



# Examining the Impact of Cyberbullying for Academic Performance: A Study of Kebbi State University, Kebbi State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This research investigates the impact of cyberbullying on the academic performance of students at Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero (KSUSTA). The primary objective of this study was to investigate and identify the level of threats of cyberbullying towards students' performance. The researcher employed only qualitative data. The population of the study comprised of the total number of students of Kebbi State University, which was estimated to be 6,000 students, while the sample size of this research is 500 students chosen from 500 level students only, in which 350 students participated in all instruments used for data collection, i.e., questionnaires, key informant interviews (KII), and in-depth interviews. The results indicated that out of 350 students, 250 (71.4%) agreed to participate in the questionnaires, while out of 360 students, 50 (14.3%) indicated their interest in participating in the in-depth interview (IDI), and also about 30 students out of 350 students showed interest in participating in the key informant interview (KII). Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted to determine the effect of cyberbullying. Students were divided into five groups for better communication and management. The instruments used to collect data were video recording, note-taking, and digital photography. Many extraordinary incidents, such as students' gestures, facial expressions, and body language, are simply self-explanatory about difficulties they face in their classes. Furthermore, all the respondents indicated that, in their views, cyberbullying causes emotional and psychological stress. Further, the majority of the respondents, 300 (85.7%) agreed that cyberbullying adversely affects students' academic performance. Results further designate that 60 (16.6%) of the respondents averred that they had bullied other students within and outside the university at least 2 or 3 times a month, while 4 (1.1%) of the participants said that they had bullied someone outside the university at least 2 or 3 times a month. It is interesting to note that the majority of the students, 75 (20.8%), signify that they have heard cyberbullying taking place inside the university.

**Keywords:** *Cyberbullying, Students, Academic Performance, Cybercrime, KSUSTA*

## Introduction

The Internet has become part of daily life for many people, including adolescents and children, through the use of computers and/or mobile phones, and studies on the prevalence of Internet-addiction among Hong Kong adolescents have shown rates ranging from 7%–38%. Cyberbullying, a form of cyber-deviant behaviour, is broadly defined as repeated and deliberate aggressive behaviours acted out intentionally by an individual or group through electronic means of communication (e.g., computers and smartphones) against an

individual who cannot easily defend themselves from such victimisation (Chan & Wong, 2015a). Among others, frequently observed cyberbullying behaviours include; name-calling, spreading rumours, and verbally abusive attacks in social forums, instant messenger platforms, emails, and text messages (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Cyberbullying often concerned of two major behaviour: overt or relational aggressive harassment (Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009). Overt-aggressive harassment is often performed



via electronic text, such as sending threatening messages to the target victim, while relational-aggressive behaviour may comprise of outing/trickery (i.e. divulging the victim's sensitive, personal, or embarrassing information to unintended recipients), impersonation (i.e. sending messages to others through the victim's hacked electronic account), denigration (i.e. posting the victim's personal information, rumours about them, or embarrassing photos), or exclusion (i.e. intentionally barring the victim from joining an online social chat). Cyberbullying victimisation is frequently associated with the development of serious internalised problems, including anxiety, emotional distress, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Schneider et al., 2012), and those suffering from such psychological difficulties may develop more serious problems, such as school disciplinary issues, alcohol and abuse, truancy, and delinquency (Chan & Wong, 2017). Research on cyberbullying has been extensive in the West (Kowalski et al., 2011), and a plethora of literature has sampled Chinese populations (e.g., Chan & Wong, 2015a, 2019; Wang et al., 2016, 2017); however, the results of previous studies that have reported on cyberbullying prevalence in Chinese societies have varied widely. For instance, in a mainland Chinese sample of adolescents aged 15–17 years, 35% and 57% were reported to be cyberbullying perpetrators and victims, respectively (Zhou et al., 2013). Among Taiwanese adolescents aged 11–18 years, the reported proportion of cyberbullying perpetrators was 8–24% and victims was 19–30% (Chang et al., 2015; Yen et al., 2014); while in Hong Kong, 13% and 12% of adolescents aged 12–15 years were reported to be cyberbullying perpetrators and victims, respectively (Wong et al., 2014). Most cyberbullying studies have discovered that females are more likely to be victim of cyberbullying than males (DeHue et al., 2008; Zsila et al., 2019), while males are more likely to be the perpetrators (Chan & Wong, 2019; Lee & Shin, 2017).

