

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between EI and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The study population comprised 4,250 postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample specification was used to draw the sample of 384 students. Stratified random sampling was used to divide the population into smaller subgroups known as strata. Akinboye's 5-Branch Creative Model of Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Academic Achievement (AC) were the two research instruments used for the study. The collected data were subjected to statistical analysis using the mean score and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the t-test and PPMCC were used to test the hypotheses. The study findings revealed that the emotional intelligence of postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria is moderate. The study also shows that the overall academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria is relatively above average. The study also indicated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria. The study further revealed that the emotional intelligence of male and female students did not differ significantly. It was recommended that emotional intelligence should be included in the postgraduate school curriculum to improve the level of students' emotional intelligence competencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in all ramifications is the catalyst for human development, and it is structured into different levels and categories. For humans to be fully integrated into society for local and national development, education is an instrument through which it can be actualized. According to Apeh et al. (2023), a school is an institution of learning, a vehicle, and a transitional point where every planned and structured educational activity occurs. They further posited that learners acquire a wide range of essential skills and socio-cultural virtues from school, which prepares and propels them for the world of work and makes them responsive to their immediate environment and the larger society. This explains why Nigeria's education state continues to be our national discourse at all levels. One of the essential tasks of education in every country is the transmission of its community's cultural heritage, to develop students' talents and prepare them for active community participation. Therefore, educating people for various purposes seems necessary, and success and failure in education have been a primary objective of any educational system around the world. A major concern in the educational setting is the inability of experts to pay attention to studies on emotional intelligence. Most of our academic attention in schools is focused on students' academic achievement without concerted attention to the emotional content that reflects academic achievements, especially among post-graduate students in our universities.

Intelligence is a general mental capability that involves the ability to reason, plan, think abstractly, comprehend ideas, understand language, and learn. According to Robinson (2020), highly intelligent people are not the most successful or the most fulfilled in life. This is because some human beings are academically brilliant but socially inept and unsuccessful at work or in their personal relationships. Therefore, intellectual ability or intelligence quotient (IQ) is insufficient on its own to achieve success in life. Emotional intelligence could also be a fundamental factor for students in achieving academic success. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, use, and manage one's emotions in positive ways to relieve stress. It enables us to communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict. Emotional intelligence is the capacity to manage one's sensitivity and feelings to promote healthy relationships in the environment. It helps build stronger relationships, succeed at school and work, and achieve career and personal goals. It can also help one to connect with feelings, turn intention into action, and make informed decisions about what matters most to them (Segal et al., 2020). EI is something within each of us that is somewhat intangible and determines how we control our behavior, how we deal with our social issues, and how we make decisions that lead to positive results (Mayer et al., in Nwafor, 2018).

Emotional intelligence deals essentially with the aspect of human instinct that motivates one to display positive energy(s) when faced with societal, life, or educational challenges. It produces in a person the intrapersonal and interpersonal ability to design a positive outlook that can enable the individual to gain foremost performance (Jaegar and Eagen in Reuben and Ubulom, 2022). According to Babajide and Amosu (2019), "Emotion is the state of the mind that is related to feelings and thought which may result to some degree of pleasure or displeasure." Therefore, emotional intelligence is the power of a student to be aware of one's emotions, be able to control and express such emotions, and effectively handle interpersonal relationships. The above may reflect on students' academic achievement in school. Hence, students need emotional factors such as self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, empathy, and self-motivation to achieve the Master's Degree or Doctor of Philosophy Degree (Muiga 2020). Emotional intelligence is the ability of students to apply their knowledge of self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, social awareness, and empathy in written and oral communication form from the formative stage of the Program to the summative stage.

Currently, models of human achievement are debating that besides the abilities of analysis and reasoning, the ability of social communications is also effective on the performance of humans, and some evidence shows that

there are different mechanisms in the brain for cognitive and emotional abilities related to social interactions, while intelligence tests measure only cognitive abilities (Jeune in Zirak, 2015). Academic achievement is the measurement of learning activities and its outcome through the assignment of grades to interpret achievement levels within an academic period for promotion and placement in school. One of the performance measures of any educational system is a student's academic achievement, which is the acquisition of the planned outcome. According to Abbas and Khatony (2019), academic achievement is the combination of study methods and skills to accomplish a desirable academic impact and performance in learning activities and exercises that are measurable in the educational system for academic placement and promotion.

