

**CYBER -TROLLING, CYBER-IMPERSONATION AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT  
AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CALABAR EDUCATION ZONE,  
CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study is an investigation of cyber-trolling, cyber-impersonation and social adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the discovery of the influence of cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation on social adjustment of SS1 students which is the main purpose of the study. The research design adopted was the ex-post facto research design. 8829 public secondary school students formed the study population. A total sample of 579 students was selected through the purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was the researcher-made Cyber bullying Assessment Questionnaire (CAQ), constructed on a four-point Likert scale of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability method was used to establish the reliability coefficient of the instrument with a range of 0.71 to 0.79. The statistical tool for data analysis was the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings of the study revealed after the testing of the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance were that cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation have negative influence on the social adjustment of secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, the need for the government to formulate policies to assist in effective eradication of harmful online communications was stressed. It was also recommended that Social Welfare Agencies should device means of implementing and consolidating effective cyber frame works that will protect students from being harassed.*

**KEYWORDS:** cyber, trolling, impersonation, social, adjustment, students.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The critical nature of the role of secondary school students' behaviours in their social adjustment cannot be overemphasized. The consequences of their school behaviours can be harmful in the sense that bad behaviour is a distraction to learning both to the students and those around them. Social adjustment problems of secondary school students, especially those of Calabar Education Zone in recent times have caused restiveness among students and have been worrisome to stakeholders in education. Ngbar (2019) observed that the success, achievement and academic performance of students depend largely on how well they interact with one another or adapt to the school environment.

The school, being an agent of socialization should be a place where good behaviour is modelled but unfortunately the students have a lot of challenges to grapple with which may hinder good social adjustment. For instance, students have to interact with other students from diverse social backgrounds either during classes, assembly or other activities from

whom they may pick up some inappropriate social habits; they also grapple with the challenges of keeping to structured formal rules, making new friends, understanding the peculiarities of different subjects and different teachers, having to get used to the unfamiliar school structures, coupled with the fact that the conveniences may not easily be within their reach. Inability to manipulate and understand the school environment may cause unsuccessful and unmeaningful social adjustment of students. Jateline (2006) thus opined that social adjustment refers to behaviour that permits people to meet the demands of the school environment or the effort made by an individual to cope with new standards, values and needs of a school in order to be accepted.

Social maladjustment is fast becoming a daily occurrence in the secondary schools. Duvall (2009) revealed that these days it is gradually becoming a normal thing to see children of secondary school ages indulging in different degrees of crimes ranging from rape, pick-pocketing, phone snatching and cultism. According to Chidozie (2016), maladjusted students are impulsive, and they cannot stand frustration. Loeber (2000) and Bell (2006) observed that maladjusted students steal, lie and cheat and are often armed with good skills, charm or appearance that enable them to convince others to comply with their wishes. Learning and academic achievement are also affected by social maladjustment as examination malpractice is on the increase. Bunoung (2012) commented that seemingly, poor performance could also be attributed to absenteeism, and students' dependence on examination malpractice which are acts of school maladjustment behaviour.

Stakeholders in education such as parents, teachers, counsellors and administrators have frowned at the various havocs resulting from problems of social adjustment in the school system and have suggested that something urgent must be done to curb the problem of social adjustment among secondary school students. According to Ngar (2019), efforts by the Nigerian government to rid the secondary schools of maladjustment problems include the introduction of the Nigerian Peace Corps (NPC) and the Nigerian Civil Defence Corps (NCDC) while some Non-governmental Organizations have contributed to the solution of this problem by introducing voluntary organizations in the schools such as Boys' Scout and Man o' War. Seminars and orientations have also been organized to improve the knowledge of students in computers, and to create more awareness on the dangers of cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation. Parents, teachers, Counsellors and other well-meaning individuals have also made contributions in their own little ways. Parents for instance ensure the provision of moral support and basic needs for their children. Sadly, the numerous intervention strategies have not profited much in terms of curtailing social maladjustment. Several researches have also been done to investigate how teacher factor, peer group, school facilities, age of students, administrative styles, socio-economic status of parents and others could explain the high level of social maladjustment among secondary school students and why they defied solutions.

