



## The Impact of Cyberbullying in Tertiary Institutions of Yobe State, Nigeria

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### Abstract:

This study investigates the extent, effects, and prevention measures of cyberbullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State, Nigeria. It explores the prevalence of cyberbullying, the platforms used, vulnerable student groups, and the psychological and academic consequences for victims. The study adopted Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) to explain the prevalence of cyber-bullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State. Methodologically, mixed-methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative data collection through surveys and in-depth interviews, was used to gather responses from students, academic staff, and non-academic staff. The findings reveal a significant prevalence of cyberbullying, with social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram being the primary tools for harassment. Freshmen students, particularly females, were identified as the most vulnerable groups. Cyberbullying was found to have a profound impact on victims' mental health, with anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem being common psychological effects. It also negatively affects academic performance, as victims experience a decline in focus and participation. Despite these severe consequences, reporting mechanisms were found to be largely ineffective, and there is a general reluctance among victims to report incidents. The study also highlighted the need for stronger institutional policies, improved support systems, and greater parental involvement. Based on these findings, the study offers several recommendations, including the development of systematic anti-cyberbullying policies, the establishment of more effective reporting mechanisms, and the implementation of awareness campaigns. This research contributes to understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying in Nigerian tertiary institutions and provides actionable insights for creating safer and more supportive academic environments.

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## 1.1 Introduction

The emergence of modern information and communication technology has brought about a dual reality: on one hand, it simplifies human social interactions, while on the other hand, it introduces significant risks through virtual social connections. These contrasting realities are evident as this technological progress excites us while simultaneously presenting serious security concerns. Cyberbullying is one of the many threats linked to wireless information systems (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017). The widespread availability of young people's personal information across cyberspace, including email addresses, mobile phone numbers, and instant messaging IDs, youths are now more susceptible to harassment online than in traditional physical environments like playgrounds (Olasanmi & Adeyemi, 2020).

In United States, England, Portugal, Italy, as in other European and Asian countries, there is increase in cyberbullying in the years following new millennia, i.e. from 2000 upward (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Mesch, 2009; Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Palmeri, 2013; Okoiye, Nwoga, & Onah, 2015; Garcia-Lopez & Pasic, 2018; Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project, YEIP, 2018). In a longitudinal study conducted between 2000 and 2005 in England, there was a 50% increase in the number of youths who experienced online harassment (Okoiye et al. 2015). In the same country, out of 15,686 students from Grades 6 to 10, about 29.9% reported moderate to frequent involvement in bullying activities (Okoiye et al. 2015). Cyberbullying has also significantly increased in Portugal and Italy in the last few years and it represents one of the most common forms of violence among young people in those countries (YEIP, 2018).

In Nigeria, the occurrence of bullying in secondary and tertiary educational institutions has evolved with the widespread use of information and communication technology devices (Nwosu *et al.* 2018). The internet has become a common platform for many in-school adolescents to engage in cyberbullying. This form of aggression is often expressed through verbal threats, attacks, and taunts exchanged among peers while communicating via the internet or through text messages (Okoiye *et al.* 2015). Additionally, Mesch (2009) argues that cyberbullying endangers the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of children and contributes to the ethical and moral decline within society. Unlike traditional face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying does not cease when the school day ends but continues to affect the child or adolescent at home due to easy access to various digital communication devices. This form of bullying has become more prevalent with the growing use of mobile phones and the internet among adolescents.

During preliminary study, the researcher found that cyberbullying is taking place in Yobe State's tertiary institutions and its effects on victims are far-reaching and detrimental to their overall well-being. In some cases, the constant exposure to online harassment leads to academic decline. Affected students struggle with concentration, reduced motivation, and absenteeism. Socially, victims withdraw from peer interactions, leading to loneliness and a lack of support networks. Therefore, it is essential to develop strategies aimed at preventing cyberbullying, particularly within online learning environments in Yobe State's tertiary education institutions. Although there have been prior studies on cyberbullying in tertiary institutions and its connection with social media, such as those conducted by Frank & Odunayo (2013), Okoiye et al. (2015), Nwosu *et al.* (2018) and Olasanmi & Adeyemi (2020), none have specifically addressed cyberbullying focussing it extent, effects on victims and preventing its impact using mixed method approach in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This research gap highlights the need for the current study, which aims to explore cyberbullying within tertiary institutions across Yobe State, which has never been the focus of the previous studies.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the prevalence of cyberbullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State;
2. To analyse the effects of cyberbullying on victims within these institutions; and
3. To propose effective prevention strategies to combat cyberbullying in tertiary institutions.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This section deals with the review of relevant literature on the topic of cyberbullying, its extent and impacts. It also reviews relevant theories- to explain the extent, effects and preventive measures against cyberbullying.

