

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON STUDENT-TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL CHOICE: PERCEPTION OF TEACHER EDUCATORS

¹**Ngozi D. DURU,**

Ingozidamasius1@gmail.com(08036486587);

²**Ursula O. IBEBUIKE,**

Department of Curriculum and Educational Technology, Alvan Ikoku
Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State.
ursulaibebuike

³**Chinekwu G. OFOEGBU**

chineduofoegbu@gmail.com(08033310125);

&

⁴**Ijeoma C. AJILEYE**

^{1,3 &4}: Department of Educational Psychology & Guidance and Counselling;
ijayajileye77@gmail.com (08066777505)

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of emotional intelligence on students' academic decisions as evaluated by teacher educators. The issue discussed was the inadequate comprehension of how emotional abilities influence students' academic decision-making, encompassing topic choices and career planning. The objective was to evaluate teacher educators' perspectives regarding the significance of essential emotional intelligence components in influencing these decisions. A descriptive survey research design was utilized. The sample comprised 102 teacher educators intentionally selected from the Faculty of Education at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. Data were gathered via a validated 20-item structured questionnaire, which exhibited a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Responses were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale and analyzed by mean and standard deviation, with a threshold of 2.50. The findings indicated that emotional intelligence substantially affects students' capacity to correlate academic skills with professional aspirations, make intelligent educational choices, and manage academic stress successfully. Students exhibiting elevated emotional intelligence were regarded as displaying superior drive, self-regulation, and social awareness in their academic endeavors. The study determined that emotional intelligence is a vital element in improving students' educational decision-making and overall academic progress. It consequently advocates for the incorporation of emotional intelligence frameworks into educational methodologies. Structured mentorship programs should be instituted to assist students in navigating academic and personal challenges, while career counseling services ought to integrate emotional intelligence strategies to facilitate the alignment of students' educational decisions with their capabilities and long-term objectives.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Educational Choice, Teacher Educators.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is widely acknowledged as a pivotal aspect affecting students' academic behavior and educational decisions. Emotional Intelligence (EI) denotes the capacity to recognize, comprehend, regulate, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others. It includes essential elements such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008; Goleman, 1995). In addition to cognitive aptitude, students' emotional abilities significantly influence their judgments for topic selection, career paths, and long-term academic objectives. Educational decision-making is not solely cerebral; it is significantly affected by emotional characteristics such as confidence, resilience, and the capacity to manage pressure and uncertainty (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2020; Salami, 2023).

In modern educational settings, especially in developing regions such as Nigeria, students frequently encounter intricate academic and socio-emotional obstacles that can influence their decision-making abilities. Research indicates that individuals possessing elevated emotional intelligence are more inclined to exhibit clarity in goal formulation, perseverance amongst obstacles, and adaptability in managing academic requirements (Yusuf & Busari, 2022). These students typically synchronize their academic skills with job ambitions more efficiently and demonstrate enhanced dedication to their educational endeavors.

Teacher educators are essential in this process, as they engage intimately with students and are tasked with guiding, mentoring, and equipping them for professional practice. Their experiences uniquely situate them to observe the impact of emotional abilities on students' academic choices. Research indicates that teacher educators frequently view emotionally intelligent students as more engaged, self-directed, and proficient in making informed educational and professional decisions (Adeyemo, 2021). Thus, their viewpoints are crucial for comprehending the practical ramifications of emotional intelligence in educational contexts.

Despite the increasing acknowledgment of emotional intelligence in education, there is still a necessity to methodically investigate how teacher educators assess its influence on students' educational decisions. Comprehending these views is crucial for guiding curriculum creation, especially in incorporating emotional intelligence into teacher education programs. This integration may improve students' ability to make informed academic choices and foster their overall growth.

This study aims to evaluate teacher educators' perspectives regarding the impact of emotional intelligence on students' educational decisions. The research aims to enhance the current literature and offer insights that can inform educational policy and practice to promote cognitive and emotional abilities in students.

Empirical Studies

Recent empirical studies have progressively highlighted the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in influencing students' academic behavior, decision-making, and career paths, especially in teacher education settings. Emotional intelligence, which includes characteristics like self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, has been scientifically associated with enhanced academic adjustment and informed educational decisions among student-teachers.

