

**PERSONALITY TRAITS AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL
ADJUSTMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CROSS RIVER
STATE, NIGERIA**

Nsan, Ogar Inongha (Ph.D)

Department of Educational Foundations; University of Cross River State (Unicross),
Calabar.

*E-mail: ogarnsanpsychology@gmail.com: 08161712347 / 08109829545

Abstract

The study investigated personality traits as predictors of student's social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross-River State, Nigeria. To guide this study, 3 research questions and 3 null hypotheses were raised. The study employed correlational survey research design. The population of this study comprised 11, 364 senior secondary two (SS II) students, consisting of 5,530 males 5, 834 females. The sample size for the study consisted of 377 senior secondary two (SS II) students of which 191 are male and 186 are female students. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) criteria for a population of about eleven thousand, three hundred and sixty four (11, 364) at a 95 percent confidence level was used to draw three hundred and seventy seven (377) senior secondary two (SS II) students. The sample was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Two types of validity were employed in the study, construct and face validity. To determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument Cronbach Alpha was used. Simple linear regression was used to answer research questions and regression-test was used to test the null hypothesis. All the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the analysis of data in the study, the following findings emerged: openness to Experience predicts 6.7% of social adjustment, with significant predictive power, conscientiousness accounts for 13.3% of social adjustment, showing strong predictive power, and extraversion predicts 1.2% of social adjustment, with significant influence. The study concluded among others that students who exhibit high levels of openness—characterized by curiosity, imagination, and a willingness to explore new experiences—are more likely to adjust socially. Recommendation made included; teachers and school authorities should collaborate with parents to ensure that appropriate measures such as small groups and peer tutoring that foster collaboration, participation, and skill development are taken to enhance student's social adjustment.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Social Adjustment

Introduction

The social adjustment of students in secondary schools plays a crucial role in their overall academic experience, psychological development, and interpersonal competence. Social adjustment refers to the ability of individuals to adapt to social environments,

maintain meaningful relationships, and conform to societal norms within a given context, such as a school. In adolescence a critical developmental period social adjustment becomes particularly important as students are expected to build peer relationships, navigate group dynamics, and interact effectively with teachers and others within the school system (Ajayi & Afolabi, 2020).

Among the many factors influencing students' social adjustment, personality traits have attracted considerable attention in educational and psychological research. The Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality, commonly known as the Big Five, has become a dominant framework for understanding how individual differences affect behavior and social interaction. This model identifies five key personality dimensions: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1999; updated in later applications by DeYoung, 2018). The current study focuses on three of these traits—openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion—due to their significant influence on students' adaptability and interpersonal relations.

Openness to experience describes individuals who are intellectually curious, imaginative, and open to new experiences and ideas. Students with high levels of openness are more likely to engage in diverse social settings, appreciate differences, and adapt to new social norms, all of which facilitate smoother social adjustment (Oshio *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, conscientiousness, characterized by self-discipline, organization, and goal-directed behavior, contributes to social stability and respectful interpersonal conduct. Conscientious students tend to exhibit socially appropriate behaviors that promote acceptance and reduce peer conflict (Soto, 2019).

Moreover, extraversion—the tendency to be outgoing, energetic, and assertive—has been shown to positively correlate with social engagement. Extraverted students are more likely to initiate conversations, participate in group activities, and establish peer connections, all of which foster social adjustment in school environments (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). These personality traits collectively contribute to how students perceive and interact with their peers, how they respond to social challenges, and how well they integrate into the school community.

In Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, the issue of students' poor social adjustment has been a growing concern. Public secondary schools face challenges such as peer pressure, bullying, emotional instability, and weak interpersonal relationships, which can hinder students' social functioning and academic success. While environmental and familial factors have been studied extensively, personality-based predictors of social adjustment remain underexplored in this context. Understanding the influence of openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion on social adjustment can help educators, counselors, and school administrators develop personality-sensitive strategies for fostering healthy school relationships.

Given the increasing emphasis on student well-being and holistic development, this study is timely and relevant. It seeks to examine the predictive power of selected personality traits on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State, with a view to informing guidance and counseling programs, classroom management practices, and social-emotional learning interventions tailored to students' personality profiles.

Statement of the Problem

Social adjustment is a critical component of students' overall development, particularly during adolescence when individuals are expected to form meaningful relationships, adapt to changing social environments, and function effectively within the school community. In public secondary schools across Cross River State, there has been growing concern over students' inability to adjust socially, as evidenced by rising cases of peer conflicts, bullying, isolation, emotional instability, and difficulty in maintaining interpersonal relationships. These challenges not only affect students' psychological well-being but also hinder their academic progress and general school experience.

