Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Disruptive Behaviour among Adolescents in Public Secondary Schools in Lagos State

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the influence of emotional intelligence on disruptive behaviour among in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria, and explored the effect of gender on these behaviours. Using a cross-sectional design, a total of 1001 adolescents (48.3% male, 51.7% female), aged 12–18 years (M = 15.31; SD = 1.49), were sampled across nine public schools in four education districts. Participants completed the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and the Conduct and Oppositional Defiant Disorder Scales (CODDS). Regression analysis revealed that emotional intelligence significantly and negatively predicted disruptive behaviour (β = –.21, p < .01), accounting for 4.5% of the variance. Male adolescents reported significantly higher disruptive behaviour than females (t = 5.36, p < .001). These findings emphasise the role of emotional intelligence in reducing disruptive tendencies and point to the importance of gender-sensitive behavioural interventions.

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1.0 Introduction

Disruptive behaviour among teenagers is no doubt a critical challenge in secondary schools, often undermining classroom stability, academic progress, and student wellbeing. Disruptive behaviour in adolescence, characterised by defiance, aggression, and classroom disturbances, is a prevalent challenge in educational settings (Fatimah *et al.,* 2024; Guil *et al.,* 2024). Such behaviours may include refusal to comply with authority, verbal outbursts, physical altercations, deceit, and theft (Karimy *et al.,* 2018). These actions disrupt the learning process, strain teacher–student relationships, and create a tense classroom environment, with potential long-term consequences including delinquency, emotional difficulties, and diminished academic achievement (Young *et al.,* 2019; Bae, 2020). When persistent and untreated, these patterns can progress into clinically recognised disorders, such as oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Adolescents often navigate a complex interplay of developmental challenges, including peer relationships, academic demands, and expectations from adults. In these contexts, emotional intelligence, which is generally recognised as the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions, plays a key role in influencing how individuals function and interact (Chukwu & Onukwufor, 2018; Gao *et al.,* 2023).

Emotional intelligence was introduced as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Building on this, Goleman (1995) framed the concept in a broader version, emphasising five key components (self-awareness, self-management, empathy, relationship skills, and decision-making) crucial for personal and professional success. Bar-On (1997) presented it as a set of emotional and social skills influencing one's ability to cope with environmental demands. Mayer *et al.* (2004) later refined their original model into four core branches: perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions. Adolescents with high emotional intelligence are often better able to manage interpersonal conflict, academic stress, and social provocation, which can lower the risk of disruptive outbursts (Cejudo *et al.,* 2018; Martínez-Martínez *et al.,* 2020).

Recently, studies have highlighted the role of emotional intelligence in adolescent behavioural regulation. In a sample of adolescents from Santo Domingo, Briones and Ramos (2023) reported an inverse association between emotional intelligence and disruptive behaviours, with lower emotional intelligence being linked to greater disobedience, rule-breaking, and hostility toward authority. Similarly, Sekar and Bhuvaneswari (2024), in a cross-sectional study of 106 male adolescents aged 14–18 residing in observational and special homes in Tamil Nadu, India, examined multiple predictors of delinquent-prone behaviour, including age, personality traits, emotional intelligence, and family environment. Their findings indicated that elevated emotional intelligence, especially when coupled with a nurturing family environment, correlated with diminished levels of disruptive behaviour. In a cross-sectional study conducted in Malaysia, Yap *et al.* (2019) examined the relationship between the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of emotional intelligence and problem behaviours in adolescents. Both dimensions were inversely related to problem behaviours, with intrapersonal emotional intelligence emerging as a significant predictor, accounting for 17.3% of the variance. No significant gender differences were observed, as male and female adolescents exhibited similar behaviour patterns. Complementing these findings, Colichón-Chiscul (2020) assessed 210 secondary school students in Lima, Peru, to investigate the influence of emotional intelligence and social skills on disruptive behaviours. Emotional intelligence demonstrated a significant predictive effect, with the Nagelkerke test indicating a 31.6% dependency.

Additional evidence links emotional intelligence to aggression in adolescence, though findings are not entirely consistent. Etika and Yunalia (2020) reported a significant negative correlation, indicating that higher emotional intelligence was associated with lower levels of aggression. Similarly, Illahi *et al.* (2018), employing a descriptive correlational design, observed a correlation coefficient of −0.431, further supporting the inverse relationship between these variables. However, in a contrasting

finding, Yusoff *et al.* (2023) utilised the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) alongside an aggression questionnaire and found a significant positive correlation, suggesting that in certain contexts, higher emotional intelligence may be associated with increased aggression. These mixed results suggest the importance of examining cultural, social, or situational factors that may influence the direction and strength of this relationship. Estevez-Casellas *et al.* (2021) found that adolescents with high emotional intelligence were less likely to engage in violent behaviour in dating relationships. Similarly, Mambra and Kotian (2022) reviewed previous research and concluded that adolescents with high emotional intelligence tend to show less aggression, while those with poor emotional regulation are more likely to display disruptive behaviour. This finding is echoed by Alonso Alberca *et al.* (2017), whose study on emotional competence and psychosocial adjustment in childhood revealed that children with limited abilities to perceive and label emotions were more likely to engage in disruptive behaviours in school settings.