Cyberbullying and physical-bullying in high schools and universities are causing

unimaginable problems to students, parents and to educational institutions. Unfortunately, little has been done to help those victims who are continuously trapped in the name of modernization and digitalization (Watson, 2010). Researchers agree that the stressful impact of bullying is escalating with the rapid expansion of technological advancement (Justin, 2011). Many students who are victims of cyber bullies suffer silently; they are reluctant to complain to the authorities or their parents owing to the social stigma attached to victims of bullies (Susan, 2011). As such, parents, teachers and institutional authorities have to be on the lookout for such occurrences.

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The problem investigated in this research is concerns on how cyberbullying affect academic performance of university students. It was learned from various research such as work of Faryadi (2011), “*cyberbullying and academic performance*” which explored that cyberbullying affected the student psychologically and emotionally. The study also averred that cyberbullying also prevents students from achieving good grades from their respective institutions of learning. It seems that technologies are in some ways creating more stress on our young in the form of cyber bullying rather than to help them progress Faryadi (2011). The research



findings have shown that young students who become victims of cyber bullies suffer great stress (Elizabeth, 2010). Hence, there is an urgent need to understand the existence of cyberbullying at KSUSTA and also the problems faced by the student i.e “victims of cyberbullying” so that concrete and proactive measures can be taken by university authorities, teachers and parents to address this global menace. The following are the significance of the study: (a) The finding of this study will provide real-time information about the nature of cyberbullying in KSUSTA (b) The finding of this research will explore a blue-print of how cyberbullying affects students (c) The finding of this research will assist the authorities of the university, lecturers and parents to take more preventive measures to combat cyberbullying. (d) Records of interviews, observations and questionnaires are valuable assets for future researchers in finding lasting solutions to curtail cyberbullying.

This research was limited to Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, and the data obtained from this study is from 500-level students only, and the researcher utilised 500 sample sizes. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised. There is a need to further investigate and examine how other students, such as 100-400 level PGD students, Masters students, and PhD students, also experience the detrimental effects of cyberbullying. Secondly, the researcher utilised one–two months, for which further study with a longer period of time is required, as well as more samples to test whether cyberbullying affects the lecturers and all personnel of the institute. Thirdly, it is beyond the control of this research to avoid human factors such as bias toward cyberspace and affected students.

### **Literature Review**

The Internet has created a new space in communication. Today our youth are addicted to using electronic communication tools. It is an undeniable fact that electronic-based communication has transformed our lives tremendously, but unfortunately, there is a dark side to this technological advancement.

Cyberspace is a potential site for violence, victimization and oppression (Faye, 2011). According to Olweus (1993), a student is being cyberbullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Hence, bullying is showing aggressive behavior to a person without any prior provocation with the intention of causing harm. It also denotes that the harm is done repeatedly over time and there is a disparity in strength and power between the victims and cyber criminals.

### **Concept of Cyberbullying**

According to Kowalski (2011), electronic bullying, or cyberbullying, is an act of using the Internet to cause psychological and emotional disturbances. Olthof (2011) defined cyberbullying as the strategic behavior of an individual to dominate another individual or a group of individuals virtually. Online Oxford Dictionary defines cyberbullying as the use of electronic communication to cyberbully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature. Cyberbullying is an online aggressive behavior in cyberspace. Cyberbullying is a form of peer aggression, which can be as damaging as any form of conventional aggression (Mickie, 2011). Cyberbullying is defined by Wikipedia as a deliberate act of aggression using technological advances such as the internet to cause harm to a person. This aggression can be repeated, deliberate hostility. Cyberbullying occurs when the Internet, cell phones, or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. Cyberbullying causes grave harm to an individual or group of people by exposing their personal data, real names, and addresses to criminals with malicious intent to the targeted individual or group. Cyberbullying can include such acts as making threats, sending provocative insults or racial or ethnic slurs, gay bashing, attempting to infect the victim's computer with a virus, and flooding an e-mail inbox with messages (WatIs.com).



