Teacher Leadership through Emotional Intelligence: A Gender-Comparative Study of Its Effect on Student Discipline in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examined the predictive role of teachers' emotional intelligence, focusing on self-awareness and social awareness, on students' disciplinary patterns in Lagos basic schools. A quantitative correlational design was employed, using data from 260 teachers selected through multistage sampling. The Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Students' Disciplinary Pattern Checklist served as data sources. Multiple regression analysis showed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted students' disciplinary behaviour, accounting for 13.3 % of the variance. Social awareness was the only significant predictor, indicating that teachers who are more attuned to students' emotions and social cues manage behaviour more effectively. Self-awareness showed no independent effect. An independent samples t-test revealed gender differences in social awareness, with female teachers scoring higher, while no gender differences appeared for self-awareness. The findings underscore the importance of social awareness within Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory and highlight implications for teacher training and behaviour management practices in Lagos schools.

Keywords: Teacher emotional intelligence, Social-awareness, Self-awareness, Student disciplinary patterns, Leadership attributes

1.   Introduction

Educators increasingly assume multifaceted leadership roles in influencing the behavioural, social, and emotional development of students, particularly within foundational educational settings where learners undergo critical formative experiences. Within Nigeria's basic education framework, encompassing primary and junior secondary levels, teachers serve not only as academic instructors but also as primary leaders who establish behavioural standards, exemplify emotional regulation, and facilitate students' social adaptation. Contemporary classroom leadership extends beyond mere subject matter expertise, necessitating the emotional competence to interpret, manage, and shape the behaviours of a diverse student body (Traikou, 2024). Consequently, teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a pivotal focus in current discourse on educational leadership and student discipline, especially in dynamic urban environments such as Lagos State.

Emotional intelligence refers to the teacher's ability to recognise personal emotions, interpret student emotions, and regulate interpersonal interactions in ways that support learning. Two domains, self-awareness and social awareness, form the core of this construct and are especially relevant for behaviour management (M. Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). Self-awareness, regarded as the foundational domain of EI, pertains to a teacher's recognition of their own emotions, triggers, values, and behavioural patterns. Educators exhibiting heightened self-awareness tend to respond to student misbehaviour with composure, deliberation, and reflective judgment rather than impulsivity.

Empirical studies indicate that self-aware teachers are better positioned to model emotional stability, prevent escalation during behavioural conflicts, and uphold consistent behavioural expectations (Mornar, 2024; Sutton et al., 2009). Conversely, social awareness involves a teacher's ability to perceive and interpret students' emotional states, empathize with their experiences, and comprehend the social dynamics within the classroom environment. Teachers possessing strong social awareness demonstrate greater sensitivity to early behavioural indicators, heightened responsiveness to students' emotional needs, and enhanced efficacy in managing classroom interactions prior to their escalation into disciplinary issues (Balyer & Özcan, 2020; Oberle et al., 2014).

On a global scale, the importance of emotional intelligence in teacher leadership has grown in parallel with the increasing emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives within educational institutions. Empirical evidence consistently reveals that educators with elevated emotional intelligence foster classroom environments conducive to positive behaviour, minimize disruptions, and promote mutual respect among students (O'Connor et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2020). For instance, M. A. Brackett et al., (2011) found that teachers with higher emotional awareness reported fewer challenges related to classroom management and lower incidences of student misbehaviour. Similarly, Noa and Meital (2025) demonstrated that socially aware teachers were more adept at de-escalating conflicts, encouraging student cooperation, and supporting learners' behavioural self-regulation.

A substantial portion of the extant global literature has predominantly concentrated on educational contexts within Western and Asian settings, resulting in a limited comprehension of the predictive role of teachers' emotional intelligence attributes on student behaviour in African educational environments (MacCanna et al., 2020). In Nigeria, classrooms are frequently characterised by high student–teacher ratios, socio-economic heterogeneity, and behavioural challenges, thereby amplifying the significance of teacher leadership grounded in emotional intelligence. Lagos State, Nigeria's economic centre and one of Africa's most rapidly expanding megacities, offers a distinctive educational milieu characterised by cultural diversity, overcrowded classrooms, socio-economic pressures, and escalating concerns regarding student discipline. Empirical reports from Lagos schools consistently document behavioural issues such as disruption, disobedience, bullying, absenteeism, aggression, and defiance, which collectively impede teachers' ability to effectively manage classrooms and sustain an environment conducive to learning (Oluwamumibori et al., 2022; Onasanya, 2020). Although basic education in Nigeria includes both primary and junior secondary levels, this study focuses on junior secondary schools because behavioural challenges intensify at this stage and teachers' emotional leadership becomes more consequential.