### 2.1 The Concept of Cyberbullying

Bullying in schools is defined by Moon, Hwang, & McCluskey (2011) to involve physical and verbal attacks and harassment directed at a victim(s) by one student or a group of students over an extensive period of time. According to cyberbullying shares similar attributes with the traditional variety, but its online dimension means that perpetrators do sometimes hide their true identities (Owolabi, 2020). Specifically, cyberbullying refers to a form of bullying that utilises electronic technology as a tool for victimising individuals. It involves the use of internet platforms and mobile technologies such as emails, chat room discussion groups, mobile phones, mobile phone cameras, web pages, and text messages, all with the deliberate intention of causing harm to others (Olasanmi & Adeyemi, 2020). This type of bullying encompasses harassment or mistreatment perpetrated by an offender towards a victim who is often physically distant. Despite the absence of direct personal contact between the offender and the victim, cyberbullying remains psychologically and emotionally harmful, especially to young people (Okoiye et al., 2015).

The methods commonly employed in cyberbullying include offensive messaging, impersonation, public humiliation, and social exclusion. Sending offensive text messages via mobile phones, is where students even show these messages to peers before forwarding them to the intended target. It also involves sending threatening emails, publicly humiliating individuals by forwarding private emails to multiple contacts, and forming groups to bombard a particular student with hostile or inflammatory messages, known as "flaming." Other cyberbullying tactics include persistent negative messaging, sexual and racial harassment, denigration (spreading false or damaging information), impersonation, deception (trickery), social exclusion, and cyberstalking. Cyberbully can spread harmful rumors on a victim's Facebook status or flood the victim's inbox with abusive text messages within minutes. This amplifies the psychological distress experienced by the victim (Okoiye et al., 2015; Olasanmi & Adeyemi, 2020). Cyberbullying is a complex and evolving form of harassment that leverages electronic technologies to inflict psychological and emotional harm, particularly among adolescents. Unlike traditional bullying, its unique characteristics- such as anonymity, wide reach, and the ability to target victims at any time and place- make it more pervasive and difficult to control. As observed by scholars like Olasanmi & Adeyemi (2020), Okoiye et al. (2015), and Palmeri (2013), the detrimental effects of cyberbullying call for urgent need for constructive strategies to prevent and address this growing issue, especially within educational environments where young people are most vulnerable.

### 2.2 Cyberbullying in Tertiary Institutions, Effects on Victims and Preventive Measures

Cyberbullying has become a global phenomenon, significantly impacting youths (Byrne, Vessey & Pfeifer, 2018) students across educational institutions (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Nwosu, Ementa, Ejikeme, 2018; Chinwe, 2018). According to the National Center for

Social Research (as cited in Okoiye et al., 2015), an analysis of bullying incidents among over 10,000 secondary school students in England, aged 14 to 16, revealed that cyberbullying- characterised by taunts, threats, and insults delivered through the internet and mobile devices - has emerged as the most prevalent form of bullying. In a national survey involving 15,686 students from Grades 6 to 10, approximately 29.9% reported moderate to frequent involvement in bullying activities. Furthermore, a longitudinal study conducted between 2000 and 2005 documented a 50% increase in the number of youths who experienced online harassment (Okoiye et al. 2015). The steady rise in both the number of victims and perpetrators correlates positively with the growing adoption of digital technologies among adolescents, including mobile phones, personal data assistants, and computers with internet access.

In Nigeria, the widespread adoption of digital technology has led to an increase in internet usage and mobile phone penetration. The average Nigerian now owns a mobile phone, and internet access continues to expand rapidly. Between 2000 and 2012, mobile phone subscriptions in Nigeria surged from just 30,000 users (0.02 subscribers per 100 inhabitants) to 112,777,785 users (67.68 subscribers per 100 inhabitants). Similarly, internet subscriptions rose from 0.06 to 32.88 subscribers per 100 inhabitants during the same period (Internet Crime Complaint Center, 2010, as cited in Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017). This rapid growth in internet usage has made Nigeria highly susceptible to both the benefits and risks associated with digital connectivity. While the internet has brought numerous opportunities, it has also contributed to a rise in cyberbullying cases (Frank & Odunayo, 2013).

