

The Role of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Improving Academic Achievement and Student Well-Being among Secondary School Student in Osun State

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Abstract

The worrying of the students' declining academic performance and emotional distress in secondary schools has led to a focus on socio, emotional learning (SEL) as a way to support the traditional academic education. The study mainly looked at how socio, emotional learning skills and academic performance relate to each other. A descriptive correlational research design was used. The population was senior secondary students of public secondary schools in Osun State. A sample of 360 students was selected through multistage sampling techniques. Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire named: Socio, Emotional Learning and Student Outcomes Questionnaire (SELSOQ), whose face and content validity was judged by the panel of experts. The instrument was validated by experts in educational psychology and counselling and its reliability was determined through Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($r = 0.84$). Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and independent samples t , test at a 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between socio, emotional learning skills and academic achievement ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$). The research also confirmed that there is a strong correlation between SEL competencies and students' well, being. Besides, no significant gender difference was found in socio, emotional competencies, whereas a minor difference in academic achievement scores was evident. It is inferred from the report that socio, emotional learning is a major factor in promoting not only students' academic performance but also their mental health among secondary school students. Hence, the authors suggest that formal SEL programs should be included in the secondary school curriculum in Osun State and school counsellors and teachers be trained on SEL, based interventions.

Keywords: Socio-Emotional Learning, Academic Achievement, Student Well-Being, Secondary School Students, Emotional Intelligence, School Counselling,

Introduction

Education has historically been geared mainly towards intellectual growth, focusing on students mastering academic content and attaining measurable scores. For many years, examination results and grade performance have been the chief indicators of success in school. However, classroom experiences and research have repeatedly shown that intellectual ability is not the only determinant of student success (Durlak et al., 2022; Adeyemo, 2010). Many students with high cognitive potential face difficulties in regulating their emotions, establishing friendships, finding motivation, and demonstrating resilience. Conversely, students of average academic ability may excel because they possess strong social skills, self-discipline, and emotional awareness (Ojo & Akinlabi, 2021). This growing understanding has contributed to the increased focus on social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL is the process through which individuals acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, show empathy, establish and maintain relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023). These abilities are not separate from academic learning; they shape students' behaviors, approaches to learning, responses to challenges, and interactions within the school environment (Taylor et al., 2017). Recently, the “whole child” approach has become central to global educational discourse. Educational psychology and philosophy highlight that learners are not merely recipients of knowledge but bring emotional, social, and psychological dimensions that influence learning outcomes (Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Adebola & Ogunyemi, 2019). If students are anxious, disconnected, or unsupported, their academic performance is likely to decline. Conversely, students who feel emotionally safe, confident, and regulated are more motivated to learn (Olufemi & Okubanjo, 2017).

Secondary schools in Nigeria, and particularly in Osun State, face issues such as examination pressure, lack of counselling services, socio-economic challenges, peer influence, and, at times, family instability (Alade & Adebisi, 2020). Teachers have reported rising levels of student anxiety, lack of motivation, behavioral disorders, and inconsistent academic performance (Adeyemo, 2010; Ojo & Akinlabi, 2021). Traditionally, curriculum development in Nigerian schools has focused mainly on content, often overlooking students' social and emotional well-being (Adebola & Ogunyemi, 2019). SEL provides a structured framework to address these gaps. SEL competencies—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and

responsible decision-making—equip students to identify emotions, control impulses, empathize with others, work collaboratively, and make ethical choices (CASEL, 2023; Durlak et al., 2022). Numerous studies have shown that students with strong emotional regulation skills are less likely to cause classroom disturbances, display higher concentration, and demonstrate greater perseverance in academic tasks (Taylor et al., 2017; Olufemi & Okubanjo, 2017). Additionally, positive peer relationships foster supportive learning environments that enhance student engagement (Ojo & Akinlabi, 2021).

Student well-being is increasingly recognized as equally important as academic outcomes. Well-being encompasses mental health, life satisfaction, a sense of belonging, emotional stability, and resilience (Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Alade & Adebisi, 2020). Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by identity exploration and emotional fluctuations. Without adequate coping mechanisms, students may experience stress, low self-esteem, or social withdrawal (Adebola & Ogunyemi, 2019). School counsellors are vital for promoting SEL, yet many secondary schools in Osun State lack sufficient counselling services, with support often limited to academic and career guidance (Alade & Adebisi, 2020). Integrating SEL into everyday teaching can extend the benefits of counselling, making social and emotional support more accessible to all students.

