

Original Research Article

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS PERCEPTION OF CYBER-BULLYING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC GRIT OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ONITSHA SOUTH LGA, ANAMBRA STATE.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the perception of students and teachers on cyber-bullying and the influence of cyber bullying on students' academic grit. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided this study. The ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 280 senior secondary school students and 120 teachers from secondary schools in Onitsha South Local Government Area, Anambra State were selected using purposive and simple random sampling respectively. Three instruments filled; Students Cyberbullying Awareness Questionnaire (SCAQ); Teachers' Perception of Cyberbullying Questionnaire (TPCQ); School Cyberbullying Eradication Questionnaire (SCEQ), were developed by the researchers to elicit responses from the respondents, while the School Grit Scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) was also adapted to measure students' academic grit. Reliability of the instrument was computed using the Cronbach Alpha technique. Questionnaires were distributed to 50 students and 30 teachers outside the study area. Reliability coefficient scores of 0.81, 0.79, 0.78, and 0.83 were realized for the SCAQ, TPCQ, SCEQ and the adapted version of the Short Grit Scale, respectively. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, and dependent T-test statistics. It was found among others that students and teachers are aware of the incidence of cyberbullying in our schools. Also, the researchers found that cyberbullying had significant influence on academic grit of students. It was recommended that technology should be incorporated in the fight against cyberbullying.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Trolling, Cyberstalking, Academic Grit.

Introduction

The rapid increase in the use of digital technology has brought about the digitalization of learning, globalization and literal compression of the world into a global village. With a click on a device, messages, content and information can be shared to any part of the world in a fraction of a second. As a result, young people who embraced social media as a channel through which they express themselves, seek out entertainment and advertise their creative ideals. The rate at which adolescents access social media has gone astronomical in contemporary time. Varella (2021) revealed that around 30 million young people have access to social media in 2021, with the figure expected to increase to a whopping 80 million in 2026. A further inquest revealed that the ten major social media platform include Whatsapp 93%; Facebook 86.2%; YouTube 81.6%; Instagram 73.1%; FB Messenger 67.2%; Twitter 61.4%; Telegram 56.3%; LinkedIn 32.8%; TikTok 31.9% and Snapchart 31.2% (Varrella, 2021).

With increased access to social media, users could be sucked into vicious cyber engagement practices that could have long lasting implications on themselves when they are victims or others when they are the aggressors. While social media serves as a network of platforms that serves as an avenue for escapism from unpleasant life experiences (Ezeonwumelu & Okoro, 2020), it has also been found to negatively affect academic goal-oriented behaviours (Ezeonwumelu, Nwikpo, Okoro & Eyaema, 2021), in addition, other vices like cyber scam, engagement in risky sexual behaviours and cyber bullying have been associated with increased social media use (Alim, 2016; Kao, 2021; Asrese & Mekonnen, 2018).

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs without physical contact between the aggressor and victim. The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, UNICEF (nd) defined cyber bullying as bullying orchestrated with the use of digital technologies. These

bullying behaviours are persistent and perpetuated using social media platforms, messaging applications, and mobile phones which are used to spread malicious lies against a victim, send threatening messages, gang up against the victim or stealing a victim's identity and creating mischief with same.

Cyber bullying is also prevalent in Nigeria. In fact, its definition is rooted in Nigerians Cybercrimes Act 2015 which referred to the menace as cyberstalking and defined same as “any course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.” These acts are mostly perpetuated using computer and other forms of digital communications. Adediran (2020) pointed out that cyberbullying has become a trending issues in Nigeria. The menace has been heightened by the proliferation of mobile communication gadgets and increased access to social media sites. Nwufo and Nwoke (2018) added that cyberbullying is a common problem in the society and share similar traits with conventional bullying. Generally, bullying entails power imbalance between the bully and the victim which allows the former to take advantage of the victims' vulnerability to harass and intimidate him or her for sheer fun.

