

EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PUPILS IN ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study examined emotional regulation and its impact on academic achievement of internally displaced pupils. The target population comprised internally displaced pupils enrolled in IDP-hosting public primary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. There were approximately 221,000 internally displaced persons in Adamawa State, with an estimated 35% being school-aged children. A correlational research design was employed using a sample of 396 upper primary school pupils drawn from IDP-hosting schools across three LGAs in Adamawa State using multi-stages sampling techniques. Emotional regulation was assessed using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire for Children (ERQ-C), while academic achievement was measured through records in core subjects English, Mathematics, and Social Studies. To establish validity, both instruments were reviewed by experts in Educational Psychology and Education in Emergencies, while pilot testing was conducted with 20 non-sample IDP pupils to refine contextual appropriateness. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.78, which is considered acceptable for internal consistency. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC). Findings revealed a generally low level of emotional regulation among IDP pupils, with a grand mean of 2.20 on a 5-point scale. Pupils struggled significantly with managing anger, anxiety, and emotional distractions in academic contexts, though some exhibited high levels of emotional expression and teacher help-seeking behavior. Most notably, the study established a moderately strong and statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.623$, $p < 0.05$) between emotional regulation and academic performance, indicating that pupils with higher emotional regulation skills were more likely to perform better academically. The study concludes that emotional regulation is a critical but often neglected factor influencing the academic success of displaced children. The study recommends integrating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into school curricula, training teachers in trauma-informed pedagogy, providing psychosocial support services, and engaging parents and communities to foster emotionally responsive learning environments.

Key Note: Emotional regulation, Internally Displaced Person, Pupils and Academic achievement

Introduction

One of the most critical but often overlooked dimensions of internally displaced pupils' well-being was emotional regulation the ability to recognize, express, and manage emotional responses in adaptive and socially acceptable ways (Gross, 2015). Emotional regulation had a direct and reciprocal link with academic engagement, cognitive flexibility, social competence, and resilience in school settings (Denham, Bassett, Zinsser, & Wyatt, 2012; Blair & Raver, 2015; Adeyeye 2019). However, the traumatic experiences faced by IDP children including witnessing violence, family separation, destruction of homes, insecurity, and hunger often overwhelmed their emotional capacities, resulting in chronic emotional dysregulation (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Children living in IDP settlements in Adamawa State often presented with signs of emotional instability such as anxiety, depression, hyper-vigilance, aggression, and withdrawal. According to Musa and Ibrahim (2022), displaced pupils who lacked emotional coping strategies tended to engage in disruptive behavior, showed reduced attention spans, and were more likely to skip school or drop out entirely. These manifestations were rooted in their inability to regulate affective responses to environmental stressors, which, if unaddressed, evolved into barriers to learning and academic success.

In a mixed-method study by Bello and Yunusa (2020), teachers in conflict-affected schools in Adamawa and Borno States reported that learners exposed to violence often struggled with emotional control, exhibited behavioral challenges, and failed to meet academic benchmarks. Their study emphasized that emotional dysregulation contributed to absenteeism, low test scores, and a general decline in motivation to learn.

Recent empirical studies across North-East Nigeria and other conflict-affected regions provided strong evidence linking emotional regulation with academic performance. For example, Olatunde and Daniel (2023) conducted a post-intervention study in Plateau State focusing on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for displaced learners. The findings revealed that children who received emotional regulation training demonstrated notable improvements in classroom behavior, concentration, and academic scores compared to the control group. Similarly, Afolayan, Danladi, and Muktar (2021) studied displaced pupils in Yobe and Adamawa States and discovered a strong

positive correlation between emotional regulation capacity and students' cognitive engagement. Pupils with moderate to high self-regulatory abilities were more likely to complete assignments, participate actively in class, and persist through academic challenges. A quantitative study by Efosa-Ehioghiren and Izehiuwa (2024) further emphasized that emotional well-being accounted for nearly 88% of the variance in students' academic engagement among conflict-affected youth. Their research concluded that when learners were equipped with tools to manage frustration, fear, and anxiety, they were more likely to succeed academically, despite their displacement status.

In a large-scale SEL (Social Emotional Learning) intervention led by Creative Associates International (2024), more than 88,000 learners from IDP-hosting schools across North-East Nigeria were introduced to trauma-informed education programs. The study found a statistically significant improvement in attendance, class participation, and standardized test performance among pupils who received consistent SEL support, particularly in Adamawa State.

