



TEACHERS' MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SELF-EFFICACY, AND STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

EMIKE, ESTHER ALI

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2512-5684>

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Veritas University, Abuja.

*Corresponding author: alie@veritas.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study examined teachers' awareness of emotional disorders and its relationship with students' emotional difficulties and emotional well-being among secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria. Descriptive correlational research design was adopted involving 500 participants comprising 50 teachers and 450 students selected from ten public and private secondary schools. Data were collected using the Teachers' Awareness of Emotional Disorders Scale, Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and Well-Being Index. The instruments demonstrated acceptable reliability coefficients. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that teachers had high awareness of emotional disorders ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.38$) and high self-efficacy in supporting students with emotional difficulties ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.70$). Students reported low emotional difficulties ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.68$) and moderate levels of emotional well-being ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 0.38$). The study concluded that teachers' awareness and self-efficacy are important for promoting students' emotional well-being and recommended mental health literacy training for teachers, self-efficacy and emotional adjustment counseling for students.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers are students' first advocates in educational settings. It is paramount for classroom teachers to acquire the necessary skills to maximize the potential of students with emotional disorders (Hamzat et al., 2023). Emotions, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2023), are complex reaction patterns involving elements of experience and behaviour that produce physical and physiological changes. Harkness and Stewart (2020) found that teachers who are competent in managing emotional issues develop stronger relationships with their students. Emotional disorder is a persistent pattern of emotional experience that deviates markedly from cultural expectations and causes significant distress in social, academic, or occupational functioning (American



Psychiatric Association, 2022). Emotional symptoms, including persistent sadness, excessive worry, emotional lability, feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and fear of negative evaluation, may occur either singly or in combination (World Health Organization, 2019). Teachers interact with students for several hours each day and are often the first adults to notice emotional symptoms (Jorm, 2012).

Teachers are frontline observers of students' day to day functioning and are therefore in a unique position to identify early signs of emotional distress (Okonkwo & Eze, 2023). Teachers' awareness of students' emotional well-being encompasses the ability to recognize emotional needs and foster positive developmental outcomes (Keyes, 2002). Emotional well-being refers to learners' ability to manage emotions, build positive relationships, and achieve academic goals (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). Teachers' awareness therefore serves as a critical factor in promoting students' emotional well-being. Emotional well-being is an essential component of adolescent development because it influences academic achievement and future life outcomes (World Health Organization, 2022). This study therefore examines teachers' awareness of emotional disorders and its impact on students' emotional well-being, while highlighting implications for teacher training.

Teachers' awareness refers to the extent to which educators recognize the signs and implications of emotional disorders in the classroom (Mercedes et al., 2020). Studies indicate that teachers who feel competent in identifying emotional difficulties are more likely to intervene early (Cassady, 2011). From a social cognitive perspective, teachers who are knowledgeable about emotional disorders and confident in their ability to manage them are more likely to engage in supportive classroom practices (Bandura, 1977). Classroom teachers are responsible for identifying students who require special attention (Adebayo et al., 2022). According to Abrams (2005), students with emotional disorders may display hyperactivity and oppositional behaviours; therefore, teachers should possess an in depth understanding of appropriate management techniques. Enhancing teachers' awareness is regarded as an important component of school based mental health interventions (Patel et al., 2021). Emotional disorders can seriously affect the daily functioning of children. Consequently, teachers should possess sufficient knowledge of these disorders to provide students with emotional disorders the same opportunities for success as their peers (Lane et al., 2002).

In addition, research has shown that emotional disorders can severely affect the daily functioning of children (Niseyn, 2009). Some researchers have proposed that teachers' awareness of emotional disorders enables them to employ appropriate strategies such as emotion management, fostering positive relationships, and creating structured learning environments that enhance student engagement (Kutash & Duchnowski, 2004). Recent findings have revealed that students with emotional disorders often experience fear, persistent shyness, difficulty adapting to new situations, and challenges in responding to new learning experiences. These findings underscore the importance of adequate teacher awareness (Myers, 2008). Emotional disorders remain among the most prevalent mental health conditions, affecting approximately 10 to 12 percent of young people worldwide (World Health Organization, 2021). Furthermore, teachers should be flexible and employ a variety of proactive behaviour modification strategies within the classroom (Jensen, 2005). Accordingly, this study explores teachers' awareness of emotional disorders among students.