In response to these challenges, scholarly discourse has increasingly identified teachers' emotional competencies as critical determinants of student discipline. Research conducted within Nigeria indicates that teachers possessing high emotional competence tend to achieve more favourable behavioural outcomes by engaging students empathetically, articulating behavioural expectations with clarity, and responding to misconduct in an appropriate manner (Bello et al., 2017; Olatunji, 2025). Notably, social awareness has been associated with enhanced student engagement and a reduction in behavioural infractions (Adeyemo & Chukwudi, 2014). While these findings offer preliminary evidence supporting the influence of emotional intelligence on student behaviour, there remains a pronounced paucity of empirical investigations that concurrently examine self-awareness and social awareness as leadership attributes predictive of disciplinary patterns within basic schools in Lagos.

However, prior findings remain inconsistent. Some studies report strong links between emotional intelligence and classroom behaviour, while others find weak or no associations. These mixed results create a need for context-specific investigation in Lagos, where school environments differ markedly from those in other regions. Furthermore, the extent to which these emotional intelligence attributes vary according to gender remains an open question, with international and Nigerian studies yielding inconclusive results. Certain studies suggest that female teachers exhibit higher levels of empathy and emotional understanding, which purportedly translate into more effective classroom leadership and behavioural management (Jamal et al., 2023; Nwankwo & Agu, 2019). Conversely, other research finds no statistically significant gender differences in teachers' emotional intelligence competencies, implying that factors such as professional experience and training may exert a greater influence than gender per se (Akinola & Johnson, 2025; Carroll & Bower, 2021; Tozoğlu & Erciş, 2025). This divergence in findings highlights the necessity for context-specific research exploring gender differences within Lagos State, where teacher demographics, cultural norms, and school environments diverge markedly from those in other regions.

The theoretical underpinning of the present study is primarily derived from Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, which delineates self-awareness and social awareness as fundamental components of emotionally intelligent leadership. Goleman (1998, 2021) posits that emotionally intelligent leaders possess heightened attunement to their own emotional states, enhanced capacity to interpret the emotions of others, and superior skills in managing interpersonal relationships. When applied to educational settings, this theory suggests that teachers' self-awareness influences their management of emotional triggers during disciplinary interactions, while social awareness affects their ability to accurately interpret and respond to students' behavioural signals. Together, these attributes foster a leadership style that harmonises empathy with authority, structure with support, and discipline with understanding. This theoretical perspective is further complemented by the Social–Emotional Competence Framework, which asserts that emotionally competent teachers facilitate positive behavioural outcomes by cultivating supportive learning environments wherein students experience safety, respect, and emotional validation (Schonert-reichl, 2017).

Despite its theoretical significance and growing empirical validation, a notable practical and academic gap persists in comprehending the role of teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) within the distinctive context of basic education in Lagos. Existing literature often addresses emotional intelligence in a generalized manner, without isolating particular leadership-related dimensions such as self-awareness and social awareness. Moreover, there is a scarcity of research investigating how these specific attributes collectively predict students' disciplinary behaviours in primary and junior secondary schools in Lagos. Concurrently, escalating concerns regarding student misconduct and increasing demands for enhanced teacher professionalism underscore the urgent need for evidence-based insights to guide teacher training, the development of emotional competencies, and reforms in behavioural policies.

Although Nigeria's basic education system includes primary and junior secondary schools, this study focuses on junior secondary schools because they represent the stage at which behavioural problems intensify and teacher emotional leadership becomes most consequential. This gap is further accentuated by the heightened national and international focus on positive behaviour support, social-emotional learning, and holistic educational approaches. Nigerian educational reforms emphasize the necessity for advancements in classroom management, teacher leadership, and professional conduct (Federal Republic of Nigeria., 2013). Nonetheless, emotional intelligence, an integral component of these reforms, remains insufficiently integrated into teacher development initiatives. In particular, schools in Lagos require educators who are not only proficient in instructional delivery but also emotionally adept in leading diverse classroom environments. Deficiencies in understanding and regulating emotions, whether personal or those of students, may exacerbate disciplinary challenges, undermine teacher–student relationships, and diminish academic engagement.

