

INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY TRAITS AND SELF-EFFICACY ON THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ENUGU EDUCATION ZONE, ENUGU STATE

Ezinna Edge Iroegbu; Chiaha Marcel Onyebuchi & Franklin Chizoba Udenze

Abstract

Beyond academic excellence, students are expected to develop social competencies that enable them to integrate successfully into the school environment and society at large. It is against this backdrop that this study was carried out to examine the influence of personality traits and self-efficacy on the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone. This study was carried out to determine the extent to which personality traits influence the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone; determine the effect of self-efficacy on the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone, determine the influence of gender differences on the personality traits of secondary school students, determine the influence of gender differences on the self-efficacy on social adjustment and determine the influence of gender differences on the social adjustment of secondary school students. Ex post facto design was used in the study. A total of 4,713 senior secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone. A sample size of 399 was gotten from the population using Taro Yamane formula. Findings: personality traits influence the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone; self-efficacy influences the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone; gender differences significantly influence the personality traits of secondary school students to a very great extent. Recommendations: schools should incorporate personality development workshops and self-efficacy training into the curriculum, school-based counseling should be integrated as to enhance students' ability to interact positively with peers and teachers.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Self-efficacy, Social Adjustment, Gender differences.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental aspect of human development, and the secondary school stage plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic, social, and personal lives. Beyond academic excellence, students are expected to develop social competencies that enable them to integrate successfully into the school environment and society at large. Social adjustment, which refers to an individual's ability to adapt to social environments, build relationships, and conform to societal norms, is a critical factor in determining a student's overall well-being and success in school (Ozuluonye, Obiageli, & Benataokwu, 2023). It is equally a significant concern for many, particularly parents, teachers, counselors, and psychologists (Singh & Sharma, 2023). This issue arises from the understanding that a student's social aspect involves interactions with others in both personal and public settings. Consequently, students, especially those in secondary schools, often face social challenges that are closely linked to academic difficulties, which have become prevalent in educational institutions. The inability of students to socially adjust in school has become a troubling issue due to its potential impact on academic performance and the increased risk of students engaging in anti-social behaviors such as drug use, theft, alcoholism, and even sexual assault as a way of coping (Ollfors & Andersson, 2021). Many secondary school students in Nigeria are often perceived as being vulnerable to various social issues, including drug abuse, robbery, and alcoholism, in addition to the academic challenges that have seemingly become ingrained in the school experience. According to Obeten (2021), these difficulties often stem from factors like parental or guardian neglect, unstable family settings, insufficient home training, and a lack of affection and care. As a result, students may experience emotional and social instability, increasing their vulnerability to

harmful behaviors such as substance abuse, prostitution, and other detrimental activities, which in turn impede their ability to integrate successfully into society.

For students, adjustment refers to their capacity to engage constructively with members of the school community to the best of their abilities (Montgomery, Gregg, Somers *et al.*, 2019). Tamannaefar and Rezae (2020) defines adjustment as a state of balance between an individual and their surroundings, highlighting the extent to which a person integrates smoothly and contentedly into their environment or culture without experiencing conflict or distress.

Self-efficacy, a concept introduced by Albert Bandura refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute tasks successfully. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perception of their capability to successfully complete a specific task. Nwabuike and Nwankwo (2020) described self-efficacy as the confidence in one's ability to reach designated performance levels that shape outcomes in their lives. It plays a vital role in students' social adjustment within the school environment. Emotional strengths, such as self-efficacious beliefs, are crucial for successfully navigating and adapting to social settings (Harahap, 2019).