In contrast, some findings from Nigerian contexts reveal mixed results. Take, for instance, Obungwah (2022), who conducted a correlational study among secondary school students in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and delinquent behaviour. The study found no significant relationship between self-awareness, social awareness, emotional maturity, and delinquent behaviour, highlighting that emotional intelligence alone might not fully predict disruptive behaviours in all sociocultural settings. However, Ugoani (2015), using a survey of 294 adolescents, found a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and anger control, suggesting that emotional regulation may help in managing aggressive outbursts and reducing disruptive tendencies. Similarly, Enem *et al.* (2024) studied in-school university adolescents in Enugu State and discovered a negative correlation between all five domains of emotional intelligence and restiveness. The study highlighted that adolescents with lower emotional intelligence scores exhibited higher levels of restiveness and

disruptive behaviours, likely due to their inability to regulate emotions and maintain appropriate social interactions.

Despite mounting evidence of the protective effects of emotional intelligence, disruptive behaviour remains a persistent problem among in-school adolescents in Lagos State (Fatimah *et al.*, 2024). Teachers, school administrators, and parents continue to report incidents of truancy, aggression, disrespect, and defiance that hinder effective teaching and learning (Jabaar, 2021), while most behavioural interventions adopted in Nigerian schools tend to focus on punitive or disciplinary measures, often neglecting the emotional and psychological dimensions of student conduct (Hassan *et al.*, 2024; Ekwelundu *et al.*, 2023). This gap in literature raises a pressing concern: to what extent does emotional intelligence influence disruptive behaviours in secondary school within Lagos State?

In line with this, the current study sought to investigate how emotional intelligence among school adolescents in Lagos State influences disruptive behaviour. Specifically, the study sought to:

i. Examine the extent to which emotional intelligence predicts disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State.

ii. Examine the extent to which disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public schools in Lagos State depends on gender.

1.1 Hypotheses

1. Emotional intelligence will significantly predict disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State.'

2. Disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State will significantly depend on gender.

2.0 Materials and Methods

2.1 Design

A cross-sectional research design was employed to collect data from adolescents across different age groups from 11 to 18 years. The study was conducted in public secondary schools across four education districts in Lagos State.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Techniques

The G*power statistical program was used to determine the sample size of 834 students with an effect size (Cohen's d) = 0.25, α = 0.05, and Power = 0.95. A projected 10% attrition was added, that is, (83+834), making a total of 917. However, it was increased to 1001 to accommodate the disparity in the response rate and incomplete responses and enhance the strength of the generalisation of the research outcome. Nine public secondary schools from four education districts in Lagos State were randomly selected: Ajumoni Secondary School (105), FESTAC College (102), Lagos State Government Secondary School, Badagry (100), Community Secondary School, Ikotun (119), Ikotun High School (146), Community Secondary School, Ojo (117), Aje Comprehensive School, Yaba (93), Ajao Estate Secondary School (111) and Birrel Avenue High School, Yaba (108), and a convenience sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaire to the students (48.3% male and 51.7% female) aged 12–18 years (mean = 15.31; SD = 1.49). The inclusion criteria are adolescents between the age range of 11 and 18 years who should be able to read and write effectively, while the exclusion criteria are children below 11 years and adults above 18 years; adolescents not in secondary school were also excluded.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

The researchers explained the purpose of the research to the school administrators (the proprietor, principal, vice principal, school counsellor and teachers). The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and those willing to participate were given an assent form before being administered the questionnaire. Students who volunteered and gave their agreement to participate were given the questionnaire by the researcher, who visited each classroom. The researcher established a positive rapport with the participants and explained the goal of the study while assuring them of its confidentiality. The participants filled out the surveys right away while the researcher waited to pick them up. Over two weeks of fieldwork, 1001 copies of the research instruments were administered.