Considering these contextual factors, the present study aims to empirically examine the predictive influence of teachers' emotional-intelligence leadership attributes on students' disciplinary patterns within Lagos basic schools. By focusing on both self-awareness and social awareness, the study seeks to provide a more refined understanding of the emotional capacities that affect teacher leadership and student behaviour. Additionally, it explores whether distinct dimensions of emotional intelligence differentially impact discipline management and assesses the potential moderating effect of gender on teachers' EI levels. The findings are anticipated to have significant practical implications for teacher education, educational leadership development, and the formulation of school behavioural policies.
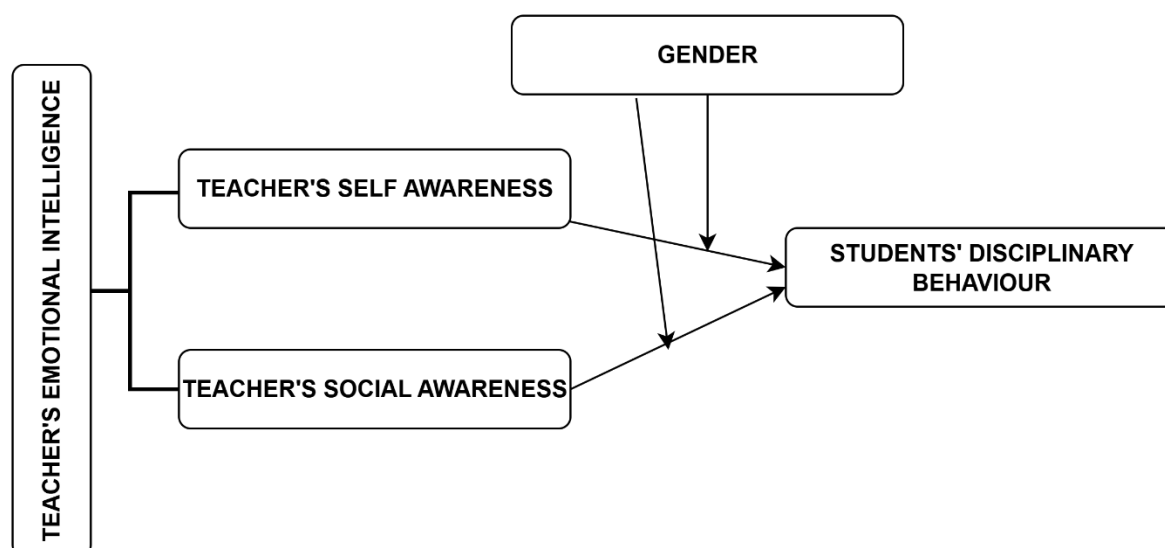

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model underpinning this study, illustrating the hypothesized relationships between teachers' emotional intelligence leadership attributes and students' disciplinary patterns. Guided by Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, the model conceptualizes teachers as classroom leaders whose emotional competencies shape behavioural outcomes among students. As shown in Figure 1, self-awareness and social awareness constitute the independent variables, while students' disciplinary patterns represent the dependent variable.

Self-awareness reflects teachers' capacity to recognize and regulate their own emotions during instructional and disciplinary encounters. Within the model, this attribute is theorized to support calm decision-making, emotional regulation, and consistent behavioural responses. Social awareness, in contrast, represents teachers' ability to accurately perceive students' emotions, social cues, and classroom dynamics. Figure 1 posits that socially aware teachers are more likely to identify early signs of misconduct, respond empathetically, and prevent the escalation of disruptive behaviours. The model specifies direct paths from both emotional intelligence dimensions to students' disciplinary patterns, indicating a predictive relationship rather than causality. Gender is included as a background variable to examine differences in teachers' emotional intelligence attributes, although it does not alter the primary predictive structure.

Therefore, the present study is guided by the following hypotheses:

H_{01}: Teachers' emotional-intelligence leadership attributes (self-awareness and social awareness) do not significantly predict students' disciplinary patterns.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in teachers' emotional-intelligence leadership attributes based on gender.

