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# PEER-ATTACHMENT, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT OF HIGH ABILITY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Teachers are often indifferent towards high ability students with the misconception that they could sort themselves out hence, they are neglected. This therefore, affects their ability to adapt to the school environment which had been resulting to depression, general anxiety disorder, academic-underachievement and drop-out from school. Previous studies dwelt more on academic performance and adjustment of regular students with little attention on high ability students. This study, therefore, investigated influence of peer-attachment, emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students in Oyo State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design of correlational type was adopted. Simple random sampling technique was used to select five local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts in Oyo State. Simple random sampling technique was also used to select two secondary schools from each local government, while purposive sampling technique was used to select 450 high ability students in SS1 (184 males and 266 females),based on their scores in Slossan Intelligence test, Achievement test in English Language and Mathematics. Instruments used were Slossan Intelligence Test (r= 0.86); Mathematics Achievement (r=0.72) and English Language Achievement tests (r=0.75) Peer-attachment (r=0.74); and Emotional Intelligence scale (r=0.78) while Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse the hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance. Special educators and counselling psychologists should take cognizance of these factors while dealing with high ability students who were newly admitted to schools. It was recommended that teachers of high ability students should be updated on the influence which peer-attachment and emotional intelligence have on the school adjustment of high ability students.*
**Keywords:** Peer-attachment, Emotional intelligence, School adjustment, High ability students

## Introduction

Many high ability students exhibit deficiency in coping effectively in the school environment during the period of transition from Junior Secondary School to Senior Secondary School, due to challenging expectations imposed by the newfound environment. As a result of this, they may experience difficulties in association with new peers, chosen a career and inability to abide by the rules and regulations. Besides, this period has been seen as the period of transition from childhood to adolescent stage which involves different crisis in the life of a child. This period usually fall between age15and above. High ability students had been seen as those students who had been consistently scored high grades in all their academic subjects over the years. But, many times, teachers and the parents are of the view that, these categories of students have been endowed with potentialities which could help them to

manage most of their crisis in school environment, such as depression, strictness in the school environment, lesson too dull just to mention a few. They also believe that these challenges may not even have any effect on their academic performance and school adjustment.

More so, high ability students from time to time relates with teachers, students and the school authority even gathering experiences that differ from those gained from home and all these requires great efforts in order to make a long series of adjustments between the whole unique personality and the school environment. The ardent desire of high ability student is to become an individual person having a healthy physique, a growing intellectual ability, a greater degree of emotional poise and increase participation in social groups, such as to enhance one's personality. Parents, teachers and significant members of the society to which high ability belong would encourage this desire (Hallahan and Kauffman; 2006).

However, there are lot of challenges as reported by Roy and Mitra (2012) which had been hindering high ability student's adjustment to the school, such as peer challenges, influence of environmental factor, imposition of too much rules and regulations by the school authority and the likes. It was stated that, this always manifest most especially during high ability students' progression to the senior classes. As a result of this, high ability students exhibit depression, anxiety, academic under-achievement, maladjusted behaviour. Patel (2013) submitted, that high ability student's failure to perform at level commensurate with their previous documented abilities had been associated with lack of school adjustment. The high ability student's inability to function in the area of school adjustment has become a persistent concern of stakeholders and as the decline continues, so does the search for solution (Parma, 2014).

School adjustment is a major socialisation for high ability students. It is the child's first contact with the world outside the home. For nearly 12years, a high ability student spends 5-7 hours a day in the school. The School is one of the most important foundation on which a high ability student learns proficiencies in various abilities. This include learning process and homework, social communication, emotion and the management of daily interactions at home and school. Agbakwuru and Agbakwuru (2012) argued that school adjustment of high ability students is a process of bringing their behaviour in conformity with the norms of the school setting. It is a continuous process that is geared towards the adaptation of the high ability students to school life and culture.

