

Cyberbullying and Students' Educational Development in Secondary Schools in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined cyberbullying and students' educational development in secondary schools in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State. The study was guided by two research questions and anchored on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised 4,500 students, from which a sample of 367 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using simple percentages. The findings revealed a high extent of cyberbullying among the students, particularly through impersonation or fake accounts and sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages. The study also found that respondents perceived cyberbullying as having a considerable negative influence on students' educational development, particularly in relation to poor academic performance, low self-esteem, reduced classroom attention, school absenteeism and emotional distress. The study concludes that cyberbullying extends beyond the digital environment to affect students' educational experiences and development. It recommends strengthened cyberbullying awareness, responsible digital-use education, effective reporting mechanisms, enhanced counselling services and closer collaboration among schools, parents and other relevant stakeholders.

KEYWORDS

Cyberbullying, Educational Development, Secondary School Students, Digital Information, Social Media, Umuahia South

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of cyberbullying has emerged as a significant form of harmful behaviour in the digital age, extending the traditional experience of bullying into spaces where individuals can be intimidated, humiliated or harassed through digital technologies. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur through repeated messages, images, videos, impersonation and other forms of digital communication, often allowing perpetrators to hide their identities and reach their targets beyond the physical environment (UNICEF, 2026). This relative anonymity and the continuous nature of online interaction may increase the frequency and intensity of harassment, while making it difficult for victims to escape the experience even outside school hours. Among secondary school students and adolescents,

the consequences can extend beyond emotional distress to withdrawal from friends and family, loss of motivation and, in some cases, school avoidance, thereby raising concerns about their educational development (Ngoc et al., 2020). Cyberbullying, therefore, is not merely an online social problem; it has the potential to become an educational problem when its effects interfere with students' ability to participate, concentrate and progress in school.

The nature of cyberbullying makes it particularly relevant to the experiences of secondary school students. Adolescents constitute a population that increasingly interacts through digital technologies, creating opportunities for peer relationships to extend beyond the conventional school environment. The boundaries between school and non-school experiences can consequently become blurred when bullying that occurs through digital channels continues after school hours or reaches students wherever they have access to digital devices. In a Nigerian secondary-school context, Oyewusi and Orolade (2014) identified cyberbullying as a disruptive behaviour associated with the technological affordances available to students. Their study noted that mobile phones and internet connectivity had created another platform through which students could taunt their peers in ways that differed from face-to-face bullying. The researchers further observed that although students might be familiar with the idea of cyberbullying, their consciousness of it was not necessarily comparable to their awareness of conventional bullying.

The increasing concern surrounding cyberbullying is not merely because of its occurrence but because of the consequences that may follow from continued exposure to it. Evidence indicates that cyberbullying can be associated with a range of adverse experiences among adolescents, including emotional and psychological difficulties and disruptions in everyday functioning. Gohal et al. (2023), in examining the prevalence, related risks and effects of cyberbullying among adolescents, demonstrate the wider significance of the phenomenon as a problem affecting young people. Such consequences are important within the school environment because students do not compartmentalise their experiences into strictly digital and educational spheres. What occurs through digital interaction can influence how a student feels, behaves and participates in the physical school environment. UNICEF (2026) similarly identifies withdrawal, loss of motivation and school avoidance among possible consequences of cyberbullying, thereby drawing attention to its potential implications for students' engagement with schooling.

This connection becomes particularly important when cyberbullying is considered in relation to students' educational development. Educational development extends beyond examination performance to include students' engagement with learning, concentration, development of learning strategies and effective participation in educational activities. Recent evidence suggests that bullying and cyberbullying are associated with lower levels of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies among young people, indicating that experiences of victimisation may interfere with processes that support effective learning. Nigerian evidence has also examined this relationship, although the findings have not been uniform. Ezewulu and Ebenebe (2022), for instance, investigated cyberbullying and academic achievement among in-school adolescents in Anambra State, demonstrating the relevance of the issue within the Nigerian secondary-school environment. Similarly, Aljasser (2024) reported a statistically significant effect of cyberbullying on academic achievement among secondary-school students in Riyadh. These findings suggest that the consequences

of cyberbullying may extend beyond the immediate digital interaction to students' engagement with learning and their broader educational development, making the relationship worthy of further investigation within specific educational contexts.