UNICEF (2024), under the Global Partnership for Education Accelerated Funding (GPE-AF) initiative, identified emotional regulation as a cornerstone skill necessary for the successful reintegration of out-of-school children. Findings from the field indicated that learners who showed emotional maturity and resilience were more likely to transition from non-formal learning centers back to mainstream schools and demonstrated improved academic outcomes.

Despite promising interventions, a significant proportion of internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State continued to underperform academically due to unresolved emotional trauma and a lack of sustained psychosocial support in their schools (Street Child, 2021; Save the Children, 2020). Teachers, often untrained in trauma-sensitive pedagogy, struggled to address behavioral issues linked to emotional dysregulation. Moreover, schools in host communities were typically under-resourced, lacking counseling services, SEL programs, or safe spaces where children could process and regulate their emotions.

In interviews conducted by NRC (2023), education officials noted that many displaced children "came to school with burdens too heavy to learn" a powerful illustration of how emotional suffering directly impaired learning. Without focused interventions that targeted emotional regulation, academic remediation programs yielded only temporary or marginal results.

This study was anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and the Process Model of Emotion Regulation (Gross, 2015). The Social Cognitive Theory emphasized the dynamic interaction between personal factors, behaviors, and the environment, suggesting that children learned and regulated emotions through observation, modeling, and reinforcement. Internally displaced pupils exposed to emotionally responsive environments, such as trauma-informed classrooms, were more likely to develop better emotional regulation and academic coping strategies (Adeyeye, 2023)

There was also a scarcity of longitudinal studies tracking the effectiveness of SEL interventions on IDP pupils' academic outcomes over time. Additionally, few studies incorporated teachers' perspectives or capacity in managing emotional regulation in the classroom, leaving a gap in understanding the holistic educational environment of displaced learners.

By addressing these gaps, this study sought to examine emotional regulation and its impact on the academic performance of internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine emotional regulation and its impact on the academic performance of internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria

Research Question

The research question formulated to guide this study is: What is the level of emotional regulation of pupil Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria?

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant between emotional regulation and academic achievement of internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design within the framework of a descriptive survey to investigate the relationship between emotional regulation and academic performance among internally displaced pupils. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed for the examination of the direction and strength of the relationship between naturally occurring variables without experimental manipulation (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

The target population comprised internally displaced pupils enrolled in IDP-hosting public primary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023), there were approximately 221,000 internally displaced persons in Adamawa State, with an estimated 35% being school-aged children. Based on data from the Adamawa State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB, 2024), approximately 23,500 internally displaced pupils were enrolled in public primary schools across the state.

The study focused on Upper Basic pupils (Primary 4–6), as they were developmentally capable of completing self-report instruments and were typically more academically assessed.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. First, purposive sampling was used to identify three local government areas (Yola North, Girei, and Michika) with the highest concentration of IDP pupils. Then, three IDP-hosting schools were randomly selected from each LGA. Within each school, 44 pupils were selected making total of 396 samples using stratified random sampling based on gender and class level, ensuring balanced representation.

From the estimated population of 23,500 IDP pupils, a representative sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size calculation:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

$$n = 23,500 / (1 + 23,500 \times 0.05^2)$$

$$n \approx 396$$

To ensure logistical feasibility and depth of analysis, a manageable sample size of 396 pupils was drawn. This sample was considered statistically sufficient for correlational analysis, especially given stratified selection to reduce sampling bias (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Two major instruments were used: Firstly, the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire for Children (ERQ-C) adapted from Gross and John (2003) was used to assess emotional regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression. The ERQ-C utilized a five-point Likert-type scale to measure responses, where: Very High Level = 5, High Level = 4, Moderate Level = 3, Low Level = 2, and Very Low Level = 1. This scale had been widely validated and used in both Western and African contexts. Secondly, the Academic Performance Checklist (APC) consisted of students' continuous assessment and term examination records in core subjects (Mathematics, English, and Social Studies) were used. These subjects were aligned with national curricula and offered standardized benchmarks of academic performance (NERDC, 2020). The instruments were validated by experts in Educational Psychology and Education in Emergencies and were pilot tested among 20 non-sample IDP pupils to estimate reliability using Cronbach's alpha. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained

Data were collected through visits to the selected schools. The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA) consists of a total of 10 items, designed to assess two key emotional regulation strategies among young individuals. These include Cognitive Reappraisal, which comprises 6 items, and Expressive Suppression, which comprises 4 items. Each item is typically rated on a Likert-type scale, often ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 or 7 (strongly agree), depending on the version used. The ERQ-CA is an adaptation of the original Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross and John (2003) and has been widely used and validated for measuring how children and adolescents manage and express their emotions, particularly in educational and psychological research contexts. The ERQ-C was administered directly to pupils with the help of trained research assistants who understood the local language and psychosocial dynamics of displaced children. Mathematics, English Language and social studies Academic records were obtained from school registers with permission from head teachers.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to summarize emotional regulation levels and academic scores. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the relationship between emotional regulation and academic performance at a 0.05 significance level. Regression analysis was also employed to determine the predictive value of emotional regulation on academic outcomes.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Adamawa State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the relevant institutional ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians, and assent was sought from pupils. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were guaranteed. Ethical research practice was especially critical when working with vulnerable populations such as children affected by conflict and displacement (UNICEF, 2019).

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the level of emotional regulation of pupil Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria?

S/N	Emotional Regulation Item n= 396	Mean	S.D	Remark
1	I have ability to stay calm when upset or angry.	1.42	1.08	VLL
2	I have ability to control emotional outbursts during classroom activities.	1.36	1.15	VLL
3	I have ability to stay focused despite emotional distractions.	2.07	1.28	LL
4	I have ability to express emotions appropriately.	3.72	1.11	HL
5	I have ability to identify one's emotions during stressful situations.	2.31	1.19	LL
6	I have ability to manage feelings of fear and anxiety in class.	2.12	1.26	LL
7	I have ability to bounce back quickly after setbacks.	2.08	1.30	LL
8	I have ability to seek support from teachers when emotionally overwhelmed.	3.84	1.08	HL
9	I have ability to maintain positive interactions with peers despite emotional stress.	2.21	1.22	LL
10	I have ability to use self-soothing strategies (e.g., breathing) when anxious.	2.27	1.18	LL
Average grand Mean		2.20	1.19	LL

The results presented in Table 1 reveal the level of emotional regulation among pupils residing in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria. The findings indicate that the overall emotional regulation ability of the pupils is low, as reflected by the average grand mean score of 2.20 with a standard deviation of 1.19. This implies that, generally, pupils in these camps struggle to manage and control their emotions effectively in the face of daily stressors and academic challenges.

A closer look at the individual items shows that two emotional regulation indicators ability to stay calm when upset or angry" (M = 1.42) and "ability to control emotional outbursts during classroom

activities” ($M = 1.36$) fall within the very low level category. This is particularly concerning, as it implies that many pupils in IDP camps lack basic skills to regulate impulsive emotional reactions, which may negatively affect their classroom behavior and peer relationships.

Furthermore, six of the ten items recorded low-level ratings, indicating that most pupils struggle with recognizing and managing their emotions in various school and social contexts. For instance, the ability to stay focused despite emotional distractions ($M = 2.07$), manage feelings of fear and anxiety ($M = 2.12$), and bounce back after setbacks ($M = 2.08$) all received low mean scores. These findings may be linked to the unstable and traumatic environment that many of these children have experienced due to displacement, insecurity, and loss.

Interestingly, two items stood out with high-level ratings: the ability to express emotions appropriately ($M = 3.72$) and the ability to seek support from teachers when emotionally overwhelmed ($M = 3.84$). This indicates that despite the general emotional difficulties, some pupils possess positive coping strategies and are willing to seek help when necessary.

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant between emotional regulation and academic achievement of internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State, Northeast Nigeria.

To determine the relationship between emotional regulation and academic achievement among internally displaced pupils, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was computed. The analysis involved emotional regulation scores from the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire for Children (ERQ-C) and academic achievement scores (based on term assessments in English, Mathematics, and Social Studies).