Adeyemo (2021) Carried out a quantitative analysis including teacher educators in South-West Nigeria to investigate the correlation between students' emotional intelligence and their academic decision-making. The study, utilizing a standardized questionnaire distributed to 120 teacher educators, identified a substantial positive correlation between emotional intelligence and students' clarity in career selection, subject preference, and academic dedication. The results indicated that student-teachers with high emotional intelligence were more inclined to synchronize their academic skills with career goals and exhibit resilience in the face of academic difficulties. Educators in the survey also saw these pupils as more proactive in pursuing academic assistance and making informed choices. Yusuf and Busari (2022) examined teacher educators' opinions of emotional intelligence and its impact on students' educational plans at three public institutions in North-Central Nigeria. The research employed a descriptive survey methodology including a sample of 150 participants. Research demonstrated that aspects of emotional intelligence, especially self-awareness and drive, substantially impacted students' capacity to make pragmatic and goal-directed educational decisions. The research indicated that teacher educators regarded emotionally intelligent students as more consistent in their academic choices and less vulnerable to peer influence when choosing courses or career trajectories.

At a related study, Salami (2023) examined the influence of emotional intelligence on academic resilience and decision-making among pre-service teachers at Nigerian institutes of education. Data were gathered from 200 student-teachers utilizing a correlational research method, employing standardized assessments for emotional intelligence and academic resilience. The findings indicated that emotional intelligence was a major predictor of students' capacity to manage academic stress and maintain persistence in their selected disciplines. The study emphasized that individuals with elevated emotional intelligence had superior long-term educational planning and displayed greater decisiveness in their job decisions. Educators participating in the study confirmed that emotionally competent pupils demonstrated enhanced concentration and adaptability in their academic endeavors. Consequently, Oladipo and Balogun (2022) investigated the incorporation of emotional intelligence training inside teacher education programs and its impact on students' academic decision-making. The research utilized a quasi-experimental design with two cohorts of pre-service teachers—one group received emotional intelligence training while the other did not. Research indicated that students who underwent emotional intelligence training had notable enhancements in decision-making abilities, self-awareness, and academic goal formulation relative to their peers. Teacher educators indicated

that these kids exhibited greater reflection, confidence, and the ability to make educated educational and professional choices.

International studies, in addition to those conducted in Nigeria, have validated the significance of emotional intelligence in educational decision-making. Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts (2020) discovered that emotional intelligence is essential for students in assessing academic choices and handling the emotional challenges of decision-making. Their research, encompassing university students from several institutions, demonstrated that those with high emotional intelligence were more adept at managing uncertainty and making smart educational decisions in accordance with their own objectives. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) offered essential empirical data connecting emotional intelligence to adaptive decision-making processes. Their research indicated that persons possessing high emotional intelligence are more proficient in processing emotional information, hence improving their judgment and decision-making capabilities in academic and professional settings.

These empirical investigations collectively highlight the substantial influence of emotional intelligence on the educational decisions of student-teachers, as observed by teacher educators. Research consistently demonstrates that emotional intelligence boosts students' academic achievement and resilience while also significantly influencing educated, practical, and goal-oriented educational decisions. These results underscore the necessity of incorporating emotional intelligence development into teacher education programs to enhance academic and career outcomes for student-teachers.

Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on key theories that explain emotional intelligence and its influence on decision-making, particularly in educational contexts. The framework draws primarily from the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence, the Emotional Intelligence Competency Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory, as they collectively provide a basis for understanding how emotional competencies shape student-teachers' educational choices.

The **Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence** developed by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) posits that emotional intelligence is a set of cognitive abilities involving the perception, understanding, management, and use of emotions. According to this model, individuals who can accurately perceive and regulate their emotions are better equipped to process information and make rational decisions. In the context of this study, student-teachers with higher emotional intelligence are expected to make more informed educational choices, such as selecting appropriate subject areas and career paths that align with their strengths and interests. Teacher educators, through observation and interaction, can assess how these emotional abilities manifest in students' academic decision-making.

Complementing this is **Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Competency Theory** (1995), which conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a combination of personal and social competencies, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

This theory emphasizes the role of emotional competencies in achieving success in both personal and professional domains. Within teacher education, these competencies are crucial for student-teachers as they navigate academic demands, interpersonal relationships, and career planning. For instance, self-awareness enables students to recognize their academic strengths and weaknesses, while motivation drives persistence in chosen fields. Teacher educators' perceptions of these competencies provide insight into how emotional intelligence influences students' educational decisions.