Empirical research has increasingly provided grounds for examining the relationship between cyberbullying and students' educational outcomes. However, existing findings have not been entirely consistent. Ezewulu and Ebenebe (2022), in their study of 600 in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria, examined the influence of cyberbullying on academic achievement and found no significant difference in academic achievement between adolescents who had experienced cyberbullying and those who engaged in cyberbullying. Their finding suggests that the relationship between cyberbullying and academic outcomes may not be straightforward and may vary according to the context and dimensions of educational development being considered. In contrast, Ezeonwumelu et al. (2022), in a study conducted among senior secondary school students in Onitsha South Local Government Area of Anambra State, found that cyberbullying significantly influenced students' academic grit. These contrasting findings are important because they demonstrate the need for further empirical investigation of cyberbullying and educational outcomes among students in different educational and geographical contexts. The present study therefore seeks to examine this relationship among secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State.

More recent evidence has strengthened the case for such investigation. Williams and Halliday (2025), studying 8,675 South Australian students, found that students who experienced cyberbullying had lower learning-readiness scores and poorer subsequent numeracy and literacy outcomes than students who were not cyberbullied. Their findings are particularly relevant because they connect cyberbullying victimisation not merely with general wellbeing but directly with students' readiness to learn and measurable educational outcomes. Similarly, Halliday et al. (2023), using data from more than 9,000 South Australian students, examined the relationship between early-adolescent cyberbullying victimisation and later academic achievement and identified a need to understand the longer-term educational consequences associated with cyberbullying.

Further evidence from a large prospective cohort study published in 2026 provides an even more contemporary basis for this concern. Nagata et al. (2026), using data from 10,003 adolescents, found that an increasing cyberbullying trajectory was associated with lower grades and greater school absence. The study is significant because it moves beyond a simple cross-sectional association and provides evidence that patterns of cyberbullying over time may be linked to subsequent academic outcomes. This emerging evidence suggests that cyberbullying should be viewed not only as a behavioural or interpersonal problem but also as an issue capable of affecting students' educational experiences and outcomes.

Despite the growing body of research, the findings across contexts are not entirely uniform, and much of the available evidence originates from settings outside Nigeria. Even within Nigeria, existing studies have examined cyberbullying in relation to general student behaviour or academic achievement in particular states, leaving room for further context-specific investigation. The Nigerian secondary-school environment presents its own social, educational and technological circumstances, and findings from other countries or regions

cannot automatically be assumed to reflect the experiences of students in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State. This creates a need for empirical evidence that examines the extent to which cyberbullying is experienced by secondary school students in this locality and, more importantly, how such experiences relate to their educational development.

It is against this background that this study examines the influence of cyberbullying on students' educational development in secondary schools in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State. The study is guided by two research questions which examine the extent of cyberbullying among secondary school students and its influence on their educational development.

II. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

A. *Cyberbullying*

Cyberbullying has been described as a form of aggressive behavior carried out through electronic or digital media. Akdeniz and Doğan (2024) conceptualize it as intentional and repeated harmful behavior conducted through electronic devices, while Łosiak-Pilch et al. (2022) explain that cyberbullying involves the use of electronic media to communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to cause harm or discomfort. The concept may take different forms, including harassment, cyber stalking, denigration, impersonation, exclusion, flaming, and the unauthorized sharing of another person's information. For the purpose of this study, cyberbullying is therefore defined as the intentional and repeated use of electronic or digital communication technologies to harass, intimidate, embarrass, threaten, humiliate or otherwise cause psychological, social or educational harm to another person.

B. *Educational Development*

Educational development is concerned with the systematic and continuous improvement of educational processes, teaching and learning practices, and the capabilities required to support effective learning. Stefani (2003), describes educational development as systematic and scholarly support for improving educational processes as well as the practices and capabilities of educators. Similarly, Mozelius et al. (2022) view educational development within higher education as a process of improving educational practices through the identification of challenges, exploration of opportunities, and adoption and evaluation of appropriate tools and techniques, particularly in technology-enhanced and lifelong learning. Educational development in the context of this study refers to the progressive development of students' academic performance, concentration, participation, attendance, motivation and other learning-related experiences that contribute to successful educational progress. It encompasses the extent to which students are able to engage effectively in learning activities, maintain attention in the classroom, attend school regularly and make satisfactory academic progress. In this study, educational development is operationalized through indicators such as academic performance, classroom attention, school attendance, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

C. Digital Information

Digital information refers to information that is created, represented, stored, processed and communicated in digital or electronic form through information and communication technologies. Walton (2015) explains that digital information changes how people and organizations interact with information by altering the ways information is accessed, communicated, selected and used, while also influencing information quality and the ease with which information can be obtained.

Digital information can be defined in this study as information that is created, stored, processed, accessed and communicated in electronic or digital form through ICT devices and platforms, enabling users to obtain, evaluate and use information for learning, research, communication and other purposes.

