

Relationship between academic adjustment and psychological well-being of senior secondary schools' students in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Academic adjustment plays an important role in students' psychological development because the ability to cope with academic demands may influence their self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and independent functioning. This study investigated the relationship between academic adjustment and psychological well-being among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the relationships between academic adjustment and self-acceptance, positive relations with others, and autonomy. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised senior secondary school students in public schools across Adamawa State, while a sample of 300 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using Academic Adjustment and Psychological Well-Being questionnaires, which were validated and tested for reliability. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between academic adjustment and self-acceptance ($r = 0.456$, $p < 0.05$), positive relations with others ($r = 0.476$, $p < 0.05$), and autonomy ($r = 0.395$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that effective academic adjustment contributes positively to important dimensions of students' psychological well-being. It was recommended that schools should strengthen counselling programmes, promote supportive teacher-student relationships, and provide opportunities that encourage students' self-management and independent learning skills.

Keywords: Academic adjustment; Psychological well-being; Self-acceptance; Positive relations with others; Autonomy; Senior secondary school students; Adamawa State.

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE
• IMPACTING SOCIETY •

Introduction

Adolescence is an important developmental period characterised by significant academic, psychological and social changes. For students in senior secondary schools, these changes occur alongside increasing academic expectations, preparation for examinations, career decisions and the need to establish meaningful relationships and greater personal independence. How effectively students adapt to these demands can influence both their educational experiences and psychological functioning. Consequently, adjustment to the academic environment constitutes an important aspect of students' development and may have implications for their psychological well-being.

Academic adjustment refers to the extent to which students successfully adapt to the demands, expectations and experiences associated with schooling. It involves students' ability to cope with academic tasks, participate effectively in learning, maintain appropriate study behaviours and function satisfactorily within the school environment. Contemporary research views school adjustment as multidimensional, incorporating academic performance, emotional engagement and social integration within the school environment (Azpiazu et al., 2024). Their study of 1,397 adolescents showed that social support, resilience and positive affect contributed to indicators of school adjustment, including emotional engagement, school integration and perceived academic performance.

Academic adjustment is particularly important during adolescence because school constitutes one of the major social environments in which young people develop their identity, interpersonal relationships and sense of competence. Students who experience difficulty coping with academic demands may become frustrated, disengaged or socially withdrawn, whereas those who adapt successfully may develop stronger confidence, engagement and social integration. Evidence suggests that school adjustment is associated with important psychological and social outcomes during adolescence and is influenced by both personal characteristics and the support available within the school environment (Azpiazu et al., 2024).

Psychological well-being, on the other hand, reflects positive psychological functioning rather than merely the absence of psychological distress. Ryff (2014) conceptualised psychological well-being as comprising self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. In the present study, attention was restricted to three dimensions that are particularly relevant to adolescent adjustment within the school context: self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy. Self-acceptance reflects a positive evaluation of oneself; positive relations with others concern the ability to establish warm, trusting and supportive interpersonal relationships; while autonomy reflects independence, self-regulation and the capacity to make decisions based on personal convictions.

The school experience may contribute to these dimensions of psychological well-being. Successful academic adjustment can provide students with experiences of competence and accomplishment that may strengthen their evaluation of themselves. Similarly, effective adaptation to school requires interaction with classmates and teachers and may promote supportive interpersonal relationships. Tian et al. (2015), in a longitudinal study involving 1,316 adolescents, found that teacher and classmate support were related to subjective well-being in school and that scholastic competence and social acceptance played important roles in this relationship.

Academic adjustment may also relate to students' autonomy. As adolescents progress through secondary school, they increasingly assume responsibility for organising their studies, making academic decisions, solving problems and regulating their behaviour. Van Ryzin et al. (2009) found that school-based autonomy and belongingness were associated with adolescent psychological adjustment and engagement in learning. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) reported that autonomy support was positively associated with adolescents' academic adjustment and subjective well-being, particularly through academic competence and learning strategies.

Within the Nigerian context, school adjustment and psychological well-being are equally important concerns. Dombo and Awoyemi (2016), in their study of secondary school adolescents in Bayelsa State, examined psychological well-being alongside school adjustment, demonstrating the relevance of investigating both constructs among Nigerian secondary school students. However, relatively little empirical attention has been directed towards the specific relationships between academic adjustment and the dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State. The present study therefore investigated the relationship between academic adjustment and these three dimensions of psychological well-being among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Senior secondary school students are expected to adapt successfully to increasing academic demands while maintaining positive psychological functioning. Ideally, students who adjust effectively to their academic environment should be able to develop confidence in themselves, establish supportive relationships and exercise appropriate independence in managing their academic responsibilities. However, adolescence is accompanied by academic, emotional and social pressures that may make such adjustment difficult.

