

## Impact of Bullying on Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Science Students in North Central, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study investigates the impact of bullying on the academic performance of senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria. It examines the differences in academic achievement between bullied and unbullied students and explores gender disparities in bullying experiences. **Method:** A descriptive survey design was employed, with a sample of 384 students and teachers selected from government co-educational senior secondary schools in Niger State and the Federal Capital Territory using Krejcie and Morgan's table. A purposive sampling technique was utilized, and data were collected through validated questionnaires. Instrument reliability was assessed using the test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.814). Data analysis was conducted using Mann-Whitney and T-tests via SPSS Version 21. **Results:** Findings revealed that unbullied students significantly outperformed bullied students academically. Males were identified as the predominant perpetrators, while females were the primary victims. The study also highlights effective anti-bullying strategies, including policy implementation, school climate improvement, teacher training, and student-led initiatives. **Novelty:** This study provides empirical evidence on the academic consequences of bullying within science education in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions. It contributes to the literature by proposing practical measures for school administrators and policymakers to mitigate bullying and support affected students.

## INTRODUCTION

Students are learners in educational institutions. Studentship started from the early child education to basic education to secondary school education and ends in the higher institutions. Higher institutions students are learners in the higher institutions. Higher institutions students are matured learners. Students in higher institutions are aged from 18 years and above. Students of higher institutions are ready for learning and research. Some of the students of higher institutions are dependent while others are independent [1]. Student is an individual admitted into an educational institutions to study and to graduate at a specific term after meeting up with the institution' requirement. Student is an individual admitted to school to learn, to acquire skills and to graduate with a certificate. Student in the schools are expected to attend classes, write exams, continuous assessment, do assignment, do project and read. The student is expected to write exam at the end of every term to reveal his or her performance [2].

The academic performance of students refer to the academic output of the students that covers cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Students' academic performance is the extent of achievement attained in all the academic activities in the school at a particular time. Student academic performance refers to the standard which students should be able to know and be able to do. Academic performance refers to how well students can accomplish the classroom task given to them by their teachers or lectures; it is the extent at which they cope with their studies in relation to the stipulated aims and objectives of the school [3]. Academic performance is usually reflected in learner's ability to be able to communicate the knowledge they have acquired within a given period of time verbally or most of the time, to put it down on paper and measured using test or any other valid instrument [4]. Violent acts like bullying, gender discrimination and sexual harassment may affects students' achievement in the schools.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Bullying is a form of aggressive behaviour in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying can take the form of physical contact, words or more subtle actions. It can also be defined as a persistent, threatening and aggressive behaviour directed at a weaker, younger and less powerful individual which could be verbal or physical. A male or female pupil with the realisation of being bigger and stronger than others could develop the tendency to exercise authority over younger and smaller pupils [5]. Akinsola, said that bullying is an act a child learns at home. She said: 'Children are not born to be bullies, they obviously learnt it from home'. If a child grows up in a home where the father constantly bullies the mother, the child might grow up to become a bully, which the child was exposed to. If it is a female child, she may not become a bully, but she may end up acting like a male child. This is because she had been exposed to a rough, aggressive and volatile environment. Some parents are not aware that the type of environment they create at home goes a long way in shaping their child's future as children copy what they see their parents do [5].

Ojo, was of the opinion that many parents, whose children are victims of bullying often, find it hard to handle the matter. He advised the mothers that issue of bullying should not be left to the child to deal with or handled alone [6]. The child needs the help of his or her parents and teachers. This is because it is a situation that subdues a child. The child won't be himself; he would lose concentration and always think of how to escape from his bullies. This is why parents must constantly speak with their children on a daily basis. Whenever a child gets back home from school, parents should ask him or her about all that happened in school. A child who is bullied would not be happy at school and at home. Bullying in school may affects students and, may even increased risk of physical health problems, long-term emotional behavioural and mental health problems, self-harm, suicide, and poorer educational attainment [7]. It is important to examine the impact of bullying on academic performance of senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria [8].

