



## BULLYING AS PREDICTOR OF STUDENTS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONITSHA NORTH LGA

ANOLIEFO ONYINYECHI ANTHONIA

Email: [anthonia4u299@gmail.com](mailto:anthonia4u299@gmail.com)

ONWUBUALILI UCHENNA THERESA

Email: [onwubualili@coou.edu.ng](mailto:onwubualili@coou.edu.ng)

NWOKOLO IFEOMA PRECIOUS CHINELO

Email: [preciouschukwuneke21@gmail.com](mailto:preciouschukwuneke21@gmail.com)

DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION, FACULTY OF  
EDUCATION,  
ODUMEGWU OJUKWU UNIVERSITY, IGBARIAM CAMPUS

### ABSTRACT

*This study examined bullying as predictor of students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North local government area of Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Correlational research design was adopted and the population of the study consisted of 4,304 (2963 Female and 1341 males) SSIII students of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local government area. A sample of 300 respondents was selected using purposive sampling technique. The Bullying Experiences and Exclusion Scale (BEES), an 18-item retrospective self-report measure of school-age bullying experiences in three different roles (victim, witness and perpetrator) was employed as the instrument for collecting data on bullying. The result of the students in English language was employed to measure the students' academic achievement. The data were collected by the researcher with the help of two research assistants who were properly briefed on manner on how to administer and retrieve the instrument. Simple regression analysis was used to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses. The results indicate that bullying significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area; and that bullying of male and female students significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The study concludes that bullying predicts the students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North Local government area. The study recommends amongst others that the management of public schools to ensure all students and teachers adhere to the set of rules and regulations to reduce the cases of bullying in order to enhance students' academic achievement.*

**Keywords:** Bulling, Students Academic Achievement



## **Introduction**

The importance of students' academic achievement cannot be overemphasized. Students' academic achievement is an important parameter in measuring success in students. Student's academic achievement refers to the height of formal education successfully attained by an individual in the course of pursuing a career (Omeh, 2017). It involves a product of effort or series of effort. Students' academic achievement is a test for the measurement and comparison of skills in various fields of academics or study. Stiggings cited in Soliu et al (2017) saw students' academic achievement as something a learner does or achieves at school, college, or university, in class, in a laboratory or field work. Students' academic achievement refers to achievement of individuals' objective to various types of knowledge and skills. The objectives are established based on the age, prior learning and capacity of individuals with regards to education, socialization and qualification.

In recent times, educators in Nigeria have been increasingly concerned about the need to improve on the students' academic achievement (Akubuiro, 2018). Observations and reports have shown that success or high academic achievement has become a Herculean task to accomplish by students in recent times. Students' poor performances in school have continued to pose a serious concern to government agencies, parents and the students themselves (Usoro 2017). A critical look at the achievement of the students in West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and NECO indicates dismal achievement of students. Generally, Anambra State children in the last few years have demonstrated improvement in their performance at WAEC and NECO examinations. However, the improved performance is not uniform across the State.

The recent result of WAEC, NECO, and JAMB in 2022/2023 revealed poor students' performance in some education zones in Anambra State as less than 50% of students credited English and Mathematics. Odikpo and Ejide (2021) noted that students are required to obtain five credits in relevant subjects including English and Mathematic and have a minimum aggregate of JAMB score, before they can be admitted into Nigerian Universities. Any performance below the benchmark is not good students' academic achievement. This can be attributed to a number of factors which include teachers' factors (low qualification, lack of experience, poor salaries and allowances, poor supervision), students' factors (poor ability of students, under age, unwillingness to learn, bad peer groups influence) and environmental factors (school location, school type, facilities). Furthermore, other factors such as attitude of students and teachers, study habit, teaching methods, school environment, government policy, family types, school location, students' gender have been identified in several studies as factors influencing students' academic achievement (Akissani & Ahmed, 2019). But this study will concentrate on bullying.