Difficulty in academic adjustment may have implications beyond academic performance. Students who repeatedly experience difficulties coping with school demands may develop negative perceptions of

themselves, experience problems in their interactions with peers and teachers, or have difficulty exercising appropriate independence in academic decision-making. Existing research indicates that school adjustment is related to emotional engagement, peer integration, perceived academic competence and broader adolescent well-being (Tian et al., 2015; Azpiazu et al., 2024).

Evidence further suggests that autonomy and social belonging within the school environment contribute to positive adolescent psychological functioning. Van Ryzin et al. (2009) established relationships among autonomy, belongingness, school engagement and psychological well-being, while Liu et al. (2021) showed that adolescents' academic adjustment formed an important pathway between autonomy-supportive experiences and subjective well-being. These findings suggest that the capacity to adjust academically may be associated with important dimensions of psychological well-being.

Despite growing research on adolescent adjustment and well-being, much of the available empirical evidence originates outside Nigeria or examines psychological well-being as a broad construct without considering its specific dimensions. Within Nigeria, studies involving secondary school students have examined school adjustment and psychological well-being in other states, but empirical evidence specifically linking academic adjustment with self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State remains limited. The extent and direction of these relationships could therefore not be assumed from studies conducted in different social and educational settings. It was against this background that the study investigated the relationships between academic adjustment and self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the Relationship between academic adjustment and psychological well-being of senior secondary schools' students in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the:

1. Relationship between academic adjustment and Self-Acceptance of students in senior secondary schools in Adamawa state.
2. Relationship between academic adjustment and students' positive relations with others in senior secondary schools in Adamawa state.
3. Relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy of students in senior secondary schools in Adamawa state.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State?
2. What is the relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State?
3. What is the relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Literature Review

Concept of Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment refers to the process through which students adapt to the academic expectations, routines and demands of their school environment. It encompasses the ability to cope with learning activities, meet academic responsibilities, maintain effective study behaviours and remain adequately engaged with school. Academic adjustment should therefore not be viewed solely in terms of examination performance; it also reflects students' emotional engagement, integration into school and perceptions of their academic competence.

Azpiazu et al. (2024) described school adjustment as a multidimensional construct involving performance, social relationships and emotional experiences associated with schooling. Their study demonstrated that teacher and peer support, resilience and positive affect contributed to adolescents' school adjustment through emotional engagement, integration and perceived academic performance. Academic adjustment

therefore represents the interaction between the student and the academic environment rather than an isolated personal characteristic.

During senior secondary education, students are expected to assume greater responsibility for their learning and respond to more demanding academic tasks. Effective adjustment enables them to organise academic activities, cope with school-related difficulties and sustain meaningful participation in learning. Poor adjustment, by contrast, may manifest through disengagement, difficulties with school relationships, negative perceptions of academic competence and dissatisfaction with the school experience.

Concept of Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being describes positive psychological functioning and the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as functioning effectively in important areas of life. Ryff's model identifies six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth (Ryff, 2014). The present study focused on self-acceptance, positive relations with others and autonomy because these dimensions correspond directly with the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

Self-acceptance refers to possessing a positive attitude towards oneself and recognising both positive and negative aspects of one's personality and experiences. For adolescents, self-acceptance is important because this developmental period involves increased self-evaluation and comparison with peers. Experiences of academic competence and successful adjustment to school demands may contribute to a more favourable evaluation of the self.

Positive relations with others represent the capacity to establish warm, trusting and satisfying relationships. This dimension is particularly relevant to secondary school students because a considerable proportion of their daily interaction occurs with peers, teachers and other members of the school community. Supportive school relationships can provide students with emotional support, acceptance and a sense of belonging.

Autonomy concerns self-determination, independence and the ability to regulate one's behaviour according to personal standards. During adolescence, increasing autonomy is developmentally important as students gradually become more responsible for academic choices, learning strategies and personal decisions. Autonomy does not imply isolation from others but rather the capacity to exercise appropriate independence while maintaining functional interpersonal relationships.