While numerous studies have explored environmental, familial, and institutional factors affecting social adjustment, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how personality traits—especially openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion—contribute to students' ability to integrate socially within the school system. These traits are known to influence behaviour, interaction patterns, and

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adaptability, yet their specific predictive role in students' social adjustment within the context of public secondary schools in Cross River State remains under-investigated.

This gap in knowledge creates a problem for educators, counselors, and school administrators who seek effective, personality-informed strategies to support students' social development. Without a clear understanding of how these personality traits influence social adjustment, efforts to improve school climate, promote healthy peer relationships, and support students' emotional and social well-being may remain ineffective or misdirected.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the limited understanding of how the personality traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, and extraversion predict social adjustment among students in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate personality traits as predictors of students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to ascertain the;

1. Predictive power of personality trait of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools.
2. Predictive power of personality trait of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools.
3. Predictive power of personality trait of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustments in public secondary schools in Cross River State?
2. What is the predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustments in public secondary schools in Cross River State?

3. What is the predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustments in public secondary schools in Cross River State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant predictive power of personality trait of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Ho₂: There is no significant predictive power of personality trait of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Ho₃: There is no significant predictive power of personality trait of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Methods

The study employed correlational survey research design. This study was conducted in Cross River State. The population of this study comprised 11,364 senior secondary two (SS II) students, consisting of 5530 males and 5834 females senior secondary two (SS II) students (Planning Research and Statistics Department, Secondary Education Board Calabar, Cross River State, 2022/2023 academic session. The sample size for the study consisted of 377 senior secondary two (SS II) students, of which 191 are males and 186 are female. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) criteria for a population of about 11,364 at a 95 percent confidence level was used to draw 377 senior secondary two (SS II) students (191 male SS II students and 186 female SS II students). The sample was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure.

Two instruments were used for data collection. They include; Personality Trait Questionnaire (PTQ) and Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ). Personality Traits Questionnaire (PTQ) was adapted from Psychological World (2023). However, the researcher modified them to a four point likert-type scale of Very accurate (VA) – 4; moderate accurate (MA) - 3; moderately inaccurate (MI) – 2; and very inaccurate (VI) – <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

1. Also, Section B of Personality Traits Questionnaire (PTQ) is structured to cover openness to experiences, conscientiousness, and extraversion. Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ) was adapted from social adjustment questionnaire by Sathe, Vishranti and Uttum (2010). The instrument consisted of two sections: A and B. Section A sought to elicit bio data from the respondents while Section B of Social adjustment questionnaire (SAQ) comprised of twenty-five (25) items and were reduced to twenty (20) items statements structured to cover social adjustment. It was designed on a four point liker scale of strongly agreed (SA) - 4, agreed (A) - 3, Disagreed (D) - 2 and strongly disagreed (SD) -1.

The face-validity of the instrument was established by given copies of the drafted questionnaires (instruments) to four experts from the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The professional guidance, critiques, suggestions, and modifications were incorporated into the relevant items, resulting in the instrument's current form. The construct validity of the instrument was determined by administering the instruments to 50 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Cross River State. The reliability of the instruments was ascertained by administering the instruments to 20 senior secondary two (SS 2) students in public secondary schools in Ogoja Education Zone not included in the sample of the study but shows similar characteristics with those in the sample schools. The responses of the respondents were subjected to reliability analysis, using Cronbach Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the instruments (Personality Traits Questionnaire (PTQ), and Social Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ)). The choice of Cronbach Alpha is because the instruments were polytomously scored. An internal consistency coefficient reliability estimate of openness to experience Cluster A was 0.76; the coefficient for conscientiousness cluster B was 0.85; the coefficient reliability for extraversion Cluster C was 0.80. The overall reliability for all the clusters was 0.85. The reliability coefficient of Social Adjustment was 0.87.

The collection of the data for the study was done using face-to-face and on-the-spot method. Simple linear regression was used to answer research questions. When the r-value lies between ± 0.50 and ± 1 , it is regarded as a strong correlation; when the r-

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value lies between ± 0.30 and ± 0.49 , it is regarded as a medium correlation; and when the r-value lies below ± 0.29 , it is regarded as a weak correlation. A regression t-test was utilized to test null hypotheses. All null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. If the probability value was less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), the null hypotheses were rejected; however, if the probability value was greater than or equal to 0.05 ($P \geq 0.05$), the null hypotheses were retained.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State?