The study is also informed by the **Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)** proposed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994). SCCT explains how individuals form career interests, make educational choices, and achieve career success based on the interplay of personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour. Central to this theory are self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Emotional intelligence contributes significantly to these constructs by enhancing individuals' confidence, resilience, and ability to manage challenges. Student-teachers with high emotional intelligence are more likely to develop strong self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations, which in turn influence their educational and career choices. Teacher educators, as part of the students' learning environment, play a critical role in shaping these perceptions and guiding their decision-making processes.

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and educational choice. The Ability Model explains the cognitive processing of emotional information, Goleman's theory highlights the practical competencies required for effective functioning, and SCCT situates these within a broader context of career development and decision-making. Together, they suggest that emotional intelligence is a critical determinant of how student-teachers evaluate options, cope with academic challenges, and make informed educational choices.

Statement of the Problem

In an era characterized by rapid globalization, complex educational demands, and socio-emotional challenges, students are increasingly pressured to make significant academic and professional choices at early developmental stages. Historically, educational choice has been primarily viewed through a cognitive lens, emphasizing intellectual ability, performance, and accessibility. Recent research in psychology and education highlights the growing importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in shaping these assessments (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2020). Emotional intelligence, encompassing self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal abilities, correlates with students' capacity to make realistic, confident, and goal-oriented academic decisions (Goleman, 1995; Salami, 2023). Despite the growing recognition, a substantial gap remains in understanding the influence of emotional intelligence on educational decisions, particularly within the Nigerian educational system. Nigerian students face unique emotional and social challenges, including economic instability, fierce academic competition, and inadequate career counseling services, which hinder

their educational decision-making process (Yusuf & Busari, 2022). Furthermore, teacher education programs systematically neglect to integrate emotional intelligence training, leading to many educators being devoid of the framework or resources necessary to evaluate its impact on students' academic decision-making (Oladipo & Balogun, 2022). This study seeks to fill a critical vacuum by assessing teacher educators' evaluations of the impact of emotional intelligence on students' educational choices. Understanding these views is essential for developing focused interventions, guiding curriculum adjustments, and fostering emotionally intelligent learning environments that enable informed, confident, and purposeful academic decisions among students. Without this understanding, efforts to improve student performance may continue to overlook a vital psychological factor that underpins motivation, resilience, and personal alignment in education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. How do teacher educators perceive the influence of students' emotional intelligence on their subject and career choices?
2. Which components of emotional intelligence do teacher educators identify as most relevant to students' ability to make informed educational decisions?
3. To what extent do teacher educators believe emotional intelligence contributes to students' academic success and long-term educational planning?
4. What strategies do teacher educators recommend for integrating emotional intelligence into teacher education programs to improve students' decision-making skills?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design of the survey type to assess teacher educators' perceptions regarding the impact of emotional intelligence on students' educational choices. This design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of quantifiable data from a defined population to describe current opinions, attitudes, and beliefs without influencing respondents' behaviors or environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population comprised all teacher educators in the Faculty of Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, totaling approximately 145 academic staff across three departments. A sample of 102 teacher educators was purposively selected based on the following criteria: (i) minimum of two years teaching experience, (ii) active involvement in teaching and supervising pre-service teachers, and (iii) availability during the period of data collection. The distribution included 38 respondents from Educational Foundations, 34 from Curriculum Studies, and 30 from Educational Psychology and G&C. Data were collected using a structured, researchers-designed questionnaire titled "*Teacher Educators' Perception of Emotional Intelligence and Educational Decision-Making Questionnaire (TEPEIEDMQ)*." The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A collected demographic data such as gender, years of teaching experience, and area of specialization. Section B contained 20 items measuring perceptions of the influence of five

components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—on students' educational choices including subject selection, academic aspirations, career planning, and long-term educational goals. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instrument underwent content validation by three experts in educational psychology, curriculum studies, measurement and evaluation. A pilot test was conducted with 20 teacher educators outside the sampled institution, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84 was obtained, indicating high internal consistency. The researchers personally distributed and collected the questionnaires from the respondents over a two-week period. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of responses was ensured. All analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), and the decision rule was based on a cutoff mean of 2.50.