2.4 Measures

A socio-demographic questionnaire was administered to the respondents to gather their sex, age, class, religion, family size and school type. Thereafter, the assessment of adolescent disruptive behaviour disorders was conducted using the Conduct and Oppositional Defiant Disorder Scales (CODDS), developed by Raine *et al.* (2022). This 23-item self-report measure is based on the criteria of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The scale is divided into two subcomponents: oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), assessed through items 1 to 8, and conduct disorder (CD), assessed by items 10 to 24. Scores from each subscale are summed to produce separate totals for ODD and CD, which are then combined to generate an overall disruptive behaviour score. Higher composite scores indicate greater levels of disruptive behaviour (ODD/CD). Responses are rated on a three-point scale (never, sometimes, often), and item scores are aggregated to create disorder-specific and overall indices. The internal reliability for oppositional defiant disorder, as reported by Raine *et al.* (2022), was 0.83, while the conduct disorder was 0.84. According to this study, the total Cronbach's alpha reliability for the disruptive behaviour was 0.89. For this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability for oppositional defiant disorder was .72, conduct disorder was .85, and disruptive behaviour was .86.

2.4.1 The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

The SSEIT Emotional Intelligence Scale was developed by Schette *et al.* (1998). The scale has 33 items, and each one is rated on a five-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The goal is to measure emotional intelligence based on the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model. The items of the scale are designed to assess multiple aspects of emotional functioning, including how emotions are appraised and expressed in oneself and others, how emotions are regulated internally and interpersonally, and the ability to use emotions effectively in problem-solving situations (Schuette *et al.,* 1998). A test-retest reliability

study yielded a coefficient of 0.78, suggesting that the SSEIT is reliable. The pilot study conducted by the researcher found that Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.82. In scoring the scale, items 5, 28 and 33 should be first reversed, and after scoring all the items, all 33 items were summed to get the composite score (minimum = 33, maximum = 165). Schuette *et al.* (1998) reported means of 135 and 120 for therapists and prisoners, respectively, and means of 131 and 125 for female and male, respectively.

2.5 Statistical Analysis
Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data using SPSS version 25 statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the sociodemographic distribution of the respondents, while the stated hypothesis one was tested using simple linear regression, while hypothesis two was tested using a t-test for independent means.

3.0 Results

3.1 Hypothesis 1
Emotional intelligence will significantly predict disruptive behaviour disorders among in-school adolescents in Lagos State.

Table 1

Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis Showing Emotional Intelligence Predicting Disruptive Behaviour Disorders among Adolescents in Public Secondary Schools in Lagos State

Model	B	SE(B)	β	T	sig
Constant	19.08	1.44	-	13.27	.000
Emotional Intelligence	-.07	.01	-.21	-6.88	.000

Model Summary: R= .213, R^2 = .045, F(1, 1000) = 47.38, P<.01

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the extent to which emotional intelligence predicts disruptive behaviours among adolescents. The regression was significant [F(1, 1000) = 47.38, p < .01], with emotional intelligence accounting for approximately 4.5% of the variance in DBD (R^2 = .045). The unstandardised regression coefficient for emotional intelligence was *B* = -.07 (SE = 0.01), indicating that for every one-unit increase in emotional intelligence, disruptive behaviour scores reduced by 0.07 units. The standardised

coefficient (β = -.21) indicates a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and DBD, t(1,1000) = -6.88, p < .01. Therefore, the stated hypothesis that emotional intelligence would predict disruptive behaviour is thereby accepted.

3.2 Hypothesis 2
Disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State will significantly depend on gender.

Table 2

Summary table of an independent t-test showing the influence of gender on disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State.

	Gender	N	X	S.D	Df	t-value	Sig
Disruptive Behaviour Disorders	Male	483	10.51	7.89	999	5.36	.000
	Female	518	8.17	5.87			

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine the influence of sex on disruptive behaviour among adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State. The results revealed a significant difference in disruptive behaviour scores between male and female, [t(999) = 5.36, p < .001], with a mean difference of 2.35 points. Male students showed significantly higher disruptive behaviour than

female students. The results confirm the stated hypothesis.

4.0 Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate whether emotional intelligence significantly predicts disruptive behaviour among in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State. The results of the regression analysis

clearly support this hypothesis. Emotional intelligence was found to be a significant negative predictor of disruptive behaviour, with higher levels of emotional intelligence associated with a corresponding decrease in disruptive tendencies. The model explained a modest variance in disruptive behaviour, reflecting the importance of emotional intelligence in understanding adolescent disruptive behaviour within the education system.

The findings of the current study align closely with those of Briones and Ramos (2023), who reported a significant inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and disruptive tendencies among adolescents in Santo Domingo. From their study, adolescents with lower emotional intelligence were more prone to disobedience, hostility, and noncompliance with authority figures, reinforcing the notion that emotional regulation is a crucial determinant of behavioural adjustment. Likewise, the study by Sekar and Bhuvaneswari (2024) supports this interpretation. Their research, though it was focusing on only male adolescents in special care facilities, found that emotional intelligence was not only predictive of behaviour but also positively correlated with nurturing home environments, suggesting that emotionally intelligent adolescents are more likely to internalise prosocial norms and resist disruptive impulses, particularly when buffered by positive familial support.