D. Secondary School Students

Secondary school students are learners undergoing formal education at the post-primary level. Nwanyanwu and Johnnie (2020) explain that secondary education follows primary education and is provided in junior and senior stages, with the aim of developing learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes and values while preparing them for further education, productive living and participation in society. They further note that secondary education provides young people with skills and knowledge necessary for personal development and effective contribution to society. Secondary school students can be defined in this study as learners enrolled in recognized junior or senior secondary schools who are undergoing formal post-primary education and developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required for further education, personal development and productive participation in society.

E. Statement of the Problem

Cyberbullying has become an emerging concern among secondary school students as digital technologies increasingly form part of their everyday communication and learning experiences. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur beyond the physical boundaries of the school and may continue through digital platforms, exposing students to repeated intimidation, humiliation and harassment. Such experiences have been associated with difficulties in students' psychological well-being and educational experiences.

Of particular concern is the possible effect of cyberbullying on students' educational development. Although studies have examined cyberbullying and academic outcomes, findings have not been entirely consistent. Ezewulu and Ebenebe (2022), for instance, found no significant difference in academic achievement between students involved in cyberbullying, while Ezeonwumelu et al. (2022) reported an influence on students' academic grit. Recent evidence has also linked cyberbullying with learning strategies, learning readiness and academic achievement (Solas-Martínez et al., 2025; Williams & Halliday, 2025). These variations suggest the need for evidence from specific educational contexts. Thus, although previous studies have established that cyberbullying may be associated with academic and psychosocial outcomes, evidence remains limited regarding its perceived influence on the broader educational development of secondary school students in Umuahia

South Local Government Area of Abia State. The present study therefore examined the extent of cyberbullying and its perceived influence on students' educational development in the study area.

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 4,500 students across ten secondary schools in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State. Using the Taro Yamane formula at a 0.05 level of precision, a sample size of 367 respondents was obtained. The sample was selected using a proportionate sampling procedure to ensure representation of students across the selected schools, after which respondents were selected through simple random sampling. A self-constructed structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire comprised two sections: Section a elicited demographic information, while Section B contained items relating to cyberbullying and students' educational development. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

The questionnaire was administered in the selected secondary schools following permission from the school authorities. Data were analysed using simple percentages to answer the research questions.

F. Research Questions

The following research questions were answered to guide this study:

- What is the extent of cyberbullying among secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State?
- What is the influence of cyberbullying on the educational development of secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model

This study is anchored on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework, developed and popularized by Daniel Goleman in 1995. Although the concept of emotional intelligence was earlier introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman extended and popularized the concept by emphasizing the importance of emotional competencies in individuals' personal, social and behavioural functioning. Salovey and Mayer (1990) conceptualised emotional intelligence as a set of abilities involving the accurate appraisal and expression of emotions, regulation of emotions in oneself and others, and the use of feelings to guide thought and action.

Goleman (1995) presented emotional intelligence as involving the capacity to recognise and understand one's emotions, regulate emotional responses, motivate oneself, recognise the emotions of others and manage interpersonal relationships effectively. His framework is commonly expressed through five major components: self-awareness, self-regulation,

motivation, empathy and social skills. Self-awareness concerns an individual's ability to recognise and understand his or her emotional states; self-regulation involves controlling or appropriately managing emotional reactions; motivation relates to the ability to use emotions in pursuing goals; empathy involves recognising and understanding the feelings of others; while social skills concern the effective management of relationships and communication.

The relevance of this framework to the present study lies in its explanation of how students' ability to recognise, manage and respond to emotions may shape their reactions to difficult interpersonal experiences. Cyberbullying is an interpersonal and digitally mediated form of negative social interaction that can expose students to emotional distress, humiliation, fear, anger, social withdrawal and other reactions capable of interfering with their educational experiences. From the perspective of Goleman's theory, students with stronger emotional competencies may be better positioned to recognise the emotional consequences of cyberbullying, regulate their responses, seek appropriate support and maintain constructive relationships and engagement with school activities. Conversely, difficulties in emotional regulation and interpersonal management may make it more difficult for affected students to cope with cyberbullying experiences.

The model therefore provides a useful basis for explaining the possible connection between cyberbullying and educational development. Where cyberbullying generates persistent negative emotional experiences, students may experience difficulties in concentration, participation, motivation, interpersonal relationships and other aspects of their educational development. The model does not imply that emotional intelligence eliminates the effects of cyberbullying; rather, it provides a framework for understanding how students' emotional competencies may influence their ability to respond to and cope with harmful digital interactions. In relation to this study, self-awareness may help students recognise the emotional effects of cyberbullying; self-regulation may assist them in controlling impulsive or harmful responses; motivation may help them maintain commitment to their educational activities despite negative experiences; empathy may contribute to understanding the feelings and perspectives of others; and social skills may help students develop healthier interpersonal relationships and seek appropriate assistance when necessary. These dimensions make the model relevant to understanding why cyberbullying may have consequences for students' educational development.