Bullying is a major problem around the globe. Bullying is observed across race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Bullying has been the focus of recent international research, policy development, and student's performance. The estimated prevalence of bullying usually depends on how bullying is perceived and who reports the incidence. Bullying involves engaging in repeated actions, such as physical contact, verbal assault, nonverbal gesture, or deliberate social exclusion, and intentionally designed to inflict harm on individuals who are unable to defend themselves (Fraser, Edwards & Williams, 2018). Najam and Kashif (2018) defined bullying as the unprovoked abuse, which is repeated over an extended time to inflict distress upon a person perceived to be vulnerable in one -way exercise of power. Also, bullying is



defined as the dynamic interaction between the aggressor and the victim at which the power of the perpetrators increases while the power of the victims diminishes. As the victims lose their power, they are unable to cope with or respond to the problem (Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

Bullying usually takes several forms, from direct physical harm (physical bullying) to verbal taunts and threats (verbal bullying); to exclusion, humiliation, and rumor-spreading (relational or social bullying); to electronic harassment using text, emails, or online medium (cyberbullying). Although physical and cyberbullying is often of greatest concern, social and verbal bullying is the most common form experienced by students (Naidoo, Satorius, de Vries & Taylor, 2016). In this study, bullying is the act of intentionally harming someone, verbally, psychologically, or physically. Bullying is often repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power. The acts of bullying include hitting, pushing, or unwelcome physical contact, teasing and name-calling, reiterated omission of an individual from games and activities, sending threatening or mean-spirited messages in the form of text, chat or voicemails, and spreading of deleterious rumors.

Bullying can lead to both physical and emotional harm, and the imbalance of power, real or perceived, may consist of a difference in physical, social, and/or emotional power (Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011). Bullying may appear in many forms, including direct or indirect physical and/or psychological aggression, verbal harassment (such as cruel teasing, name calling), negative gestures and peer isolation. In addition to acts of deliberate physical aggression, bullying also includes verbal aggression (e.g., name calling and threats), relational aggression (e.g., social isolation and rumor spreading), and cyber-aggression (e.g., text messaging and e-mailing hurtful messages or images), a new venue for inflicting harm in an increasingly electronic youth culture (Holt, Vivolo, Polanin, Holland, DeGue, Matjasko & Reid, 2015). The major types of bullying are often classified in the literature as direct or indirect. Physical and verbal bullying are usually considered to be a direct form, while social (relational) bullying refer to an indirect form of bullying. Direct bullying such as hitting and name-calling is quite obvious in nature. Bullying is aimed at damaging the victim's social status and is often much less detectable by bystanders or witnesses. It may include gossiping, rumour mongering and convincing others to socially exclude the victim (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

Bullying influences both the individual and the perpetrator and may lead to present and long-term effects (Aleem, 2016). Bullying always have either direct or indirect effects on the victims and may result in students academic performance. Al-Raqqad, Al-Bourini, Al Talahin and Aranki (2017) noted that bullying has contributed to a decline in classroom activities and school engagement, which tend to impact students academic achievement negatively. An investigation by Arseneault (2018) showed that the incidences of bullying in schools result from victimization, which leads to school adjustment problems of academic achievement, school avoidance, and loneliness. Peer victimization and academic difficulty are also caused by elevated levels of depression due to bullying (Fanti & Georgiou, 2013). Elevated levels of bullying have been witnessed, which is associated with academic disengagement and poor grades in school (Mbah, 2020). Students who are more bullied fall in the range of rank order that receives low grades and engaging less in the academic task than others that are not bullied. Students usually stop classroom participation due to victimization by peers and fear of ridicule (Garandeau, Yanagida, Vermande, Strohmeier & Salmivalli, 2019).

Another variable of interest in this study is gender. Gender is important when considering the influence of school type and school location on the academic achievement of senior



secondary school students. Gender is an important variable in the school system. Gender refers to the condition of being male or female. According to Kanno (2018), gender is an analytic concept that describes sociological roles, cultural responsibilities and expectations of men and women in a given society or cultural setting. Therefore, gender is a psychological term and a cultural construct developed by society to differentiate between the roles, behaviour, mental and emotional attributes of males and females (Eugene & Ezech, 2016). Hence, Okeke (2018) described the males' attributes as bold, aggressive, tactful, economical use of words while the females are fearful, timid, gentle, dull, submissive and talkative. This may be the reason Umoh (2013) asserted that more difficult works are usually reserved for males while the females are considered feminine in a natural setting. The question of gender is a matter of great concern especially among academics and policy formulators as it can affect students' outcomes especially in terms of students' academic performance. Hertz, Everett, Barrios, David-Ferdon and Holt (2015) noted that bullying is prevalent in schools and boys and girls are victims. Bullying remains a serious threat to the entire school population, and boys appear to be more involved in bullying than girls across all bully status groups. This implies that it can affect students' academic achievement of male and female students differently.