This calls for questions such as whether the high level of cyber trolling and cyber-impersonation promote poor social adjustment among students. This research has therefore been embarked upon to check if curtailing cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation could solve the problem of maladjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone.

### **Cyber trolling and social adjustment**

Cyber-trolling according to Buckels, Trapnell, and Paulhus (2014), is the practice of behaving in a deceptive, destructive or disruptive manner in a social setting on the internet with no apparent instrumental purpose. It is a deliberate act of using insults or bad language on online platforms and social networking sites to bring about a response from its targets. It involves the sending or submission of provocative emails, social media posts, or tweets (tweeter message) with the intention of inciting an angry or upsetting response from its intended target or victim (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). A troll personally attacks his victim or his victim's close relation in order to provoke a response. The aim of the troll is to make his victim angry enough to act in the same way. Trolls spend their time looking for vulnerable people to make angry while making themselves feel good. They usually post outrageous comments which generate or trigger off conflicts and reactions from the person or the targeted community. Wilbur (2013) described an internet troll as a member of an online social community who deliberately tries to disrupt, attack, offend or generally cause trouble within the community by posting certain comments, photos, videos, GIFs or some other form of online content.

Trolls can cause harm in various ways. A troll can disrupt the discussion on a news group, disseminate bad advice, and damage the feeling of trust in the group. In a group that has become sensitized to trolling (where the rate of deception is high), many honestly naïve questions may be quickly rejected as trolling (Ngbar, 2019). This can put off the new user who is immediately bombarded with angry accusations when he makes a first posting. Postmes, Spears and Lea (2018) commented that even if the accusation is unfounded, being branded a troll is quite damaging to one's online reputation.

Huffington (2013) used the meta-analytical design to study the offline nightmares behind online trolling, and revealed that when cyber-trolling is sustained, it results in teenagers losing confidence. The damaging effects are compounded as more than 2,000 youngsters polled, said they receive the abusive messages from someone they know, making them more personal. Almost half of the respondents said that they kept the attacks secret. Despite this, one in ten of those interviewed admitted to trolling, with a quarter saying they find it funny and almost a third (29%) saying they do it because their friends do so too. Eken (2011) discovered from his study on online trolling and its effects using 2000 teenagers that majority of offensive online comments by trolls are in respect of the victims' appearance (40%), or about their religion or race (16%) with Facebook being the most common platform for victims to be trolled.

Anybody can be a victim of trolling. A study on school pupils trolling teachers with vile abuse on face book and twitter by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teacher (NASUWT) and reported by Paton (2014) revealed that teachers face vile abuse from children as young as seven on social networking websites like face book, you tube Instagram and twitter. The study which used Social Media Questionnaire (SDQ) for data collection revealed from a descriptive analysis of the responses that more than a fifth of teachers have been the victims of cyber-trolling from pupils and their parents. This study also revealed that through the social media, offensive remarks are made about teachers' personal appearance, classroom performance and sexuality while malicious claims about alleged

inappropriate behaviour and drunkenness of teachers are also circulated. The studies so far reviewed related cyber-trolling to feminism, nightmares, victimization, abuse and societal disorder but one of the issues this study investigated is the influence of cyber-trolling on social adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Cyber impersonation and social adjustment**

Cyber-impersonation is the use of digital tools to fake the entire identities of people and companies. It means identity theft to embarrass or destroy a person's identity (Clifford, 2012). Cyber-impersonation comes in various dimensions. It may involve scamming which employs identity fraud for financial theft, hacking involving breaking into someone's account to cause havoc without control or authorization, stalking by vindictive ex-partner who takes advantage of the information he gained from the relationship to cause havoc, and online bullying where the bully hurts, frustrates and instils fear into the victim through a hidden identity, and others (Ngar, 2019).