The relationship between emotion and academic achievement is complex and bi-directional. Sensations are the relay stations between sensory inputs and thinking. Thus, positively reproducing the input will motivate students to act and achieve objectively (Kumar, 2020). Learning generally has an emotional undertone; hence, emotional intelligence is not opposed to the intelligence quotient. It is not the triumph of the head over the heart; rather, it is a unique intersection of both, since it helps students solve problems and live a more productive life. Several studies have been conducted to determine the relationship between EI and students' academic achievement. For instance, Nnaji et al. (2020) revealed a significant positive relationship between the components of emotional intelligence and students' academic achievement in their study on emotional intelligence and its relationship with students' achievements in mathematics. They further highlighted that EI not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters creativity, helps manage problematic behaviors, and optimizes the time students spend on academic tasks. This shows that students who possess high levels of EI are likely to face fewer behavioral challenges, which contributes positively to their academic performance and time management, ultimately helping them graduate within a standard timeframe.

Nkemakolam et al. (2019) studied the relationships between the six emotional intelligence abilities and the academic performance of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in chemistry and discovered that all emotional intelligence abilities and total emotional intelligence were positively and significantly correlated with the academic performance of students in chemistry. Muiga 2020 in a study on the extent to which emotional intelligence and academic self-efficacy beliefs predict academic achievement of secondary school students found that emotional intelligence and academic achievement have a significant positive relationship. Amalu (2018) conducted another related study on the prediction of academic achievement from emotional intelligence among high school students and discovered that emotional management, self-awareness, self-motivation, social awareness, and empathy significantly predict students' achievement in mathematics. In their study, Oyewunmi et al. (2016) indicated a strong association between emotional intelligence and the academic achievement of university undergraduates.

On the issue of gender, men and women tend to have a shared, gender-specific profile of strong and weak points. Bar-On (2006) analyzed the emotional intelligence of thousands of men and women and found that women are more aware of their emotions, show more empathy, and are more adept interpersonally. Men, on the other hand, are more self-confident and optimistic, adapt more easily, and handle stress better. Jaegar et al. (2017) and Segal et al. (2020) specifically explored the relationship between the emotional intelligence traits of postgraduate students and their academic success. Both studies indicated no statistically significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female students, suggesting that gender does not play a significant role in determining emotional intelligence levels among postgraduate students.

Despite previous findings on the relationship between emotional intelligence and life achievement and academic success as well as emotional intelligence skills among students, such a study had not been conducted among postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria. Moreover, the literature surveyed on gender differences in

academic achievement indicated mixed results with some reporting no gender disparity, some revealing females' superiority in academic achievement when compared with males, and others contradicting it. This research study intends to fill this gap by examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of some postgraduate educational foundations students in North-central Nigeria, with the aim of suggesting training in appropriate emotional competencies necessary for academic achievement, career success, and fulfillment. Unfortunately, most of the public universities in North-central of Nigeria have little or no activities promoting emotional intelligence in their curricula. Not minding the fact that postgraduate students' academic accomplishment in schools may reflect on their capacity to manage personal emotions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Overconcentration on educational performance and achievement quantification on one-sided intelligence, which is the intelligent quotient, has become a concern in the educational system and in the labor market. It is gratifying to note that the quantification of abilities and academic achievement concentrates on the ability of graduates to remember facts and learning contents embedded in the school curriculum, scheme of work, textbooks, and other learning materials. However, it is of great concern today that little or no attention is given to EI, which also contributes to teaching, learning, and academic achievements in schools, especially among postgraduate students in Nigerian universities. The labor market is at the receiving end of trained human resources and end products in different fields of study. Employers of labors do not focus only on the intelligent quotient but also evaluate emotional intelligence in line with the operation of their systems for optimum productivity. It generates a serious challenge when the school system gives little or no attention to EI, which is needed in the labor market. Every employer of labor has eyes on productivity and would normally focus on the qualities of postgraduate students/applicants from various viewpoints of cognitive abilities and emotional competencies.