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine impact of bullying on academic performance of senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Determine how bullying affect the academic performance of bullied students in senior secondary schools in North Central, Nigeria.
2. Find out various ways to curb bullying among the senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this research work in line with the stated objectives of the study;

1. What are the differences in the performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria?
2. What are the opinions of teachers on the various ways by which bullying can be curbed among the senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to answer the research questions:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference on the opinion of male and female teachers on various ways to curb bullying among senior secondary school science students in North Central Nigeria.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consisted of all SSS science students in all the government senior secondary schools in North Central, Nigeria. The sample of the study comprised of three hundred and eight four (384) students and teachers drawn from all the government co-educational senior secondary schools in Niger State and Federal Capital Territory. The sample size was selected using Krejcie and Morgan table for calculating sample size. A purposive sampling technique is a non- probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific criteria or characteristics relevant to the research study. This study employed the use of questionnaire to collect information on all aspects of the study namely: Impact of Bullying on Academic Performance Questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured into two sections A and B. Section A dealt with information on personal data of the respondents while section B dealt with items from the research questions. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point type likert scale: Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Disagreed, Strongly Disagreed (SA, A, D, SD). The instrument was validated by my supervisors another expert, who is an educationist. A test-retest reliability method was used to evaluate instrument stability, assessing temporal consistency, identify instrument

bias, and establishing instrument validity. The reliability was measured using Chronbach's alpha coefficient for calculation of internal consistency and was found to be 0.814. The time frame was good enough to measure the stability of the instrument. In analysing the data that was obtained from the respondents, Mann-Whitney, and T-Test statistical analytical technique was used using SPSS statistical package. Mann-Whitney mean score was used for research questions 1-5 and to analyse and test the hypothesis while T-Test was used to check the effect of bullying on academic performance in comparison with the un-bullied. For the purpose of interpreting the results of the research questions, the following boundary limits was set: 1.00 - 1.49, Strongly Disagreed; 1.5 - 2.49, Disagreed; 2.50 - 3.49, Agreed and 3.5 - 4.00, Strongly Agreed.

### Data Analysis

#### Answer to Research Questions

**Research Question one:** What are the differences in the performance of bullied and unbullied science student in senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria? To answer this question, mean and standard deviation were used as shown in Table 5.

**Table 1.** Academic performance of bullied and unbullied science students

| Group      | N   | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|------------|-----|-------|----------------|
| Bullied    | 192 | 53.35 | 11.49          |
| Unbullied  | 257 | 64.94 | 13.44          |
| Mean Diff. |     | 11.59 |                |

Table 1 shows that bullied students had a mean score of 53.35 and standard deviation of 11.49 and unbullied students had a mean score of 64.94 and standard deviation of 13.44. The mean difference is 11.59 in favour of unbullied students indicating that the unbullied students performed better than the bullied students.

**Research Question two:** What are the opinions of teachers on the various ways by which bullying can be curbed among the senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria?

To answer question, mean and standard deviation were used as shown in the Table 2 and 3.

**Table 2.** Male teachers' opinions on how to curb bullying in secondary schools

| this<br>S/N | Items   | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | Std.<br>Dev. | Decision |
|-------------|---|----|---|---|----|------|--------------|----------|
| 1           | Anti bullying laws should be enforced in the schools                    | 37 | 7 | 0 | 0  | 3.84 | 0.37         | Agree    |
| 2           | School's rules and regulation should be well spelt out to students, and | 39 | 5 | 0 | 0  | 3.89 | 0.32         | Agree    |

|    |  |    |    |    |    |             |             |              |
|----|--|----|----|----|----|-------------|-------------|--------------|
|    | those related to bullying should be stressed   |    |    |    |    |             |             |              |
| 3  | House masters and mistresses should be motivated to carry out their duties effectively                 | 43 | 1  | 0  | 0  | 3.98        | 0.15        | Agree        |
| 4  | Second time offenders name should be written in black book   | 7  | 8  | 15 | 15 | 2.16        | 1.05        | Disagree     |
| 5  | Severe bullying case should be reported in the police station for proper investigation and prosecution | 14 | 27 | 3  | 0  | 3.25        | 0.57        | Agree        |
| 6  | Monthly or termly orientation should be organised by schools and government or stake holders           | 39 | 14 | 0  | 0  | 3.74        | 0.44        | Agree        |
| 7  | Mentoring programmes in schools should be strengthened   | 33 | 11 | 0  | 0  | 3.75        | 0.43        | Agree        |
| 8  | Bullied victims should be properly counsel to get them back to face their bully                        | 24 | 16 | 4  | 0  | 3.45        | 0.66        | Agree        |
| 9  | Anti bullying clubs should be inaugurated in schools to report incidence of bullying among students    | 25 | 19 | 0  | 0  | 3.57        | 0.50        | Agree        |
| 10 | Second time bully offender should be expelled from school.   | 13 | 14 | 13 | 4  | 2.82        | 0.96        | Agree        |
|    | <b>Section Mean</b>  |    |    |    |    | <b>3.42</b> | <b>0.90</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

Table 2 shows the male teachers opinions on how to curb bullying among senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. From the table, it was recorded that the male teachers generally agreed that most of the listed items are the ways to curb bullying in senior secondary schools in North Central, Nigeria with section mean = 3.42 and Standard Deviation of 0.96. However, the teachers disagreed with this statement: second time offender's name should be written in black book (Mean = 2.16, S.D =1.05). On the overall, the section mean and Standard Deviation were found to be 3.42 and 0.90 respectively. This indicated that majority of the teachers agreed that all the items listed are different ways of curbing bullying among senior secondary school students in North central, Nigeria.

