EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ADJUSTMENT TO BOARDING ENVIRONMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE NORTH WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study determined how emotional intelligence variables predict adjustment to boarding environment of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial, Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. Related literature was reviewed. The correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was all the 841 JSS 1 students in ten schools with functional boarding facilities in the District. A sample of 670 respondents was selected through multistage sampling technique "The National Health Service Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire" and" Students Adjustment to College Questionnaire" were adapted for the study. The reliability coefficients of 0.73 and 0.94 were obtained on the adapted NHSEIQ and SACQ respectively, using Cronbach Alpha statistical analysis. The instruments were face validated by experts, two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one from the Department of Psychological Foundations of Education. Data analysis was done using simple and multiple linear regression statistics and all hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. Results of the study revealed that emotional intelligence variables predicted adjustment of secondary school students to boarding environment individually and jointly. It was therefore recommended among others that in order to facilitate a seamless transition to the boarding environment, counsellors should make use of self-awareness assessment tools to gauge students' strengths and areas discover for improvement.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, adjustment, boarding environment

Introduction

Living in the boarding house for numerous children marks their initial departure from the familiar surroundings of their home and the constant presence of their parents, which they have been accustomed to since birth. The first year of boarding at a secondary school can prove to be a daunting experience for both students and parents alike. Again, adjusting to a new environment may be a huge task for many students. There are various factors that can influence students' stay and adjustment in the

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dormitory, among which are relationships with mates, senior students, school authorities, a regimented lifestyle, feeding habits, time use, hygiene habits, and emotional engagements. Interventions through guidance and counselling programmes may be necessary to address these factors in order to ensure a student's well-being.

Interactions with students in institutions with boarding facilities indicate that some students easily adjust to the boarding environment, while others find it difficult to cope and get along with their colleagues. The researcher's experiences in the boarding environment were neither palatable nor easy because of the hostile nature of the environment. Some first-year students leave the dormitory and switch to becoming day students due to the unpleasant nature of some boarding experiences. However, some students may find it easy to relate to and get along with others in the dormitory setting, whereas others may find it incredibly challenging. Connectivity and integration are crucial for children to be satisfied with happenings in the environment, succeed academically, and to remain in school (Derek *et al.,* 2018a).

Students are social beings, and as such, one of their basic, natural needs is to establish and maintain interpersonal connections and relationships with one another. However, the boarding environment in a secondary school is unique, sometimes exposing the students to unanticipated challenges. The complexity involved in human relationships informs the need for students to make some adjustments so that they can get along with others meaningfully in the boarding environment. These young students face enormous challenges as they attempt to adapt to new school environments, which include adjusting to classroom routines, boarding house rigours, performing increasing academic tasks, and negotiating the complexities of interpersonal relationships with classmates, dormitory mates, and teachers. It is crucial for individuals to adapt well to a new environment, such as a boarding school, as they are required to make social, emotional, personal, and academic adjustments (Arul and Arul, 2016). According to Lakhani and Chandel (2017a), failure to adjust properly can have long-lasting negative effects on a person's personality. College adjustment is a psychological process that new students experience as they transition to the next stage of their college lives (Zhuhra *et al.,* 2022).

Social adjustment problems often show up among children who find themselves in new environments (Simarmata and Rahayu, 2017). Adjusting to a new environment is usually difficult for some children, especially those in their pre-pubescence stage. At this stage, children are still primarily concrete thinkers but are beginning to be able to think in more abstract ways and about more abstract concepts. With the onset of puberty, children begin to experience a great number of changes in their physical bodies and psychological makeup. Most children can see things from another's perspective and, because of this, can show genuine empathy for other people's experiences and feelings. Students who fail to adjust to new environments may become rigid and form unhealthy habits because they may become victims of bullying, violence, sexual harassment, and intimidation, and also show signs of being low on emotional intelligence (Frederico and Casey, 2013).

According to Chapin (2014), emotional intelligence has been suggested as a critical factor in successful adjustment to life in general and to work and academics in particular. Emotional intelligence is the ability to assess, classify, and monitor emotions. It also involves the ability to regulate one's emotions. According to McLeish (2016), Daniel Goleman's emotional intelligence model consists of five elements, namely, self-awareness (understanding one's own emotions), self-regulation (controlling

one's emotions), self-motivation (encouraging oneself), social skills (managing relationships), and empathy (identifying other people's emotions).