In North-central Nigeria, some persons who have finished their first degree are engaged in postgraduate studies either within or outside the country. Some of them are either self-employed or employed by government or private sector. As they continue with or without their jobs, those of them that deemed it fit to return to school for a postgraduate diploma (PGD), Masters Degrees (M. Sc./M. Ed) and Doctors of Philosophy (PhD) are often married with children, while some are still searching for a true-life partner. This could result in too many postgraduate dropouts, failure in academic work, quarrels at home and workplace, domestic violence, inability to manage success and failures very well, drug abuse, and so on. On the surface, some people who have either below average, average, or above average in their academic endeavors but with a high level of EIQ could have more success in life than those with a low level of EIQ and a high intellectual quotient. These problems may negatively correlate with the academic achievement of post-graduate students.

This study intends to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria. The following specific objectives were hereby raised to find out:

1. The level of emotional intelligence of postgraduate university students in North Central Nigeria;
2. The academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria;
3. The relationship between the emotional intelligence and academic performance of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria,
4. The difference between male and female students in the emotional intelligence of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the emotional intelligence level of university postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria?
2. What is the academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria?

HYPOTHESES TESTING

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The research design for this study was the descriptive survey research design, which required the use of descriptive statistics, particularly through the calculation and interpretation of means and standard deviations of students. According to Morgan in Rust (2023), the most basic information, reported as measures of central tendency, is often the most useful. Nworgu and Okafor (2019) view survey research design as one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. This study investigated the differences in the emotional intelligence of students and the relationships that might exist with the W GPA gained scores of the students; thus, this design is very much appropriate for the study.

Population and Sample size

The study population comprised 4,250 postgraduate students of public universities in North Central Nigeria. The total number of male and female postgraduate students of public universities in North Central, Nigeria is 2305 males and 1945 females, respectively.

The sample size for this study was 384 postgraduate students (220 males and 164 females) from the Department of Educational Foundations of public universities in North Central Nigeria, in line with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample specification. The sample consisted of 64 students from six states in North-central, Nigeria. The six states are Kogi state, Kwara, Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, and Niger. The sample size was drawn using stratified random sampling, which was used to divide the population into smaller subgroups known as strata. In stratified random sampling or stratification, strata are formed based on members' shared attributes or characteristics. Hence, it enabled the researcher to select postgraduate students specifically from the Department of Educational Foundations of public universities in the six states in North-central Nigeria.

Instrument for Data Collection

Two instruments were used for data collection. The first instrument was Akinboye's 5-Branch Creative Model of EQ. Thus, there were five parts in this model:

- i. Awareness of emotions
- ii. Knowing Emotions
- iii. Applying emotions to creatively and innovatively think.
- iv. Designing saleable values using the energy of emotions
- v. Managing Emotions.

It is 40 items of modified 4-point rating scale type with four categories of responses and numerical values of 4 = Very High Level (VHL), 3 = High Level (HL), 2 = Moderate Level (ML), 1 = Low Level (LL). The modification made to the original version was to adapt to the standards of the postgraduate students. The main modification was to reduce the number of items to thirty.

The students' academic performance was ascertained through the second instrument called Academic Achievement (AC). This information was elicited from the section of the questionnaire that asked the participants to state their last GPA/CGPA scores of the 2022/23 session, which was equally confirmed from the exams and records of the universities.

Procedure for Data Collection

For easy access to respondents for data collection, the researcher employed the assistance of three part-time lecturers in three different public universities where the research was conducted to assist in the distribution of questionnaires, while the researcher equally distributed part of the questionnaires to the remaining three universities. Students confirmed their willingness to participate in the study and completed the pen-on-paper EI-Q, while also providing GPA/CGPA scores of 2022/23 session within three weeks.

Method of Data Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis tools. This study used descriptive statistics, particularly through the calculation and interpretation of means and standard deviations of questionnaire respondents, to answer the research questions while t– test and PPMCC were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of confidence.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the emotional intelligence level of university postgraduate students in central Nigeria?