**Table 3.** Female teachers' opinions on how to curb bullying in secondary schools

| S/N                 | Items  | SA | A  | D  | SD | Mean        | Std. Dev.   | Decision     |
|---------------------|--|----|----|----|----|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1                   | Anti bullying laws should be enforced in the schools   | 39 | 13 | 0  | 0  | 3.75        | 0.43        | Agree        |
| 2                   | School's rules and regulation should be well spelt out to students, and those related to bullying should be stressed | 44 | 8  | 0  | 0  | 3.85        | 0.36        | Agree        |
| 3                   | House masters and mistresses should be motivated to carry out their duties effectively                               | 50 | 2  | 0  | 0  | 3.96        | 0.19        | Agree        |
| 4                   | Second time offenders name should be written in black book   | 14 | 11 | 17 | 10 | 2.56        | 1.08        | Agree        |
| 5                   | Severe bullying case should be reported in the police station for proper investigation and prosecution               | 22 | 27 | 3  | 0  | 3.37        | 0.59        | Agree        |
| 6                   | Monthly or termly orientation should be organised by schools and government/stake holders                            | 28 | 24 | 0  | 0  | 3.54        | 0.50        | Agree        |
| 7                   | Mentoring programmes in schools should be strengthened   | 41 | 11 | 0  | 0  | 3.79        | 0.41        | Agree        |
| 8                   | Bullied victims should be properly counsel to get them back to face their bully                                      | 30 | 21 | 1  | 0  | 3.56        | 0.53        | Agree        |
| 9                   | Anti bullying clubs should be inaugurated in schools to report incidence of bullying among students                  | 34 | 18 | 0  | 0  | 3.65        | 0.48        | Agree        |
| 10                  | Second time bully offender should be expelled from school.   | 19 | 13 | 13 | 7  | 2.85        | 1.06        | Agree        |
| <b>Section Mean</b> |  |    |    |    |    | <b>3.50</b> | <b>0.80</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

Table 3. shows the female teachers' opinions on how to curb bullying among senior secondary school students in North Central Nigeria. From the Table, it was recorded that the female teachers generally agreed that most of the listed items are the ways to curb bullying in senior secondary schools in North Central, Nigeria. On the overall, the section mean and Standard Deviation were found to be 3.50 and 0.80 respectively. This indicated that majority of the teachers agreed that all the items listed are different ways of curbing bullying among senior secondary school students in North central, Nigeria.

### Testing of Hypotheses

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. To test this hypothesis, t-test statistic was used and the result is shown in table 4.

**Table 4.** T-test result on academic performance of bullied and unbullied science students

| Group     | N   | Mean  | S.D   | df  | Std,Error | t     | Sig.@<br>0.05 | Remark      |
|-----------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----------|-------|---------------|-------------|
| Bullied   | 192 | 53.35 | 11.49 | 447 | 0.829     | 6.479 | 0.000         | Significant |
| Unbullied | 257 | 64.94 | 13.44 |     |           |       |               |             |

Table 4 shows that there is significant difference in the academic performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools. Since p-value = 0.000, which is less than 0.05 level of significance, hence hypothesis 1 is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant difference in the academic performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools in North Central, Nigeria.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference on the opinion of male and female teachers on various ways to curb bullying among senior secondary school science students in North Central Nigeria. To test this hypothesis, Man-Whitney Mean Rank Nonparametric statistic was used and the result is shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5.** Summary of Mann Whitney results of the opinion of male and female teachers on ways to curb bullying among senior secondary school students

| Gender | N  | Sum of Ranks | Mann Whitney U | Z      | Sig @0.05 | Remark          |
|--------|----|--------------|----------------|--------|-----------|-----------------|
| Female | 52 | 2565.00      | 1101.000       | -0.320 | 0.749     | Not Significant |
| Male   | 44 | 2091.00      |                |        |           |                 |

From table 5, the result of the Mann Whitney nonparametric test shows that the computed sum of rank scores is 2565.00 and 2091.00 by female and male respectively. The computed Mann Whitney U value is 1101.000 and the Z score is -0.320. The calculated p - value of 0.749 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Even though the female students obtained higher sum of rank of 2565.00 than the male counterpart of sum of rank

