

# Withdrawal Behaviour and Social Adjustment among Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State

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Received: 20.01.2025 | Accepted: 17.02.2026 | Published: 23.02.2026

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18739921](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18739921)

## Abstract

## Original Research Article

This study examined withdrawal behaviour and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State, Nigeria, within the broader context of adolescent psychosocial development. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by emotional, social, and behavioural changes that can influence students' capacity to adapt to school environments. Using a descriptive survey design of the correlational type, the study targeted 6,161 Senior Secondary School One (SS1) students in Sokoto Metropolis, from which a sample of 365 students was selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using two adapted instruments: the Depression, Anxiety and Social Withdrawal Scale (DASWS) and the Social Adjustment Scale (SAS-M), both of which demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability. Two theories were used Erik Erikson's psychosocial development Theory and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the level of social adjustment, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the relationship between withdrawal behaviour and social adjustment at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that senior secondary school students in Sokoto State generally adjust socially to their school environment, though this adjustment occurs only about half the time. Furthermore, a significant negative relationship was found between withdrawal behaviour and social adjustment, indicating that increased withdrawal is associated with reduced social adjustment. These results underscore the influence of withdrawal behaviours on students' ability to function effectively within the school social environment. The study highlights the need for targeted psychosocial interventions, including counselling services and supportive school climates, to enhance students' social adjustment and overall well-being.

**Keywords:** Withdrawal behaviour, social adjustment, adolescence, senior secondary school students, Sokoto State.

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## Introduction

Adolescence represents a transformative phase in human development, characterized by profound shifts in identity formation, emotional regulation, and social interaction patterns (Ali et al.,

2022; Rubin et al., 2020). During this period, students encounter various stressors, including peer pressure, fluctuations in self-esteem, and evolving family dynamics, all of which significantly influence their psychosocial trajectories and ability to integrate into the school environment (Johnson et al., 2021).



**Citation:** BAWA, B. W., & Aliero, H. S. (2026). Withdrawal behaviour and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State. *GAS Journal of Education and Literature (GASJEL)*, 3(2), 8-14.

Education serves as a critical mechanism for navigating these changes, as schools provide structured social settings where individuals learn to manage emotions and develop essential interpersonal skills (Ladd, 2005). However, the school environment can also become a source of significant stress due to academic pressures and social conflicts, potentially leading to maladaptive psychosocial outcomes such as anxiety, depression, or social withdrawal (Hughes & Coplan, 2019).

Psychosocial behaviour is defined as the continuous interaction between internal psychological processes such as thoughts, emotions, and beliefs and external social contexts, including relationships and cultural expectations (Johnson et al., 2021). A critical dimension of this construct is social withdrawal, which involves an active behavioural pattern of isolating oneself from social contact and avoiding peer interactions (Rubin et al., 2020). In the context of secondary education, social withdrawal is often a manifestation of underlying psychological distress and is characterized by a lack of interest in maintaining relationships or a refusal to associate with schoolmates (Lasisi & Ahmed, 2023). Factors such as fear of embarrassment, poor communication skills, and unfavourable environmental conditions can trigger these behaviours, which frequently result in peer rejection, victimisation, and negative self-regard (Hughes & Coplan, 2019; Rubin et al., 2020).

Conversely, social adjustment refers to the process by which an individual adapts to the social environment of the school to meet its various demands effectively (Adeyemi & Ogunleye, 2020). It encompasses emotional stability, the formation of supportive peer networks, and the maintenance of a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for long-term academic success and psychological well-being (Abubakar et al., 2022; Ladd, 2005). Effective social adjustment enables students to conform to school norms and maintain emotional and social stability, whereas poor adjustment is frequently associated with bullying, social anxiety, and low academic performance (Hughes and Coplan, 2019).

In Sokoto State, Nigeria, the interaction between psychosocial behaviour and social

adjustment is shaped by a distinctive cultural and socioeconomic context. The state's rich cultural heritage and predominantly Muslim population influence social norms, behavioural expectations, and patterns of student interaction within schools (Usman and Ahmed, 2021). However, challenges such as poverty, limited access to quality educational resources, and persistent gender disparities can hinder students' capacity to adjust socially within the school setting (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013; Usman & Ahmed, 2021). Empirical evidence from the region indicates that senior secondary school students frequently exhibit withdrawal as a dominant psychosocial behaviour, often as a coping strategy to avoid anxiety, depression, or complex social interactions (Abdulkareem, 2023; Bawa, 2026). Findings further suggest that although some students demonstrate moderate levels of social adjustment, this adjustment tends to be inconsistent, reflecting persistent difficulties in achieving stable social integration (Abubakar et al., 2022).