Cyberbullying may expose students to humiliation, fear, anger, anxiety and social rejection. These experiences may affect their ability to regulate emotions, sustain motivation and maintain positive interpersonal relationships. Consequently, affected students may experience reduced classroom attention, low self-esteem, absenteeism and poorer academic performance. Goleman's model therefore provides a useful framework for understanding the emotional and interpersonal processes through which cyberbullying may be associated with students' educational development. Consequently, Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study because it provides a useful explanation of the emotional and interpersonal processes through which experiences of cyberbullying may influence students' educational development. It also provides a basis for understanding the importance of emotional awareness, emotional regulation, motivation and positive social interaction in helping secondary school students cope with harmful digital experiences and remain engaged in their educational activities.

B. Concept of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to the use of digital technologies and electronic communication platforms to deliberately harass, threaten, embarrass, intimidate or otherwise cause harm to another person. It may occur through mobile phones, social media, text messages, emails, websites and other online platforms. Lokithasan et al. (2020) describes cyberbullying as the use of digital technologies to send threatening or harmful messages that may result in psychological and social problems for the victim. Similarly, Bergman and Baier (2018) view it as an act of social aggression involving the posting or transmission of harmful materials through the internet and other digital technologies. Sharif and Gouin (2019) further explain that cyberbullying constitutes psychological bullying carried out through electronic devices and online communication channels.

Cyberbullying can take different forms, including harassment, flaming, denigration, and impersonation, outing, and exclusion, cyber stalking and trolling. Among secondary school students, these behaviours may occur through social networking sites, messaging applications, text messages and other digital platforms that form part of their everyday communication. The accessibility of mobile phones and internet-enabled devices has therefore created opportunities for bullying to extend beyond the physical school environment into students' online and social spaces.

The consequences of cyberbullying are particularly relevant to the present study because of their potential implications for students' educational development. Victims may experience emotional distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness and other psychological difficulties, which can interfere with their participation in school activities. Fadhli et al. (2022) associates cyberbullying with outcomes such as depression, anxiety, anger and declining school performance, while Lei et al. (2020) notes that the widespread use of electronic media among young people has increased the opportunities for cyberbullying. Thus, in the context of secondary schools in Umuahia South Local Government Area, cyberbullying is conceptualised in this study as the intentional use of digital communication technologies to harass, threaten, embarrass or socially harm students in ways that may adversely affect their educational development.

C. Effects of Cyberbullying on Students' Educational Development

The literature reviewed in this study strongly demonstrates that cyberbullying is not merely an online social problem but a serious educational and developmental concern that can negatively affect students' overall school experience and academic development. Okoth (2020) observes that cyberbullying produces social, physical and psychological effects on victims, while Ngesu (2019) identifies absenteeism, violence, low self-esteem and poor academic performance among its major consequences. These findings suggest that the effects of cyberbullying extend beyond the immediate emotional pain caused by offensive messages, threats, humiliation or harassment. When students are repeatedly exposed to cyberbullying, their sense of safety, confidence and belonging may be undermined, making it increasingly difficult for them to participate effectively in school activities. Thus, the educational consequences of cyberbullying should be understood as part of a broader chain in which emotional and social difficulties eventually interfere with learning and academic progress.

A particularly important finding from the literature is the relationship between cyberbullying and students' psychological well-being. Safana (2016) associates cyberbullying with increased social anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, emotional distress, poor adjustment, aggression and suicidal ideation. Similarly, Li (2020) identifies low self-esteem, anger, anxiety, depression, school avoidance or absenteeism, school violence and suicide as possible psychological harms associated with cyberbullying. Russell (2020) further reports depression, helplessness, lack of social competence, anxiety, low self-esteem and difficulty defending oneself from attacks among victims. These psychological consequences are significant for education because a student who is anxious, depressed, fearful or emotionally distressed may have difficulty concentrating, interacting with classmates, attending school regularly and engaging meaningfully in classroom activities. Therefore, the psychological effects identified in the literature provide an important explanation for why cyberbullying may eventually manifest in poor educational outcomes.

The literature also provides substantial evidence that cyberbullying can directly or indirectly disrupt students' academic development. Victims have been reported to exhibit decreased concentration, absenteeism and poor academic achievement. Cyberbullying may cause students to avoid school because they perceive the school environment as unsafe, particularly when the online harassment involves classmates and continues into the physical school environment. Okoth (2019) similarly identifies low self-esteem and poor academic performance as important consequences, while Ngesu et al. (2013) links cyberbullying with absenteeism and poor academic outcomes. This suggests that academic underachievement among victims should not always be interpreted simply as a lack of ability, motivation or commitment to learning. In some cases, declining performance may be a consequence of the emotional distress, fear, distraction and disengagement produced by persistent online harassment. Consequently, addressing cyberbullying should form part of efforts to improve students' academic achievement and not be treated as an issue separate from educational development.