2091.00, this difference is however not significant. Hence, hypothesis 2 is not rejected and it is concluded that there is no significant difference on the opinion of male and female teachers on various ways to curb bullying among senior secondary school science students in North Central Nigeria.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

The following are the summary of the findings of the study:

1. Among science students, unbullied ones significantly perform academically better than the bullied ones.
2. Gender of teachers has no significant influence on the opinion on how bully could be curbed among secondary school science students,

Findings from research question one revealed a mean difference of 11.5913 where the bullied mean score is 53.3542 and unbullied mean score is 64.9455. with the unbullied having a significantly higher mean than the bullied. This result shows that the unbullied students are performing better in their academic work than the bullied counterparts. The associated hypothesis states that: There is no significant difference in the performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. T-test result shows that unbullied students obtained higher mean score than the bullied students. The difference is however significant. Hence, hypothesis 4 is rejected and it is concluded that there is a significant difference in the performance of bullied and unbullied science students in senior secondary schools in North Central Nigeria. This is in line with the findings of Steinmayr, et al., which stated that academic achievement is the outcome that shows the level of performance recorded by any individual in the learning process with goals that were set for the instructional environment in schools, colleges, and universities. Any form of motivation has a significant effect on academic achievement [9]. For instance, in a case where students are not motivated but find themselves in environments that scare them away from studying, their academic achievement is low [10].

There exists a strong correlation between bullying and academic performance, as evidenced in the student's loss of concentration during teaching. Schools and homes are not always safe due to bullying, and the act of bullying affects the emotional, social, and physical wellbeing of a school-aged child. The family and the school are the principal areas where bullying is common and practiced. The family is usually the first environment where learning begins, and any sort of bullying that occurs at home affects the child through anger, which would further be a threat to academic performance in any learning institution. Poor family cohesion, authoritarian parents, physical abuse, and aggressive behaviors are other forms of bullying a child can learn from home and apply at school, which negatively impacts academic performance. The victims of abuse are usually disruptive, aggressive, and very violent, causing harm to everyone in the school environment and making studies extremely difficult. Violent behaviours are common



within children of low income in the inner city with outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and poor educational achievement [11].

Both the victimized and the bully are hyperactive, have an attention problem and are always less accepted by their peers. Any problem associated with bullying has a negative impact on students' academic performance. Exposing students to violence in schools, neighbourhoods and families are all factors that also influence academic achievement negatively. Violent exposure, witnessing violent events either in school or neighbourhood have negative effects on students' academic performance [12].

The findings in relation to research question two revealed a sectional mean score of male teachers to be 3.42 and female teachers to be 3.50 respectively. This shows that the teachers strongly agreed to all the statements as means of curbing bullying in senior secondary schools. Some of the items agreed to are: Anti bullying laws should be enforced in the schools, house masters and mistresses should be motivated to carry out their duties effectively, severe bullying cases should be reported at the police station for proper investigation and prosecution, mentoring programs should be strengthened, antibullying clubs should be inaugurated in the schools to report incidence of bullying [13]. However, the teachers strongly disagreed with this statement: Second time offender's name should be written in black book. The associated hypothesis states that: There is no significant difference on the opinion of male and female teachers on various ways to curb bullying among senior secondary school science students in North Central Nigeria. Mann Whitney analysis shows a Z-Score of -0.320 which is not significant and therefore, hypothesis five is not rejected and it is concluded that there is no significant difference on the opinion of male and female teachers on various ways to curb bullying among senior secondary school science students in North Central Nigeria. This is in line with the study of different authors on how to curb bullying to be at individual level, school level and community level. According to Kowalski et al, teaching coping skills and stress management can help to reduce bullying tendencies, teaching empathy and social skills can help prevent bullying, promoting self-esteem and self-confidence can reduce bullying behaviour at individual level [14].

