

ADOLESCENCE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: IMPACT OF AGE AND GENDER

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Abstract

Our study investigated the impact of gender and age on the emotional intelligence (EI) among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria. Despite increasing literature on adolescent EI, findings regarding the influence of age and gender remain inconclusive, particularly within the Nigerian context. We employed the descriptive survey design, sampling 417 senior secondary school students aged between 12–21 years across six educational zones in Anambra State. The Indigenous Emotional Intelligence Scale (IEIS) was employed to collect data. T-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the data collected and hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. Our findings revealed no significant differences in the EI mean scores between male and female adolescents across all seven dimensions of EI (interpersonal, empathy, stress tolerance, optimism, assertiveness, problem-solving and flexibility). Age, on the other hand, significantly impacted three dimensions of EI - optimism, assertiveness, and flexibility. Regarding this, middle aged adolescents (15–17 years) scored significantly higher than early adolescents (12–14 years) in these three domains. We concluded that whereas age is a significant factor in the development of certain EI dimensions, gender may not be a significant factor. Implications of the findings and recommendations were highlighted.

Keyword: Adolescence, Age, Emotional Intelligence, Gender, Secondary School Students.

Introduction

One of the crucial stages of human development is the adolescence stage which marks a transition from childhood to adulthood. It can be said to be a dynamic period characterized by rapid changes at the physiological, emotional, and social levels (Özdemir et al., 2016). Furthermore, there are also important cultural variations in terms of how adolescence is defined, particularly surrounding societal conceptions of how and when adult status is achieved (Bell, 2016). Many traditional societies view marriage as the marker signifying the end of adolescence, and many adult privileges are not afforded to an individual until marriage is achieved (Bell, 2016). During adolescence, fundamental

biological changes - known as puberty - occur within the body, which transform a child into a biological adult capable of sexual reproduction. Puberty is a gradual and sequential process that spans across the adolescent years and encapsulates multiple and complex biological processes (Dorn & Biro, 2011 as cited in Bell, 2016).

Adolescents become stronger and more physically able than children and gender differences in physicality emerge; males typically grow taller with larger heart and lung capacities, develop more muscle mass and less body fat than their female counterparts (Rogol, Roemmich, & Clark, 2022 as cited in McKinnon & Kolen, 2018). Male pubertal development also includes the deepening of the voice, changes in male genitalia and increases in androgen hormone production. In contrast, female pubertal development includes the growth of breasts, changes to female genitalia and increases in estrogen hormone production. Thus, puberty serves to exacerbate sex differences and make them more visually salient (Bell, 2016).

The adolescence stage is a time in which adolescents give way to intense emotional relationships and find self-concept. Tajpreet and Maheshwari (2015) reports that 55%-63% of adolescents are at low level of emotional intelligence. They also revealed that higher emotional intelligence is typically associated to positive moods because emotionally intelligent persons can maintain positive mental states due to their capability to efficiently manage their emotions. A person is said to be emotionally intelligent when he feels proper emotion in a proper situation and express it in a proper quantity.

Emotions play a very important role in human behaviour and life. In fact, even moral behaviour is based on emotion to some extent (Goleman 1995). Emotions are reactions that human beings experience in response to events or situations. An emotion combines cognition, bodily arousal and behaviour in a ready-made formula for responding in line with the way the situation has been interpreted. There is a huge difference in the ways of feeling emotions by human beings and animals although both of them experience anger, fear, sadness, and joy (Cherry, 2023). EI is considered as intelligence as it can solve problems and monitor emotions in themselves and others (Sharma, 2017). Emotional intelligence is a type of social intelligence that combines <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

emotion and intelligence by viewing emotions as useful sources of information that help us to navigate our social environment. The emotional intelligence quotient is a flexible group of skills, which can be learned and acquired. It is the key to life and career success (Sadiku & Musa, 2021).

Different scholars and theories have emerged and defined emotional intelligence. It has been defined as the “ability to monitor one’s own and other people’s emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1995) also defined EI as the capacity to recognize one’s own feelings, the feelings of others, and to motivate oneself to adequately deal with one’s relationships with others and with oneself. In addition, Bar-On (2000) as one of the pioneer person in the EI field also defined EI as a set of personal, emotional, and social factors influencing people’s ability to adapt to the demands and pressures of the environment.