Empathy has an effect on a person's behavior and social relationships with others (McDonald and Messinger, 2011). Those who are unable to understand their own emotions are totally unable to understand the feelings of those around them (Libbrecht *et al.,* 2013). People with empathy may be necessary in a social setting like a boarding home in order for residents to acclimatize to their surroundings without incident. Secondary school students should be able to regulate their reactions to strong emotions like frustration, excitement, anger, and embarrassment in the boarding environment. Adolescents often struggle with self-regulation, just like adults. According to Cuncic (2022), self-regulation can play an important role in relationships, well-being, and overall success in life. Where the skill of regulating one's emotions is absent, there could be some difficulties in adapting to environments and making significant achievements in various fields.

Statement of the Problem

When people are exposed to new environments and experiences, they strive to adjust their abilities and resources to the demands of the new setting. Boarding houses in secondary schools seem to be settings that expose new students to different forms of psychological stress and maladjustment. Much antisocial behaviour, including bullying, victimisation, sexual harassment, and physical assault, seem to result from maladjustment experiences in boarding houses. For students who have experienced victimisation, harassment, or abuse in boarding homes, building and maintaining positive relationships with others can be a daunting task. The Nigerian social media community has voiced their dissatisfaction with the disturbing trend of inhumane treatment of students in some Nigerian boarding schools and the numerous negative outcomes that have resulted. Tragically, there have been fatalities in boarding schools, and students have suffered from bullying, physical harm, and emotional trauma.

Students attending boarding schools may encounter various obstacles that can impede their academic progress and conduct. Individuals who have been subjected to antisocial behaviour may encounter difficulties adjusting to unfamiliar surroundings and may exhibit disruptive behaviour. Additionally, conflicts within the dormitories can further complicate the already demanding task of residing in the shared living quarters. The researcher observed that some students attending secondary school in boarding houses in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District have encountered difficulties in the boarding environment. This has led some of them to leave the dormitory and choose to attend as day students instead. The researcher was therefore motivated to conduct this study so as to determine the extent to which emotional intelligence variables predict the adjustment of first-year students to boarding environments in secondary schools in the North West Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which emotional intelligence predicts adjustment of first year students to boarding environments in secondary schools in North West Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:
1. Determine how self-regulation predicts first year secondary school students' adjustment to boarding environment.

2. Determine how empathy predicts first year secondary school students' adjustment to boarding environment.

Research questions

This study specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does self-regulation predict how first-year secondary school students adjust to boarding environment?
2. To what extent does empathy predict how first-year secondary school students adjust to boarding environment?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

1. Self-regulation does not significantly predict the adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students
2. Empathy does not significantly predict the adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students

Theoretical framework

Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (EI) (1996)

Goleman (1996) created a framework that explains emotional intelligence through five elements, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. He realized that a high intelligence quotient doesn't guarantee success in life, which sparked his interest in EI. In his book, Emotional Intelligence, he mentions how some academically brilliant individuals failed socially or in corporate life. On the other hand, he identifies others who weren't academically distinguished but managed to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives. Goleman linked emotional intelligence to business success. In his later book, "Working with Emotional Intelligence", he listed 25 EI competencies or surface behaviours and explained how having high emotional intelligence can be the key to success.

The five elements that explain emotional intelligence are described as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Each of these elements has distinctive characteristics, as outlined. Self-awareness as examining how one's emotions affect performance and using values to guide decision-making Self-assessment as looking at one's strengths and weaknesses, learning from experiences, and being self-confident and certain about one's capabilities, values, and goals. Self-regulation means controlling one's temper, controlling stress by being more positive and action-centered, retaining composure and the ability to think clearly under pressure, handling impulses well, and nurturing trustworthiness and self-restraint. Motivation means enjoying challenge and stimulation, seeking out achievement, commitment, the ability to take the initiative, optimism, and being guided by personal preferences in choosing goals. Empathy is the ability to see other people's points of view, behaving openly and honestly, avoiding the tendency to stereotype others, and being culturally aware. Social skills are the use of influencing skills such as persuasion, good communication with others, including employees, listening skills, negotiation, cooperation, dispute resolution, the ability to inspire

and lead others, the capacity to initiate and manage change, and the ability to deal with others' emotions, particularly group emotions.