Another important dimension is the role of mobile phones, social networking sites and other digital platforms in intensifying the problem. Porter (2020) identifies disruption of adolescent sleep patterns, prolonged time spent on social networking sites, harassment and bullying, and increased access to inappropriate online content as factors associated with mobile phone use and academic performance. Excessive engagement with online platforms may reduce the amount of time students devote to schoolwork and may also expose them to cyberbullying and other disruptive online experiences. The implication is that the same technologies that provide opportunities for communication, learning and social interaction can also become channels through which students experience harassment and distraction. Cyberbullying can therefore interfere with education both through the psychological harm it causes and through the disruption of students' time, attention and engagement with schoolwork.

The reviewed literature further indicates that the effects of cyberbullying can extend into students' social relationships and broader development. Feelings of incompetence, alienation, helplessness, anxiety and low self-esteem may reduce students' willingness to interact with others or seek assistance when they are being bullied. In more severe cases, cyberbullying has been associated with self-harm, suicidal thoughts and other serious forms of psychological distress. Although such outcomes may not occur in every case, their

presence in the literature demonstrates the potential seriousness of cyberbullying and reinforces the need for early identification and intervention. A school system that focuses only on examination results without considering students' emotional and social well-being may therefore fail to address some of the underlying factors responsible for declining academic engagement.

The findings also emphasize that the responsibility for addressing cyberbullying cannot rest solely on the victims. Russell (2020) recommends that parents, teachers and school administrators maintain open communication with students, monitor their online activities appropriately and create an environment in which students feel safe discussing cyberbullying. Raskanskas and Stoltz (2020) similarly recommend raising awareness among adults and incorporating cyberbullying into school anti-bullying policies, instructional materials and teacher-training programmes. Hoff and Mitchell (2019) propose a comprehensive approach involving the education of students and parents, the development of school-based strategies for dealing with social tensions and the use of professional networks to address legal and practical challenges associated with cyberbullying. These recommendations reinforce the argument of this paper that cyberbullying requires a coordinated response involving the home, school and wider community.

Bauman (2011) further provides practical measures for responding to cyberbullying, including preserving evidence, blocking or deleting abusive contacts, reporting offensive profiles, monitoring children's online activities, informing school personnel and seeking appropriate legal or professional assistance where necessary. Such measures are particularly relevant because cyberbullying can leave digital traces that may help schools, parents and relevant authorities understand the nature and extent of the abuse. However, intervention should go beyond simply blocking or reporting perpetrators. Students who have already experienced cyberbullying may require emotional support, counselling and sustained follow-up to restore their confidence, sense of safety and willingness to participate fully in school activities.

Overall, the evidence reviewed in this study buttresses the position that cyberbullying constitutes a significant threat to students' educational development. Its effects can operate through several interconnected pathways: psychological distress can reduce concentration and motivation; fear and insecurity can lead to school avoidance and absenteeism; prolonged engagement with social media can reduce time available for schoolwork; and declining self-esteem and social competence can weaken students' participation in the learning environment. The problem therefore extends beyond the digital space into the classroom, the school community and students' wider developmental experiences. For this reason, effective prevention and intervention should combine awareness creation, clear school policies, parental involvement, teacher training, responsible digital-use education, appropriate monitoring, prompt reporting mechanisms and access to counselling and other support services. In this regard, controlling cyberbullying is not only necessary for protecting students from online harm but is also essential for creating a safe and supportive educational environment in which learners can concentrate, participate and achieve their academic potential.

D. Data Collection/Articulation

1. Research Question 1

What is the extent of cyberbullying among secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State?

Table 1: Responses on the Extent of Cyberbullying among Secondary School Students

Item	Indicator	SA	A	D	SD	Agree (SA+A)
1	Experience cyberbullying through digital platforms	180 (49.04%)	110 (29.97%)	60 (16.38%)	17 (4.63%)	79.01%
2	Insulting, humiliating, intimidating or threatening messages	160 (43.59%)	120 (32.69%)	60 (16.38%)	27 (7.35%)	76.28%
3	Embarrassing pictures, videos or other harmful information posted digitally	150 (40.87%)	137 (37.32%)	50 (13.62%)	30 (8.17%)	78.19%
4	Impersonation or use of fake accounts to communicate in students' names	200 (54.49%)	130 (35.42%)	22 (5.99%)	15 (4.08%)	89.91%
5	Sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages	207 (56.40%)	120 (32.69%)	30 (8.17%)	10 (2.72%)	89.09%

Analysis of Table 1:

Table 1 presents respondents' views on the level of reported cyberbullying among secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State. The results show substantial levels of agreement across all five indicators. For Item 1, 180 respondents (49.05%) strongly agreed and 110 respondents (29.97%) agreed that students experience cyberbullying through digital platforms, giving a combined agreement of 79.02%. Conversely, 60 respondents (16.35%) disagreed and 17 respondents (4.63%) strongly disagreed, representing 20.98% combined disagreement. This indicates that experiences of cyberbullying through digital platforms were widely reported among the respondents.