Table 1: Linear regression analysis of the predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.259 ^a	.067	.064	4.88247

(R²) = Coefficient of Determination

The result in Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficient between openness to experience and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State was 0.259. This means that, there exist a low positive relationship between openness to experience and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State. Table 1 also revealed that, the coefficient of determination (R²) associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.259 was 0.067. This coefficient of determination (R²) indicates that 6.7% of variation in students' social adjustment in secondary schools in Cross River State is attributed to openness to experience. This is an indication that 93.3% of the variation in students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State is attributed to other factors other than openness to experience.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Table 2: Regression t-test analysis of significant predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	29.031	1.773		16.376	.000
	Openness	.211	.041	.259	5.132	.000

The result in Table 2 shows that t-value of 5.132 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value of 0.000 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State was rejected. The researcher therefore, concludes that there is a significant predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Research Question Two: What is the predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State?

Table 3: Linear regression analysis of the predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.365 ^a	.133	.131	4.70576

(R²) = Coefficient of Determination

The result in Table 3 shows that the correlation coefficient between conscientiousness and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State was 0.365. This means that, there exist a low positive relationship between conscientiousness and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State. Result in Table 3 also revealed that, the coefficient of determination (R²) associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.365 was 0.133. This coefficient of determination (R²) indicates that 13.3% of variation in students' social adjustment in secondary schools in Cross River State is attributed to conscientiousness. This is an indication that 86.7% of

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the variation in students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State is attributed to other factors other than conscientiousness.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Table 4: Regression t-test analysis of significant predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	24.414	1.830		13.342	.000
	Conscientiousness	.358	.048	.365	7.512	.000

The result in Table 4 shows that t-value of 7.512 with associated exact probability value of .000 was obtained. This probability value of 0.000 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the obtained probability value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State was rejected. The researcher therefore, concludes that there is a significant predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Research Question Three: What is the predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State?

Table 5: Linear regression analysis of the predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.109 ^a	.012	.009	5.02432

(R²) = Coefficient of Determination

The result in Table 5 shows that the correlation coefficient between extraversion and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State was 0.109. This means that, there exist a very low positive relationship between extraversion and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State. Table 5 also revealed that, <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtесе>

the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.109 was 0.012. This coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 1.2% of variation in students' social adjustment in secondary schools in Cross River State is attributed to extraversion. This is an indication that 98.8% of the variation in students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State is attributed to other factors other than extraversion.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Table 6: Regression t-test analysis of significant predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	34.175	1.851		18.466	.000
	Extraversion	.099	.047	.109	2.107	.036

The result in Table 6 shows that t-value of 2.107 with associated exact probability value of 0.036 was obtained. This probability value of 0.036 was compared with 0.05 set as level of significance for testing the hypothesis and it was found to be significant since the obtained probability value of 0.036 is less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State was rejected. The researcher therefore, concludes that there is a significant predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

Predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools

The findings of the study have shown that, there exist a low positive relationship between openness to experience and social adjustment of secondary school students. The result also revealed that, the coefficient of determination associated with the correlation

coefficient indicates a variation in students' social adjustment which is attributed to openness to experience. This is an indication that the variation in students' social adjustment in public secondary schools is attributed to other factors other than openness to experience. Further findings revealed that the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of openness to experience on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State was rejected. The implication is that, the low positive relationship between openness to experience and social adjustment may be as a result of their unwillingness to embrace new things, fresh ideas and novel experiences and generally have a narrower range of interests to change.

The finding is not supported by the outcome of the study by Nnachi, and Omabe, (2024) that there is significant correlation between personality traits of openness to experience to students' social adjustment and that personality traits of conscientiousness equally correlates highly to students' social adjustment. The finding is not also in agreement with the findings by *Ogba, and Nwankwo, (2023) that personality types; psychoticism, introversion/openness and neuroticism are significant predictors of secondary school students' social adjustment.* The study also found that secondary school students' personality types jointly are significant predictors of their social adjustment. However, the finding agreed with the finding with Corradi, and Levrau, (2021) who found that social adjustment is necessary for adjusting academically, and that it has a small, but positive effect on students' success. This can be justified that, the more open-minded students are, the less socially adjusted they tend to be, and they seem to benefit from a more close-minded stance than from open-mindedness in terms of adjusting to the social (and academic) context of a school. The study is also in agreement with the study by Laidra, Pullmann, and Allik, (2007) that openness correlated positively with students GPA in almost every grade.

Predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools

The findings of the study have shown that, there exist a low positive relationship between conscientiousness and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross

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River State. The findings of the study also revealed that, the coefficient of determination associated with the correlation coefficient, indicates a variation in students' social adjustment which has been attributed to students' conscientiousness which may be as a result of their inability to plan ahead of time and lack of self-discipline. Further findings also revealed that the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of conscientiousness on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State was rejected.

The finding is not supported by the outcome of the study by Nnachi, and Omabe, (2024) that there is significant correlation between personality traits of openness to experience to students' social adjustment and the personality traits of conscientiousness equally correlates highly to students' social adjustment. The finding was also supported by the findings by Eyong, David, and Umoh, (2014) who noted that a significant difference was found between the achievements of students with high level of conscientiousness and agreeableness, and those with low levels of the traits. However, the finding is in agreement with the finding by Laidra, Pullmann, and Allik, (2007) Conscientiousness correlated positively with students GPA in almost every grade. When all measured variables were entered together into a regression model, intelligence was still the strongest predictor of GPA, being followed by Agreeableness and Conscientiousness.

Predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools

The findings of the study have shown that, there exist a very low positive relationship between extraversion and social adjustment of secondary school students in Cross River State. The findings also revealed that, the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with the correlation coefficient indicates a variation in students' social adjustment in secondary schools which is attributed to extraversion. This indication shows that the variation in students' social adjustment in public secondary schools is attributed to other factors like achievement motivation other than extraversion; this may have resulted from their opinion to always spending more time alone and do not need as

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much social stimulation. Further findings also revealed that the null hypothesis no significant predictive power of extraversion on students' social adjustment in public secondary schools in Cross River State was rejected.

The finding of this study is in agreement with the finding by Devi, (2011) whose findings shows that Extraversion has positive effect on social, educational and general adjustment and Neuroticism has negative effect on the emotional, social, educational and general adjustments. However, the finding is not in agreement with the findings by Srivastava, and Barmola, (2013) who noted that there exist a negative relationship between extraversion and adjustment of students. The same has been found true for males as well as females. It is clear that extrovert male students are better adjusted. It is revealed in their study that, in female group, coefficient of correlation between personality and total adjustment is negative and significant. Among five dimensions of adjustment the correlation with personality is significant for home, health, social and emotional aspects, but the relationship of school adjustment with personality is not found significant. All the relationships obtained are negative, indicating female extrovert are better adjusted.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that certain personality traits significantly contribute to students' ability to adjust socially within the school environment. Students who display high levels of openness marked by curiosity, imagination, and a readiness to explore new experiences tend to adapt more easily in social situations. Their acceptance of diverse perspectives and willingness to engage with new people fosters adaptability, allowing them to build positive relationships with both peers and teachers. Similarly, conscientious students, known for their organization, responsibility, and self-discipline, often cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships and consistently exhibit socially appropriate behavior. Their reliability and focus on achieving goals earn them respect and trust from others, thereby facilitating smooth social interactions and promoting a sense of belonging within the school community.

Furthermore, extraverted students characterized by their outgoing nature, high energy, and sociability are more at ease in group settings and actively initiate and maintain social relationships. Their strong communication skills and enthusiasm for engaging with others enable them to adjust effectively, form meaningful friendships, and participate confidently in various school activities. Collectively, these traits enhance students' social integration and contribute to a positive school climate.

Implications

From the findings of the study, one can deduce some educational implications for students, teachers, school psychologists and guidance counsellors, parents, curriculum planners and future researchers.

1. Students who are more open to new experiences tend to adapt better to social environments in secondary schools. Schools can encourage students to engage in creative activities, group discussions, and experiential learning to foster this trait, which in turn can improve their social adjustment.
2. Students with higher levels of conscientiousness are better adjusted socially. This suggests that school programmes that promote responsibility, time management, and goal-setting can improve students' social behaviour and interaction within the school environment.
3. Though extraversion contributes a small percentage, it still plays a role in students' social behaviour. Extraverted students are more likely to engage with their peers, and schools can create opportunities for social interaction through clubs, sports, and group projects to leverage this trait for improved social adjustment.

Recommendations

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

1. Teachers and school authorities should collaborate with parents to ensure that appropriate measures such as small groups and peer tutoring that foster collaboration, participation, and skill development are taken to enhance student's social adjustment.

2. School guidance counsellors should collaborate with parents to help students to understand their personality traits and the personality traits of others. This will assist them in understanding their individual differences, which may likely help them develop proper social adjustment, which in turn enhance their academic achievement.
3. School guidance counsellors should also organize seminars workshops and educate the students on the danger involve in examination malpractice.

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