An important aspect in the adjustment to school of high ability student is the sense of belonging and their socio-emotional functioning. In order words, their sense of well-being, a high sense of association, the feeling of social connection and or sociability that may lead to high motivation and good grades. Students with a low sense of sociability may feel alienated at school. This problem may cause poor achievement which may force such student to drop out from school (Akos; 2010). Indeed, high ability student's school adjustment depends on the match between his or her competences, needs and the demands of the school environment. Adeyemo (2014) revealed that student adjustment is the ability to cope, to manage their emotion and anatomy to behave in socially appropriate and responsible way to

meet up with the school challenges and responsibilities. This means that school adjustment involves the coping ability of physiological and emotional components to meet-up with the social demands of the school environment by the high ability students. The quality of any nation depends on the educational development of her citizens especially the intellectuals. In Nigeria, the standard of education is not only determined by academic staff, administrative services, library services, curriculum structure and infrastructure, but most importantly by academic achievement and school adjustment of the high ability students (Tsinidou; 2006).

High ability student adjustment and educational attainment have been studied within different frameworks. Studies by (Mistry, 2014; Ogoemeka, 2015) focused on parents' education, occupation or home background (family income, language of the home, activities of the family and work methods); parents support (achievement motivation of wards, parental attitudes towards education, the aspiration of parents. Aremu, (2012); Ambedkar, (2013) and Parmar (2014), considered teachers' variables (teacher's age, experience, education, gender.); school variables (environment, structures, buildings, location). The assertion above is evident from the reviewed literature that a close look at high ability students indicates that, many of them lack proper adjustment to the school environment, however, little studies have been conducted on the influence of peer – attachment, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and parental involvement on school adjustment of high ability students which Nagra (2016) considered as important in school adjustment of high ability students.

Peer-attachment is a bond or emotional link between a child and others in the school environment which provides profound influence on whether a school provides intellectual stimulation, physical and psychological safety and supportive relationship. Bowlby (2014) reported that, high ability student's attachment remains relatively stable from childhood to adulthood, based on the belief that it was perpetrated through the individual's internal beliefs. Thus, if a person is securely attached as a child, he or she learns to feel loved, capable, and comes to understand that others are trustworthy. In turn, these beliefs secure and maintain attachment style into adulthood.

Indeed, Bretheton (2011) believed that an individual's attachment would continue through life and that these early experiences could greatly affect later life. He believes that early experiences with attachment help to form internal working models of self and others, which, once formed are relatively stable over time. These working models include feelings, beliefs, expectations of the self, others and the world, behavioural strategies, and —rules for directing attention, interpreting information, and organising memoryl which would —have long-lasting consequences for personality development and close relationships. People who experienced attachments early in life are likely to learn early from what they are socially competent in and loved, that the world was a safe place, and that others are reliable. These beliefs would remain with them throughout life. A number of researchers have sought to discover how peer attachment is linked to school adjustment and well-being in young adults, with the hypothesis that those with secured peer attachment would be better adjusted to school and have a greater sense of well-being than those with insecure peer attachments (Bowlby, 2014).

Furthermore, another variable of concern in this study is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence

can be conceptualized as a set of acquired skills and competencies that predict positive outcomes at home with one's family in school and at work. It is individuals' ability to monitor their own and others' feelings also to discriminate among emotions, and to use this information to guide thinking and action. Specifically, it was conceptualised as adaptive abilities, which includes: appraisal and expression of emotions in self and others, regulation of emotions in self and others, and utilisation of emotions in solving problems through flexible planning, creative thinking, redirected attention and motivation. So emotional intelligence of high ability students is believed to encompass a variety of social and cognitive functions related to the school environment (Akinboye, 2014).

Emotionally intelligent individuals are often seen as well-adjusted, warm, genuine, persistent, and optimistic. Akinboye (2007) postulated that, emotional intelligence is a set of non- cognitive abilities that, influence human ability to success in life and at work place. He stresses that for human beings to be successful in life and work place, they need the skills of emotional intelligence which manifest in attitudes such as honesty, energy, trust, integrity, resilience, purpose, commitment, courage, conscience and humility. As emotional intelligence developed in the academic literature, some principal issues were raised to challenge the construct as an actual intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a set of abilities that can be classified as mental or cognitive abilities using emotions for national thought, action and control of one's environment. The _trait versus ability' debate can be attributed largely to the many attempts by researchers to create and validate a measure of emotional intelligence. Over the past decades, researchers have made many attempts to create a measure that is acceptable to academic standards and useful as a precise yet easy to use tool to measure this concept. These measures are based on various conceptualisations of the emotional intelligence construct, which further muddled the debate. High ability students who are emotionally intelligent have the tendency of having a fulfilled adjustment capability (Nwazuoke, 2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