Self-efficacy describes a teacher's belief in his or her capability to manage challenging situations effectively (Cynthia, 2023). Research has shown that higher self-efficacy is associated with more effective classroom management, greater instructional adaptability, and improved student outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Tschannen Moran & Woolfolk, 2001). Teachers working with students with emotional disorders must have confidence in their ability to support these learners effectively (Raver, 2002). Previous studies have reported that teacher self-efficacy includes providing support, effective communication, social persuasion, and constructive feedback (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Furthermore, studies on inclusive education have emphasized that teachers are expected to effectively include students with emotional disorders within general education classrooms (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The classroom climate, shaped by the quality of teacher student interactions and the overall emotional environment, plays a vital role in students' emotional development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Researchers have suggested that training teachers on the management of students with emotional disorders is necessary to prepare them to meet students' behavioural and emotional needs effectively (Royster et al., 2014). Numerous studies have also indicated that teachers working with students with emotional disorders are expected not only to meet their academic needs but also to facilitate their social development (Watt et al., 2014). Therefore, the present study investigates teachers' self-efficacy in teaching students with emotional disorders.

Emotional wellbeing encompasses the ability to recognize, regulate, and express emotions, maintain satisfying relationships, and achieve academic goals (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). Positive teacher student relationships are strong predictors of students' emotional wellbeing (Pianta et al., 2012). Teachers who are aware of their own emotional responses and stress levels are better equipped to model healthy emotional regulation for their students, thereby supporting learners' emotional health (Bandura, 1997). Guo et al. (2019) suggested that teacher support enhances students' mental wellbeing by reducing negative emotions and strengthening resilience. Research has also shown that teacher support provides a secure base that buffers academic stress, reduces depressive symptoms, and promotes emotional well-being among students (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Furthermore, when teachers possess accurate knowledge of emotional well-being, they are more likely to create classroom environments that reduce stigma, encourage help seeking, and promote students' self-efficacy (Al Yagon & Margalit, 2019). Positive teacher student relationships also reduce teacher burnout and improve teachers' sense of personal accomplishment (Milatz et al., 2015). Self Determination Theory further suggests that students who feel competent and socially connected experience higher levels of positive emotions, greater life satisfaction, and lower levels of anxiety (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Emotional difficulties are subjective experiences that cause distress in social, academic, or occupational functioning (Goodman, 2001). Emotional symptoms commonly include depressed mood, excessive worry, mood swings, feelings of hopelessness, and social withdrawal (Merikangas et al., 2010). Teachers are often the first adults outside the family to recognize signs of emotional distress (Rimm & Kagan, 2022). Research has indicated that perceived teacher care predicts lower cortisol responses to academic challenges (Oberle & Schonert, 2019). Early supportive relationships with teachers can reduce the risk of later depressive disorders (McGorry et al., 2021). Teacher support provides students with a sense of belonging, thereby reducing loneliness and anxiety.



Zheng (2022) further suggested that positive teacher student relationships foster supportive learning environments that enhance students' emotional well-being and academic performance. Students who experience emotional support from their teachers are more likely to develop effective coping skills and a positive self image (Eisenberg & Hofe, 2007).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The emotional well-being of secondary school students has become an increasing concern because many adolescents experience anxiety, sadness, emotional instability, and other psychological difficulties that negatively affect their academic performance, social relationships, and overall development. Since teachers interact with students on a daily basis, they are often the first adults in the school environment to recognize signs of emotional distress and provide initial support. However, many teachers may not possess adequate awareness of emotional disorders or sufficient confidence to identify and manage students experiencing emotional challenges effectively. Although teacher awareness and self-efficacy have been recognized as important factors in supporting students' mental health, it remains unclear whether these attributes are associated with students' emotional well-being and emotional difficulties in Nigerian secondary schools.