On the contrary, personality traits are enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that shape how individuals interact with their environment (Klimstra, Nofle, Luyckx *et al.*, 2018). The Five-Factor Model of personality comprising openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism has been widely used to assess personality differences among individuals (Ogba & Nwankwo, 2023). Each of these traits plays a significant role in social adjustment. While personality traits and self-efficacy are distinct constructs, they are interrelated and jointly influence social adjustment (Cazan & Iacob, 2017). The interaction between these two traits is relevant in shaping students' social behavior and coping mechanisms. Personality traits can shape an individual's level of self-efficacy. Students with high levels of extraversion and self-efficacy are more likely to initiate and maintain friendships, participate in class discussions and seek when needed; while, students high in neuroticism but low in self-efficacy may exhibit withdrawal, social anxiety and even maladaptive behavior (Capara *et al.*, 2018). John, Soto and Donnellan (2021) have shown that the ability of students to adjust socially in the school setting or system is influenced in a greater extent to their personality traits and self-efficacy beliefs.

Personality according to Ratu, Rai, Prasetya *et al.*, (2020) is the sum total of ways in which an individual reacts to and interacts with others. Personality traits, as enduring characteristics that shape an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, have a significant influence on social adjustment. The Big Five Personality Traits framework is commonly used to analyze five key personality dimensions: extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (John, Soto & Donnellan, 2021). These traits can be identified through both self-assessments and peer evaluations across different age groups and cultures. Nnachi and Omabe (2024) indicated that personality traits are largely inherited and remain stable throughout life. Personality plays a significant role in various aspects of well-being, such as life satisfaction, happiness, and social adjustment. Research has shown that extraversion and neuroticism are the most influential predictors of happiness, while neuroticism and conscientiousness are the strongest determinants of life satisfaction (Abood, Alharbi, Mhaidat *et al.*, 2020). The word adjustment connotes changes on the part of an individual in order to cope, fit and perform successfully in an environment where he belongs (Atoum & Al-Momani, 2018). Adjustment commences when one is born into this world, it cannot be averted. Man does not exist in a vacuum. The basic objective of adjustment is to set a balance between one's wishes and social expectations that affect all aspects of one's life. As a result, the person can respond properly to all environmental stimuli to acquire his favourable stimuli and reinforcement (Erzen & Ozabaci, 2023). Social adjustment is an effort made by an individual to cope with standards, values and needs of a society in order to be accepted.

Self-efficacy, or a student's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations, is another key determinant of social adjustment (Paunonen & Ashton, 2021). High self-efficacy empowers students to confidently engage with others, resolve conflicts, and navigate challenging social situations (Ekennia, 2020). It also influences how they perceive and react to social feedback, shaping their ability to form and sustain relationships. Students with high social self-efficacy are better equipped to handle social interactions, leading to more positive peer relationships and smoother integration into group settings. Gender differences represent one of the most studied variables in educational psychology, particularly in relation to personality, self-efficacy, and social behavior. The term "gender differences" refers to the psychological, behavioral, emotional, and social distinctions commonly observed between males and females due to a combination of biological, cultural, and socialization processes (Raufelder, Berner, & Schneider, 2021). Two theories were used in this research. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Big Five Personality Traits theory. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping human behavior (Schultz & Schultz, 2015). It posits that individuals develop and regulate their behaviors through reciprocal determinism, where personal factors (such as personality traits and self-efficacy), environmental influences (such as school and peer interactions), and behavioral patterns (such as social adjustment) interact dynamically (Mcleod, 2017). While the Big Five Personality Traits theory, also known as the Five-Factor Model (FFM), which originated from the lexical hypothesis of researchers such as Lewis Goldberg, Paul Costa, and Robert McCrae explains why some people are quiet and passive, whereas others are loud and aggressive (Mcleod, 2017).

The school environment, teachers and gender differences play critical mediating roles. Teachers through their feedbacks, relational warmth, and classroom management styles can either reinforce or hinder students' self-perceptions and personality expressions (Hamre & Pianta, 2017). They equally highlighted that highlighted that students with supportive teacher relationships exhibited better adjustment, regardless of their personality profile. The emotional safety, peer support and institutional structure either foster or frustrates social development all together (Thapa, 2016). Raufelder *et al.*, (2021) opined that personality traits' effects on social integration are often moderated by school climate and peer acceptance. The ability of secondary school students to adjust socially is a crucial aspect of their academic and personal development. Personality traits and self-efficacy are fundamental psychological factors that shape how students interact with their peers, handle social challenges, and integrate into the school environment. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to examine the influence of personality traits and self-efficacy on social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone.