Adjustment of high ability secondary school students to the school environment is an important factor in academic success. However, high ability students who shows academic promise sometimes, fail to perform at a level commensurate to their previous documented abilities. This situation has become worrisome to both teachers, parents and the society at large due to the fact that these high ability students exhibit element of inability to adjust to the school environment because, they face a lot of school challenges which makes adjustment to the school environment difficult and as a result of this, it has been resulting to behavioural problems which includes, depression, bullying, rebellion, anxiety, cybercrime, drop-out from school, academic underachievement, personality disorder, general anxiety disorder and social and maladjusted behaviour.

Adjustment in terms of interaction with peers, coping with the norms, rules and values set by the school authorities seems to undermine high ability students' potential abilities, even, ability to affectively adjust to learning and the likes. There is no doubt that, many variables have been used to ameliorate school adjustment problem such as gender, attitude, self-concept, self-esteem, study habit, interest, school location, teacher's qualification, yet the problem persist. Inability to adjust to the school

environment among the high ability students is yet to receive appropriate attention from relevant authorities. These researchers observed that not much have been done on peer-attachment, emotional intelligence on the school adjustment of the high ability students. Therefore, these researchers deemed it fit to work on the relationship between peer-attachment, emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated relationship between peer-attachment, emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students in Oyo State.

**Hypotheses**

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

$Ho_1$: There is no significant relationship between peer-attachment and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

$Ho_2$: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

## Methodology

Descriptive survey research design of the correlational type was adopted in this study. The study is interested in examining the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, in which these researchers did not manipulate any variable of interest. The population of this study comprised of all the high ability Senior Secondary School Students one (SS1) in Oyo State. The selection of the population was based on the high ability students in Science, Art and Commercial classes. Oyo State has three senatorial district and five hundred and fifty eighty (558) secondary schools, in which only thirty (30) secondary schools were used for this study.

Four hundred and fifty high ability secondary school students were the participants in this study. Multistage sampling technique was adopted. The first stage involved enumerating the state by the three senatorial districts (Oyo Central, Oyo North and Oyo South). The second stage involved using simple random sampling technique for the selection of five local governments from each of the senatorial district, making fifteen local governments' altogether. Also, two secondary schools were selected using simple random sampling technique from each of the local government, making a total number of ten secondary schools from each of the senatorial districts and a total number of thirty secondary schools were used for this study.

The third stage involved the use of purposive sampling technique in the selection of high ability students which cut across science, Art and Commercial classes. Slossan intelligence test was first administered in order to measure the intelligence and identify the high ability students. Moreover, the school examination records of the students were looked into after which achievement test in both English and Mathematics were administered on the students and the researcher finally selected those who scored above 75th percentile. Fifteen high ability students from each of the thirty secondary schools were

selected and participated in this study making a total number of four hundred and fifty high ability students (450). The school adjustment, peer-attachment, emotional intelligence scales were later administered on the high ability students that were selected.

## Instrumentations

Slosson Intelligence Test (SIT) was constructed and validated by Slosson (1961) and re-normed in 2006. It was designed and organised as a test of general mental ability. Oyundoyin (2003) sees SIT as a foreign test that has been adapted to suit African students, for example, certain words and items were changed to suit the culture of the testee without altering the content validity of the test such words like —Pennies —Dollars were changed to —Naira and —Kobo —Dime and Nickel to 10 and 5 kobo respectively. The validity and utility of the test appear to be well established in Academic Records. The instrument was pilot tested on forty respondents who were not part of the sample at the interval of two weeks. Thereafter, the data was analyzed using test- re- test reliability estimation. The reliability co-efficient obtained was r=0.86.

The school examination records of the participants were thoroughly scrutinised after the screening of their intelligent. All the students who cumulatively and persistently scored 75 above in all their subjects were allowed to participate in this current study. And these students were regarded as high ability students. This consists of 40 questions drawn from SS1 English Language and Mathematics Scheme of work. A pilot testing was carried out on twenty high ability students who were not part of the main respondents used in this study. The achievement test was subjected to statistical analysis using Pearson product moment correlation to test the reliability coefficient and the results yielded 0.75 in English Language while 0.72 was also recorded for Mathematics. This achievement test was used in order to support Slosson intelligent screening test to ascertain the real high ability students who were the participants in this study.