With focus centred around physical or conventional bullying, incidents of cyberbullying in schools and in the home are quite under-reported. In addition to shame and embarrassment suffered by victims of cyber bullying, Wozencroft, Campbell, Orel, Kimpton and Leong (2015) admitted that anti-bullying policies appear to be vague on cyber bullying because of the virtual nature of the attacks, hence difficult to report and punish. A United State Frontline anti-bullying platform expressed concerns over the peculiarity of cyber bullying. The platform known as Stopbullying.gov claimed that cyber bullying raises “unique concerns” which were:

Persistent: There is a reoccurrence of this behaviour as long as the victim has access to digital devices which allows him or her to communicate with others online.

Permanent: Online content are permanent. A disturbing content posted on a social media site will remain public unless it is taken down by the social network site or the aggressor. Therefore, the cyber victim must either stay away from the source of the stressor or persevere with the disturbing content.

Hard to Notice: Unlike conventional bullying which is mostly physical and leaves a mark on the individual's body, cyber bullying is difficult to notice. This makes control of the menace difficult.

Cyber bullying manifests in several forms, however, the following are the most common bullying observed on cyberspace;

Trolling: This is a deliberate attempt at upsetting someone by sending them offensive messages, using extreme vulgarities or demeaning picture memes on the victim's social media wall, group chats or in comments made on pages. The aim of using these slurs and offensive messages and media is basically to denigrate the victim and cause utmost pain to him or her. To make matters worse, these troll messages are found ridiculous by a majority of the social media audience thereby eliciting validation in the form of encouraging reactions and endorsing emojis. Swenson-Lepper and Kerby (2019) claimed that social media trolls effortlessly use sarcasm to upset their victims. The positive feedback from their audience serves as reinforcement as they continue with this practice over and over again.

Cyber stalking: This is a form of bullying that is often interchangeably used with cyber bullying. However, it can be distinctively explained to throw light on how cyber bullies operate. Cyber stalking can be defined as using electronic communications constantly to harass or threaten another person. Cyber stalkers follow their victims from one online platform to another. Santrock (2016) corroborated this; adding that adolescents are both perpetrators and victims of

this menace. On social media, Facebook for instance, users belong to various platforms depending on their interests. These platforms range from pages with educational, sporting, entertainment and current affairs content. A typical cyber stalker identifies a victim, seeks out his or her accounts/login account and follow him or her on all pages, sending threatening message and emojis to upset the victim.

Identity theft: This is the criminal impersonation or stealing of the victim's identity on social media, or nursing the aim of using same to perpetuate fraud, or for the purpose of embarrassing the original user. Nwufu and Nwoke (2018) claimed that young individuals who are savvy enough to manipulate digital technology devices now hack into people's social media accounts and use these accounts to commit various crimes. Identity theft is a serious cybercrime as it is often used by cyber scammers to solicit for funds from unsuspecting friends and relatives of their victims causing them serious embarrassment. In addition, identity theft helps perpetrators gain access into users' messenger apps, allowing them obtain personal information which they could use in blackmailing the users.

Social Exclusion: This is a subtle form of bullying that entails systematically rejecting someone from interpersonal relationships. Fraser-Thill (2010) claimed that social exclusion is more common among women than men. The period of adolescence is often characterized by formation of cliques within peer groups. Onyejiaku and Onyejiaku (2011) opined that this is often necessitated by adolescents' psychogenic needs of validation and peer loyalty. As a result, when their peers try to ostracize them, they (the victims) develop a sense of isolation which is hurtful. This is exactly the goal of perpetrators of social exclusion. They target the ego and self-esteem of the victims by ignoring them on social media. They avoid interacting with them and avoid engaging on posts made by the victims.