For Item 2, 160 respondents (43.60%) strongly agreed and 120 respondents (32.70%) agreed that students experience insulting, humiliating, intimidating or threatening messages. The combined agreement was 76.29%, while 23.71% disagreed. This indicates that abusive and threatening digital communication represents a substantial form of cyberbullying experienced by the students. For Item 3, 150 respondents (40.87%) strongly agreed and 137 respondents (37.33%) agreed that embarrassing pictures, videos or other harmful information are posted digitally. The combined agreement was 78.20%, compared with 21.80% combined disagreement. This suggests that the posting or circulation of embarrassing or harmful digital content is another prominent manifestation of cyberbullying among the students.

Item 4 recorded the highest combined agreement. A total of 200 respondents (54.50%) strongly agreed and 130 respondents (35.42%) agreed that impersonation or the use of fake accounts to communicate in students' names occurs among the students. The combined agreement was 89.92%, while 10.08% disagreed. This indicates that impersonation and identity misuse were the most strongly reported form of cyberbullying measured in the study. For Item 5, 207 respondents (56.40%) strongly agreed and 120 respondents (32.70%) agreed that students experience sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages. The combined agreement was 89.10%, while 10.90% disagreed. This was the second-highest reported indicator.

Overall, all five indicators recorded substantial majority agreement, with combined agreement ranging from 76.29% to 89.92%. The average combined agreement across the five indicators was approximately 82.50%. The findings therefore indicate a high level of reported cyberbullying experiences among the secondary school students studied. Impersonation or fake accounts (89.92%) and sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages (89.10%) were the most prominently reported forms.

2. *Research Question 2*

What is the influence of cyberbullying on students' Educational Development in secondary schools in Umuahia-South Local Government Area of Abia State?

Table 2: Responses of respondents on the perceived influence of cyberbullying on students' educational development

Item	Indicator	SA	A	D	SD	Agree (SA+A)
6	Development of low self-esteem	210 (57.22%)	90 (24.52%)	47 (12.81%)	20 (5.45%)	(81.74%)
7	Poor academic performance	203 (55.31%)	98 (26.70%)	40 (10.89%)	26 (7.08%)	(82.01%)
8	Emotional distress	170 (46.32%)	110 (29.97%)	60 (16.35%)	27 (7.36%)	(76.29%)
9	School absenteeism	160 (43.60%)	120 (32.70%)	55 (14.99%)	32 (8.72%)	(76.30%)
10	Reduced classroom attention	180 (49.05%)	110 (29.97%)	50 (13.62%)	27 (7.36%)	(79.02%)

Analysis of Table 2:

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of the influence of cyberbullying on students' educational development. The results indicate substantial agreement across all five indicators.

For Item 6, 210 respondents (57.22%) strongly agreed and 90 respondents (24.52%) agreed that cyberbullying contributes to the development of low self-esteem among students. The combined agreement was 81.74%, while 18.26% disagreed. This suggests that low self-esteem was widely perceived as one of the consequences associated with cyberbullying. For Item 7, 203 respondents (55.31%) strongly agreed and 98 respondents (26.70%) agreed that cyberbullying is associated with poor academic performance. The

combined agreement was 82.02%, while 17.98% disagreed. This was the highest-rated educational-development indicator in the table.

For Item 8, 170 respondents (46.32%) strongly agreed and 110 respondents (29.97%) agreed that cyberbullying contributes to emotional distress. The combined agreement was 76.29%, compared with 23.71% disagreement. For Item 9, 160 respondents (43.60%) strongly agreed and 120 respondents (32.70%) agreed that cyberbullying contributes to school absenteeism. The combined agreement was 76.29%, while 23.71% disagreed. For Item 10, 180 respondents (49.05%) strongly agreed and 110 respondents (29.97%) agreed that cyberbullying is associated with reduced classroom attention. The combined agreement was 79.02%, while 20.98% disagreed.

Overall, the combined agreement across the five indicators ranged from 76.29% to 82.02%, with an average combined agreement of approximately 79.07%. Poor academic performance recorded the highest level of agreement (82.02%), followed by low self-esteem (81.74%), reduced classroom attention (79.02%), emotional distress (76.29%) and school absenteeism (76.29%).

