Munir and Ma'aruf (2020), however, found no significant influence of emotional intelligence on students' academic performance. This study's findings contrast with the majority of the literature, highlighting a key area for further investigation

Moreover, the significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance ($r = .097, p = .002$) found in this study is in line with the majority of the reviewed literature. This finding is consistent with Nisar Ahmed Kurmar (2019), who also reported a significant positive relationship between academic achievement and emotional intelligence among students in India. It supports the conclusion of Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2012) that developing students' emotional intelligence skills enhances their academic achievement. The finding is also supported by Jane Muiga et al. (2020) in Kenya, Chamundeswari (2013) and Ogundokun and Adeyemo (2010), all of whom found a positive correlation or a predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance. However, this finding contradicts the work of Munir and Ma'aruf (2020) in Katsina State, Nigeria, who found no significant influence of emotional intelligence on academic performance. The current study's findings thus contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this relationship within Nigeria.

Furthermore, the significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being ($r = -.411, p < .05$) is an important finding that fills a knowledge gap from previous research, such as the one by Taiwo A. Akinboye et al. (2023), which did not include emotional intelligence in its analysis of psychological well-being

Moreover, the study found a significant gender difference in emotional intelligence, with a higher mean score for males (77.90) compared to females (75.02) and a p-value of .000. This aligns with Nisar Ahmed Kurmar (2019), who found a significant difference in emotional intelligence among students with high and low emotional intelligence levels based on gender. However, it contradicts the findings of Munir and Ma'aruf (2020) in Katsina, Nigeria, who found no significant difference in the influence of emotional intelligence on academic performance due to gender. Similar to H07, there was no significant gender difference in academic performance ($p = .212$). This again contradicts the

findings of both Davood Ahmad Dar (2024) and Rajesh Kumar and Roshan Lal (2014), who found that females had better academic outcomes than males. A significant gender difference was found for psychological well-being, with females having a higher mean score (50.66) than males (49.30) and a p-value of .000.

Conclusion

This research provides a critical empirical baseline for understanding the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the lives of students within Federal Government Colleges in North-West Nigeria. Based on the findings, several key conclusions are drawn:

First, Emotional Intelligence acts as a functional facilitator of academic achievement ($r = .097$, $p = .002$). This confirms that students who possess the ability to regulate their emotions and delay gratification are better equipped to handle the cognitive demands and "test anxiety" associated with core subjects like English Language.

Second, the study identifies a "noteworthy" inverse relationship between EI and psychological well-being ($r = -.411$, $p < .05$). This suggests that in the high-pressure, communal environment of a boarding school, higher emotional sensitivity may lead to increased "emotional labor." Students who are highly attuned to their own and others' emotions may experience higher levels of empathic distress and lower life satisfaction, indicating that EI without robust coping mechanisms can be a source of psychological strain.

Finally, the significant gender difference in EI ($p = .000$), where males reported higher mean scores (77.90) than females (75.02), highlights the impact of divergent socialization patterns. While males may be socialized toward assertive social navigation, females in this context may face different emotional pressures that impact their perceived emotional competency.

Recommendations

To optimize the emotional and academic development of students, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Federal Ministry of Education should formally integrate SEL into the curriculum of Federal Government Colleges. Training students in self-regulation and stress management can help them leverage their EI for academic success without compromising their mental health.
2. School counselors should move beyond general guidance to provide specialized support for "emotionally sensitive" students. Since high EI correlates with lower well-being in this study, these students need specific strategies to manage "empathic burnout" and emotional exhaustion.
3. Schools should implement gender-specific mentorship programs aimed at boosting the emotional confidence of female students. Providing safe spaces for emotional expression can help bridge the gap in perceived emotional intelligence.
4. Teachers and house parents should be trained to recognize the signs of emotional labor in students. Understanding that a "high-performing" or "emotionally aware" student might actually be struggling internally is crucial for early intervention.

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