Statement of the Problem

In Enugu Education Zone, secondary school students are faced with problems such as the poor academic achievement of some students as a result of low self-efficacy and poor adjustment; peer related conflicts such as peer aggression, bullying and disregard for school rules and regulations; increase in school dropout incidents as a result of difficulty in adjusting socially and losing interest in education; mental and emotional health issues such as anxiety, unnecessary fear, low self-esteem affects students ability to cope in school and strained teacher-student relation as a result of the inability of the teacher being able to understand the student and vice versa. The issue of poor social adjustment among students remains prevalent and can be observed not only in the Enugu Education Zone but across this country known as Nigeria. This situation affects not only the students themselves but also teachers, parents, school authorities, and other concerned members of society. It is based on the above problems and its persistence that this study was undertaken to fill the academic gap in this part of the country

especially in Enugu Education Zone where such study has not been carried out to examine the influence of personality traits and self-efficacy on social adjustments in Enugu Education Zone.

Objectives of the study

The following research questions guided the study

1. determine the influence of personality traits on the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone.
2. determine the influence of self-efficacy on the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone.
3. determine the influence of gender differences on the personality traits of secondary school students.
4. determine the influence of gender differences on the self-efficacy on social adjustment. determine the influence of gender differences on the social adjustment of secondary school students.

Methods

This study adopted the ex post facto research design, which is a type of non-experimental research design used to investigate the possible cause-and-effect relationship between variables without manipulating the independent variables. According to Nwankwo and Emunemu (2015), it is a type of non-experimental research design that does not attempt to control or manipulate any variable. The area of the study is Enugu Education Zone. The population for the study is 4,713 representing all the SS 2 students in Enugu Education Zone (PPSMB, 2023). A sample of 368 SS2 students was drawn from the population using the Taro Yamane formula. The purposive sampling technique was used. 40 SS2 students were purposefully selected with the exception of Annunciation Secondary where 48 SS2 students were selected as a result of its large population. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher for the study.

Results

Table 4.1: Influence of Personality Traits on Social Adjustment (IPTSA)

Item Statements	VGE (4)	GE (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	ΣFX	X	Decision Rule
I find it easy to make new friends	198	90	45	26	1202	3.35	Accepted
I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts in class	189	81	54	25	1171	3.26	Accepted
I prefer to work in groups rather than alone	225	72	27	35	1235	3.44	Accepted
I handle stress and pressure well in school.	162	108	36	53	1135	3.16	Accepted
I am open to trying new activities and experiences.	234	63	36	26	1272	3.54	Accepted
I get along well with my classmates and teachers	207	81	36	35	1211	3.39	Accepted
I feel anxious or nervous when meeting new people	45	54	81	179	812	2.26	Accepted
I avoid social interactions because I feel shy	36	63	72	188	804	2.24	Accepted
Grand Mean					8842	3.08	SA

From the above data, it implies that personality traits influence the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education.

Table 4.2: Influence of Self-efficacy on Social Adjustment (ISSA)

Item Statements	VGE (4)	GE (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	ΣFX	X	Decision Rule
I believe I can solve difficult school assignments.	207	90	36	26	1217	3.39	Accepted
I feel confident when facing challenges at school	199	81	45	34	1180	3.29	Accepted
I can handle unexpected situations in school	190	99	36	34	1180	3.29	Accepted
I always try again when I fail at something.	226	72	36	25	1242	3.46	Accepted
I believe I have control over my academic success	235	63	27	34	1242	3.46	Accepted
I am confident in my ability to make friends	221	72	45	21	1224	3.41	Accepted
I can effectively communicate with classmates and teachers	212	81	36	30	1217	3.39	Accepted
I feel capable of overcoming difficulties in my school environment	54	63	81	161	844	2.35	Accepted
Grand Mean						3.25	SA

The analysis above shows that self-efficacy has a significant and positive influence on the social adjustment of students in the Enugu Education Zone.