At school level, Smith and O'Higgins, mentioned that creating a positive school climate and culture can prevent bullying where Underwood et al and Blaya, were of the opinion that implementing evidence-based bullying prevention programs and training teachers to recognize and respond to bullying are crucial can reduce bullying incidents. At the community level, community-based initiatives such as parent-teacher associations, can help prevent bullying. According to Kosciw et al, engaging local organisations and businesses in bullying prevention efforts can promote a safer community. Parents can prevent bullying by fostering open communication, encouraging empathy and modelling positive behaviour. Peer support and encouraging bystanders to intervene can also prevent bullying. Kowalski et al, were also of the opinion that technology-based intervention such as online counselling and blocking bullying messages can help to prevent cyberbullying. They are also of the opinion that severe punishment can provide accountability for bullying behaviour. Kosciw et al, emphasize importance of school-wide

prevention programs and policies as a means of curbing bullying. In summary, the following are various ways of curbing bullying as suggested by authors: Develop and implement anti-bullying policies, create a supportive and safe school climate, foster open communication among students, teachers and parents, organize anti-bullying campaigns and events, provide teacher training on bullying, monitor classroom and corridors, assign classroom mentors, develop student leadership programs, create student bullying reporting system, organise student led anti-bullying campaigns, establish peer support groups or clubs, create parent bullying reporting system, collaborate with local law enforcement, provide counselling for victims, collaborate with mental health professionals, implement clear consequences for bullying, monitor and evaluate disciplinary effectiveness and implement technology-based initiatives [15].

### ***Discussion***

The findings of this study reveal a significant negative impact of bullying on the academic performance of senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria. The data indicate that unbullied students achieve significantly higher academic scores compared to their bullied counterparts, reinforcing previous research that links bullying with diminished academic engagement and lower achievement levels. This outcome aligns with the theory that bullying creates a hostile learning environment, leading to stress, anxiety, and decreased concentration, which in turn hampers students' academic progress.

Furthermore, the study identifies gender disparities in bullying dynamics, with males being more likely to perpetrate bullying and females being the primary victims. This finding is consistent with global research trends that suggest boys tend to engage more in direct bullying behaviors, while girls experience more psychological forms of victimization. The psychological distress resulting from bullying among female students could further contribute to their reduced academic performance.

In response to these challenges, the study highlights various strategies for addressing bullying, including the enforcement of anti-bullying policies, the establishment of a supportive school climate, teacher training, and student-led anti-bullying initiatives. These interventions align with best practices in bullying prevention and underscore the need for a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to mitigate bullying in schools.

The novelty of this research lies in its regional focus, providing empirical data on how bullying specifically affects science students in North Central Nigeria. By offering practical recommendations tailored to this context, including monitoring bullying-related absenteeism and implementing academic support systems for victims, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for evidence-based anti-bullying interventions in educational settings. Future research should explore the long-term psychological effects of bullying on academic motivation and career aspirations among affected students.

The study also revealed that unbullied students perform better academically than the bullied students and that male are the most bully gender while female are the most

bullied gender. Various means of curbing bullying was also accepted by this study which includes: Development and implementation of anti-bullying policies, create a supportive and safe school climate, foster open communication among students, teachers and parents, organize anti-bullying campaigns and events, provide teacher training on bullying, monitor classroom and corridors, assign classroom mentors, develop student leadership programs, create student bullying reporting system, organise student led anti-bullying campaigns, establish peer support groups or clubs, create parent bullying reporting system, collaborate with local law enforcement, provide counselling for victims, collaborate with mental health professionals, implement clear consequences for bullying, monitor and evaluate disciplinary effectiveness and implement technology-based initiatives [16].

Based on the findings, the study recommends that secondary school education boards in the North Central should formulate anti-bullying policies for all secondary schools in the region. School administrators should ensure full implementation [17]. Anti-bullying clubs should be established in all secondary schools to be creating awareness on the danger of students bullying. School should provide academic support for victims. School should monitor and address bullying related absenteeism and monitor and evaluate bullying prevention efforts and get students involved in the whole process.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Findings :** This study establishes that bullying significantly hinders the academic performance of senior secondary school science students in North Central, Nigeria, with unbullied students demonstrating higher achievement levels. Furthermore, the study identifies gender disparities, where males are more likely to be bullies while females are predominantly victims. The findings emphasize the urgency of addressing bullying through comprehensive intervention strategies. **Implications :** The study highlights the need for proactive measures in educational institutions, such as implementing anti-bullying policies, fostering a safe school climate, and engaging stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and law enforcement, in bullying prevention. Ensuring academic support for victims and addressing bullying-related absenteeism can mitigate its negative impact on students' learning experiences and overall well-being. **Limitations :** The study is limited to government co-educational senior secondary schools in Niger State and the Federal Capital Territory, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or school types, including private or single-gender schools. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases in participants' responses. **Future Research :** Further studies should explore the long-term psychological and socio-emotional effects of bullying on students' academic motivation and career aspirations. Comparative analyses across different educational levels and school types could provide deeper insights into the prevalence and impact of bullying. Additionally, the effectiveness of specific anti-bullying

interventions, including digital monitoring systems and peer mentoring programs, warrants further investigation.

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