## **Characteristics and Symptoms of Cyberbullying**

Faryadi (2011) cited six (6) characteristics of cyber bullies:

- a. Often involved in other antisocial activities such as drug use.
- b. Impulsive and easily angered
- c. Strong need to dominate other students.
- d. Show little empathy toward students who are victimized
- e. Often physically stronger than other students in the class.
- f. Often defiant and aggressive, including to parents and teachers.

Faryadi further iterated some symptoms of victims of cyber bullying which includes:

- a. Anxious, insecure, unhappy and have low self-esteem
- b. Cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn and shy
- c. Depressed and engaged in suicidal ideation much more often than their peers
- d. Do not have a single good friend to discuss problems.
- e. Often physically weaker than their peers in the school.

Cyber bullying also happens when a person's name is used to publish undesirable materials online, thus causing character assassination of the victim. Character assassination can be done through e-mail, chat room, sms, calls, social network, twitter, MySpace, Facebook, discussion boards, on-line forums, blogs, instigation and rumors. Recent findings indicate that cyber bullying is becoming a pervasive problem around the world and it is increasing alarmingly. (John, 2011). The psychological effects of cyber bullying in our society and institutions cannot be ignored any longer (Bulent, 2009). As the social networking domain expands in cyber space, it inevitably creates more opportunities for cyber criminals to victimize young, unsuspecting internet users (Allison, 2009). Research findings have shown that cyber bullying causes emotional and physiological damage to defenseless victims. (Yavuz, 2010).

## **Methodology**

This research is a case study survey that employed only primary data. The data obtained combined both qualitative and quantitative data. The reason for adopting that qualitative methodology is very naturalistic and conducted in real time with the investigator in control. The population of the study is the total number of enrolled students of Kebbi State University of Science and Technology Aliero, in which the number of students estimated to around six thousand (**6,000**) students at the time of conducting of this research. The sample size of this study is five hundred students (500), which were randomly selected from 500 level-year students to participate in this survey. Lecturers, security, students, and parents were given special recruitment so that their feedback might reveal significant information about the uncalled attitude of their children. The philosophy behind the choice of 500-level students is that they spend more years in the institute than those of 100, 200, 300, or 400, and they are very experience with the general activities of the university.

The instruments used for the collection of data in this study include: (i) questionnaires for students and their parents; (ii) in-depth interviews (IDI) with selected students; (iii) key informant interviews (KII) with some selected lecturers and students.

A set of reliability tests was also conducted to determine the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was noted at .945, indicating that all the instruments used in this study were satisfactory and reliable.

Two hundred and fifty (**250**) structured interview was administered to the (500 lvl- students) the student were randomly selected from ten (10) departments using simple random techniques, A total number of fifty (50) in-depth interviews and fifty (50) Key informants interview were randomly administered by the researcher. All the data collected from the interviews and





questionnaires were personally collected by the researcher. The whole process took one- two month.

The framework for data analysis in this research was adopted from the model developed by Miles and Huber-man (1994) to describe the major phases of the data analysis. The primary tools used to analyze collected data were the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0 IBM) and Microsoft Excel to determine means, frequencies, standard deviations, and percentages of the data. A combination of deductive and inductive analyses was used to organise the collected data. Data were then categorized and reconfigured logically. Most important data were extracted, simplified, and abstracted for easy comprehension. Data were cross-checked several times to determine their validity and reliability.

## Results

**Table 1: Research Instruments and Respondents**

No	Instruments	Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1	Questionnaire	Students	250	71.4%
2	In-depth Interview (IDI)	Students	50	14.3%
3	Key informants Interview (KII)	Students	50	14.3%
TOTAL			360	100%

**Table 1** shows the summary of the instruments and the responses of the participants. It is interesting to observe that the data collection was smooth and satisfactory. Results indicate that out of 350 students, 250 (71.4%) agreed to participate in the questionnaires while out of 360 students 50 (14.3%) indicated their interest to participate for in-depth Interview (IDI) and also about 30 students out of 350 students show interest to participate on Key Informant Interview (KII) while only 20 students out of 350. Structured and Unstructured interviews were conducted to determine the effect of cyberbullying. Students were divided into five groups for better communication and management.