Table 4.3: Influence of Gender differences on Personality Traits (IGDPT)

Item Statements	VGE (4)	GE (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	ΣFX	X	Decision
I believe my gender affects how confident I am in school.	279	45	18	9	1379	3.85	High Extent
My gender influences how I express my feelings.	270	54	18	9	1366	3.81	High Extent
I believe my gender affects how I relate with classmates.	265	54	23	9	1356	3.79	High Extent
My gender does not stop me from being open to new experiences.	272	50	18	9	1374	3.83	High Extent
I think my gender influences how often I take leadership roles.	283	45	18	4	1381	3.85	High Extent
I believe my gender affects how calm or aggressive I behave.	269	54	18	10	1360	3.80	High Extent
My gender influences how cooperative I am in group work.	288	45	14	4	1392	3.87	High Extent
I feel my gender affects how determined I am to achieve my goals.	296	41	9	4	1398	3.90	High Extent
My gender influences how often I speak in public.	279	28	36	16	1345	3.75	High Extent
I believe my gender affects how friendly I am to others.	269	39	18	33	1338	3.73	High Extent
Grand Mean						3.82	High Extent

The analysis above indicates that gender differences significantly influence the personality traits of secondary school students to a very great extent.

Table 4.4: Influence of Gender differences on Self-efficacy (IGDS)

Item Statements	VGE (4)	GE (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	ΣFX X	Decision
I believe I can do well in my studies regardless of my gender.	288	41	18	4	1390 3.87	High Extent
My gender does not stop me from participating in class activities.	283	45	18	4	1381 3.85	High Extent
I am confident that I can solve difficult school tasks no matter my gender.	280	49	18	4	1374 3.83	High Extent
I believe I can perform as well as any student of the opposite gender.	292	41	14	4	1393 3.88	High Extent
I feel my gender does not affect my ability to pass examinations.	297	41	9	4	1399 3.90	High Extent
I have the courage to ask questions in class no matter my gender.	308	32	7	4	1405 3.92	High Extent
I believe I can compete academically with students of the opposite gender.	302	36	8	4	1399 3.91	High Extent
My gender does not limit my ambition to achieve my career goals.	295	41	11	4	1392 3.89	High Extent
I am confident I can lead school activities regardless of my gender.	278	40	40	9	1297 3.61	High Extent
I believe I can perform well in any school subject, whether it is common for my gender or not.	280	38	38	9	1301 3.62	High Extent
Grand Mean					3.83	High Extent

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Gender differences do not significantly influence the self-efficacy of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone.

Table 4.5: Influence of Gender differences on Social Adjustment (IGDSA)

Item Statements	VGE (4)	GE (3)	ME (2)	LE (1)	ΣFX X	Decision
I believe my gender affects how easily I make friends.	288	41	18	4	1390 3.87	High Extent
My gender influences how I relate with classmates of the opposite sex.	283	45	18	4	1381 3.85	High Extent
I feel my gender affects how quickly I adjust to new school environments.	280	49	18	4	1374 3.83	High Extent
My gender influences how I join school clubs and activities.	292	41	14	4	1393 3.88	High Extent
I think my gender affects how I resolve conflicts with other students.	297	41	9	4	1399 3.90	High Extent
My gender influences how confident I feel in group discussions.	308	32	7	4	1405 3.92	High Extent

Item Statements	VGE (4)	GE (3)	ME (2)	LE (1)	$\Sigma F X$	$\bar{X}$	Decision
I believe my gender affects how I interact with my teachers.	302	36	8	4	1399	3.91	High Extent
My gender influences how comfortable I feel in social gatherings at school.	295	41	11	4	1392	3.89	High Extent
I think my gender affects how often I participate in school events.	292	45	9	4	1394	3.88	High Extent
My gender influences how I cooperate with other students in class work.	289	35	23	12	1318	3.67	High Extent
Grand Mean						3.86	High Extent

Gender differences significantly influences the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone.