2. Methodology

This research employed a quantitative methodology grounded in a correlational design to investigate the predictive effects of teachers' emotional intelligence, specifically self-awareness and social awareness, on student disciplinary behaviours within secondary schools in Lagos. The correlational approach was selected due to its capacity to assess the strength and direction of relationships among naturally occurring variables without necessitating manipulation of the educational environment. This method was deemed appropriate given the study's objective to evaluate how two teacher-related emotional constructs forecast student behavioural outcomes in authentic classroom contexts.

This study sampled teachers from junior secondary schools, which form part of the basic education structure in Nigeria. Lagos is divided into six educational districts, each comprising both public and private secondary schools. The focus on public secondary schools was motivated by documented increases in behavioural issues reported by local authorities and the dynamic classroom conditions that render emotional intelligence particularly pertinent to daily teaching activities. The target population consisted of all teachers employed in Lagos public secondary schools. Due to the large population size, a multistage sampling strategy was implemented to enhance representativeness.

In the initial stage, two education districts were purposively selected based on reports from state education quality assurance units indicating persistent discipline-related challenges. Subsequently, twenty public secondary schools were randomly chosen from these districts. Finally, stratified random sampling was employed to select 260 teachers across various departments, ensuring proportional representation. The sample size was considered sufficient in accordance with established guidelines for behavioural research involving regression analyses, as larger samples increase statistical power and minimize sampling error.

Two primary instruments were utilized in data collection. The first, the Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Scale (TEIS), was adapted from validated emotional intelligence questionnaires and contextualized for Nigerian secondary school settings. The TEIS comprised two subscales assessing self-awareness and social awareness, with items reflecting common scenarios encountered by teachers, such as student disrespect, classroom disruptions, and emotionally charged interactions. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Content validity was established through evaluation by three experts in educational psychology and measurement to ensure cultural relevance and construct clarity. A pilot study conducted in two schools outside the main sample demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 for the overall scale.

The second instrument, the Students' Disciplinary Pattern Checklist (SDPC), captured teachers' evaluations of students' behavioural tendencies, including punctuality, attentiveness, compliance with instructions, frequency of disruptions, and peer interactions. Teachers rated items on a five-point scale from "rarely" to "very often." Pilot testing yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable consistency for behavioural assessment.

Data collection spanned six weeks. Prior to administration, school principals were briefed regarding the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality protocols. Teachers completed the TEIS and SDPC instruments during scheduled sessions. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise sample characteristics and variable distributions. Multiple regression analysis was then conducted to determine the predictive capacity of self-awareness and social awareness on students' disciplinary outcomes. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Lagos State Ministry of Education, and informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers.

3. Results

This section presents the results of this study.

3.1 Participants' Profile

Table 1 shows that the sample comprised 260 teachers, of whom 61.5 percent were female and 38.5 percent were male, indicating a predominantly female workforce. Most participants had between 1 and 10 years of teaching experience, with 32.3 percent in the 1–5 year range and 22.7 percent in the 6–10 year range. Only a small proportion (1.2 percent) had more than 30 years of experience. In terms of qualifications, the largest groups held B.Ed/B.Sc(Ed) and master's degrees (30 percent each), while 7.7 percent possessed doctoral degrees, suggesting a relatively well-qualified teaching population.

Table 1. Participant' Profile

Variable	Type	N	%
Gender	Male	100	38.50
	Female	160	61.50
Years of Experience	1-5 years	84	32.30
	6-10 years	59	22.70
	11-15 years	44	16.90
	16-20 years	44	16.90
	21-25 years	19	7.30
	26-30 years	7	2.70
	31 and above	3	1.20
Higher Qualification	HND + PGDE	53	20.40
	B.A, B.SC + PGDE	31	11.90
	B.Ed, B.Sc (Ed)	78	30.00
	M.A, M.Sc, M.Ed	78	30.00
	PhD	20	7.70
	Total	260	100.00

3.2 Hypothesis Testing

H_{01}: Teachers' emotional-intelligence leadership attributes (self-awareness and social awareness) do not significantly predict students' disciplinary patterns. The regression analysis showed that emotional intelligence had a modest but meaningful influence on students' disciplinary behaviour. The model produced a moderate correlation (R = .364), with the predictors explaining 13.3% of the variance in students' disciplinary behaviour (R^2 = .133), indicating that emotional-intelligence attributes collectively contribute meaningfully to behavioural outcomes.