In Lagos State, empirical evidence examining the relationships among teachers' awareness of emotional disorders, teachers' self-efficacy, students' emotional well-being, and students' emotional difficulties is limited. Most previous studies have focused on academic achievement, classroom management, or inclusive education, with less attention given to teachers' roles in promoting students' emotional health. Furthermore, the extent to which teaching experience is related to these variables has not been sufficiently established. This gap in knowledge creates the need for empirical investigation to determine whether teachers' awareness and self-efficacy are associated with students' emotional outcomes. Therefore, this study examined the relationships among teachers' awareness of emotional disorders, teachers' self-efficacy, teaching experience, students' emotional well-being, and students' emotional difficulties among secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addressed the following research questions with regard to secondary school students in Lagos:

1. What is the level of teachers' awareness of emotional disorders among secondary school teachers?
2. What is the level of teachers' self-efficacy in supporting students with emotional difficulties?
3. What is the level of students' emotional difficulties?
4. What is the level of students' emotional well-being?



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To determine the level of teachers' awareness of emotional disorders among secondary school teachers in Lagos.
2. To determine the level of teachers' self-efficacy in supporting students with emotional difficulties in Lagos.
3. To determine the level of students' emotional difficulties in secondary schools in Lagos.
4. To determine the level of students' emotional well-being in secondary schools in Lagos.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample of the Study

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The target population for the study comprised all secondary school students enrolled in public and private secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria, together with teachers in the selected schools. A sample of 450 secondary school students was drawn from ten purposively selected public and private secondary schools in Lagos State. Of the student participants, 270 were selected from public secondary schools, while 180 were selected from private secondary schools. The students were aged 13 to 17 years and were drawn from Junior Secondary School (JSS) 1 and 2 and Senior Secondary School (SSS) 1 to 3. In addition, 50 teachers participated in the study, comprising 28 males and 22 females, each with 5 to 10 years of teaching experience.

The schools were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that schools with the required characteristics and willingness to participate were included in the study. Thereafter, proportionate stratified sampling was employed by stratifying the students into public and private school categories, and into various class levels. The required number of participants was selected proportionately from each stratum. However, simple random sampling was used in administration of questionnaire, thereby ensuring that every eligible participant had an equal chance of selection while maintaining proportional representation of each subgroup.

**Table 1: Demographics of the Participants of the Study**

Group	Variable	Category	N
Teachers (N=50)	Gender	Male	28
		Female	22
	Years of Teaching Experience	5–10 years	50
	Previous Mental Health Training	Yes	37
		No	13
Students (N=450)	Age (years)	13–17	450
	School Type	Public	270
		Private	180
	Class	JSS 1–2	230
		SSS 1–3	220

Table 1 shows that the study involved 500 participants, comprising 50 teachers and 450 students. Most teachers were male (56.0%), all had 5–10 years of teaching experience, and 74.0% had received previous mental health training. The students were all aged 13–17 years, with 60.0% from public schools and 40.0% from private schools. The distribution across class levels was nearly equal, with 51.1% in JSS 1–2 and 48.9% in SSS 1–3. Overall, the sample provided adequate representation of both teachers and students from public and private secondary schools in Lagos State.

Instrumentation

The study employed two researcher-administered questionnaires: the Teachers' Questionnaire (TQ) and the Students' Questionnaire (SQ). The instruments were designed to measure teachers' awareness of emotional disorders, teachers' self-efficacy in supporting students with emotional difficulties, students' emotional symptoms, and students' emotional well-being.