Academic Adjustment and Self-Acceptance

Academic experiences can influence how adolescents perceive and evaluate themselves. Students who are able to meet academic demands, solve school-related problems and perceive themselves as academically competent may develop greater confidence in their abilities and a more positive self-view. Conversely, persistent adjustment difficulties may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and negative self-evaluation.

Research supports the relationship between adjustment-related factors and students' perceptions of themselves. Tian et al. (2015) found that scholastic competence was an important mechanism through which school-related social support contributed to adolescents' subjective well-being. Their findings also demonstrated the importance of social acceptance in determining well-being within the school setting. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) reported that adolescents' perceptions of academic competence and learning strategies were positively associated with subjective well-being. These findings suggest that positive adaptation to academic demands may be associated with favourable self-evaluation. The present study consequently examined whether academic adjustment was significantly related to self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Academic Adjustment and Positive Relations with Others

Adjustment to school involves more than coping with coursework; it also includes students' ability to function within the social environment of the school. Interaction with classmates and teachers can influence students' sense of belonging, acceptance and emotional security. Positive interpersonal experiences may facilitate adjustment to school, while rejection, conflict and poor integration may create difficulties in both academic and psychological functioning.

Tian et al. (2015) reported that teacher and classmate support were important to adolescents' subjective well-being in school and that social acceptance contributed to the relationship between school support and well-being. Azpiazu et al. (2024) similarly found that peer and teacher support were associated with important indicators of school adjustment, with peer support particularly related to fewer school integration problems. These findings demonstrate the close connection between adjustment to the school environment and the quality of students' interpersonal experiences.

The importance of social relationships is particularly relevant during adolescence, when peer acceptance and belonging assume increasing developmental significance. Students who adjust effectively to academic life may be better positioned to participate in cooperative academic activities, seek assistance when needed and maintain constructive relationships with peers and teachers. It was therefore necessary to determine

whether academic adjustment was significantly related to positive relations with others among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Academic Adjustment and Autonomy

Autonomy develops substantially during adolescence as young people acquire greater responsibility for their behaviour, decisions and future plans. Within the academic environment, autonomy may be demonstrated through independent learning, organisation of academic responsibilities, choice of appropriate learning strategies and the ability to make informed educational decisions.

Van Ryzin et al. (2009), in a longitudinal investigation of secondary school students, found that academic autonomy and teacher-related belongingness were reciprocally related to engagement in learning and that autonomy and belongingness contributed to adolescent psychological well-being. Liu et al. (2021) similarly found that autonomy-supportive experiences were positively associated with aspects of adolescents' academic adjustment and subjective well-being. These findings demonstrate that independence in the academic environment and successful adjustment are closely connected to positive adolescent development.

As senior secondary school students increasingly assume responsibility for managing their studies and making decisions concerning their educational future, their capacity for academic adjustment may be related to the development of autonomy. However, this relationship required empirical verification within the context of Adamawa State. The study therefore examined the relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design and was conducted among senior secondary school students in public schools across the five education zones of Adamawa State, Nigeria. The design was appropriate for examining the relationship between academic adjustment and psychological well-being without manipulating the study variables. The population comprised SS3 students in public secondary schools across the state. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure adequate representation of students from the different education zones and schools. A sample of 300 students was selected for the study. Data were collected using two standardized questionnaires: the Academic Adjustment Questionnaire and the Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire. The instruments were validated by experts in educational psychology and pilot-tested on a sample of 40 respondents and obtained reliability coefficient of 0.79 using Cronbach's alpha method. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize the data, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the hypotheses and

determine the relationship between academic adjustment and psychological well-being at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Three research questions were raised and answered and three corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State?

Table 1: Relationship between Academic Adjustment and Self-Acceptance among Senior Secondary School Students in Adamawa State

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	R-value
Academic Adjustment	300	3.486	0.6509	0.456
Self-Acceptance	300	3.353	0.6541	

Table 1 shows that academic adjustment recorded a mean score of 3.49 with a standard deviation of 0.65, while self-acceptance recorded a mean score of 3.35 with a standard deviation of 0.65. The correlation coefficient of 0.456 indicates a moderate positive relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State. This implies that students with higher academic adjustment tend to demonstrate higher levels of self-acceptance.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State?