Chinwe (2018) conducted a study on cyberbullying among high school students, focusing on the beliefs and behaviors linked to this issue. His research was guided by four key perspectives: (a) the aftermath of bullying incidents on students, which is usually devastating; (b) students' responses when witnessing cyberbullying, which may include death; (c) reasons why victims often refrain from reporting such incidents, as a result of shame; and (d) students' general perceptions of cyberbullying, which is negative. In relations to the above, Owolabi (2020) reported that the risks associated with cyberbullying victims include fear, distress, psychosomatic problems such as recurring abdominal pain, headaches, and sleeping problems. In addition, the student may be feeling uncared for by teachers, develop emotional and peer problems, high level of perceived difficulties, somatic illness, high level of conduct problems, regular smoking, hyperactivity, drunkenness, and substance abuse, etc. In fact Benjamin Dada (2020) argued that cyberbullying kills.

In response to the growing threat of cyberbullying, many countries' governments and non-state actors began to take measures to address the problem. For example, Forum MNE organises trainings on multiculturalism, tolerance, promoting universal human rights, openness, partnership, community activism, peace conflict transformation and individual development. The organisation also uses online tools, such as the video clip with 60 young people who send messages to their peers who are victims or witnesses of online or in-person recruitment for religious extremist groups or cyber-bullying based on national or religious affiliation (Garcia-Lopez & Pasic, 2018). The Nigerian government has also implemented various cybersecurity policies. One of the most significant legislative measures is the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015, which explicitly addresses cyberbullying and related offenses. The Act incorporates cybersecurity issues into the legal framework of Nigeria. For instance, under Part III (Offenses and Penalties), Section 24, Subsection 2, Paragraph (a), the Act prescribes strict penalties for individuals found guilty of cyberbullying. Specifically, it states:

(2) Any person who knowingly or intentionally transmits or causes the transmission of any communication through a computer system or network-

(a) To bully, threaten, or harass another person, where such communication places the individual in fear of death, violence, or bodily harm, whether directed at them or another person, Shall be liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for a term of up to 10 years and/or a minimum fine of N25,000,000.00.

Despite the existence of legal measures to combat cyberbullying in Nigeria, incidents of cyberbullying continue to rise, particularly within online learning environments. This growing trend highlights the urgent need for more proactive and preventive strategies to mitigate the victimisation associated with cyberbullying, especially in tertiary institutions across Yobe State. In recent years, cyberbullying has become increasingly prevalent in tertiary institutions across Yobe State, mirroring the global trend driven by the rapid growth of digital technology. The widespread use of smartphones, social media platforms, and internet-enabled devices among students has significantly contributed to the rise of this issue. Cyberbullying in these institutions often manifests through harmful behaviors such as sending threatening messages, spreading false rumors, online harassment, social exclusion, and public humiliation via digital platforms. This trend is particularly alarming within online learning environments, where the absence of face-to-face interactions creates opportunities for anonymous bullying, making it more difficult to detect and control. This rising trend of cyberbullying attracts the urgent need for collective intervention strategies in Yobe State's tertiary institutions. Such measures should focus not only on prevention through awareness programmes and digital literacy but also on providing psychological support services for victims. Establishing clear reporting mechanisms and enforcing existing cybercrime laws will also play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of cyberbullying on students' academic and personal lives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will utilise Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explain the growing prevalence of cyberbullying within online learning environments in Yobe State. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views power as a fundamental element of social life. According to Wodak, CDA involves questioning assumptions, being critical of how ideas are represented in texts and discourses, and engaging in self-reflection to deconstruct texts. This process aims to reveal hidden ideological positions, uncover underlying agendas, and differentiate between ideological influences and the official meanings of linguistic expressions. For example, in everyday conversations, individuals often aim to assert their viewpoints over others. Language, therefore, is deeply intertwined with social power- it can reflect, express, and even contest power. While power itself does not originate from language, language serves as a tool to challenge, subvert, or reshape power dynamics both in the short and long term (Anyanwu & Udoh, 2021).