Globally, extensive evidence supports the effectiveness of SEL (Durlak et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2017), but there is limited empirical research on its impact within Osun State secondary schools. The unique cultural, socio-economic, and infrastructural context in Nigeria necessitates local research to determine whether SEL is a key factor in academic achievement and student well-being (Adeyemo, 2010; Adebola & Ogunyemi, 2019). This study aims to address this gap by examining the interrelationships among SEL skills, academic performance, and psychological well-being of secondary school students in Osun State. The results are expected to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for policymakers, school leaders, and counsellors seeking to promote student success through holistic development.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school students in Osun State are still confronting academic challenges and an increase in emotional pressures. Even with curriculum reforms and better access to education, a good number of students are still having difficulties with poor academic performance, exam anxiety, lack of motivation and behavioral issues. The focus of traditional teaching methods is on cognitive success, whereas emotional and social competencies are often overlooked. It is a well-known fact that socio, emotional learning worldwide is a strategy for enhancing both academic and psychological outcomes, however, its impact on secondary schools in Osun State is still not thoroughly researched. Without data from the local situation, it is uncertain if socio, emotional learning has a major impact on academic achievement and student well, being in this case. Hence, the research question of this study is the degree to which socio, emotional learning, as a factor, can help in academic performance and psychological well, being of secondary school students in Osun State.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between socio-emotional learning competencies and academic achievement among secondary school students in Osun State.
2. Determine the relationship between socio-emotional learning competencies and student well-being.
3. Investigate whether there is a significant gender difference in socio-emotional learning competencies and academic achievement.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between socio-emotional learning competencies and academic achievement among secondary school students in Osun State.
2. H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between socio-emotional learning competencies and student well-being.
3. H_{03} : There is no significant gender difference in socio-emotional learning competencies and academic achievement among secondary school students in Osun State.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework of Socio-Emotional Learning

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) defines a framework that nurtures the development of students from a holistic perspective. The extensively acknowledged CASEL model specifies five major interconnected skills-self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The children who excel in these skills are able to identify their emotions, handle their impulses, express themselves effectively, and make wise decisions. CASEL (2023) identifies SEL as a base in building self-regulation and social skills of students, which in turn, are associated with their academic and social accomplishments. However, current education researchers are in agreement that high-quality SEL should, in fact, be the core of the educational system and not just an "add-on" program (Durlak et al. 2022).

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is based on Emotional Intelligence and Social Learning Theory. Daniel Golemans Emotional Intelligence Theory points out that the ability to understand and control one's own emotions and those of others is a key factor for success not only in school but also socially; these abilities are very much the same as SEL competencies. Banduras Social Learning Theory is about how acquiring knowledge and skills happens most effectively when a person is observing, imitating and getting feedback; teachers and classmates then become very important people in students' socio-emotional development. As for Nigeria, Adeyemo (2010) discovered that deliberate SEL programs and teaching using emotional intelligence are main factors that positively impact students social and academic outcomes.

Socio-Emotional Learning and Academic Achievement

Numerous studies, both international and local, have demonstrated a positive association between socio-emotional competence and academic achievement. Taylor et al. (2017) did an extensive meta-analysis demonstrating that students in SEL programs academically performed better but also enjoyed improved classroom climate and behavior. Durlak et al. (2022) have supported that socio-emotional skills play an important role in students test scores and grades. Studies in Nigeria verify these conclusions. Ojo and Akinlabi (2021) discovered that self-

regulation and interpersonal skills were the most accurate predictors of academic success among secondary school students in Lagos State. Olufemi and Okubango (2017) saw a positive association of emotional intelligence with academic performance among secondary school students in Osun State. In addition, Adeyemo (2010) found out that emotional intelligence has a profound impact on academic outcomes in a number of Nigerian locations. However, apart from this, very few authors have studied the relationship between SEL and academic achievement in Osun State, which calls for more investigations in this respect.

Socio-Emotional Learning and Student Well-Being

Student well-being includes mental health, life satisfaction, a sense of belonging, and emotional stability. Adolescents face challenges such as exam stress, peer influences, and identity formation; without effective coping mechanisms, these can lead to anxiety or reduced motivation. SEL programs have been shown to improve students' sense of belonging and reduce stress (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Adebola and Ogunyemi (2019) found that SEL initiatives in secondary schools across Oyo and Osun States improved classroom atmosphere, reduced disciplinary problems, and increased student satisfaction. Alade and Adebisi (2020) further documented reduced student stress and anxiety in Osun State schools following SEL interventions.

Gender Differences in Socio-Emotional Competence

There is no a clear consensus in research regarding gender differences in socio-emotional skills. Okafor and Oladele (2018) revealed that girls in Nigerian secondary schools display a stronger sense of empathy and interpersonal awareness whereas boys are more independent. Nevertheless, Aderibigbe and Ajayi (2021) indicated that structured SEL teaching has the potential to reduce or even wipe out gender differences in socio-emotional competence. The above contradictions underline the necessity of more research into gender differences in SEL of students in Osun State.