Table 1: *Mean Responses on Teacher Educators' Perception of the Influence of Students' Emotional Intelligence on Their Subject and Career Choices*

S/N	Item	M	SD	Decision
1	Students' emotional self-awareness affects their subject preferences.	3.32	0.76	Agree
2	Emotionally intelligent students make more consistent career choices.	3.25	0.81	Agree
3	Emotional intelligence helps students align with their academic strengths.	4.18	0.84	Agree
4	Students who manage emotions well cope better with subject-related challenges.	4.35	0.79	Agree
5	Students' empathy influences their choice of career paths.	4.10	0.90	Agree
	Mean	3.84		Agree
	Standard Deviation		0.82	

Note. Criterion mean = 2.50. Mean scores of 2.50 and above indicate agreement.

Teacher educators generally perceived emotional intelligence as an important factor influencing students' subject and career choices. While moderate agreement was observed on aspects such as self-awareness and decision consistency, higher ratings were recorded for academic alignment, coping with challenges, and empathy. The overall mean of 3.84 indicates a strong perception of emotional intelligence as a determinant of students' academic and career pathways.

Table 2: Mean Responses on Components of Emotional Intelligence Relevant to Students' Informed Educational Decision-Making

S/N	Item	M	SD	Decision
1	Self-awareness is critical to informed academic decision-making.	4.40	0.70	Agree
2	Self-regulation helps students manage academic pressure when choosing subjects.	4.30	0.75	Agree
3	Motivation is a key emotional factor in students' career planning.	4.38	0.72	Agree
4	Social awareness influences students' choice of collaboration and support groups.	4.20	0.77	Agree
5	Resilience supports effective educational planning.	4.15	0.85	Agree
	Mean	4.29		Agree
	Standard Deviation		0.76	

Note. Criterion mean = 2.50.

Teacher educators identified all components of emotional intelligence as highly relevant, with self-awareness ranked highest, followed by motivation and self-regulation. The overall mean of 4.29 reflects strong agreement on the importance of emotional intelligence in informed educational decision-making.

Table 3: Mean Responses on the Extent Emotional Intelligence Contributes to Students' Academic Success and Long-Term Educational Planning

S/N	Item	M	SD	Decision
1	Emotionally intelligent students generally perform better academically.	4.22	0.88	Agree
2	Emotional intelligence helps students set and maintain realistic academic goals.	4.28	0.82	Agree
3	Emotionally intelligent students recover better from academic setbacks.	4.16	0.90	Agree
4	Students use emotional insight in developing long-term educational goals.	4.10	0.85	Agree
5	Emotional maturity contributes to persistence and educational progress.	4.24	0.78	Agree
	Mean	4.20		Agree
	Standard Deviation		0.85	

Note. Criterion mean = 2.50.

Findings indicate strong agreement that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to academic success and long-term planning, with an overall mean of 4.20.

Table 4: *Mean Responses on Strategies for Integrating Emotional Intelligence into Teacher Education*

S/N	Item	M	SD	Decision
1	Classroom practices should promote emotional self-awareness.	4.33	0.74	Agree
2	Reflective journals enhance emotional regulation and decision-making.	4.18	0.86	Agree
3	Co-curricular activities should develop emotional intelligence.	4.25	0.81	Agree
4	Emotional intelligence training should be embedded in career guidance.	4.36	0.73	Agree
5	Mentorship programs should be introduced to improve emotional intelligence and decision-making.	4.29	0.79	Agree
Mean		4.28		Agree
Standard Deviation			0.79	

Note. Criterion mean = 2.50.

Teacher educators strongly supported multiple strategies for integrating emotional intelligence into teacher education. The overall mean of 4.28 indicates a strong consensus on adopting practical, curriculum-based, and experiential approaches to enhance students' decision-making skills.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that teacher educators perceive emotional intelligence as a crucial factor influencing student-teachers' educational choices. It was established that emotional competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills significantly shape students' ability to select appropriate subjects, make consistent career decisions, and align their academic strengths with long-term goals. The findings further indicated that emotional intelligence contributes meaningfully to students' academic success, resilience, and persistence, while teacher educators strongly endorsed the integration of emotional intelligence strategies into teacher education programmes to enhance students' decision-making skills.