Vaillancourt, Faris and Mishna (2017) revealed that cyber bullying of which cyber-impersonation is a type, leads to depression, anxiety, emotional distress, suicidal ideation and attempts, somatic complaints, poorer physical health, and externalizing problems such as increased delinquency and substance abuse. Family Lives (2019) observed that cyber-impersonation affects people from any age or work of life including children, teenagers, and adults who all are inconvenienced in one way or the other. Findings by Family Lives (2019) after a study on the effects of cyber-impersonation on psycho-social wellbeing of children showed that 20% of children and young people indicate that fear of cyber-impersonators made them reluctant to go to school, 5% reported self-harm, 3% reported an attempt of suicide as a direct result of cyber-impersonation. Other effects of cyber-impersonation include low self-esteem, withdrawal from family and spending a lot of time alone, hiding phones and laptops from parents and other family members, refusal to go to school, seclusion from social events, weight loss, self-harm, anger, depression, crying, and so on. Caudle (2014) studied cyber-impersonation and its effects on youths using survey method and discovered that kids who have experienced cyber-impersonation are likely to have anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness and poor sleep.

Literatures reviewed on cyber-impersonation related cyber-impersonation to self-esteem, depression and violence but this study investigated the influence of cyber-impersonation on social adjustment among secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **The Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation on the social adjustment of senior secondary 1 (SSI) students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. It was also aimed at examining if preventing cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation would prevent social maladjustment.

**Subjects**

The study population comprised 8,829 students in the schools in the study area. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 530 SS1 students from the population, but 479 students eventually served as the sample because only 479 questionnaires were appropriately filled out of the questionnaires retrieved.

**Instrumentation**

This research employed the ex-post facto research design and used a researcher-made questionnaire called Cyberbullying Assessment Questionnaire (CAQ) as the instrument for data collection. Section A of the CAQ had six items which dealt with cyber-trolling, section B with six items dealt with cyber-impersonation while section C with 20 items dealt with school maladjustment. The responses for the questionnaire items were based on the Likert type options of very often, often, sometimes and never. The validation of the instrument was done by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Guidance and Counselling who made useful recommendations, modifications and corrections. Through a pilot testing using test-retest reliability technique on a group of respondents with similar characteristics to the actual respondents, the internal consistency of the instrument was determined. This yielded a reliability coefficient range of 0.71 to 0.83 which was considered significantly reliable. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used as the statistical tool for data analysis.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Two research assistants were employed by the researchers to help in the administration of the questionnaires directly to the respondents. The respondents filled the questionnaires after receiving appropriate instructions from the researchers. 479 appropriately-filled and retrieved questionnaires were scored manually. The order of scoring for the positively-worded items was 4,3,2,1 for very often, often, sometimes and never, respectively. The order of scoring was reversed for the negatively-worded items. The sum of scores obtained for each respondent on the individual scales was subjected to further analysis using one-way ANOVA.

**RESULTS**

The results of data analysis based on the study purpose and hypotheses are presented on tables 1 and 2.

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant influence of cyber-trolling on social adjustment of SS1 students. The dependent variable in this hypothesis is social adjustment while the independent variable is cyber-trolling. The scores obtained from the respondents were split into three categories of cyber-trolling. The highest score a respondent was expected to have was 24, lowest 6 and average score was 12. Any respondent that scored 11 or below the average was considered to have been experiencing low cyber-trolling. Scores of between 12 and 18 were within the average and were regarded as moderate level of cyber-trolling while those with the scores of 19 and above were above average and so were regarded as high level of cyber-trolling. To test this hypothesis, the three categories of cyber-trolling were compared with social adjustment using one way- ANOVA and the results of this analysis are presented on table 1.



TABLE 1: Summary of One – way Analysis of Variance of the Influence of Cyber-trolling on Social Adjustment. N=479

Groups	N	X	SD		
Low	164	4 3.29	11.69		
Moderate	159	41.64	10.88		
High	156	40.23	9.17		
Total	479	41.75	10.70		
Variables	SS	df	MS	F	p-level
Between	752.07	2	376.035		
Within	54044.861	476	113.540	3.312	.000
Total	54796.931	478			
*p<.05, df=2 and 476, F-critical=3.02					

The result of the analysis revealed that the calculated F-value of 3.312 is greater than the critical value of 3.02 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 476 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected at .05 level of significance. This implies that cyber-trolling has a significant influence on social adjustment of students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## Hypothesis 2

There is no significant influence of cyber-impersonation on social adjustment of SS1 students. The dependent variable in this hypothesis is social adjustment while the independent variable is cyber-impersonation. The scores obtained from the respondents were split into three categories of cyber-impersonation. The highest score a respondent was expected to have was 24, lowest 6 and moderate score was 12. Any respondent that scored 11 or below the average was considered to have been experiencing low cyber-impersonation. Scores of between 12 and 18 were within the moderate and were seen to be experiencing moderate level of cyber-impersonation while those with the scores of 19 and above were above average and so were experiencing high level of cyber-impersonation. To test this hypothesis, the three categories of cyber-impersonation were compared with social adjustment using one way- ANOVA and the results of this analysis are presented on Table 2.