**Table 2: Students Participants by Gender**

NO	MALE	FEMAL	AGE	TOTAL
1	250	100	21 and above years	350(100%)

Table 2 indicated that, 250 males' students which is equal to 71.4% of the participants were 21 years and above while about 100 females participated in the interview which is equal to 29% of the total enrollment. It is good to explored that, the difference in gender enrollment is obvious as result of female child enrollment in University education is facing a lot of resistance such as ethic, religion and myths among others.

**Unstructured Interviews:** It is worth mentioning that not all questions tendered to the participants were formal questionnaires. The prime purpose of having formal and informal questions was to make participants feel free and keep talking. When asked about *what are the effect of cyberbullying* all participants which is (100%) interviewed indicated that cyberbullying indeed affects their academic performance such as clear understanding of each course they study because of fear and anxiety. When asked, *do you think bullying causes students to suffer psychologically and emotionally?* All the participants<sup>5</sup> (100%) were of the view that bullying in fact causes psychological and emotional effects on students. To another question *do you think bullying can affect students' academic performance such as grade?* 100% of the participants viewed cyberbullying indeed affects students' performance in the exam.

**Table 3: Checklist**

S/N	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
1	Did the students enter the class in a happy mode?	(No)
2	Did the students pay attention to the teacher?	(No)
3	Did the students ask any questions during the lesson?	(Yes)
4	Were the students motivated in the class?	(No)
5	Did the students retain the lesson and continue to learn?	(No)
6	Did the students remain happy in the class?	(No)
7	Did the students understand the lesson?	(Yes)
8	Did the students complain about class condition?	(Yes)
9	Were the students confident in the class?	(No)
10	Did the students annoy the teacher? (Mood change)	(Yes)



The above class observation and checklists signify that majority of the responses 60% (6 out of 10) were negative based on pre-determined checklists. It is interesting to note that only 4 out of 10 (40%) are positive. It shows that majority of the students were not happy in the class perhaps due to some sort of emotional disturbance of cyberbullying.

**Table 4: Summary of Important Questionnaires (Structured Interview)**

S/N	Category of Questions	What did you consider as effects of cyberbullying?	Frequency	Percentage(%)
1	Psychological/Mental Health effect	• feeling distressed/depression	35	12.5%
		• feel embarrassed	15	5%
		• fear for their safety	10	3%
		• low self-esteem	10	3%
		• Anxiety	30	10%
		• Humiliation	30	10%
		• Feeling loneliness	10	3%
		• Isolation	20	8%
		• Suicidal ideation	15	5%
		• Sleep disturbances	15	5%
		• Gastrointestinal Complications	10	3%
2	Physiological effect	• Disordered Eating	10	3%
		• possibility of attacking financial institution of the victims	10	3%
		• Disseminations of Fake information threatening to harm the organisation or customer using bullies Apps and Applications such as; Bully Button, Take a Stand together, safe eyes mobile, know bullying, bully block etc.	10	3%
		• Ideation to loss job/status	15	5%
		• Consumption of drugs, alcohol or substance for relief	25	7.5%
3	Behavioral effect	• Skipping school/school dropout	10	3%
		• Carrying arms/weapon for retaliation	20	8%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4** indicated various response of the respondents, ranged from physiological, psychological and behavioural effects of cyberbullying. The above response signifies the detrimental effects of cyberbullying to student of learning.

**Table 5: Summary of Important Questionnaires For Students 1**

No	Response	Do you think cyberbullying causes students to suffer psychologically and emotionally?	Do you think bullying can affect students' academic performance such as grade?	Have you ever been cyberbullied inside the university?
1	Yes	300 (85.7%)	300 (85.7%)	250 (71.4%)
2	No	50 (14.3%)	50 (14.3%)	100 (29.6%)
3	Sometimes	0%	0%	0%
4	Most probably	0%	0%	0(0%)

**Table 5** signifies that majority of the respondents 300 (85.7%) agree that bullying indeed causes devastating impact on students' emotion and equally causes unimaginable psychological problems among the youths. It is of value to note that majority of the students 300 (85.7%) agreed that cyber bullying has a negative effect on students' academic performance while only 250 (71.4%) have indicated to the contrary. A significant number of participants 50(14.3%) have mentioned that they indeed been cyberbullied by cyber criminals inside the university. 100 (29.6%) of the respondents clarified that they been cyberbullied by cyber criminals at least once or twice inside the university.