Call-out/Cancel Culture: This is a new trend associated with social media ostracism directed at a victim to ridicule, embarrass and subjugate him or her. The call-out culture entails a virtual mob annihilation of the victim orchestrated by an individual, or group of people with the aim of harassing the victim because of a difference in opinion or conflict of interest. The perpetrator(s) instigate a campaign of calumny against the victim by making derogatory and inflammatory posts about him or her, tagging a wide audience and pushing a certain narrative to hurt the victim. Romano (2020) argued that cancel culture is often targeted at popular individuals with the aim of derailing their careers. Here, there is a call to boycott the victim's contents, products, services and so on. Cancel culture is a prevalent issue of discourse. Rueb and Taylor (2019) reported on how former U.S. President, Barack Obama warned adolescents on the dangers associated with call-out. He (Obama), made a distinction between activism and cancel culture, claiming that the behaviour is a disturbing culture that does more damage than good.

Cyber bullying also occurs in other ways, however, the effects it has on victims is even of more importance. Mental health issues continue to necessitate genuine concerns from around the world with mental health specialists unrelenting in their efforts to identify linkages between cyber bullying and mental health. Skilbred-Fjeld, Endresen and Mossig (2020) found that cyber bullying could lead to depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and self-harm. They, Skilbred-Fjeld *et al.* (2020) also claimed that cyber victims and cyber-bully victims were found to be vulnerable to mood problems in addition to anti-social behaviour tendencies (Skilbred-Fjeld *et al.*, 2020; Alim, 2016).

Also, studies have revealed that adolescents who experience cyberbullying exhibit fluctuations in affect which impairs their daily functioning. Batool, Yousaf and Batool (2017) asserted that cyber-bullying affects the psyche of young people and hinders performance in key

facets of their endeavours. Academic performance has been observed as a key area of the adolescents' life that takes a plunge when the teenage learner is subjected to online bullying. This is very understandable given the fact bullying behaviour generally distorts motivation to achieve as the learner is often preoccupied with negative thoughts and rarely spends enough time engaging in scholarly tasks (Santrock, 2016; Fareo and Habila, 2018).

Academic Grit: An Overview

Academic grit, also known as academic perseverance is a trait that is typified by intentional focus, resilience and determination to achieve success in one's academic endeavour. It is a personality characteristic found in individuals who are goal-oriented and steadfast, even in the face of debilitating situations that could hinder one's drive.

Grit is seen as an important predictor of academic achievement and persistence (Strayhorn, 2013; Bazalais, Lemay & Doleck, 2016), it was defined by Tang, Wang, Parada and Salmera-Aro (2020) as a trait of passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Literature on academic grit benefited a lot from the work of Duckworth and Quinn (2009) that saw academic grit as central to various academic-oriented outcomes. In other words, academic grit explains fluctuations in academic motivation, academic engagement, school attendance and attrition tendencies (Duckworth *et al.*, 2019; Oluremi, 2014; Kutlu, Kula-Kartal & Simsek, 2017; Harnandez, Moreno-Murcia, Cid, Monteiro & Rodright, 2020).

In the face of the increased rate of cyber-bullying amongst adolescents in this part of the world, and the consequences it portends for their mental health and psychological disposition towards their academic endeavours, as well as the relative apathy shown in addressing this problem, there is need to study how cyber-bullying affects student's willingness to persist with academics and strategies to combat this virtual malady. This inspired the researchers to look at

the perception of students and teachers of cyber-bullying, the influence of cyber-bullying on academic grit and strategies to combat this problem.

Statement of the Problem

The increase access to digital technology has exposed adolescents to another menace that is raging like wildfire. Cyber-bullying has become so rampant and continues to attract attention from several quarters because of the implications it has on the mental health of young learners, as well as various aspect of their academic orientation. Interestingly, unlike conventional bullying, cyber-bullying appears to be under-reported by students. This has effectively tackled. Also, it has been found that academic grit plays an important role on students' academic performance, academic engagement and achievement motivation. Therefore, the researchers are determined to ascertain the perception of students and teachers of cyber-bullying on the influence of cyber-bullying on academic grit of adolescent learners in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of students and teachers on cyber-bullying and influence of cyber-bullying on academic grit. Specifically, the study sought to find;

Students perceptions of cyber-bullying in Anambra State.