Table 2: Relationship between Academic Adjustment and Positive Relations with Others among Senior Secondary School Students in Adamawa State

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	R-value
Academic Adjustment	300	3.49	0.65	0.476
Positive Relations with Others	300	3.45	0.74	

Table 2 reveals that academic adjustment had a mean score of 3.49 and a standard deviation of 0.65, whereas positive relations with others recorded a mean score of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 0.74. The correlation coefficient of 0.476 indicates a moderate positive relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others. This suggests that improved academic adjustment is associated with better interpersonal relationships among senior secondary school students. HABIBU results of analysis new

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State?

Table 3: Relationship between Academic Adjustment and Autonomy among Senior Secondary School Students in Adamawa State

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	R-value
Academic Adjustment	300	3.49	0.65	0.395
Autonomy	300	3.53	0.72	

Table 3 indicates that academic adjustment had a mean score of 3.49 with a standard deviation of 0.65, while autonomy recorded a mean score of 3.53 with a standard deviation of 0.72. The correlation coefficient of 0.395 indicates a moderate positive relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy. This means that students who adjust better academically are more likely to exhibit greater independence and self-regulation.

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the Relationship between Academic Adjustment and Self-Acceptance among Senior Secondary School Students in Adamawa State

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	R-value	p-value	Decision
Academic Adjustment	300	3.49	0.65	0.456	0.000	H ₀₁ Rejected
Self-Acceptance	300	3.35	0.65			

Table 4 shows that the correlation coefficient between academic adjustment and self-acceptance was $r = 0.456$ with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant positive relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Table 5: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the Relationship between Academic Adjustment and Positive Relations with Others among Senior Secondary School Students in Adamawa State

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	R-value	p-value	Decision
Academic Adjustment	300	3.486	0.6509	0.476	0.000	Ho2 Rejected
Positive Relations with Others	300	3.449	0.7353			

Table 5 indicates that academic adjustment and positive relations with others produced a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.476$ with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant positive relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Hypothesis 3

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Table 6: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of the Relationship between Academic Adjustment and Autonomy among Senior Secondary School Students in Adamawa State

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	R-value	p-value	Decision
Academic Adjustment	300	3.486	0.6509	0.395	0.000	Ho3 Rejected
Autonomy	300	3.529	0.7200			

Table 6 shows that the relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.395$ with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed a moderate positive and significant relationship between academic adjustment and self-acceptance among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State. This indicates that students who adapt effectively to academic demands tend to report more favourable evaluations of themselves. The finding is consistent with Tian et al. (2015), who showed that scholastic competence and social acceptance contribute meaningfully to adolescents' well-being in school. It also aligns with Liu et al. (2021), who found that academic competence and adaptive learning strategies were positively associated with adolescents' subjective well-being. The result therefore suggests that successful adjustment to academic demands may strengthen students' sense of competence and contribute to more positive self-perceptions.

The study also found a moderate positive and significant relationship between academic adjustment and positive relations with others. This finding implies that students who adjust well to the academic environment are more likely to maintain constructive and supportive relationships with peers and teachers. The result agrees with Tian et al. (2015), who reported that teacher and classmate support were significantly associated with adolescents' well-being in school. It is also supported by Azpiazu et al. (2024), who found that peer and teacher support were important predictors of school adjustment, particularly through emotional engagement and school integration. The finding therefore underscores the close connection between successful academic adjustment and students' ability to function positively within the social environment of the school.

Furthermore, the study revealed a moderate positive and significant relationship between academic adjustment and autonomy among senior secondary school students. This suggests that students who adapt effectively to academic expectations are more likely to demonstrate independence, self-regulation and responsibility in managing their academic activities. The finding is consistent with Van Ryzin et al. (2009), who established that autonomy and school engagement contribute to adolescents' psychological well-being. It also agrees with Liu et al. (2021), who found that autonomy-supportive experiences were positively related to academic adjustment and subjective well-being. The result therefore indicates that effective academic adjustment may promote greater self-direction and independent functioning among senior secondary school students.

Conclusion

The study concludes that academic adjustment has a significant positive relationship with key dimensions of psychological well-being among senior secondary school students in Adamawa State. Students who demonstrate better academic adjustment are more likely to develop higher self-acceptance, maintain positive relationships with others, and exhibit greater autonomy. This implies that effective adaptation to academic demands contributes to students' emotional stability, social interaction, and independence in managing their educational responsibilities. Therefore, promoting academic adjustment among students may enhance their overall psychological well-being.