Emotional intelligence is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions and manage them. Emotional intelligence is the capacity to create positive outcomes in relationships with others and with oneself. Research has shown that adolescents with high emotional intelligence are more likely to perform better in tasks requiring emotions than those with low emotional intelligence skills. (Ezebube & Emeka, 2023). Besides, EI has been demonstrated to be linked to students’ academic achievement (Okwuduba et al., 2021).

Differences in psycho-social manifestations have been observed among male and female adolescents including emotion related factors. Gender refers to effects or influences that relate to one being a male or female. The term gender is often used to indicate the distinction between human beings on the basis of masculinity and femininity in relation to their expected roles (Ezebube & Emeka, 2023). Studies on differences in the expression of emotions in boys and girls indicate that boys are more likely to present externalizing expressions of emotions while girls are more likely to internalize them. Gender differences in emotional expression are the result of a combination of biologically based temperamental predispositions and on the other hand, the socialization of boys and

girls will adopt gender related rules for the expression of emotions (Sanchis-Sanchis., et al, 2020). There is some evidence that the relationship of EI to social and emotional outcomes is stronger for males than females, suggesting that EI may confer greater benefit to males (Maccann., et al, 2020). There is also evidence that males and females experience different kinds of emotions; females experience greater internalising emotions such as anxiety whereas males experience greater externalising emotions such as anger (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013).

Emotional intelligence levels are hypothesized to increase with age. Many authors hold that emotional intelligence develops and improves over time, arguing that more emotion-related learning experiences lead to the development of improved emotional abilities and a greater perception of these abilities (Mankus et al., 2016). Sánchez-López, et al. (2022) found that EI increased with age, but only among women, with no age-related changes in men. Regarding age differences in adolescence, when using self-reports, EI appears to decrease, especially among girls, although other studies suggest a decline only in certain dimensions (Esnaola et al., 2017; Garaigordobil, 2020; Gómez-Baya et al., 2016). Research by Megías-Robles, et al. (2024) also found, in a sample of early adolescents (aged from 10 to 13 years), that emotional intelligence increases with age for girls, but not for boys and also that girls scored higher than boys on both the total EI and its four branches. The researchers also found that the branches of using and understanding emotions appeared to improve with age, although the total EI increased throughout adolescence, but only in girls. Different studies (Costa et al., 2021) indicated that boys reported higher levels of emotional intelligence dimensions (self-emotion appraisal, use of emotions and regulation of emotions), whereas girls showed higher levels of other-emotions appraisal. Age was negatively associated with the use of the emotions dimension and positively correlated with the emotional appraisal of others, although both correlation coefficients were small.

Garaigordobil (2020) showed that females have greater attention capacity or emotional perception (attention to feelings or ability to feel and identify one's feelings appropriately) than males, but no sex differences were found in comprehension-clarity

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(ability to understand one's own emotional states) or emotion regulation-repair (repairing moods or the ability to adequately regulate moods). Cabello et al. (2016) saw the effects of gender and the linear and quadratic effects of age on Emotional Intelligence. They found out that gender affects ability EI score including their 4 branches of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence as an ability was greater in women than men. They also concluded that Ability EI differs with age as an individual grows according to an inverted-U curve.

Emotional intelligence (EI) influences how adolescents manage relationships, deal with stress, and make decisions. Although emotional intelligence is acknowledged as essential for the social and psychological development of adolescents, existing research shows differing results concerning the impact of age and gender on emotional intelligence during adolescence while most of these existing studies offer general findings. More so, findings are inconclusive as to whether gender (male and female) and age influence adolescents' emotional intelligence. It is against this background that the researchers set out to investigate if age and gender impacts adolescences emotional intelligences especially in the Nigerian context where there is a dearth of research on adolescent EI.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the impact of gender on the emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra state?
2. What is the impact of age on the emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant impact of gender on the emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant impact of age on the emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra State.

Methods

The researcher adopted the quantitative research approach for the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The population of the study comprised 43,088 (male = 18797, female = 24, 291) senior secondary school one and two students in the six educational zone of Anambra state. The sample of the study comprised 432 SS1 and SS2 students drawn through multi-stage sampling technique and finally through the use of purposive sampling technique and simple random sampling technique. 432 copies of the instruments were distributed and four hundred and seventeen copies (417) were appropriately completed, thus fifteen copies were inappropriately filled. Instruments used for data collection was the adapted version of Indigenous Emotional Intelligence Scale (IEIS) by Afolabi (2017). A four-point rating scale of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4) was attached and used to respond to each item.