A number of empirical studies have found that bullying has detrimental effects on students' academic performance. Indeed, a growing amount of research within the last few years have reiterated the noxious concomitant and long lasting consequences of school bullying. Owing to these, researchers continuously explore potential risk or predicting factors that may in more ways than one predispose a child to engaging in bullying (Duncan, 2011). Lower school achievement, higher school delinquency and school dropout are also attributed to bullying. Students in schools with high levels of reported bullying perform poorer academically than those with lower prevalence (Barboza, 2015). Based on the foregoing, the study examined how bullying predicts students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions;

1. To what extent does bullying predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?
2. To what extent does bullying of male and female students predict students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Bullying would not significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.
2. Bullying of male and female students would not significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

### **Method**

Correlational research design was employed in this study. A correlational research design investigates relationships and/or predictions between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them. A correlation reflects the strength and/or direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. The direction of a correlation can be either positive or negative (Olayinka, Olosunde & Isola, 2016). The study was carried out in Onitsha North local government area of Anambra State. The population of the study consisted of 4,304 (2963



Female and 1341 males) SS III students in Onitsha North LGA. A total of 300 SSIII students were purposively selected for the study. Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument: Bully/Target (APRI-BT) Parada, Marsh and Craven, 2010), was employed as the instrument of data collection. The Bullying Experiences and Exclusion Scale (BEES) was used to generate data on bullying behaviour among students. The Bullying Experiences and Exclusion Scale (BEES) contains 18-item retrospective self-report measure of school-age bullying experiences in three different roles (victim, witness and perpetrator). Items are measured using a four-point likert scale ranging from 1 = Very Low Extent, 2 = Low Extent, 3 = Great Extent, 4 = Very High Extent. The scores of the students in English Language was used to measure students' academic achievement. The data collected were analyzed using simple regression analysis. Muijs' in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggestion for assessing the goodness of fit of regression model using squared regression coefficient ( $R^2$ ) and Beta weight ( $\beta$ ) were adopted in this study. For  $R^2$ : 0 – 0.1 weak; 0.1 – 0.3 modest fit; 0.3 – 0.5 moderate fit; > 0.5 strong fit.

For  $\beta$  weighting ( $\beta$ )

0 – 0.1 = weak effect

0.1 – 0.3 = modest effect

0.3 – 0.5 moderate effect

> 0.5 = strong effect

However, negative beta weighting ( $\beta$ ) indicates negative effect/relationship.

## Results

The data generated were presented and analyzed. The analysis was done in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses.

**Research Question One:** To what extent does bullying predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

**Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis of Bullying as Predictor of Students' Academic Achievement of Public Secondary School Students**

	<i>B</i>	SE	$\beta$
Constant	19.354	0.468	
Bullying	-0.041	0.022	-0.551
R	0.051		
$R^2$	0.543		
Adj. $R^2$	0.532		

Table 1 measured the predictive value of bullying on students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. Table 1 indicated that the simple regression coefficient ( $R$ ) is -0.041 while the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is 0.543. This showed that 54.3 percent of the variations in student's academic achievement are predicted by the variation in the bullying. Using Muijs' criteria, the predictive value of bullying on students academic achievement is significant. The beta weight ( $\beta = -0.551$ ) is an indication that predictive value of predictive value of bullying on students academic achievement is significantly negative, such that a unit increase in bullying will leads to 0.551 decrease in the students academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.





**Research Question Two:** To what extent does bullying of male and female students predict students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

**Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on how Bullying Predict the Students' Academic Achievement of Male and Female Secondary School Students**

		<i>B</i>	SE	$\beta$
<b>Male</b>	Constant	18.975	0.691	
	Bullying	-0.342	0.033	-0.450
	R	0.050		
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.503		
	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.503		
<b>Female</b>	Constant	18.913	0.648	
	Bullying	-0.249	0.031	-0.560
	R	0.060		
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.674		
	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.622		

Table 2 above measured the predictive value of bullying on students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The Table showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) for male students is -0.342 while the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is 0.503. This is an indication that bullying predicts 50.3 percent of the variations in the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. Using Muijs' criteria, bullying negatively predicts students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The beta weight value of -0.450 indicates that bullying negatively predicted students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This indicates that a unit increase in bullying will likely lead to 0.342 decreases in the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

Furthermore, the regression coefficient (R) for female students is -0.249 while the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) is 0.674. Using Muijs' criteria, bullying predicts students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The beta weight value of -0.560 showed that bullying negatively predicted students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This showed that a unit increase in bullying will lead to 0.249 decreases in students' academic achievement. This suggests that bullying negatively predicted students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis One:** Bullying would not significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.



**Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis of Bullying as Predictor of Students Academic Achievement**

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>P-value</i>
Constant	19.354	0.468		0.000
Bullying	-0.041	0.022	-0.551	0.000
R	0.051			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.543			
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.532			
<i>F</i>	13.589			0.000

Table 3 above indicated that the coefficient of the regression result (R) is -0.041 while the R<sup>2</sup> is 0.543. The F-ratio associated with these is 13.589 and the P-value = .000. Therefore, since P-value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, we reject the stated hypothesis. The study therefore concluded that bullying significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis Two:** Bullying of male and female students would not significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

**Table 4: Simple Regression Analysis of Bullying as Predictor of Students' Academic Performance of Male and Female Students**

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>P-value</i>
<b>Male</b>	Constant	18.975	0.691		0.000
	Bullying	-0.342	0.033	-0.450	0.000
	R	0.050			
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.503			
	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.501			
	<i>F</i>	41.651			0.000
<b>Female</b>	Constant	18.913	0.648		0.000
	Bullying	-0.249	0.031	-0.560	0.000
	R	0.060			
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.674			
	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	0.622			
	<i>F</i>	42.599			0.000

Table 4 indicated that the simple regression coefficient (R) for male and female students is -0.342 and -0.249 respectively while the R<sup>2</sup> is 0.503 and 0.674 respectively for male and female students. The F-ratio associated with these is 41.651 and 42.599 respectively for male and female students while the P-value is 0.000 and 0.000 for male and female students respectively. Since the P-values are less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, hypothesis two is rejected. Therefore, bullying of male and female students significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area.



### **Discussion**

This study investigated bullying as predictor of students academic achievement in public secondary schools in Onitsha North LGA. The result of the study indicates that bullying moderately predicts students' academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This shows that bullying can influence the students' academic achievement of students in secondary schools. The above finding agrees with the findings of Mbah (2020) that school bullying influences student's academic performance and school attendance. Similarly, Arseneault (2018) study showed that the incidences of bullying in schools leads to school adjustment problems of academic achievement, school avoidance, and loneliness.

The results also indicate that bullying of male and female students significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This indicates that the bullying can influence the level of students' academic achievement of students irrespective of their gender. The study also found that the negative effect of bullying is stronger in male students than female students in secondary school in Onitsha North Local Government Area. This agrees with the position of Barboza (2015) that students in schools with high levels of reported bullying perform poorer academically than those with lower prevalence.

### **Conclusion**

The study examined bullying as a predictor of students' academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government area. The study found that bullying moderately predicts students' academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The study also found that bullying of male and female students significantly predict the students' academic achievement of public secondary school students in Onitsha North Local Government Area. Bullying results in students developing fear, panic, and disengaging in-class activities, which leads to poor academic achievement. The implication of the study is that the findings provide the necessary empirical information on bullying activities in schools and their significant impacts on students' academic achievement. Thus, the information allows the school administration to develop appropriate strategies and measures that would help in mitigating bullying cases in schools. The study provides in-depth information that offers an opportunity for students and teachers to understand the consequences of bullying on school and academic achievement. Based on the foregoing, the study concludes that bullying predicts the students' academic achievement of secondary school students in Onitsha North Local government area.

### **Recommendations**

The bullying aspect in schools provides the basis for schools to assure conformity with school rules and policies. The study's findings provide the foundation to recommend public schools to ensure all students and teachers adhere to the set of rules and regulations to reduce the cases of bullying. The study revealed that teachers should be role models to the students in complying with the rules to avoid cases of bullying. This recommendation is given on the basis that the majority of students are highly affected by bullying. Thus, assuring adherence to school rules and policies with respect to bullying may help in preventing cases of bullying. The study





also recommends that school management should develop code of conduct that encourages students to exhibit appropriate behaviours at all times and adequate disciplinary measures should be taken against perpetrators of bullying and justice secured for victims.

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