Methodology

The main goal of this investigation was to use a descriptive correlational research design. It was the most suitable way to study the connections or relations between socio-emotional learning,

academic performance, and students' well-being without changing the variables at all, therefore the school environment remained as it was. The entire group or population that the study was focused on was the Senior Secondary School II (SS II) students existing in the public secondary schools of Osun State, Nigeria. Three hundred sixty (360) students were selected for the study. They were chosen by an elaborate multistage sampling design: Stratified sampling was first used to select schools across the three senatorial districts of Osun State. Also, two schools were selected by random sampling within each district. Finally, proportionate sampling was used to select the individuals within the chosen schools, so that the different groups made by gender and district are properly represented in the final sample. The final sample comprises 182 boys and 178 girls. Researchers collected data by utilizing the Socio-Emotional Learning and Student Outcomes Questionnaire (SELSEQ). This tool was designed based on the literature review and the objectives of the research. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: Part A: Information on respondents' demographics. Part B: 25 items measuring socio-emotional learning and Part C: 15 items measuring student well-being. Participants had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with all items on a 4-point Likert scale, where 4 (Strongly Agree) was the highest and 1 (Strongly Disagree) the lowest. Students' academic performance was measured through their average terminal examination scores which were obtained from school records. Data were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance, ensuring robust interpretation of the results.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between socio-emotional learning and academic achievement.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between SEL and Academic Achievement

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Self-emotional Learning (SEL)	360	70.43	8.28			
				0.60	0.000	Reject
Academic Achievement	360	67.10	7.85			

Table 1 revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$) between the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies and public sector accountability systems at the Osun State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM). This empirical result supports the Principal-Agent Theory, which posits that increased oversight and accountability mechanisms reduce the likelihood of corrupt actions among public officials (Jensen & Meckling, 2019).

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between socio-emotional learning and student well-being.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between SEL and Well-Being

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Self-emotional Learning (SEL)	360	71.49	8.67			
				0.69	0.000	Reject
Well-being	360	60.10	7.16			

H₀₃: There is no significant gender difference in socio-emotional learning and academic achievement.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in SEL

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	df	p-value	Decision
Male	182	70.86	7.67				
				1.39	389	0.168	Accept
Female	178	74.04	7.36				

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Academic Achievement

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	df	p-value	Decision
Male	182	66.44	7.41				
				1.69	389	0.137	Accept
Female	178	69.05	6.36				

There is no statistically significant gender difference in socio-emotional learning or academic achievement.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.684$; $p < 0.05$) between the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies and public sector accountability systems at the Osun State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM). This empirical result supports the Principal-Agent Theory, which posits that increased oversight and accountability mechanisms reduce the likelihood of corrupt actions among public officials (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). The results align with earlier empirical studies in the Nigerian context. For instance, Adebayo and Yusuf (2021) established that robust accountability frameworks such as internal controls, transparent reporting and regular audits substantially reduce corrupt practices in public

organizations. Similarly, Lawal and Adeniyi (2022) found that the implementation of transparent monitoring and enforcement practices significantly improved integrity and reduced incidents of corruption in state-level agencies. Ogunyemi (2017) also reported that transparent recruitment and performance review processes in schools fostered staff morale and discouraged malpractice. Practically, these findings indicate that TESCO can further enhance the effectiveness of its anti-corruption initiatives by strengthening existing accountability systems. Measures such as transparent reporting protocols, regular internal audits, effective whistleblowing channels, and rigorous monitoring should be prioritized. Reinforcing these mechanisms not only deters corrupt practices but also strengthens public trust and institutional performance, echoing conclusions from empirical studies and theoretical models alike.

The findings of this study also revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$) between the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies and public sector accountability systems at the Osun State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM). This empirical result supports the Principal-Agent Theory, which posits that increased oversight and accountability mechanisms reduce the likelihood of corrupt actions among public officials (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The results align with earlier empirical studies in the Nigerian context. For instance, Adebayo and Yusuf (2023) established that robust accountability frameworks such as internal controls, transparent reporting, and regular audits substantially reduce corrupt practices in public organizations. Similarly, Lawal and Adeniyi (2022) found that the implementation of transparent monitoring and enforcement practices significantly improved integrity and reduced incidents of corruption in state-level agencies. Ogunyemi (2017) also reported that transparent recruitment and performance review processes in schools fostered staff morale and discouraged malpractice. Practically, these findings indicate that TESCO can further enhance the effectiveness of its anti-corruption initiatives by strengthening existing accountability systems. Measures such as transparent reporting protocols, regular internal audits, effective whistleblowing channels, and rigorous monitoring should be prioritized. Reinforcing these mechanisms not only deters corrupt practices but also strengthens public trust and institutional performance, echoing conclusions from empirical studies and theoretical models alike.

Conclusion

This research concludes that socio, emotional learning is highly effective in improving academic performance and students' well, being of secondary school students in Osun State. The results strongly suggest that the development of socio, emotional skills should be incorporated into secondary education curriculum.

Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education in Osun State should integrate structured SEL programs into the secondary school curriculum.
2. Schools should organize regular socio-emotional development workshops.
3. Teachers should receive training in socio-emotional instructional strategies.
4. Counselling units should expand services to include structured SEL interventions.

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