Table 2. Model Summary teachers' emotional intelligence leadership attributes predicting students' disciplinary behaviour

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.364a	.133	.126	.732

a Predictors: (Constant), Social awareness, Self-awareness

The ANOVA result confirmed the significance of the model, $F(2, 257) = 19.68$, $p < .001$, demonstrating that the combined influence of teachers' self-awareness and social awareness significantly improves the prediction of student discipline beyond what would be expected by chance.

Table 3. ANOVA Summary for the Regression Model

Sources	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	21.097	2	10.548	19.675	<001b
Residual	137.783	257	.536		
Total	158.880	259			

a Dependent Variable: Student disciplinary patterns
b Predictors: (Constant), Social awareness, Self-awareness

Examination of the coefficients revealed that social awareness was the only significant independent predictor of students' disciplinary behaviour (β = .380, t = 5.98, p < .001), suggesting that teachers who demonstrate sensitivity to students' emotions and social cues are more effective in promoting positive behavioural patterns. In contrast, self-awareness did not make a significant contribution to the model (β = –.044, t = –0.69, p = .493), indicating that the ability of teachers to recognize and manage their own emotions does not independently predict students' disciplinary outcomes when social awareness is accounted for. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis stating that teachers' emotional-intelligence leadership attributes do not significantly predict students' disciplinary behaviour was rejected.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients for Predictors of Student Disciplinary Patterns

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.085	.213		14.488	<.001
Self-Awareness	-.034	.050	-.044	-.687	.493
Social Awareness	.309	.052	.380	5.975	<001

a Dependent Variable: Student disciplinary patterns

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether teachers differed in emotional intelligence based on gender. As presented in Table 5 the results for social awareness revealed a statistically significant gender difference. Levene's test indicated unequal variances, $F(1, 258) = 6.26$, $p = .013$; therefore, the unequal variance results were interpreted. Female teachers ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.89$) scored significantly higher in social awareness than male teachers ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.01$), $t(190.62) = -3.82$, $p < .001$. The mean difference of -0.47 ($SE = 0.12$) indicates that male teachers reported notably lower levels of social awareness, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.71 to -0.23.

In contrast, findings for self-awareness indicated no significant difference between male and female teachers. Levene's test showed that the assumption of equal variances was met, $F(1, 258) = 0.75$, $p = .388$. The t-test results confirmed no statistical difference, $t(258) = -1.01$, $p = .312$. Male teachers ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.00$) and female teachers ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.00$) demonstrated similar self-awareness scores. The mean difference of -0.13 ($SE = 0.13$), with a 95% confidence interval from -0.38 to 0.12, further supports the absence of gender-based variation in self-awareness

H_{02}: There is no Significant Difference in Teachers' Emotional-Intelligence Leadership Attributes Based on Gender

Table 5. Independent Samples t-test differences in teachers' emotional intelligence based on gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p	d	95% Confidence	Interval
Social Awareness	Male	100	3.698	1.008	-3.822	190	.001	0.94	-.711	-.227
	Female	160	4.168	.889						
Self-Awareness	Male	100	3.378	1.003	-1.01	258	.312	1.00	-.381	1.22
	Female	160	3.508	1.002						

4.   Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which teachers' emotional intelligence leadership qualities, specifically self-awareness and social awareness, predict students' disciplinary behaviours in basic schools in Lagos. Additionally, the research explored potential gender differences in teachers' emotional intelligence attributes. The principal findings are analyzed in relation to existing empirical research and theoretical frameworks.

The regression analysis revealed that teachers' emotional intelligence attributes collectively accounted for 13.3% of the variance in students' disciplinary patterns. Although this proportion of explained variance is moderate, it highlights the practical significance of emotional intelligence in fostering a positive behavioural climate within Lagos classrooms. This outcome supports the notion that teachers serve as frontline leaders whose emotional competencies are pivotal in influencing students' behavioural tendencies.