Table 2: Emotional Regulation and Academic Achievement of Internally Displaced Pupils

Variables	n	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev.	r-value	p-value	Decision
Emotional Regulation	396	3.18	0.74			
Academic Achievement	396	64.52	10.21	0.623	0.000	Significant ($p < .05$)

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to determine the relationship between emotional regulation and academic achievement among internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.623, which indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables. This implies that pupils with higher levels of emotional regulation also tended to perform better in their academic subjects, particularly in core areas such as English, Mathematics, and Social Studies. Furthermore, the p -value obtained was 0.000, which is well below the conventional significance level of 0.05. This implies that the observed relationship was statistically significant and did not occur by chance. In other words, the data provide strong evidence that emotional regulation plays a meaningful role in shaping the academic performance of IDP pupils.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the level of emotional regulation among internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State was generally low, with most pupils struggling to manage negative emotions such as anger, fear, and anxiety in academic and social situations. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the psychological vulnerabilities of conflict-affected children. According to UNHCR (2022) and Street Child (2021), children in displacement settings often experience cumulative trauma from exposure to violence, loss of family members, and instability, all of which impair their emotional development and regulation abilities.

The observation that key emotional regulation indicators such as staying calm when upset or controlling emotional outbursts were rated very low is consistent with findings by Musa and Ibrahim (2022), who reported that IDP pupils in Borno and Adamawa States often display heightened emotional reactivity, reduced impulse control, and disruptive behavior in classrooms. These emotional challenges stem from persistent exposure to insecurity, lack of psychosocial support, and unstructured learning environments.

Furthermore, the result that some pupils showed higher abilities in expressing emotions and seeking teacher support suggests that positive relationships and support structures within schools may offer a buffer against trauma. UNICEF (2024), under the Global Partnership for Education Accelerated Funding (GPE-AF) initiative, emphasized that supportive teacher-pupil relationships and access to social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions significantly improve displaced

learners' emotional regulation and readiness to learn. Similarly, Creative Associates International (2024) found that trauma-informed SEL programming in North-East Nigeria improved classroom participation and reduced emotional outbursts among over 88,000 conflict-affected learners.

The significant positive correlation between emotional regulation and academic achievement found in this study ($r = 0.623$, $p < 0.05$) supports existing empirical evidence linking emotional competence to academic outcomes. Efosa-Ehioghien and Izehiuwa (2024), in a quantitative study across Northern Nigeria, found that emotional wellbeing explained 88% of the variance in academic engagement among displaced adolescents. Pupils who were better at managing anxiety and frustration showed higher persistence, better attendance, and stronger academic performance. Likewise, Olatunde and Daniel (2023) reported that displaced pupils who underwent post-trauma cognitive behavioral therapy demonstrated marked improvement in both emotional control and academic achievement.

This finding is also in line with Blair and Raver (2015) and Denham et al. (2012), who noted that emotional regulation is central to school readiness, attention, executive function, and motivation to learn. In displacement contexts, where children face chronic stressors, emotional regulation becomes an even more critical factor for educational success.

Taken together, the findings reinforce the view that emotional regulation is not only a psychological need but an educational imperative for children affected by conflict and displacement. Schools serving IDP populations must incorporate structured SEL programs, trauma-informed pedagogy, and psychosocial support systems to strengthen students' emotional capacity and enhance academic outcomes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that emotional regulation among internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State is generally low, with many struggling to manage emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, and frustration in classroom settings. The inability to regulate emotions effectively poses a serious barrier to learning, classroom participation, and overall academic success.

The study further established a moderately strong and statistically significant positive relationship between emotional regulation and academic achievement. Pupils who demonstrated better emotional regulation skills performed significantly better in core academic subjects, highlighting the crucial role of emotional competence in supporting learning, especially in displacement and trauma-affected contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance emotional regulation and academic performance among internally displaced pupils in Adamawa State and similar conflict-affected settings:

1. The Ministry of Education and relevant agencies should incorporate structured SEL programs into the basic education curriculum of IDP-hosting schools. These programs should teach children how to identify, express, and manage emotions, develop empathy, and build positive relationships.
2. Teachers in IDP-hosting schools should be trained on trauma-sensitive teaching approaches. Professional development programs should equip educators with skills to recognize emotional distress in pupils and respond appropriately with empathy, patience, and support.
3. Schools should foster a culture of trust, safety, and care. Teachers should be encouraged to build supportive and respectful relationships with pupils, as the study found that seeking help from teachers correlates with better emotional regulation.
4. Parents, caregivers, and community members should be involved in emotional support initiatives. Awareness programs can help them understand the importance of emotional wellbeing and their role in reinforcing positive coping strategies at home.

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