TABLE 2: Summary of one – way analysis of variance of the influence of cyber-impersonation on social adjustment N=479

Cyber-impersonation	N	X	SD		
Low	146	56.43	9.67		
Moderate	161	39.94	4.40		
High	172	42.82	14.33		
Total	479	46.00	12.55		
Variables	SS	df	MS	F	p-level
Between	23524.912	2	11762.456		
Within	51847.079	476	108.922	107.989	0.37
Total	75371.992	478			
*p<.05, df=2 and 476, F-critical=3.02					

The result of the analysis revealed that the calculated F-value of 107.989 was greater than the critical F-value of 3.02 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 476 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected at .05 level of significance. This implies that cyber-impersonation has a significant influence on social adjustment of students in schools in Calabar Education of Cross River State.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Cyber-trolling and social adjustment:

The result of the statistical analysis revealed that there is a significant influence of cyber trolling on social adjustment of secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. This finding is in line with Huffington (2013) who studied the offline nightmares behind cyber-trolling and discovered that when cyber-trolling is sustained, it results in teenagers losing confidence. The damaging effects are compounded as more than two thirds of the 2,000 youngsters polled said that they received the abusive messages from someone they know, making them more personal. Almost half said they kept the attacks secret. Despite this, one in ten of those interviewed by Youth Charity admitted to trolling, with a quarter saying they find it funny, and with almost a third (29%) saying they do it because their friends also do so.

A similar study by NASUWT reported by Paton (2014) on school pupils trolling teachers with 'vile' abuse on Face book and Twitter showed that teachers face vile abuse from children as young as seven on social networking websites such as face book, twitter, you tube and Instagram. It revealed that more than a fifth of teachers have been the victims of cyber-trolling from pupils and even their parents in the last year. This study showed that social media was being used to make offensive remarks about the teachers' personal appearance, classroom performance and sexuality, with websites also used to circulate malicious claims about alleged inappropriate behaviour and drunkenness by teachers.

Cyber-impersonation and social adjustment:

The result of data analysis revealed that there is a significant influence of cyber-impersonation on social adjustment of students in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State. Cyber-impersonation influences social adjustment negatively. This is because the culprits usually hide in the disguise of someone else to carry out delinquent behaviours. This finding is in consonance with the findings by Family Lives (2019) after a study on the effects of cyber-impersonation on psycho-social wellbeing of children. The study found that 20% of children and young people indicate that fear of cyber-impersonators made them reluctant to go to school, 5% reported self-harm, 3% reported an attempt of suicide as a direct result of cyber-impersonation. Young people are found to be twice as likely to be bullied on the Face book as any other social networking site, 28% of young people have reported incidents of cyber-impersonation on twitter and 26% of young people have reported incidence of cyber-impersonation on Ask.fm. It was concluded that cyber-impersonation leads to low self-esteem, withdrawal from family and spending a lot of time alone, reluctance to let parents or other family members anywhere near their mobiles, laptops, etc. By implication, students who are victims of cyber-impersonation are likely to be skipping school, having declining academic performance and depression.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this study have shown that the SS1 students of Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State of Nigeria have been experiencing cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation both within and outside their schools. These forms of cyberbullying significantly influence their social adjustment, making them to indulge in some other vices which promote maladjustment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings made from this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Social Welfare agencies should device means of implementing and consolidating effective cyber frame works that will protect students from being harassed
2. Counselling should be given to students on the need to desist from cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation
3. School administrators should monitor social media blogs of students to track any form of cyber-trolling and cyber-impersonation.
4. Cyber safety techniques should be inculcated into the school curriculum so that students can be taught to be cyber safe and savvy.
5. Emphasis on the ethical use of technology and the psychological and legal implications of technology should be made.
6. Students should be taught the need of reporting cyber fraud.

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