This theory explains that managing emotions involves the ability to effectively monitor, stay open to them, and be eager to detach from them. It is the ability to solve emotion-based problems in a manner that enhances personal growth and social relations. The relevance of emotional intelligence theory to the present study is that all humans are emotional beings. The ability to monitor and manage one's emotions is more beneficial to getting alone with people in a social setting than the ability to read, write, and solve mathematical problems. Emotional intelligence supports human thoughts and interactions in meaningful and adaptive ways. This model is of the view that students can see emotions as sources of information that could help them be sensitive to happenings in their environment and relationships with others.

Methodology

A correlational research design was adopted for the study. Correlation research is a non-experimental quantitative design in which the researcher applies correlational statistics to measure and describe the degree of association among variables or sets of scores (Creswell, 2012). In this study, a correlation design was used to examine the extent to which emotional intelligence variables such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social skills, and empathy predict individually and jointly the adjustment of students to the boarding environment. The population was made up of 841 junior secondary (JSS1) students in 10 public secondary schools with functional boarding facilities in Akwa Ibom State North West Senatorial District, Nigeria (LEC, 2022).

The sample was made up of 670 first-year secondary school students selected using the multistage sampling procedure. Local government areas that have secondary schools with boarding facilities were selected, and those that are public were identified. Furthermore, one boarding school in each federal constituency out of the four was randomly selected to form the sample. Two instruments were adapted for data collection in this study. The National Health Service Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (NHSEIQ) LLA (London Leadership Academy, (2016) was adapted to measure the students' emotional intelligence level. The original instrument consisted of 50 items, 10 items for each sub-variable, with a scoring point of 1–5, interpreted as 1 Does not apply, 3 Applies half the time, and 5 Always applies. The adapted version used for this study consisted of 15 items, five items for each sub-variable (self-regulation, motivation, and empathy) of the study, and was scaled as follows:

SA   -   Strongly Agree   -   4points
A   -   Agree   -   3 points
D   -   Disagree   -   2 points
SD   -   Strongly Disagree   -   1 point.

The second instrument, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) by Baker and Siryk (1987), was adapted to measure the students' adjustment to the boarding environment. The original SACQ is a 67-item assessment comprising four sub-scales measuring academic adjustment (24 items), social adjustment (20 items), personal-emotional adjustment (15 items), and institutional adjustment (15 items). The original reliability coefficients of the instrument were stated as follows: 0.81

to 0.90 for academic adjustment, 0.83 to 0.91 for social adjustment, 0.77 to 0.86 for personal-emotional adjustment, 0.85 to 0.91 for institutional adjustment, and 0.92 to 0.95 for the full scale. Scores were rated on a nine-point Likert scale, ranging from "Not applying to me at All to all applying very closely to me".

The adapted version consisted of 20 items drawn from the sub-scale measuring social, personal, emotional, and institutional adjustments and rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly (4 points) to Strongly Disagree (1 point). To determine the internal consistency of the instrument, a trial testing using 35 students who did not take part in the study was carried out. The scores obtained were subjected to Cronbach Alpha Analysis for reliability coefficient. The overall reliability coefficients of 0.73 and 0.94 for NHSEIQ and SACQ respectively were obtained. These coefficients revealed that the instruments were reliable and suitable to be used for this study. The researcher, with the help of three well-trained research assistants, administered the instruments to all JSS 1 boarding students in the selected schools after obtaining permission from the respective school principals. A total of 670 instruments were collected and returned. Out of this number, 660 were found to have been correctly filled and therefore fit for use in the data analysis. Data collected were analyzed using Simple and Multiple Linear Regression Statistics. The R and R^2 Values (coefficient) of Simple Linear Regression Statistic were used to answer the research questions based on the interpretation scale of + or -1 while the null hypotheses were tested using significant values at 0.05 alpha level of significance. It was decided that the null hypotheses would be accepted when significant value was greater than 0.05 and rejected if less than or equal to 0.05. The decision rule used to interpret the R-value of linear regression would be based on the following values:

0.10 - .19	Very weak extent
.20 - .39	Weak extent
.40 - .59	Moderate extent
.60 - .69	High extent
.70 - .99	Very high extent
0	No extent
1.0	Perfect extent

RESULTS

Research Question 1

To what extent does self-regulation predict the adjustment of first-year secondary school students to the boarding environment in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District?