These results are consistent with international literature. Prior studies, including those by (Brackett et al., 2011; Floman et al., 2023), have consistently demonstrated that teachers with high emotional competence encounter fewer behavioural disruptions and experience greater student cooperation. Such research emphasizes that educators who exhibit warmth, empathy, and emotional regulation contribute to calmer classroom environments, reduce conflict escalation, and facilitate students' self-regulation. The current findings extend this body of evidence to the context of Lagos public schools, suggesting that emotional intelligence functions similarly across diverse cultural and socio-economic settings, including densely populated and heterogeneous environments like Lagos.

Complementary evidence from Nigerian scholarship further substantiates these conclusions. Studies by (Adeyemo & Chukwudi, 2014; Akinola & Johnson, 2025; Nnoyiba & Onyiloha, Chiedu, 2020)indicate that teachers possessing strong emotional skills are more effective in managing classroom conflicts, sustaining positive student relationships, and decreasing the incidence of disruptive behaviours. The present research reinforces these earlier findings by demonstrating that emotional intelligence attributes remain significant predictors of student behaviour amid growing concerns about indiscipline in urban Nigerian schools.

The overall predictive model's significance aligns with Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, which posits that emotionally intelligent leaders influence others not solely through formal authority but through emotional attunement and relational competence. Consistent with this theoretical perspective, teachers exhibiting heightened emotional awareness appear to cultivate behavioural environments conducive to greater student compliance with established expectations.

A more detailed analysis of individual emotional intelligence components revealed that social awareness was the sole significant independent predictor of students' disciplinary behaviour. Teachers who are more perceptive of students' emotions, social cues, and interpersonal dynamics demonstrated greater effectiveness in promoting positive behavioural outcomes. This finding corroborates prior research Oberle et al., (2014) and M. Brackett and Cipriano (2020), who concluded that teachers' capacity to accurately interpret the emotional climate of the classroom enables timely intervention, conflict de-escalation, and the fostering of supportive relationships that mitigate misconduct.

The prominence of social awareness is particularly salient in Lagos schools, where classrooms are frequently overcrowded and culturally diverse. This finding is consistent with Lagos State's ongoing efforts to strengthen classroom management and teacher professional conduct, although emotional-intelligence competencies remain underemphasised in current training structures. In such settings, subtle behavioural signals, peer interactions, and latent emotional tensions can rapidly escalate into overt disciplinary issues if teachers lack social perceptiveness. The present finding therefore provides concrete evidence that social-awareness training could significantly improve classroom management capacity in Lagos schools.

Contrary to expectations, self-awareness did not emerge as a significant predictor of students' disciplinary behaviours once social awareness was incorporated into the analytical model. Although self-awareness is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of emotional intelligence (EI), the lack of a significant effect suggests that the mere recognition of one's own emotional states may not directly influence student conduct unless it is accompanied by the capacity to interpret and respond to the emotions of others. This outcome aligns with prior research; for instance, Sutton et al., 2009) and Da Fonseca et al. (2022) have argued that self-awareness is predominantly an inward-focused attribute and may not inherently translate into effective behavioural leadership without the support of social-interactive competencies.

Within the Nigerian educational context, these findings resonate with that of Olatunji (2025), who observed that empathy-related skills exert a more pronounced influence on classroom behaviour than self-reflective abilities. Such parallels imply that while self-awareness is essential for maintaining emotional stability and professionalism, it may not independently affect student discipline unless educators concurrently demonstrate strong interpersonal awareness.

A second key finding of the study identified a significant gender disparity in social awareness, with female teachers exhibiting substantially higher scores than their male counterparts. This observation is consistent with international literature indicating that female educators generally display greater empathy, emotional comprehension, and interpersonal sensitivity (Hayat, 2016; Jamal et al., 2023; Nwankwo & Agu, 2019). These gender differences have been attributed to socialization processes that encourage the development of enhanced emotional perceptiveness among females. The present research thus provides empirical support for the persistence of this gender pattern within secondary schools in Lagos.

The practical implications of this gender variation are noteworthy for classroom management in Lagos. Given that social awareness emerged as the principal predictor of student discipline, the elevated social-awareness scores among female teachers may partially account for reports of fewer disciplinary issues in female-led classrooms within certain Nigerian studies. Furthermore, these findings suggest that targeted emotional skills training for male teachers could mitigate gender disparities in classroom management effectiveness.