Teachers perceptions of cyber-bullying in Anambra State.

Strategies to be adopted in curbing cyber-bullying.

Influence of cyber-bullying on academic grit of students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for the study.

- i. What are the students' perceptions of cyberbullying in Anambra State?

- ii. What are the teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying in Anambra State?
- iii. What are the strategies to be adopted in curbing cyberbullying in Anambra State?

Research Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study thus:

H₀₁: Cyberbullying has no significant influence on students' academic grit in Anambra State.

Methodology

The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. This enabled the researchers study the cause-effect of cyberbullying and academic grit without manipulating the variables. The area of the study is Onitsha South LGA. The purposive random sampling was used in selecting 280 senior secondary school students (147 males and 133 females), while the simple random sampling was used in selecting 120 senior secondary school teachers (50 males and 70 females) from the study area.

Two instruments used were designed by the researchers to gauge the perceptions of students and teachers on cyberbullying. Students Cyberbullying Awareness Questionnaire (SCAQ) and the Teachers Perception of Cyberbullying Questionnaire (TPCQ) were developed by the researchers. These instruments consist of 15 and 10 items respectively and were scored using a 4 point Likert scale of SA, A, D and SD; with a corresponding score of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The researchers also developed another instrument titled, Strategies for Cyberbullying Eradication Questionnaire (SCIEQ). This instrument consists of 10 items, also using a 4-point Likert scale; Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD); and weighted in 3, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

To measure students' academic grit, the Short Grit Scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) was adapted for the study. This adapted version consists of 15 items on a 4-point scale responded as follows; very much like me, mostly like me, not much like me and not like me at all. Items 2, 4, 7, 8, 10 and 12 was scored 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively for UMLM, MLM, NMLM and NLMA; while items 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 14 and 15 scored 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

To validate the instruments, the instruments were presented to three experts; one from the Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, and two from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. To ascertain the reliability of the instruments 50 copies of the SCAQ and adapted Short Grit Scale were trial tested using summer classes students in Onitsha North LGA. The responses were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha technique which yielded a coefficient of 0.81 and 0.83. On the other hand, the TPCQ and SCEQ were issued to 30 teachers in Onitsha North LGA. Data generated from their responses were subjected to Cronbach Alpha analysis which yielded coefficient scores of 0.79 and 0.78 respectively. These were considered adequate for the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

Research Question One: What are the perceptions of students in Awka South LGA?

Table 1: Mean and standard analysis of perception of senior secondary school students on cyberbullying in Onitsha South LGA of Anambra State

S/N	Students' Perceptions	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Cyberbully is a serious issue on social media	3.1	0.80	Accepted
2.	Cyberbullying is not a problem that should bother students	2.4	0.51	Rejected
3.	Cyberbullying is as bad as physical bullying	2.8	0.57	Accepted
4.	When one is attacked verbally on social media the person is bullied	2.9	0.59	Accepted
5.	Cyberbullies are responsible for hacking people's social media account	2.2	0.46	Rejected
6.	Victims of cyberbullying can become	3.1	0.81	Accepted

	depressed			
7.	Victims of cyberbullying end up becoming cyberbullies	2.4	0.50	Rejected
8.	Victims of cyberbullying find it difficult reporting their experience to the school authority	3.4	0.85	Accepted
9.	People engage in cyber bullying because their friends do it	2.9	0.54	Accepted
10.	When cases of cyber bullying are reported, teachers do not do enough to stop it	3.3	0.85	Accepted
11.	People stay away from making comment on public pages to avoid insulting replies	3.5	0.87	Accepted
12.	I find cyber bullying very disturbing	3.0	0.79	Accepted
13.	It is easier to deal with physical bullying than cyberbullying	3.2	0.84	Accepted
14.	Friends may start avoiding you on social media to make you feel rejected	3.1	0.81	Accepted
15.	It is easier to avoid physical bullies in school than cyberbullies on social media	3.2	0.83	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.96		