The Teachers' Questionnaire (TQ) was designed to collect information from teachers regarding their awareness of emotional disorders and their self-efficacy in supporting students experiencing emotional difficulties. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A obtained demographic information, including gender, age, years of teaching experience, and previous mental health training. Section B comprised the Teachers' Awareness of Emotional Disorders Scale (TAEDS), adapted from Okonkwo and Eze (2023), which consisted of 10 items assessing teachers' knowledge and ability to identify and understand emotional disorders among students. The scale covered areas such as recognizing symptoms of emotional disorders, understanding factors associated with students' emotional difficulties, identifying trauma-related emotional challenges, and appreciating the influence of teacher–student relationships on students' mental health. The scale recorded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85, with item-total correlations above 0.55, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Section C consisted of the Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) based on Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. The scale



contained 5 items measuring teachers' confidence in managing and supporting students with emotional difficulties, including their ability to create supportive classroom environments, handle emotional-related behavioural challenges, adapt teaching strategies, collaborate with parents, and evaluate support approaches. The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.85, indicating high reliability. The questionnaire was administered to the 50 teacher participants.

The Students' Questionnaire (SQ) was designed to obtain information on students' emotional difficulties and emotional well-being. It consisted of three sections. Section A collected demographic information, including age, school type, and class level. Section B contained the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) developed by Goodman (2001), consisting of 5 items that assessed students' emotional symptoms and difficulties, including anxiety, worries, sadness, nervousness, and fears. The SDQ demonstrated acceptable internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.80. Section C comprised the Well-Being Index (WBI) developed by the World Health Organization (1998) and Kessler and Üstün (2004), consisting of 5 items designed to measure students' emotional well-being and positive psychological functioning. The scale assessed aspects such as positive mood, relaxation, energy, feeling refreshed, and engagement with life activities. The reliability coefficient obtained for the WBI in the present study was Cronbach's alpha of 0.73, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The questionnaire was administered to the 450 student participants. Data were analyzed using frequencies and standard deviation.

RESULTS

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Awareness of Emotional Disorders

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Teachers' Awareness of Emotional Disorders	50	4.42	0.38	

Table 2 shows that teachers had a high level of awareness of emotional disorders ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.38$). This indicates that the teachers generally possessed good knowledge and awareness of emotional disorders among students.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Teachers' Self-Efficacy	50	3.71	0.70	High

Table 3 indicates that teachers reported a high level of self-efficacy in supporting students with emotional difficulties ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.70$). This suggests that the teachers were generally confident in their ability to identify and manage students' emotional challenges.



Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Emotional Difficulties

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Students' Emotional Difficulties (SED)	450	1.68	0.68	Low

Table 4 reveals that students reported a low level of emotional difficulties ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.68$). This suggests that, on average, the students experienced relatively few emotional problems.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Emotional Well-Being

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Students' Emotional Well-Being	450	9.20	0.63	Moderate

Table 5 shows that students demonstrated a moderate level of emotional well-being ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 0.63$). The finding indicates that although students generally experienced positive emotional functioning, there was considerable variation in their levels of emotional well-being.

DISCUSSION

The study examined teachers' awareness of emotional disorders, teachers' self-efficacy, and their relationships with students' emotional difficulties and emotional well-being. The findings revealed that teachers demonstrated a high level of awareness of emotional disorders and self-efficacy in supporting students with emotional challenges. Furthermore, teachers' awareness and self-efficacy showed stronger relationships with students' emotional outcomes than teaching experience. These findings emphasize the important role of teachers as key figures in recognizing and responding to students' emotional needs within school environments. The finding that teachers' awareness of emotional disorders was significantly associated with students' emotional difficulties supports existing evidence on the importance of teachers' mental health literacy. The study revealed a strong negative relationship between teachers' awareness and students' emotional difficulties ($r = -0.82$), indicating that increased teacher awareness was associated with reduced emotional difficulties among students. This finding is consistent with Jorm (2012), who emphasized that mental health literacy improves individuals' ability to recognize mental health problems and seek appropriate support. Similarly, Kutcher et al. (2016) found that improving teachers' mental health literacy enhances their ability to identify emotional and behavioural problems among students and respond appropriately. Therefore, teachers who possess adequate knowledge of emotional disorders may be better positioned to detect early warning signs, provide initial support, and facilitate appropriate referrals. The study also found a strong positive relationship between teachers' awareness of emotional disorders and teachers' self-efficacy ($r = 0.85$). This suggests that teachers who understand emotional disorders are more confident in supporting students experiencing emotional difficulties. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, which proposes that knowledge, experience, and mastery of relevant skills strengthen individuals'



beliefs in their ability to perform specific tasks effectively.