Despite the recognised importance of these variables, a significant research gap remains concerning how internalising psychosocial behaviours particularly withdrawal influence social adjustment within the specific sociocultural context of Sokoto metropolis. Existing studies largely focus on broader Nigerian urban centres, potentially overlooking the unique cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors that shape students' psychosocial development in Sokoto State (Lasisi & Ahmed, 2023; Usman & Ahmed, 2021). Understanding these relationships is crucial for developing evidence-based interventions, including school-based counselling services and social-emotional learning programmes, tailored to the needs of senior secondary school students in the region. By fostering environments that promote positive social adjustment, schools can mitigate the negative effects of withdrawal behaviour and enhance students' holistic development and academic success.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is anchored in two foundational psychological theories: Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory.

### Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory

This theory posits that human development progresses through eight biologically predetermined stages, each characterized by a specific crisis that must be resolved for healthy psychological growth. The most relevant stage for senior secondary students is Identity vs. Role Confusion (ages 12–18), where adolescents strive to establish a stable sense of self and meaningful peer relationships.

Erikson’s framework is essential for this study as it explains the developmental origins of social challenges, such as peer pressure and friendship formation, which are central to a student’s social adjustment. It provides a lens through which to understand how a failure to resolve the identity crisis may manifest as social withdrawal and role confusion, directly hindering a student’s ability to integrate into the school environment.

### Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura’s theory emphasizes reciprocal determinism, the continuous interaction between personal factors (beliefs and emotions), behavioral patterns, and environmental influences. A key mechanism within this theory is perceived self-efficacy a student’s confidence in their ability to perform actions required to achieve social integration.

This theory justifies the study’s focus on environmental and personal variables by explaining how students observe and model behaviors from peers, teachers, and parents. In the context of Sokoto State, it helps explain how external social support or environmental stress interacts with internal factors like self-esteem to determine a student’s level of social adjustment. It provides the rationale for examining withdrawal as a learned or anticipatory behavior influenced by the school’s social climate.

By integrating these theories, the study comprehensively addresses its objectives: Erikson’s theory highlights the internal developmental necessity of social adjustment, while Bandura’s theory accounts for the external and cognitive processes that either facilitate that adjustment or lead to maladaptive patterns like withdrawal. Together,

they provide a robust basis for testing the hypothesis that withdrawal behaviors significantly disrupt the transition and adaptation process in the secondary school setting.

### Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to;

1. Assess the level of social adjustment of senior secondary school students in Sokoto State.
2. Examine the relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State.

### Research Question

The following research question is formulated to guide the study;

1. What is the level of social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State?

### Research Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested in this study;

- Ho<sub>1</sub>** There is no significant relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State.

### Methodology

A descriptive survey design of the correlational type was employed to examine the relationships between psychosocial behavior (withdrawal) as independent variables and social adjustment as the dependent variable. The study population comprised 6,161 senior secondary school one (SS1) students from fifty-six senior secondary schools within Sokoto Metropolis, from which a sample of 365 respondents was determined using the Research Advisors (2006) table and selected through simple random sampling. Data collection utilized two adapted questionnaires the Depression, Anxiety and Social Withdrawal Scale (DASWS) and the Social Adjustment Scale (SAS-M) whose face and content validity were established through expert

review by specialists in Educational Psychology and Test and Measurement. Instrument reliability was confirmed via a pilot study with 50 respondents using the test-retest method, achieving an overall reliability index of 0.81 for the DASWS and a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.80 for the SAS-M. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), using SPSS to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents the results of data analysis and interpretation

**Research Question:** What is the level of social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State?

The responses on how senior secondary school students in Sokoto state adjust socially in the school is presented in the table 1.