Hypothesis 1

Self-regulation does not significantly predict adjustment of first year secondary school students to boarding environment in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District.

To answer the research question and test the null hypothesis, simple linear regression statistic was used in analyzing the data. The result is shown in table 1

Table 1 : **Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Self-Regulation and Adjustment to Boarding Environment of First-Year Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District**

Variables	R	R^2	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R^2	Remarks
Self-regulation Adjustment	0.451	0.203	20.3%	0.200	Moderate Extent of Prediction

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	25.565	3.836		6.665	0.000*
	SELF-REGULATION	1.655	0.227	0.451	7.287	0.000*

*= Significant at 0.05 alpha level. Source: Researcher's survey (2023)

In Table 1 the results reveal that R-value is 0.451 and R^2 is 0.203. The R-value of 0.451 indicates positive and moderate extent of prediction, while R^2 value of 0.203 which is the coefficient of determination show the extent of prediction on how self-regulation predict adjustment of first-year secondary school students to boarding environment in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District. In addition, 20.3% variance in adjustment of first-year secondary school students is predicted by self-regulation. This means that self-regulation moderately predicted adjustment to boarding environment of first-year secondary school students.

To determine whether the prediction was significant, the significant value of 0.000 was compared to and found to be less than the critical p- value of 0.05 with 1 and 208 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that self-regulation significantly predicted adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District. Table 4.3 further shows that the Beta value (the relative influence of adjustment of first year secondary school students to boarding environment) is 0.451 and its associated t-value (7.237) was significant at 0.05 level. Thus, since 0.000 level is less than 0.05 alpha level, it shows that self-regulation significantly predicted adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students.

Research Question 1

To what extent does empathy predict the adjustment to boarding environment of first-year secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District?

Hypothesis 2

Empathy does not significantly predict adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District.

To answer the research question and test the null hypothesis, simple linear regression statistic was used in analyzing the data. The result is shown in table 4.4

Table 2 **Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Empathy and Adjustment to Boarding Environment of First-Year Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District**

Variables	R	R^2	Extent of Prediction	Adjusted R^2	Remarks
Empathy	0.298	0.089	8.09%	0.084	Low

Adjustment

Extent of Prediction

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	37.640	3.513		10.713	0.000*
	EMPATHY	0.963	0.214	0.298	4.501	0.000*

*= Significant at 0.05 alpha level. Source: Researcher's survey (2023)

In Table 2 the results revealed R-value to be 0.298 and R^2 to be 0.089. The R-value of 0.298 indicates positive and low extent of prediction, while R^2 value of 0.089 which is the coefficient of determination show the extent of prediction on how empathy predicted adjustment to the boarding environment of first-year secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District. In addition, 8.09% variance in adjustment of first-year secondary school students is predicted by empathy. This means that empathy lowly predicted adjustment of first-year secondary school students.

To determine whether the prediction was significant, the sig. value of 0.000 was compared to and found to be less than the critical p- value of .05 level of significance, with 1 and 208 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that empathy significantly predicted adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District. Table 2 further shows that the Beta value (the relative influence of adjustment of first year secondary school students to boarding environment) is 0.298 and its associated t-value (4.501) was significant at .05 level. Thus, since 0.000 level is less than 0.05 alpha level, it was inferred that empathy significantly predicted adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students.

Discussion of Findings

The result of simple linear regression analysis indicated that self-regulation predicted moderately and significantly adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary schools students. The reason for this result could be because self-regulation is an important factor in helping an individual to adjust to a new environment and belong in a group. The boarding environment is a regimented environment that needs some level of self-regulation or discipline to cope with the demands of the environment. People who use more adaptive emotional self-regulation techniques tend to have more positive self-esteem and this helps them to cope effectively in stressful situations.