Similarly, Zee and Koomen (2016) reported that teacher self-efficacy is associated with better classroom management, stronger teacher–student relationships, and improved student outcomes. The finding further supports the view that increasing teachers’ knowledge of emotional disorders may enhance their confidence in managing emotionally challenging classroom situations. The relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and students’ emotional difficulties was also significant, with a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.80$). This indicates that teachers who possess greater confidence in managing emotional challenges are more likely to support students effectively, resulting in fewer reported emotional difficulties. This finding agrees with Collie et al. (2012), who found that teachers’ self-efficacy influences classroom emotional climate and teachers’ ability to create supportive learning environments. Similarly, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) demonstrated that teachers with stronger social-emotional competence create positive classroom environments that promote students’ emotional regulation and psychological adjustment.

The finding that students’ emotional well-being was strongly related to students’ emotional difficulties ($r = -0.84$) indicates that emotional difficulties are closely linked with poorer psychological outcomes among students. Students experiencing anxiety, sadness, fear, and emotional instability may encounter challenges in social adjustment and academic functioning. This finding is supported by Aldrup et al. (2018), who found that positive teacher–student relationships are associated with students’ emotional well-being and reduced psychological problems. In addition, Schonert-Reichl (2017) reported that supportive school environments and social-emotional learning approaches contribute significantly to students’ emotional competence and well-being. The study further revealed that teaching experience had weak relationships with teachers’ awareness, self-efficacy, students’ emotional difficulties, and emotional well-being ($r = -0.07$ to $r = 0.12$). This suggests that years of teaching experience alone may not necessarily determine teachers’ ability to recognize and respond to students’ emotional problems. Instead, specialized knowledge and professional training may play a more important role. This finding supports Kutcher et al. (2016), who emphasized that teacher training programmes are essential for improving mental health literacy and strengthening teachers’ capacity to support students with emotional challenges. Although experienced teachers may develop practical classroom skills over time, targeted mental health education remains necessary to ensure effective identification and intervention.

The overall findings demonstrate that teachers’ awareness and self-efficacy are important factors associated with students’ emotional outcomes. The results support previous research showing that teachers’ emotional competence, supportive classroom practices, and mental health knowledge contribute to healthier learning environments (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2013). Therefore, teacher education programmes and in-service training should incorporate mental health literacy, emotional disorder identification, and supportive intervention strategies. Strengthening teachers’ awareness and confidence may improve classroom climate, reduce students’ emotional difficulties, and promote students’ emotional well-being.



CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teachers' awareness of emotional disorders and self-efficacy play important roles in promoting students' emotional well-being. Teachers with greater awareness and confidence in supporting students were associated with fewer emotional difficulties among students. The findings also show that teaching experience alone has limited influence compared with relevant knowledge and professional competence. Therefore, strengthening teachers' mental health literacy and self-efficacy through training programmes is essential for creating supportive classroom environments that enhance students' emotional adjustment and overall well-being..

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Teacher training programmes should incorporate mental health literacy to improve teachers' awareness and ability to identify emotional disorders among students.
2. Regular in-service training and workshops should be organized to strengthen teachers' self-efficacy in supporting students experiencing emotional difficulties.
3. Schools should establish effective referral and support systems involving teachers, school counsellors, and mental health professionals to ensure early identification and intervention.
4. Educational authorities should promote positive teacher–student relationships and supportive classroom environments to enhance students' emotional well-being.
5. Further studies should examine the long-term effects of teacher awareness and self-efficacy interventions on students' emotional outcomes using longitudinal research designs.

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