The instrument was face and content validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The internal consistencies of the items were determined using Cronbach's Alpha statistics; the coefficients indicated that the instrument has a 0.77 index. This was appropriate to confirm the instruments as reliable. Data was collected through the direct delivery technique during class time. The questionnaires were administered to participants under the supervision of a research assistant who was present to facilitate the process and resolve any doubts that may arise. Data was analyzed using the IBM SPSS version 25. The statistical tools employed in the analysis are t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics. Missing values were handled by default in SPSS. At the data entering stage, missing values were coded 999.

Results

Table1: Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence Dimensions (N = 417)

S/N	Dimension	Male (<i>N</i> = 208) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Female (<i>N</i> = 209) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i> (<i>df</i>)	<i>p</i> -value	Mean Diff.	Remark
1	Interpersonal	2.84 (0.48)	2.81 (0.52)	0.58	.560	0.03	Not significant
2	Empathy	3.21 (0.76)	3.33 (0.60)	-1.69	.092	-0.11	Not significant
3	Stress tolerance	2.91 (0.50)	2.96 (0.57)	-0.92	.357	-0.05	Not significant
4	Optimism	3.00 (0.50)	3.00 (0.55)	-0.07	.945	-0.00	Not significant
5	Assertiveness	2.96 (0.53)	2.97 (0.53)	-0.16	.871	-0.01	Not significant
6	Problem-solving	3.13 (0.49)	3.13 (0.52)	-0.01	.992	-0.00	Not significant
7	Flexibility	2.93 (0.48)	2.99 (0.48)	-1.29	.199	-0.06	Not significant

Table 1 shows that there are no statistically significant differences between male and female participants in any of the emotional intelligence dimensions. Although female adolescents scored marginally higher in empathy ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.60$) than males ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.76$), the difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .092$). This was tested using independent sample t-test to compare male and female adolescences across the seven dimensions of Emotional intelligence. The result reveals that at 0.05 significant level, the null hypothesis is retained. Emotional intelligence scores were relatively consistent between genders, therefore, there is no significant impact of gender on the emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra State.

Table 2: Age Differences in Emotional Intelligence Dimensions (N = 417)

S/N	Variables	Age Category	M	SD	F(2, 414)	p-value	Significant Post Hoc Comparison
1	Interpersonal	early adolescent (12-14)	2.7893	.45354	0.62	.539	Not Significant
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	2.8349	.50587			
		late adolescent (18-21)	2.7472	.55933			
2	Empathy	early adolescent (12-14)	3.0848	.55652	2.60	.076	Not Significant
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	3.3072	.70462			
		late adolescent (18-21)	3.2245	.69745			
3	Stress tolerance	early adolescent (12-14)	2.7821	.47977	2.85	.059	Not Significant
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	2.9489	.53581			
		late adolescent (18-21)	3.0204	.60581			
4	Optimism	early adolescent (12-14)	2.8482	.51495	3.05	.049	Significant but marginal pairwise effects
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	3.0131	.52462			
		late adolescent (18-21)	3.0972	.55187			
5	Assertiveness	early adolescent (12-14)	2.8000	.49580	3.17	.043	Significant, Middle > Early adolescents (p = .042)
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	2.9888	.52111			
		late adolescent (18-21)	3.0083	.64248			
6	Problem-solving	early adolescent (12-14)	3.0383	.43883	1.14	.321	Not significant
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	3.1386	.51073			
		late adolescent (18-21)	3.1792	.55371			

7	Flexibility	early adolescent (12-14)	2.7789	.44976	4.65	.010	Significant, Middle > Early adolescents (p = .009)
		Middle adolescent (15-17)	2.9838	.46598			
		late adolescent (18-21)	3.0073	.58446			

In table 2, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted between the three age categories: early adolescents (12–14 years), middle adolescents (15–17 years), and late adolescents (18–21 years). This analysis assessed the differences across seven dimensions of emotional intelligence. Optimism showed a statistically significant difference across age groups ($F(2, 414) = 3.05, p = .049$), though post hoc comparisons revealed only marginal differences between specific groups. Assertiveness demonstrated a significant difference ($F(2, 414) = 3.17, p = .043$). Post hoc analysis indicated that middle adolescents (15–17 years) scored significantly higher than early adolescents (12–14 years) ($p = .042$). Flexibility also showed a statistically significant difference ($F(2, 414) = 4.65, p = .010$), with middle adolescents scoring significantly higher than early adolescents ($p = .009$). However, no statistically significant differences were observed in interpersonal skills ($p = .539$), empathy ($p = .076$), stress tolerance ($p = .059$), and problem-solving ($p = .321$). The result reveals that age has a significant impact on some dimensions of emotional intelligence, particularly assertiveness, flexibility, and optimism, while in other dimensions of emotional intelligences, age has no significant impact.