Data presented in table 1 shows the responses on the perceptions of secondary school students on cyberbullying in Onitsha South LGA. Apart from responses to items 2, 5 and 7, other responses yielded mean scores above 2.5 which was the criterion mean for acceptance. The grand mean of 2.96 indicates that the students are aware of the prevalence, nature and consequences of cyberbullying. Also, the standard deviation scores were close enough to indicate that the respondents were close in their responses.

Research Question Two: What are the perceptions of teachers on cyberbullying in Onitsha South LGA?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation analysis on perception of teachers on cyberbullying in Onitsha South LGA, Anambra State.

S/N	Teachers' Perceptions	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Teachers do not have the capacity to punish cyberbullies	3.2	0.82	Accepted
2.	Students who engage in physical bullying are also likely to engage in cyberbullying	3.3	0.82	Accepted

3.	Cyberbullying deserves more publicity	3.1	0.78	Accepted
4.	Students hardly report cases of cyberbullying	3.4	0.89	Accepted
5.	Students who are victims of cyberbullying are likely to develop mood problems	3.2	0.81	Accepted
6.	Anonymity of cyberbullies makes it difficult to deal with the problem	3.5	0.91	Accepted
7.	If a student is found to be a cyberbully, he or she should be expelled from school	2.8	0.69	Accepted
8.	Cyberbullying problems became more pronounced recently	3.4	0.87	Accepted
9.	Teachers have a role to play in eradicating cyberbullying	3.3	0.86	Accepted
10.	Cyberbullying victims could experience difficulties in their school work	3.1	0.81	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.23		

Data presented in table 2 reveals the responses on teachers' perception of cyberbullying in secondary schools in Onitsha South LGA. All the items yielded mean scores above the criterion mean 2.5 and were consequently accepted. This implies that the teachers accept the harsh realities of cyberbullying prevalent in our society. The standard deviation of all the items also ranges from 0.69 – 0.91 which shows that the respondents were close in their responses to the items.

Research Question Three: What are the strategies to be adopted in curbing cyberbullying in schools?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation analysis of strategies to be adopted in curbing cyberbullying in schools in Onitsha South LGA, Anambra State

S/N	Strategies	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Regulating social media use can help in reducing cyberbullying in school	2.7	0.57	Accepted
2.	Cyber victims should be encouraged to report cases of cyberbullying	3.3	0.82	Accepted
3.	There is need for strong anti-bullying policies	3.5	0.91	Accepted
4.	Schools should sensitize students on cyberbullying	3.4	0.84	Accepted
5.	Students found guilty of cyberbullying	3.2	0.81	Accepted

6.	should be expelled from school Parents should be involved in the fight against cyber bullying	2.6	0.61	Accepted
7.	Teachers and school administrators should be trained on the evolving dynamics of bullying	3.1	0.87	Accepted
8.	Technology should be incorporated in schools to monitor students' use of social media	2.9	0.65	Accepted
9.	Establishing open communication with students will help promote openness	3.2	0.87	Accepted
10.	Personal use of digital gadgets should be outrightly banned in the school.	2.4	0.59	Rejected
	Grand Mean	3.03		

Table 3 revealed that all the items, except item 10, had mean scores above 2.50. This implies that the respondents accepted all the strategies except banning students from using digital gadgets as a viable strategy for curbing cyberbullying. Also the standard deviation scores ranged from 0.57 to 0.91, indicating the closeness of the responses to the items.