Conversely, no significant gender differences were detected in self-awareness, with male and female teachers reporting comparable levels of internal emotional understanding. This result corroborates earlier studies (Al-tkhayneh et al., 2024) which have found that self-awareness tends to be relatively stable across genders and is more strongly influenced by professional experience and training than by biological sex. Similar non-significant gender differences in intrapersonal emotional skills, such as reflection, self-regulation, and emotional stability, have also been documented within the Nigerian context. Collectively, these findings reinforce the broader consensus that gender differences in emotional intelligence are more pronounced in social and interactive domains than in intrapersonal dimensions.

5.   Conclusion

The findings indicate that teachers' emotional intelligence, especially social awareness, plays an essential role in shaping disciplinary behaviour in Lagos secondary schools. Socially aware teachers were more successful in creating cooperative and orderly classrooms. While self-awareness supports personal regulation, it did not independently predict student behaviour. The gender differences observed, with female teachers displaying higher social awareness, underscore the need for targeted emotional-intelligence development for male teachers. Strengthening interpersonal emotional competencies within teacher training and school leadership initiatives may lead to improved classroom discipline and more supportive learning environments.

The present study recognizes several limitations that warrant careful consideration when interpreting the results. The employment of a cross-sectional research design constrained the capacity to infer causal relationships between teachers' emotional intelligence and patterns of student disciplinary behaviour. Behavioural patterns in Lagos, a highly urbanised context, may differ from those in rural Nigerian settings, which limits the transferability of findings. Emotional intelligence was measured using self-report instruments, which are susceptible to biases such as social desirability and subjective self-assessment. Furthermore, the study's focus on public secondary schools within selected districts of Lagos restricts the generalizability of the findings to private educational institutions or schools located in other regions of Nigeria. Additionally, the investigation was limited to two domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness and social awareness) thereby excluding other critical components such as self-regulation and relationship management. The study also did not account for broader contextual factors at the school level, including class size, leadership style, and overall school climate, which may have exerted additional influence on student behaviour. These limitations underscore the need for further research in this area.

Future research should consider employing longitudinal or experimental methodologies to enhance the ability to draw causal inferences. Incorporating mixed-method approaches or utilizing performance-based assessments of emotional intelligence could mitigate potential biases inherent in self-report measures. Comparative analyses across different states, types of schools, and socio-cultural environments would provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of emotional leadership in diverse educational contexts. Expanding the conceptualization of emotional intelligence to encompass additional domains, alongside the integration of school-level variables, would likely improve the predictive validity of such models. Moreover, qualitative investigations into teachers' lived experiences and gender-focused intervention studies are recommended to develop a more comprehensive and robust evidence base.

6.   Implications for Policy and Practice

The outcomes of this study carry several significant implications for educational leadership, teacher professional development, and behavioural policy in Lagos basic schools. First, the prominent predictive capacity of social awareness suggests that teacher training initiatives should prioritize the cultivation of interpersonal emotional competencies. Educators need to develop skills that enable them to accurately perceive student emotions, interpret behavioural antecedents, and implement strategies that mitigate conflict. This emphasis is particularly pertinent in Lagos, where classroom dynamics are influenced by diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors.

Second, the relatively limited independent effect of self-awareness indicates that emotional intelligence should not be treated as a monolithic construct within teacher development frameworks. Programs focusing exclusively on internal emotional reflection may not directly enhance student discipline. Instead, professional development should concentrate on interactive emotional skills that have a tangible impact on classroom relationships. This insight has important ramifications for both pre-service education and in-service training, which currently tend to underemphasize emotional intelligence as a leadership competency.

Third, the observed gender differences in social awareness point to potential equity and capacity-building challenges within Lagos schools. Given that female teachers consistently demonstrate stronger social perceptiveness, targeted support may be necessary to assist male teachers in developing comparable skills. Educational administrators and policymakers should acknowledge these disparities and design differentiated professional development strategies that address varying emotional intelligence levels across teacher demographics. Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on school leadership in the Nigerian context by affirming that emotional intelligence transcends a mere personal attribute and functions as a critical leadership resource influencing student behaviour patterns. Integrating emotional intelligence training into leadership development programs for teachers may facilitate the creation of safer, more orderly, and inclusive learning environments.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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