Discussions

From the findings of the study it has been shown that personality traits influences social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone. The hypothesis reveals statistically significant relationship between personality traits on the social adjustment school students in the Enugu Education Zone. This suggests that students' personality traits influence their social adjustment. Factors such as making new friends, handling stress, openness to experiences, and dealing with anxiety all play a measurable role in shaping how students adjust socially in school. The finding is in line with the findings of Onongha et al, (2025) that personality traits influence the social adjustment of secondary school students. The personality of students goes a long in influencing how they make friends and whom they choose as friends. The study finding has been able to show that self-efficacy influences social adjustment. Students who have higher self-efficacy such as confidence in handling tasks, retrying after failure, controlling academic success, and making friends are more socially adjusted than their peers with lower self-efficacy. On the other hand, students who reported difficulty in overcoming challenges (as seen in the last item) displayed weaker social adjustment. This confirms that self-efficacy is a key psychological factor shaping social adjustment, supporting the study's conceptual framework. This finding is in line with the works of Nnachi and Omabe (2024) and the works of Onongha et al, (2025) that the self-efficacy of students builds their self-esteem which in turn helps them in adjusting properly in the school environment.

The findings indicate a consistently high perceived extent to which gender differences influence personality-related behaviors among secondary school students in the Enugu Education Zone. The influence spans confidence, determination, leadership, emotional expression, cooperation, and public speaking, with notable minorities signaling resistance in areas like openness to new experiences and public voice. These in line with the study of Eshun et al (2023) that gender differences influence the personality traits of students to a reasonable extent. Students in the Enugu Education Zone report high self-efficacy regardless of gender differences. Career ambitions are the least influenced by gender stereotypes. Some minor perceptions of gender-based performance limitations still exist in certain academic tasks. The results indicate that gender differences do not substantially limit students' perceived capabilities in academics, leadership, or future ambitions. The consistent high ratings across all items reflect a positive trend toward gender equality in academic confidence within the Enugu Education Zone. The findings are equally in line with the study of Ogba and Nwankwo (2023) that gender differences is independent of the self-efficacy of the students. The strongest

influence observed in social gatherings and conflict resolution. Grand mean score of 3.66 indicates a Great Extent of perceived influence. The findings showed that that gender differences significantly shape the way secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone adjust socially in school. This influence is evident across various social dimensions, including peer relationships, participation in activities, and confidence in social settings. This finding is in line with the findings of Jahannejadi, Taghvae and Pirani (2020) that gender differences influences social adjustment.

Conclusion

The findings from the analysis indicate that personality traits and self-efficacy significantly influence the social adjustment of secondary school students in Enugu Education Zone. Students with high self-efficacy and adaptive personality traits tend to interact well with their peers, express themselves confidently, and participate actively in school activities. The grand mean scores across the three tables suggest that the majority of students exhibit positive social adjustment, demonstrating strong interpersonal skills, resilience, and a sense of belonging in school. However, some students experience challenges, particularly in following school rules and regulations, handling unfamiliar situations, and managing academic stress.

Recommendations

1. Schools should add personality development workshops and self-efficacy training into the curriculum.
2. Role-playing exercises, group discussions, and school-based counseling should be integrated as to enhance students' ability to interact positively with peers and teachers.
3. Training should be provided to teachers on how to support students struggling with rule adherence, helping them understand and accept school regulations in a structured way.
4. Schools should encourage counseling interventions for students with low social adjustment.

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