This result from the present study is also consistent with that of Yap *et al.* (2019), in which they reported that emotional intelligence negatively predicted problem behaviours among Malaysian adolescents. While Yap *et al.* identified a stronger predictive power than the present study, the direction of the relationship aligns closely with the present study, thereby reinforcing the robustness of the inverse association between emotional intelligence and behavioural problems across diverse cultural settings.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that findings from Nigerian-based studies are not entirely homogeneous. While Ugoani (2015) found that emotional intelligence significantly predicted anger control and behavioural regulation among Nigerian adolescents, Obungwah (2022) reported no significant relationship between emotional intelligence dimensions and delinquent behaviour. These different findings may be attributed to sociocultural variations, contextual stressors, or methodological differences in measurement tools and sample characteristics. However, the study by Enem *et al.* (2024) conducted among in-school university

adolescents in Enugu aligns more closely with the present findings, revealing a consistent negative correlation between emotional intelligence and disruptive tendencies. This simply shows that despite some inconsistent outcomes, emotional intelligence generally remains a relevant predictor of adolescent behaviour in Nigeria.

The second aim of this study was to determine whether gender plays a significant role in disruptive behaviour among in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State. Based on previous literature, these results appear to confirm that gender is associated with differences in the expression of disruptive behaviour. In the present study, this was evidenced by the finding that male students displayed higher levels of disruptive behaviour than female students. However, the two groups may differ more in the manner in which such behaviours are manifested rather than in the presence of disruptive tendencies per se. Muris and Meesters (2023) reported that male adolescents are more likely to engage in externalising behaviours, such as oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD), often involving physical aggression and school discipline problems, while female adolescents tend to exhibit covert behaviours, such as truancy and lying. Similarly, Guil *Bozal et al.* (2024) found that although both boys and girls can display school-related aggression, boys more frequently show overt disobedience and hostility toward authority, whereas girls more often use indirect forms of aggression. This is also consistent with Van Houtte (2023), who observed that boys raised in cultures with traditional gender roles were more likely to demonstrate aggressive and oppositional conduct, while girls in similar settings tended to show more restrained forms of behaviour.

5.0 Conclusion

The main findings of this study show that emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor against disruptive behaviour among in-school adolescents in Lagos State. Adolescents with higher emotional intelligence were less likely to engage in disruptive conduct, suggesting that emotional intelligence may serve as an internal buffer against behavioural issues in the school environment. Additionally, the results indicate a clear gender difference in the manifestation of disruptive behaviour, with male students exhibiting significantly higher levels of disruptive behaviour than their female counterparts. However, these outcomes must be interpreted in light of certain limitations. The study's cross-

sectional design restricts the ability to infer causal relationships. While emotional intelligence emerged as a significant predictor of disruptive behaviour, it is equally plausible that persistent behavioural challenges may, over time, impair emotional development, suggesting a potentially bidirectional influence. The gendered findings, too, are shaped by broader cultural constructs and may reflect both environmental pressures and internalised norms. In this regard, Van Houtte's (2023) proposition that gender conformity can either exacerbate or suppress disruptive tendencies remains particularly relevant. Future research would benefit from a longitudinal approach to better understand the developmental trajectories between emotional intelligence and disruptive behaviour.

Importantly, the findings of the present study carry practical implications for educational stakeholders, policy planners, and mental health practitioners in Nigeria. Interventions aimed at reducing disruptive behaviour should incorporate emotional intelligence training into school-based programmes. Youth mental health-focused NGOs such as Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI) and the Asido Foundation could play an important role in designing emotional literacy workshops specifically for teenagers. In addition, partnership with the Lagos State Ministry of Education and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) could ensure emotional intelligence competencies are integrated into the public-school curriculum, especially in the life orientation and civic education subjects. Due to the differences between males and females in disruptive behaviour, programmes should be gender-sensitive and take into account the emotional and behavioural characteristics of girls versus boys while promoting positive developmental socialisation and counteracting negative gender norms.

Simply put, the findings of the current study show emotional intelligence not only as a personal asset but also as a critical lever for behavioural regulation among adolescents. In the context of schools, promoting social-emotional competencies is less about reducing aggression or misconduct; it is about empowering students to navigate interpersonal challenges and develop healthier patterns of emotional expression.

6.0 Acknowledgement

7.0 Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

8.0 Ethical Considerations

The study involved human participants; as a result, regulatory ethics regarding human subjects were observed. Ethical approval was obtained from the Lagos State Ministry of Education and from the Redeemer's University Ethical Review Board with reference number RUN/REC/2024/244.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that participants understood the research's purpose and that taking part in it would be completely voluntary. They were also assured that the information gleaned from this study would be used only for scholarly pursuits.

9.0 Data Availability

Data are available on request due to privacy. The data that supports the findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

10. Funding

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