**Table 1. Students’ Social Adjustment Level**

S/N	Item Options	Frequence	Percentage
1	Not at all	639	19.67
2	Occasionally	675	20.78
3	About half the time	821	25.27
4	Most of the time	633	19.48
5	All the time	481	14.80

*Source:* Field Work (2025)

A look at table 1 indicates how senior secondary school students in Sokoto state adjust socially in the school. A look at the items indicates that the students signify adjusting “About half the time” as indicated by a frequency of 821 which is equivalent to 25.27%. This implies that students in senior secondary schools in the area of study frequently adjust socially to the environment. Consequently, based on the responses of the items, it could be concluded that students in senior secondary school adjust socially.

**Hypothesis Testing**

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the withdrawal and social adjustment scores to a Pearson *r*-test analysis as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Relationship between Withdrawal and Social Adjustment**

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>r</i> -Cal	<i>p</i> -Value	Decision
Withdrawal	361	10.04	5.07	-.397	.000	

Social Adjustment	361	24.40	6.07	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
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*Source:* Field Work (2025)

From the result of table 4.4.3, relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment though negative, is significant,  $r(360) = -.397, p < .05$ . This implies that as withdrawal increases, social adjustment decreases in a significant but related manner because the  $p$ -value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, H<sub>01</sub> which states that there is no significant relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto state was rejected and the alternative upheld. Thus, there is a relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State.

### Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis, the following are the summary of findings of this study.

1. Senior secondary school students in Sokoto State generally adjust socially to their school environment, though only about half the time.
2. Withdrawal relates negatively to social adjustment of senior secondary school students in Sokoto State.

### Discussion of Findings

The finding that senior secondary school students in Sokoto State adjust socially to their school environment about half the time both aligns with and differs from related empirical studies, as a study by Brown, Ernest-Ehibudu, & Ugwu (2024) in Bayelsa State shows that family conflict negatively affects school adjustment while self-esteem positively influences students' social adaptation, with family values showing no significant effect, and a study by Wakeh and Omoegun (2020) in Lagos State further demonstrates a significant relationship between psychosocial adjustment and academic achievement, emphasizing the link between social adaptation and educational outcomes; collectively,

these studies suggest that psychosocial factors such as family dynamics, self-esteem, and needs satisfaction are central to students' social adjustment, implying that the moderate level of adjustment observed in Sokoto State may stem from challenges including family conflict, low self-esteem, or unmet psychological needs, and underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions such as family counseling, parental involvement, self-esteem enhancement programs, and the creation of supportive school environments, which are essential not only for improving social adjustment but also for promoting academic performance and overall student well-being through collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders.

The negative correlation between withdrawal behaviours and social adjustment among senior secondary school students highlights important implications, including the need for schools to implement early mental health interventions to identify and support withdrawn students before such behaviours escalate into more severe psychological problems, the importance of enhancing students' self-efficacy through counselling, skill-building activities, and participation in extracurricular programmes to strengthen confidence and social engagement, and the necessity of addressing students' basic psychological and emotional needs by fostering supportive and inclusive school environments; additionally, active parental and community involvement through awareness programmes and collaborative support systems is essential, as collectively addressing withdrawal behaviours through mental health support, self-efficacy development, and community engagement is vital for improving social adjustment, overall development, and well-being among adolescents. This need is supported by (Hassan, Kamil, and Akorede (2025), who found that higher self-efficacy significantly reduced social withdrawal among

secondary school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis, indicating that psychosocial support can mitigate withdrawal tendencies and improve social engagement.

### Conclusion

The study concludes that while senior secondary school students in Sokoto State demonstrate a moderate level of social adjustment, this adjustment is inconsistent and significantly influenced by withdrawal behaviour. The significant negative relationship between withdrawal and social adjustment indicates that students who exhibit higher levels of withdrawal are less likely to adapt effectively to the social demands of the school environment. This underscores the importance of addressing withdrawal behaviours through school-based counselling, psychosocial support, and the creation of inclusive and supportive learning environments to promote positive social adjustment and holistic student development.

### Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should establish or strengthen counseling services to provide early intervention for students experiencing anxiety, depression, and withdrawal. Regular mental health screenings can help identify at-risk students before the problems become severe.
2. Schools should implement programs designed to improve social interaction and communication skills among students. Workshops, group activities, and extracurricular clubs can encourage peer engagement and build confidence.

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