**Table 6: Summary of Important Questionnaires for Students 2**

No	Duration	Have you bullied anyone inside the university?	Have you ever bullied anyone outside the university for fun?	Have you ever heard of bullying taking place inside the university? (yes/no)
1	It has only happened once.	20 (5.5%)	26 (7.2%)	75 (20.8%) Yes
2	2 or 3 times a month.	60 (16.6%)	4 (1.1%)	21 (5.8%) NO
3	Several times a week.	1 (0.27%)	4 (1.1%)	
4	I never had been bullied.	80 (22.2%)	80 (22.2%)	

**Table 6** shows that 20 (5.5%) of the respondents were of the view that they have bullied someone inside the university while 26 (7.2%) of the respondents clarified that it (bullying) had happened at least once. 60 (16.6%) of the students agreed that they have bullied someone at least 2 or 3 times a month while majority of the participants 80 (22.2%) indicated that they have never bullied anyone inside the university. It is interesting to note that 4 (1.1%) of the respondents indicated that they have cyberbullied someone several times a week.

## Discussion

It is interesting to observe that the data collection was smooth and satisfactory. Results indicate 350 students participated in all instruments while, 250 (71.4%) agreed to participate in the questionnaires. Fifty students 50 (14.3%) indicated their interest to participate for in-depth



Interview (IDI) and Key Informant Interview (KII) Structured and Unstructured interviews were conducted to determine the effect of cyberbullying. Students were divided into five groups for better communication and management. Table 6 shows that 20 (5.5%) of the respondents were of the view that they have bullied someone inside the university while 26 (7.2%) of the respondents clarified that it (bullying) had happened at least once. 60 (16.6%) of the students agreed that they have bullied someone at least 2 or 3 times a month while majority of the participants 80 (22.2%) indicated that they have never bullied anyone inside the university. It is interesting to note that 4 (1.1%) of the respondents indicated that they have cyberbullied someone several times a week. signifies that majority of the respondents 300 (85.7%) agree that bullying indeed causes devastating impact on students' emotion and equally causes unimaginable psychological problems among the youths. It is of value to note that majority of the students 300 (85.7%) agreed that cyber bullying has a negative effect on students' academic performance while only 250 (71.4%) have indicated to the contrary. A significant number of participants 50(14.3%) have mentioned that they indeed been cyberbullied by cyber criminals inside the university. 100 (29.6%) of the respondents clarified that they have been cyberbullied by cyberbullies at least once or twice inside the university.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study revealed that university students were not spared by the detrimental effects of cyberbullying. The authorities of the universities should take lasting solutions to curb the proliferation of cyberbullying within and outside the university premises. Victims of cyberbullying suffered significantly from the emotional, psychological, and economic implications of cyberbullying. Institutions, teachers, and parents should realize that cybercrime in general is one of the most dangerous threats on earth that is boundary-less and can be carried out anywhere.

The following recommendations could possibly protect students from becoming more advantageous victims of cyberbullying thus are: (a) Identify cyberbullying problems in the university and discuss the problem with the students and their parents. (b) Appoint an internet safety team in the university to monitor internet activities. (c) Create bullying prevention policies that include lessons on cyberbullying. (d) Make rules and regulations for acceptable use of technology. Get students, teachers, and parents to sign a pledge to report cases of cyberbullying. (e) Provide educational materials for parents and students on Internet safety. (f) Ensure that cellular phone policies are enforced consistently. (g) Encourage students to participate in programs that outline internet responsibilities. (h) Develop a program for senior students to teach younger students about Internet safety (i) Policymakers should create an enabling environment that protects students from becoming potential victims of cyberbullying all the time. (j) Allocation of funds for buying technology so that students can be protected. (k) Support and provide sovereignty in information technology faculty so that they decide what to buy to fight crimes in cyberspace.

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