For the purpose of measuring school adjustment of high ability students, the instrument used was a self-designed questionnaire tagged _Adjustment to school questionnaire' (ASQ) to reveal the Adjustment ability of the high ability secondary school students in Oyo state. It comprises two parts (A and B). Part A elicited the demographic data of the respondent, Part B comprises two sections of twenty-five (25) statements graded on a four-point liker types, the questionnaire was thoroughly scrutinized for clarity, also the instruments were checked by the experts in the field of test and measurement for precision and usability. The instrument was pilot tested on forty respondents with the use of test- re- test method within two weeks. There after the data was analyzed using test- re- test reliability estimation. The reliability co-efficient obtained was r=0.84 which was considered to be reasonable over time hence acceptable for use in this study.

Peer attachment questionnaire originally formulated by Bowlby (2005) and recently expanded by others was also one of the instruments used. The instrument is a self-report questionnaire with a five point likert-scale response format. A Cronbach's alpha of .82 was found for internal consistency of the scale. Score on the PAQ have also been found to be associated with a number of personality variables. The

instrument was pilot tested on forty respondents who were not part of the real respondents in this research with the use of test- re- test method within two weeks. Thereafter, the data was analyzed using test- re- test reliability estimation. The reliability coefficient obtained was r=0.74 which was considered to be reasonable over time hence acceptable for use in this study.

Emotional intelligence scale contains a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating a higher level of emotional intelligence. The scale was found to be correlated with theoretically related constructs such as the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (r=65) and the Attention subscale of the Trait Meta Moddo Scale (r=63). A Cronbach's alpha of .87 was found for internal consistency of the scale. The scale also showed evidence of validity as scores on the scale were shown to be related to eight of nine measures predicted to be related to emotional intelligence. A pilot study was carried out in order to tropicalise it for use. A reliability co-efficient of 0.82 using Cronbach Alpha was obtained.

## Method of Data Analysis

Data collected in this study were analysed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression Analysis. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) measured the relationship among the variables

## Results

**Ho$_1$:** There is no significant relationship between peer-attachment and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

**Table 1: Correlation matrix of the relationship between peer-attachment and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students**

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | R | P | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjustment to School | 450 | 76.16 | 8.55 | 0.877* | 0.00 | Sig |
| Peer Attachment | 450 | 91.06 | 9.22 | | | |

* Denotes significant correlation at P<0.05

Table 1 showed that the correlation coefficient between school adjustment of high ability secondary school students and peer-attachment is (r = 0.88; P<0.05). This indicates a high positive correlation between school adjustment of high ability secondary school students and peer-attachment. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and concluded that there is significant relationship between peer-attachment and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

**Ho$_2$:** There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

**Table 2: Correlation matrix of the relationship between emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students**

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | R | P | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjustment to School | 450 | 76.16 | 8.55 | 0.995* | 0.00 | Sig |
| Emotional Intelligence | 450 | 57.18 | 8.15 | | | |

* Denotes significant correlation at $P < 0.05$

Table 2 showed that the correlation coefficient between school adjustment of high ability secondary school students and emotional intelligence is ($r = 0.995$; $P < 0.05$). This indicates a perfect positive correlation between school adjustment of high ability secondary school students and emotional intelligence. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and concluded that there was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students.

## Discussion

The findings from the hypothesis one indicated that there was significant relationship between peer-attachment and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students in Oyo State, Nigeria. This showed that peer attachment has a significant influence on the high ability secondary school students' adjustment. This finding corroborates the previous finding of Grabill and Kerns (2000) who reported that young adult attachment plays a role in helping to develop intimate friendship with society. This implies that the role of peer-attachment cannot be overemphasized when discussing school adjustment of high ability secondary school student, that is, the bond or intimacy among them has a lot of influences on their adjustment to the school environment. This could be that acceptance of peer in the school is very germane to the adjustment of the high ability students. Also Parade (2013) found that peer-attachment also influence school adjustment within friendship, this means that friends always come to assist their mates during challenges they may face in the school environment. More so, high ability students that relates with friends in the school environment would be happy, friendly and cope with the school challenges.