Table 1: Emotional intelligence level of university postgraduate students in North Central Nigeria
N=384

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	I am aware of my emotions	3.20	.911	High Level
2	I can quite easily express feelings	2.70	.917	High Level
3	I can read other people's emotions	2.94	.931	High Level
4	Nonverbal emotional signals in self and in others	2.67	.883	High Level
5	Awareness of false emotions in others	2.68	.927	High Level
6	Perceived emotions in art	2.99	.871	High Level
7	I am aware of emotions in their various forms	2.56	.943	High Level
8	I know the difference between love and hate.	2.39	1.034	Low Level
9	Feelings help me focus on what is important	2.80	.877	High Level
10	Feelings distract me	2.99	.870	High Level
11	I feel what others feel when they describe the prompting event	3.17	.894	High Level
12	I know how to change a negative mood to a positive one	3.17	.828	High Level
13	Emotional innovation	2.44	.969	Moderate Level
14	Emotional creativity	2.78	.913	High Level
15	I can prompt new ideas when my feelings are positive.	2.58	1.097	High Level
16	My understanding of why people feel the way they feel is expanded when my moods are positive	2.65	.933	High Level

As	17	The active transformation of ideas into value excites me.	2.56	1.033	High Level
	18	I can spot contradictory emotions such as ‘love’ and ‘hate’	2.48	1.036	Moderate Level
	19	I love the spirit of combining ingredients to achieve positive effects	2.52	1.021	High Level
	20	Positive moods prompt intense humor to design new products	2.75	.970	High Level
	21	Combining idea ingredients generates saleable values	2.80	.986	High Level
	22	Positive feelings provoke new changes in my perception new possibilities	2.60	.979	High Level
	23	My emotional ‘what can be’ keeps expanding	2.21	1.003	Low Level
	24	Emotion is the spice of life.	2.62	1.889	High Level
	25	I always listen to my feelings	2.51	.901	High Level
	26	I always act on my feelings.	2.31	.960	Low Level
	27	I understand the influence of my emotions	2.76	.965	High Level
	28	I do not exaggerate or minimize my feelings.	2.32	.968	Low Level
	29	I can usually change bad moods.	2.18	1.000	Low Level
	30	I can usually keep my good moods going.	2.61	1.046	High Level
Sectional Mean			2.66	0.985	

shown in table 1, the level of emotional intelligence of university postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria was presented. The table shows a sectional mean score of 2.66 and a standard deviation of .985, which offers valuable insights into postgraduate students’ emotional intelligence. The mean score of 2.66 on a 4-point scale reveals that the emotional intelligence of students is moderate on average. This midpoint score indicates that while the students are emotionally intelligent, there is also considerable room for improvement to achieve higher emotional intelligence levels. The standard deviation of .985 indicates a relatively wide dispersion of EI levels among students. This variability implies that while some students are emotionally highly intelligent, others may be significantly less intelligent.

Research Question Two: What is the academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria?

Table 2: Academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria during the 2022/2023 academic session in education courses

N=384

WGPA	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average Score	Std. Dev.
	384	3.30	4.57	3.72	.272

As shown in table 2, the minimum WGPA among the students was 3.30, while the maximum score reached 4.57, with an overall average score of 3.72. These results indicate that most students performed well above average in their WGPA. The data highlight consistent academic achievement among the group, suggesting that students have maintained strong performance levels. Furthermore, the relatively high minimum score reflects a commendable standard, emphasizing that even the lowest scores were well above the passing threshold. This distribution underscores the collective dedication and competence of students in their academic pursuits.

HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlational analysis between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria

Variables	N	X	SD	r-cal	P-value	Decision
Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement	384	3.46	0.78	.103	<.001	Rejected

As shown in table 3, a PPPMC correlational analysis was conducted to test the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The table revealed a mean of 3.46, standard deviation of 0.78, and r value of .103. The table also indicates the p-value of .001 with $p < 0.05$. This implies that the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, a significant relationship exists between the emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the emotional intelligence of male and female postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test on the Difference in emotional intelligence of male and female postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D.	t-value	Df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Male	229	2.70	.408	3.247	382	.100	Not
Female	155	2.62	.381				rejected

As shown in table 4, a t-test analysis was conducted to test the difference in the emotional intelligence of male and female postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The mean for male students is 2.70 with a standard deviation of .408, whereas the mean for female students is 2.62 with a standard deviation of .381. With a significant value of .100 (more than the 0.05 level of significance), the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the emotional intelligence of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria is retained. Therefore, male and female students did not differ significantly in the emotional intelligence of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