The findings therefore indicate that the respondents perceived cyberbullying as having a considerable negative influence on students' educational development, particularly in relation to academic performance, self-esteem, classroom attention, school attendance and emotional well-being. Because the study employed a descriptive survey design and simple percentages, the findings should be interpreted as respondents' perceptions and reported associations rather than as proof of a direct causal relationship.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A. *Level of Reported Cyberbullying among Secondary School Students*

The findings of the study indicate a high level of reported cyberbullying experiences among secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State. All five indicators recorded substantial majority agreement, with the combined agreement ranging from 76.29% to 89.92%. Impersonation or the use of fake accounts recorded the highest level of agreement (89.92%), followed closely by sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages (89.10%). The results suggest that cyberbullying among the students extends beyond conventional insulting messages to include identity misuse, harassment and the dissemination of harmful digital content.

The finding is consistent with Gohal et al. (2023), who identified cyberbullying as a significant problem among adolescents and examined its prevalence, related risks and psychological effects. Their study reinforces the view that cyberbullying constitutes a significant adolescent concern rather than an isolated form of online misconduct. Similarly, Ngoc et al. (2020) identified cyberbullying as an increasingly important concern among adolescents within the school environment. The present finding therefore supports the broader literature indicating that the expansion of digital communication has created additional spaces through which peer aggression can occur.

The particularly high reporting of impersonation or fake accounts is noteworthy. Unlike ordinary verbal insults, impersonation can involve the deliberate misuse of another student's

identity and can potentially expose the victim to embarrassment, reputational damage and further harassment. The prominence of this indicator in the present study suggests that cyberbullying among the students may involve forms of digital identity misuse that require specific attention in school-based cyber-safety programmers.

The high reporting of sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages is also significant. It indicates that the problem may involve forms of digital communication that students can perceive as particularly intrusive and distressing. This finding reinforces the need for schools to provide students with clear information about responsible digital communication, personal boundaries, reporting procedures and appropriate responses to online harassment. The present finding is also relevant to the Nigerian context. Oyewusi and Orolade (2014) previously drew attention to cyberbullying as a disruptive behavior within the Nigerian secondary-school environment and noted the role of mobile phones and internet connectivity in creating additional avenues for peer aggression. The present study extends this concern to students in Umuahia South Local Government Area and indicates that cyberbullying is perceived as occurring through several forms of digital interaction.

Overall, the finding demonstrates that cyberbullying is not restricted to a single type of digital behavior. Its manifestations include direct harassment, threatening communication, harmful digital content and identity-related abuse. Consequently, interventions aimed at addressing cyberbullying among secondary school students should recognize the diversity of behaviors through which online victimization may occur.

B. Perceived Influence of Cyberbullying on Students' Educational Development

The second finding indicates that respondents perceived cyberbullying as having a considerable negative influence on students' educational development. All five indicators recorded substantial levels of agreement, with poor academic performance receiving the highest combined agreement (82.02%), followed by low self-esteem (81.74%), reduced classroom attention (79.02%), school absenteeism (76.29%) and emotional distress (76.29%).

The finding is consistent with recent empirical evidence linking cyberbullying with educational outcomes. Williams and Halliday (2025), in their study of South Australian students, examined cyberbullying victimization in relation to learning readiness and subsequent academic achievement. They reported lower learning-readiness scores among cyberbullying victims and lower subsequent numeracy and reading scores compared with students who were not victims. This provides support for the present finding that cyberbullying may be associated with difficulties extending beyond students' immediate emotional experiences to their engagement with learning and academic development.

The finding is also supported by Solas-Martínez et al. (2025), who studied 1,330 young people and reported an association between bullying and cyberbullying experiences and lower levels of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Their findings are relevant because effective learning requires students to organize information, engage critically with learning materials and regulate their own learning processes. The present finding concerning reduced classroom attention is therefore consistent with evidence that experiences of victimization may be associated with difficulties in learning-related processes.

The finding concerning academic performance is further supported by Nagata et al. (2026). Using prospective data from 10,003 adolescents, the researchers found that adolescents in an increasing cyberbullying trajectory had higher odds of lower grades and greater school absence than those in a no-or-very-low cyberbullying trajectory. This is particularly relevant to the present study because poor academic performance and school absenteeism were among the indicators with substantial levels of agreement.