Therefore, being peer-attached would empower high ability students and enable them to face any challenges in the school, thus refers to as team spirit among high ability student and their friends. Welch and Housen (2014) also reported that those students who are peer-attached were more likely to have a secure working environment and have adaptive behaviour and use their opportunity to face environmental challenges. Bowlby, (2014) in a research outcome explains that young adult with secure attachment were more likely to have self-disclosure and feel understood, validated and cared for by others, than those with insecure attachment. These result suggested that individual with insecure attachment are lacking in general characteristics necessary to develop intimacy with friendships, while those with peer-attachment developed necessary skills earlier in life. Therefore, while it is clear that peer-attachment significantly influence school adjustment of high ability students, it is also clear that,

if we are to fully understand how peer-attachment influences high ability students in their area of adjustment then, this aspect needs to be properly taken into cognizance.

But the result of Hagans (2005) negates the above submission. He argues that high ability students' differences are found to affect the level of their attachment to friends due to their level of socialization, experiences, race, ethnicity as context affect how and to what degree peer attachment influences school adjustment. The finding of hypothesis two revealed that, there was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and school adjustment of high ability secondary school students. The higher the emotional intelligence of high ability students, the higher their level of school adjustment. This implies that, high ability students with emotional intelligence would be free in a desperate situation and would be calmed when they are surrounded by chaos. It provides the capacity for individual within group and the environment to interact with one another. This study corroborates the study of Akinboye (2007) who reported that individual with high level of emotional intelligence possess ability to perceive, access and generate emotion so as to assist thought, to understand emotions, and to regulate emotion so as to promote better emotion and thought. He also posited that self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills are important attributes of emotional intelligence.

Fayombo (2012) emphasised that emotional intelligence is a crucial determinant of school adjustment and academic achievement and may even be more important than the general mental ability to success. Abraham (2006) concludes that, training in appropriate emotional intelligence skills is necessary for school adjustment. This means that emotional intelligence has significant relationship with school adjustment. Having considered some challenges facing high ability students in the school environment such as environment factors, peer-challenges, rules and regulations being imposed on the high ability students, high ability students, that lack emotional intelligence would not be able to cope and relate effectively in the school. This means that for high ability students to cope effectively such student needs to be emotionally intelligent. This would make them to be more competent to understand the emotion of their mates and how to relate in a more acceptable manner with their mates.

**Implications of the Findings**
The findings of this research provide information that are germane and could be applied in the field of special education and psychology that would ensure the development of high ability students and the education sector. This is because education is regarded as an instrument per excellence geared towards national development. However, the importance of school adjustment is the context of academic achievement; its impact can be felt with proper adjustment of high ability students to the school environment. This means that proper adjustment of high ability students cannot be overemphasized especially during teaching and learning processes because this is the time for them to acquire relevant knowledge and skills which in-turn make them useful to the society. It can also be derived from the study that emotional intelligence is more significant because most high ability students exert effort to cope in the school environment in order for them to achieve academically. The academic achievement of high ability students determines whether they can cope effectively in the school environment through their ability to maintain their emotional intelligence.

## Conclusion

The study predicted the influence of peer-attachment and emotional intelligence on school adjustment of high ability students in Oyo State, Nigeria. This is a major pointer to the fact that emotional intelligence is an important factor in the education sector as a whole and in the secondary school in particular. Pee-attachment factor also came up significantly in the finding of this study as being crucial in determining school adjustment among high ability students.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher wishes to make the following recommendations;

(1) High ability students should be motivated to develop their Peer-attachment and emotional intelligence in order to properly adjust to the school environment.

(2) The school environment should be made more friendly

(3) Teachers of high ability students should be updated on the influence of peer-attachment and emotional intelligence factors on school adjustment of high ability students.

(4) The school administrators should be made to understand that the high ability students should not be unnecessarily stressed in the school.

(5) School authorities should ensure that high ability students are not stressed with workload as this could lead to fatigue and tiredness which can result to inability to adjust to the school environment.

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