Recommendations

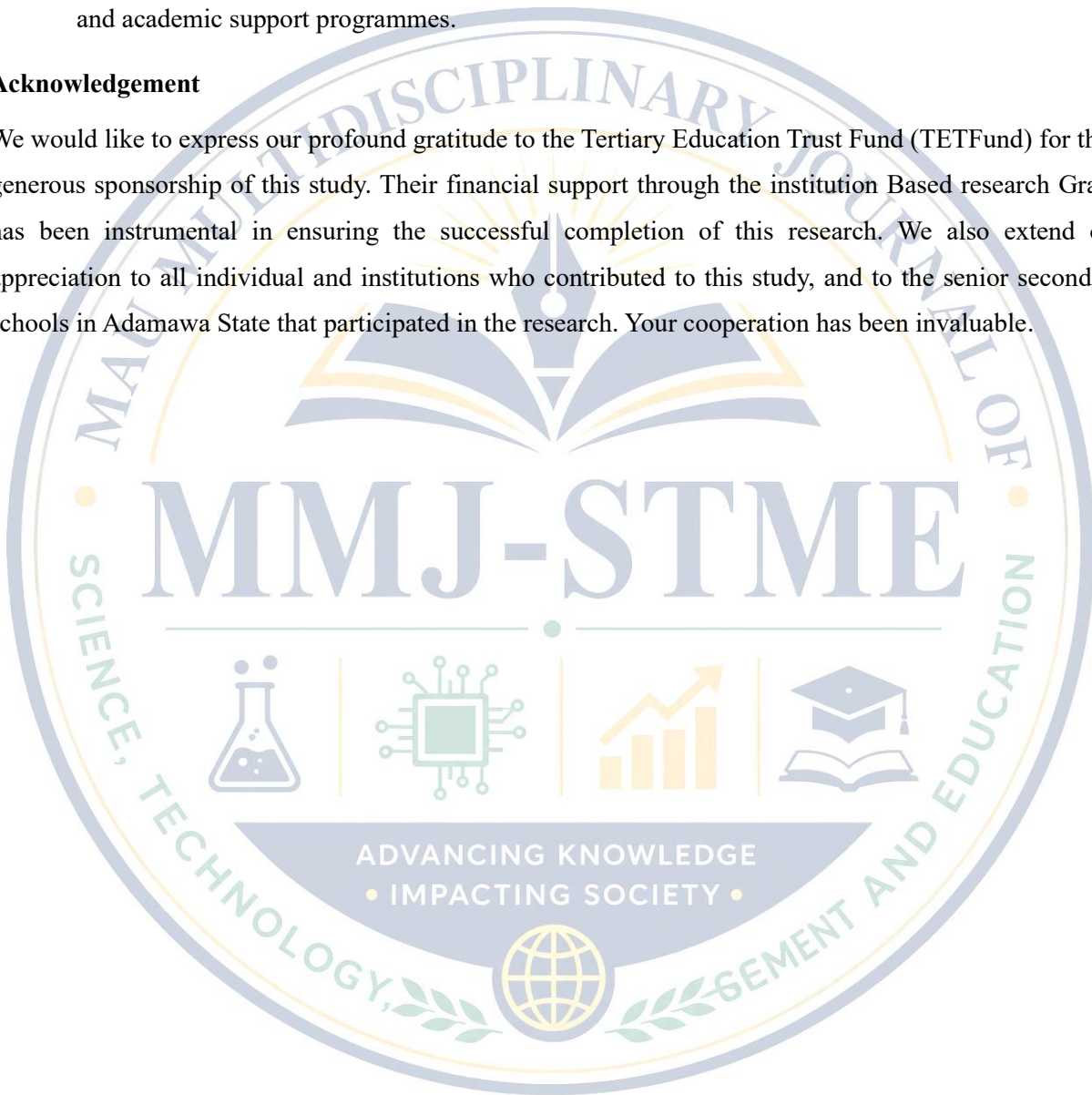
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School counsellors and secondary school administrators should implement regular guidance and counselling programmes that promote students' confidence, positive self-perception, and effective coping strategies to support their emotional and academic development.

2. School administrators and teachers should encourage cooperative learning activities, peer support programmes, and positive teacher-student interactions that promote healthy social relationships within the school environment.
3. Teachers and school counsellors should provide students with opportunities to develop decision-making skills, self-management abilities, and independent learning practices through mentorship and academic support programmes.

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