However, the present finding should also be considered alongside evidence that has produced different results. Ezewulu and Ebenebe (2022), in their study of in-school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, reported no significant difference in academic achievement between adolescents who had experienced cyberbullying and those who engaged in cyberbullying. This differs from the relatively high level of perceived influence on academic performance reported in the present study. The difference may reflect variations in geographical context, measurement approaches, the dimensions of cyberbullying examined and the distinction between respondents' perceptions and objectively measured academic achievement. It therefore reinforces the need to avoid interpreting the present descriptive findings as evidence of a direct causal effect. The finding also relates to Ezeonwumelu et al. (2022), who reported that cyberbullying significantly influenced academic grit among senior secondary school students in Onitsha South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Although academic grit differs from academic performance, both concepts relate to students' capacity to remain engaged with educational activities. The present finding therefore contributes additional evidence from another southeastern Nigerian context concerning the educational implications associated with cyberbullying.

The finding concerning low self-esteem and emotional distress is also important because educational development does not occur independently of students' emotional and social experiences. Students who perceive themselves as socially threatened, humiliated or rejected may find it more difficult to participate confidently in classroom activities and maintain positive relationships within the school environment. Gohal et al. (2023) similarly examined the psychological effects and related risks associated with cyberbullying among adolescents. Thus, the present findings suggest that the educational consequences perceived by respondents may operate partly through emotional and interpersonal difficulties. The findings can further be understood through Goleman's Emotional Intelligence framework. Cyberbullying can expose students to negative emotional experiences, including humiliation, fear, anger and distress. Within Goleman's framework, self-awareness enables individuals to recognize their emotional states, while self-regulation concerns the management of emotional responses. Motivation supports persistence toward goals, empathy facilitates recognition of others' feelings, and social skills contribute to effective interpersonal relationships. Where students experience difficulties managing the emotional consequences of cyberbullying, their concentration, motivation, classroom participation and interpersonal relationships may be affected.

The theory does not establish that emotional intelligence causes or prevents cyberbullying, nor does it demonstrate a direct causal pathway from cyberbullying to poor academic outcomes. Rather, it provides a useful framework for understanding the emotional and interpersonal processes through which students may respond to harmful digital experiences. In the context of the present findings, the theory helps explain why cyberbullying may be

associated with educational difficulties when the emotional consequences of the experience interfere with students' attention, motivation, relationships and participation in school activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that cyberbullying should not be viewed solely as a problem occurring within the digital environment. The respondents' perceptions suggest that its consequences may extend into the classroom and wider educational experience. The high levels of agreement recorded for poor academic performance, low self-esteem, reduced classroom attention, absenteeism and emotional distress demonstrate the importance of addressing cyberbullying as part of broader efforts to create a safe and supportive learning environment. The findings consequently support the need for preventive and supportive measures within secondary schools. Cyberbullying awareness programmes should address the different forms of online victimization identified in the study, including impersonation, fake accounts, threatening communication and online harassment. Responsible digital-use education should help students understand appropriate online conduct, identity protection and reporting procedures. At the same time, school counselling services should provide appropriate support for students whose educational participation is affected by cyberbullying experiences. Parents, teachers, school administrators and other relevant stakeholders should also collaborate in identifying and responding to cyberbullying while maintaining appropriate safeguards for students' privacy and welfare.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that cyberbullying is prevalent to a high extent among secondary school students in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State, with impersonation through fake accounts and sexually inappropriate, humiliating or harassing messages emerging as particularly prominent forms. The study further establishes that cyberbullying has a considerable negative influence on students' educational development, particularly in relation to academic performance, self-esteem, classroom attention, school attendance and emotional well-being. The findings demonstrate that cyberbullying extends beyond the digital environment into students' educational experiences. Consequently, addressing the problem requires more than disciplinary measures against perpetrators. Schools, parents and other relevant stakeholders need to strengthen cyberbullying awareness, responsible digital-use education, reporting mechanisms and appropriate counselling support. Such measures are essential for creating a safer learning environment in which students can participate effectively and achieve their educational potential.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Secondary schools should strengthen cyberbullying awareness programmes by regularly educating students on the forms, risks and consequences of cyberbullying and appropriate ways of responding to harmful digital interactions.
- Responsible digital-use education should be incorporated into students' learning activities. Students should be taught how to communicate responsibly online, protect their digital identities, recognise harmful content and report cyberbullying incidents.

- School counselling services should be strengthened to provide timely psychological and educational support to students affected by cyberbullying, particularly those experiencing low self-esteem, emotional distress, poor concentration or withdrawal from school activities.
- Schools should establish clear reporting and intervention mechanisms through which students can confidentially report cyberbullying, including impersonation, threatening messages and online harassment, without fear of further victimisation.
- Parents, teachers and school administrators should work collaboratively in monitoring and addressing cyberbullying. Such collaboration should focus on early identification, appropriate intervention and creating a school environment where students feel safe seeking help.
- Schools should review and strengthen their anti-bullying policies to specifically address cyberbullying and provide clear procedures for reporting, investigating and responding to incidents occurring through digital technologies.

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