DISCUSSIONS

The research findings show that the emotional intelligence of university postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria is moderate. This finding suggests that postgraduate students in this region possess an average ability to recognize, understand, manage, and use their emotions in academic and social environments. This result contrasts with the findings of Oyewunmi et al. (2016), who reported a strong association between EI and the academic achievement of university undergraduates. Their study indicated that higher emotional intelligence among undergraduates was significantly linked to improved academic performance, implying that students with strong emotional intelligence tend to achieve better academic outcomes. The discrepancy between the findings of this study and those of Oyewunmi et al. suggests a potential variation in the impact of EI across different educational levels or regions. Further research could explore these differences to better understand how EI influences

academic achievement in diverse student populations. This finding agrees with Freedman in Akinboye (2017), who stated that emotional intelligence is a way of recognizing, understanding, and choosing how we think, feel, and act. It shapes our interactions with others and our understanding of ourselves. It defines how and what we learn; it allows us to set priorities; it determines most of our daily actions and the findings of Muiga (2020) and Nnaji et al. (2020).

This study also revealed that the overall academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria is relatively above average. This suggests that postgraduate students in this region demonstrate a notable level of academic success, possibly due to various personal and environmental factors that support their educational endeavors. This is supported by Azuka and Seraphina (2015), who found a significant difference in the mean achievement scores in geometry between the experimental and control groups. Gidado and Diffang (2024) also corroborated that the overall academic achievement of students in the FCT was slightly above average.

This study also found that emotional intelligence had a statistically significant impact on students' academic achievement, proving to be a more influential factor than the time taken to graduate among postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria. This finding contradicts that of Gidado et al. (2025), who revealed that there is no significant relationship between EI and management performance of senior secondary school principals in the South-West of Nigeria. Furthermore, emotional intelligence effectively plays a crucial role in enhancing principals' management performance in schools. This finding aligns with Pryce's (2022) research, which underscores a prevailing agreement in psychological research: EI significantly influences the ability of individuals and groups to adapt, promoting both mental well-being and academic achievement. Emotional intelligence, which is often defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively, has been identified as a critical factor in academic settings. Students are better equipped to navigate academic challenges, manage stress, and maintain focus skills that ultimately enhance their academic performance by understanding and regulating their emotions. Similarly, Nkemakolam et al. (2019) corroborates these results by confirming the significant relationship between EI and academic performance. Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic success, reinforcing the notion that emotional skills are vital for managing the demands and pressures of academic pursuits, especially in the context of advanced education. Moreover, the role of EI in supporting student success is underscored. EI equips students with the skills to study independently, manage and complete academic tasks effectively, and take an active role in monitoring and improving their behavior.

This study also found no significant difference in emotional intelligence between male and female postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria. This outcome aligns with previous research conducted by Jaegar et al. (2017) and Segal et al. (2020), who found no statistically significant difference in EI between male and female students, suggesting that gender does not play a significant role in determining EI levels among postgraduate students. However, Nkemakolam et al. (2019) indicated that gender differences exist between the six emotional abilities and academic performance in chemistry with strong significant prediction among male students in all the six emotional abilities but not so among females. These findings reinforce the idea that EI is relatively consistent across genders within academic contexts; highlighting factors other than gender may be more influential in shaping EI and related academic outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The researcher concludes that the emotional intelligence of university postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria is moderate. Relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of postgraduate students in North-central Nigeria This study showed that emotional intelligence influences academic

achievement. These variables showed a statistically significant influence on students' academic performance; however, gender added less to the statistically significant difference in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. EI should be included in the postgraduate school curriculum to improve the level of emotional intelligence competencies of students.
2. The academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria is relatively above average. It will be better to maintain this standard and, if possible, go beyond it.
3. There was no significant difference between male and female students in the emotional intelligence of postgraduate students in public universities in North-central Nigeria. The study recommends that there should be no gender discrimination as far as acquiring emotional intelligence competencies is concerned.
4. The study discovered that emotional intelligence added statistically significantly to the academic achievement of postgraduate students in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The study recommends that educational stakeholders ensure that EI competencies are incorporated into the teaching and learning processes in our universities.

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