Discussion

Our findings revealed no significant impact of gender on the emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra State whereas age was found to have significant effect on three dimensions of EI. The independent sample t-test showed no significant differences between male and female adolescents on the seven emotional intelligence dimensions. This implies that gender does not have an impact on emotional intelligence of adolescences in Anambra state. This finding is in line with Brackett et al. (2011) that

stated that emotional intelligence is not gender bound but rather shaped by individual's experiences and environmental factors. It contradicts earlier assumptions that females possess greater emotional intelligence, especially in terms of empathy or interpersonal awareness. However, this finding is also contrary to the findings of Cabello et al. (2016) which showed that gender affects ability EI score including their 4 branches of emotional intelligence, and that emotional intelligence as an ability was greater in women than men. Cabello et al. (2016) study contradicts our present finding. The finding of the study shows a partial agreement to the findings of Megías-Robles, et al. (2024) which said that while girls obtain higher scores than boys when EI is evaluated through performance-based ability tests, they do not acknowledge the superiority of their skills when assessed through self-reports. This according to the researchers shows that gender affecting EI varies base on the type of test and report used.

Furthermore, findings regarding age revealed mixed findings, with both non-significant and significant outcomes on the dimensions of the AI. It shows that no significant age-related differences were found in interpersonal skills, empathy, stress tolerance, or problem-solving, with all p-values greater than .05. However, significant differences were observed in optimism, assertiveness and flexibility. Post hoc comparisons indicated that middle adolescents (15–17 years) scored significantly higher than early adolescents (12–14 years) in both assertiveness and flexibility. This indicates that EI dimensions that relate to assertiveness and flexibility could improve as adolescents grow. These could be influenced by increasing experiences of adolescents as they transit from one stage of life to another.

These findings indicates that age has a selective but significant impact on specific emotional intelligence aspects. This revealed that as adolescents grow and mature, they can exhibit more assertiveness (self-expression), flexibility (adaptation) and optimism (positivity). This supports the psychosocial development theory of Erikson (1968) which states that mid to late adolescence is a crucial period for refining social and emotional competencies as individuals gain autonomy, face difficult social tasks and engage in identity formation. Moreover, this finding may be compatible with the assumption that <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

emotional abilities improve with age (Mankus et al., 2016), since more realistic emotional self-assessments enable adolescents to recognize the development potential of certain abilities, such as the capacity to think about difficult problems before deciding on a course of action, and the capability to control impulses and consider of the potential costs associated with certain behaviors (Azpiazu et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that gender does not have a significant impact on the emotional intelligences of adolescences. There is also a partial impact of age on adolescence emotional intelligence. Many of the emotional intelligence dimensions remained stable across the age groups, significant differences were observed in assertiveness, flexibility and optimism, with middle adolescents(15-17years) scoring higher than early adolescents(12-14years). Even though this study has added valuable contributions to the various literatures on adolescence emotional intelligence, it was still limited by different factors. First, the sample of the study consists of only adolescents from Anambra State, Nigeria, which may limit the extent the findings can be generalized to other adolescents in different regions with different cultural and social backgrounds. Future studies should include adolescents from other regions and states. Secondly, the study looked at age and gender as the only socio-demographic variables impacting EI leaving out other factors that could have an impact on adolescence emotional intelligence such as family background, peer pressure and influence, parenting styles and general well-being. These variables may interact with or influence emotional intelligence development. Hence, future studies should include more adolescent socio-demographic variables. This study is deemed significant because it has provided insights into the impacts of adolescent age and gender on their EI filling a gap in the literature within the Nigerian context.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools and curriculum planner should integrate emotional intelligence training programs into their curricula that cuts across all ages to support students' emotional development.
2. Schools should partner with psychologists and counsellors to create continuing emotional literacy seminars to help students develop resilience, empathy, and interpersonal effectiveness.
3. Emotional intelligence programmes should be gender-neutral, as no significant differences were found between male and female teenagers.

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