Hypotheses One: There is no significant influence of cyberbullying on academic grit of students in secondary schools in Onitsha South LGA, Anambra State

Table 4: t-test analysis of responses on the influence of cyberbullying on students' academic grit

Variable	N	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Cyberbullying	280			
		2.07	1.96	S
Academic grit	280			

S = Significant, $P < .05$; $N = 280$, $df = 279$

From table 4, the calculated t-value of 2.07 is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and at 279 degree of freedom. As a result, the null hypothesis which states that cyberbullying has no significant influence is rejected. Therefore, cyberbullying has a significant influence on students' academic grit.

Discussion

The data presented in table 1 revealed that many students have come across one form of cyberbullying on social media or another. This is understandable judging by the fact that cyberbullying has become a global problem on social media today. Skilbred-Fjeld *et al.* (2020) agreed with this assertion claiming that most adolescents on social media have experienced one form of cyberbullying or another and are vulnerable to depressive thinking and anxiety as a result. A significant number of respondents disagreed that cyberbullies are solely responsible for hacking victims' accounts on social media. This is likely because perpetrators of other forms of cybercrime access users account solely for cyberscam (Ojilere, Nnabue and Oraegbunam, 2017). As also revealed in the responses not every victim of cyberbullying ends up becoming a cyberbully. Some of the victims try to adapt to the toxic climate of social media, while the others leave entirely or drastically reduce their level of engagement on social network platforms. This augurs well with the findings of Lawler and Molluzzo (2015) that revealed that among other strategies, victims of cyberbullying may decide to quit social media to avoid bullies and protect their mental health.

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that a majority of the teachers are aware of the forms of cyberbullying that abound on cyberspace and the toll it takes on young learners. Apart from parents and siblings, the teachers spend a substantial amount of time with learners and can observe directly their behavioural changes and mental disposition. Teachers are also victims of cyberbullying, therefore, they understand its impact on the individual and can help in proffering coping solutions for affected learners. This corroborates the finding of Kopecky and Szotkowski (2017) that teachers experience myriads of attacks like cyberstalking, cyberbaiting and humiliation on cyberspace which also affects them mentally, thus they are in the position to show empathy to affected learners.

Results from table 3 revealed that the teachers agree on several strategies that could be helpful in combating the menace of cyberbullying in schools. However, they disagreed that banning students from using digital devices like mobile phones in the school would prove helpful in fighting the problem. This is true because the students also use these devices at home. Limiting use of computers and mobile phones for recreational purpose in school is tantamount to delaying the obvious. Cyberbullying attacks are continuous and permanent, a victim will always experience the attacks once he or she logs on back to his or her social media account.

From the result of data analysis in table 4, it has been discovered that cyberbullying has a significant influence on the academic grit of students in the study area. This could be as a result of the psychological issues associated with victims of cyberbullying. This corroborates the findings of Harnandez *et al.* (2020) that found motivation to be a predictor of academic grit. When a learner is subjects to cyberbullying, such a learner may find it difficult sustaining the drive to study. This, overtime, could hamper the said learner's academic perseverance. Also, Li, Fung, Wang, Sun and Chang (2018) found that there is a positive relationship between life satisfaction and academic grit. Victims of cyberbullying have been found to be depressed, anxious, and in extreme cases suicidal. They do not feel satisfied with their predicament and as a result tend to feel disillusioned with school and scholarly tasks.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

1. Students are aware of the prevalence of cyberbullying and perceive same as a disturbing problem.
2. Teachers appreciate that cyberbullying is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.
3. There are actionable strategies that would help in fighting the menace of cyberbullying.

4. Cyberbullying has a significant influence on the academic grit of young learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for technology to be incorporated into the fight against cyber bullying. Advances in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning have brought about innovations that can help in this regard. Keyword spotting software are now used by several Social Networking Sites to help regulate use of some troubling words.
2. Parents should monitor their wards' social media activities. Parental control software are now available to filter contents that young could ones get exposed to.
3. Schools should adopt stringent anti-bullying policies to serve as deterrent to cyberbullies.
4. Encouraging young learners to report cases of cyberbullying is key to eradicating this problem. Students should be provided with cyber links where they can anonymously report cases to the authority.

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