These findings are in agreement with existing empirical studies that highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in academic and career decision-making. For instance, Adeyemo (2021) found that emotionally intelligent students demonstrate greater clarity and confidence in making academic and career choices, as well as improved commitment to their educational goals. Similarly, Yusuf and Busari (2022) reported that emotional intelligence components, particularly self-awareness and motivation, play a significant role in guiding students toward realistic and goal-oriented educational decisions. The present findings also support Salami (2023), who emphasized that emotional intelligence enhances students' resilience and capacity to cope with academic stress, thereby facilitating better long-term educational planning. In addition,

the findings are consistent with Oladipo and Balogun (2022), who observed that integrating emotional intelligence training into teacher education programmes improves students' reflective thinking, goal setting, and decision-making abilities. Furthermore, the results align with the theoretical propositions of Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) and Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts (2020), which affirm that emotional intelligence enhances individuals' ability to process emotional information and make adaptive decisions in complex situations.

The outcomes of this study can be explained by the functional role emotional intelligence plays in regulating students' cognitive and emotional responses to academic challenges. Student-teachers who possess higher emotional intelligence are better able to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, manage stress, and remain motivated in the face of academic demands. This emotional balance supports clearer thinking and more informed decision-making regarding their educational and career paths. Additionally, the strong perception observed among teacher educators may be attributed to their continuous interaction with students, which provides them with practical insights into how emotional competencies influence students' behaviour, engagement, and academic choices over time. In contexts such as Nigeria, where students often encounter socio-economic pressures, limited guidance resources, and competitive academic environments, emotional intelligence serves as a vital coping mechanism that enhances persistence, adaptability, and clarity in decision-making.

This study contributes to knowledge by extending the discourse on emotional intelligence beyond theoretical assumptions to practical observations from teacher educators. It provides context-specific evidence that emotional intelligence is not merely an abstract psychological construct but a functional skill that directly influences student-teachers' educational choices and academic outcomes. The study also highlights the critical role of teacher educators in identifying and nurturing emotional competencies among students. By emphasizing the need for integrating emotional intelligence into teacher education programmes, the study offers a framework for improving students' decision-making capacity, fostering resilience, and promoting holistic development. This contribution is particularly relevant in developing educational systems, where addressing both cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning is essential for producing competent and well-adjusted graduates.

Conclusion

This study concludes that emotional intelligence (EI) is a significant factor influencing students' educational decisions, as seen by teacher educators in higher education institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. The results confirm that students with emotional intelligence demonstrate enhanced clarity, drive, resilience, and introspective ability in their subject and career decision-making. Educators consistently ranked self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation as the most crucial components of emotional intelligence for informed academic decision-making. Moreover, emotional intelligence significantly influences students' academic achievement and long-term educational strategies, particularly by improving their capacity to establish attainable

objectives, rebound from failures, and align decisions with personal values and ambitions.

Teacher educators emphatically supported the incorporation of emotional intelligence-based initiatives, including classroom practices, reflective journaling, mentorship programs, and co-curricular activities, into teacher education training programme. These practices are regarded as excellent methods for enhancing emotional competence and decision-making abilities in kids, thereby boosting overall educational results and career alignment.

Recommendations

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

1. Teacher education institutions should integrate structured emotional intelligence training into their curricula, with emphasis on developing core competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills to enhance students' educational decision-making.
2. Teacher educators should adopt reflective and experiential learning strategies, such as reflective journals, guided self-assessment, and classroom discussions, to help student-teachers develop emotional awareness and improve their ability to make informed academic and career choices.
3. Institutions should establish formal mentorship programmes where experienced and emotionally competent educators provide continuous guidance to student-teachers in managing academic challenges and aligning their educational choices with personal strengths and career goals.
4. Career counseling services within educational institutions should be strengthened and redesigned to incorporate emotional intelligence frameworks, enabling students to make realistic, confident, and goal-oriented educational and career decisions.
5. By prioritizing emotional intelligence as a core element of teacher preparation and educational decision-making support, institutions can help foster a generation of students who are not only academically competent but also emotionally grounded and future ready.

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