Boarding environments often require students to have a higher degree of independence and responsibility compared to traditional day schools. Self-regulation skills enable students to manage their time effectively, set goals, prioritize tasks, and make responsible decisions. Students who can regulate their actions and behaviours independently are better equipped to handle the increased autonomy and demands of a boarding environment, leading to a smoother adjustment. Boarding environments typically have structured schedules and routines. Self-regulation skills help students adhere to these routines, manage their time effectively, and follow guidelines and rules.

Regulating their behaviors and adapting to the structured environment, students can establish a sense of stability and predictability, which contributes to their adjustment and overall well-being. Living in close proximity to peers in a boarding environment requires effective self-regulation in social interactions. Students need to manage their emotions, communicate assertively, resolve conflicts constructively, and respect others' boundaries. Self-regulation skills enable students to navigate social dynamics and establish positive relationships.

The finding of the present study is in support of the findings of Imhangbe *et al.* (2018) and Eguzo (2020) which revealed significant relationships between self-regulation and students' adjustment of students. The study of Wilson (2017) which revealed that social adjustment was significantly predicted by self-regulation is also supported by the findings of the present study. The finding of the present study also agrees with that of Nkwoh (2019) which revealed that self-regulation significantly correlated with students' social adjustment in tertiary schools in Abia.

The result from simple linear regression analysis indicated that empathy significantly predicted adjustment to boarding environment of first year secondary school students. The reason for this result is likely because empathy plays a key role in social understanding and interpersonal relationships. Empathy is seen as a predictor of adjustment because human beings are social creatures that gravitate towards quarters where they are listened to, understood and accommodated. This means that students in the boarding house that exhibit empathy can easily relate and get along well with other members of the school community and become easily adjusted to this new environment.

Empathy plays a crucial role in establishing positive relationships with peers, staff, and mentors in a boarding school. Understanding and sharing the feelings of others, students can relate to their peers' experiences, perspectives, and challenges. This ability to empathize fosters a sense of connection, trust, and mutual support, contributing to a positive social environment and enhancing students' adjustment. Boarding schools often have a diverse student population with individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Empathy allows students to appreciate and respect this diversity, promoting a sense of inclusion and belonging. By understanding and valuing the perspectives and experiences of others, students can navigate cultural differences, embrace diversity, and contribute to a harmonious and inclusive boarding community. Empathy is essential for effective conflict resolution and peer mediation. Students who possess empathy are better equipped to listen actively, understand different viewpoints, and seek mutually beneficial solutions.

This empathic approach to resolving conflicts helps prevent escalations, promotes understanding, and fosters collaborative problem-solving, which supports students' adjustment by creating a peaceful and supportive social environment. In a boarding school setting, students may face various emotional challenges, such as homesickness, stress, or academic pressure. Empathy enables students to offer emotional support to their peers. Understanding and sharing the feelings of others, students can provide comfort, encouragement, and understanding, fostering a supportive and caring community that enhances students' adjustment and well-being. Empathy is a key component of social competence, which refers to the ability to navigate social interactions effectively. Students who demonstrate empathy are more likely

to engage in prosocial behaviours, such as kindness, cooperation, and compassion. These behaviors contribute to positive social interactions, peer acceptance, and a sense of belonging, all of which enhance students' adjustment and social integration within the boarding school. Empathy can play a significant role in helping students address homesickness and feelings of loneliness that may arise in a boarding school environment.

Empathizing with peers who may share similar emotions allows students to connect and support each other, mitigating the negative impact of homesickness and loneliness. This empathic support system contributes to students' adjustment by fostering a sense of community and emotional well-being. Empathy is a fundamental component of emotional intelligence, which encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions effectively. Emotional intelligence is linked to better adjustment and well-being in various contexts, including boarding schools. By cultivating empathy, students develop their emotional intelligence, which aids in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and healthy interpersonal relationships.

The finding of the present study is similar to the finding of Ayeni (2018) and Eguzo (2020) which found that social adjustment by students significantly depended on their empathic skills. Also, the study by Simarmata and Rahayu (2017) showed that both assertiveness and empathy correlated significantly with adjustment of adolescents' in South Jakarta.

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