Cyberbullying often involves manipulative language, derogatory remarks, and harmful narratives that reinforce power imbalances between the bully and the victim. CDA allows for a critical examination of how digital texts, such as social media posts, emails, and instant messages, are used to assert dominance, control, and psychological manipulation. It uncovers hidden ideologies (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017b), oppressive language structures, and the subtle ways in which cyberbullies maintain influence over their victims (Anyanwu & Udoh, 2021). By deconstructing the language used in online harassment, CDA helps to identify patterns of abuse, the social meanings attached to such interactions, and the broader cultural or institutional factors that normalise or tolerate cyberbullying.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This section deals with the background of the study area and methodology employed in the study.

*3.1 Background of the Study Area:* The research is set to be conducted in Yobe State, Nigeria. According to the 2006 national census, Yobe State has a population of approximately 2.5 million people (Jamri, 2023). Located in the far northeastern region of Nigeria, the state shares an international border with the Republic of Niger to the north (Jamri, 2023). Yobe State has a rich historical background and cultural heritage. The major ethnic groups include the Kanuri/Manga, Fulani, Ngizim, Bolewa, Bade, Kare-Kare, Hausa, Ngamo, Babur/Maga, alongside various other ethnic groups from different regions of the country. In terms of higher education, Yobe State hosts 12 tertiary institutions, which include: Federal University Gashua (FUGA), Yobe State University (YSU), Federal Polytechnic Damaturu (FEDPODAM), Federal College of Education (FCE) Potiskum, Geidam Polytechnic, College of Education and Legal Studies (COELS) Nguru, Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua (COEGA), Galtima Mai Kyari College of Health Sciences and Technology Nguru, College of Nursing Damaturu, Federal College of Nursing and Midwifery Nguru, College of Administrative, Management and Technology Potiskum and College of Agriculture Gujba. There are cases of cyberbullying among students in the State, targeting their peers through digital platforms. The state government has made efforts to combat cyberbullying through measures, such as monitoring and regulating online content that contains hate speech or personal attacks, but the measures are ineffective to address the problem.

*3.2 Research Design:* This study adopted a survey research design as it aimed to collect data directly from the field to capture the opinions of respondents on cyberbullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State, Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data were utilised. For primary data, quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires, while qualitative data were collected via in-depth interviews (IDIs). The data were analysed using a mixed-method approach, incorporating descriptive statistics and traditional qualitative data analysis.

*3.3 Population of the Study:* The target population of the study included male and female students of tertiary institutions, along with their academic and non-academic staff in Yobe State.

*3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique:* The sample size for this study consisted of 156 respondents. Of these, 150 respondents provided quantitative data, while the remaining 6 respondents contributed qualitative data. To select participants for the quantitative data, Yobe State was divided into three clusters based on senatorial districts (Zone A, Zone B, and Zone C). Each senatorial district had 50 respondents, totaling 150 respondents ( $50 \times 3 = 150$ ). In the second stage, a purposive sampling technique was employed to deliberately select one Local Government Area (LGA) with tertiary institutions from each cluster. The selected institutions were: Federal College of Education, Potiskum in Zone A, Yobe State University, Damaturu in Zone B and Federal University, Gashua in Zone C. In the third stage, a convenience sampling technique was used to collect data from 50 male and female students from each of the selected tertiary institutions. For qualitative data, purposive sampling was again applied to select 6 respondents for in-depth interviews (IDIs). The qualitative sample consisted of 2 academic staff, 2 non-academic staff, and 2 students ( $2 \times 3 = 6$ ). In summary, the total number of respondents for both quantitative and qualitative data was 156 ( $150 + 6$ ).

*3.5 Sources of Data:* Both primary and secondary data were sourced. For primary data, quantitative information was gathered through questionnaires, and qualitative data were collected via in-depth interviews (IDIs). Secondary data were obtained from textbooks, internet sources, journal articles, newspapers, conference proceedings, and seminar presentations related to cyberbullying and its prevention strategies.

*3.6 Instruments and Methods of Data Collection:* Two instruments were employed for data collection: a questionnaire guide and an IDI guide. Both instruments were designed to

include questions that addressed the study's objectives effectively.

**3.7 Techniques of Data Analysis:** The data were analysed using a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analysed using direct quotations after being prescribed to complement the quantitative findings and provide insights into their feelings and perceptions of cyberbullying in academic environments.

**3.8 Ethical Considerations:** The researcher obtained informed consent from respondents through consent notes to ensure voluntary participation. Strict adherence to ethical principles was maintained, including maximising benefits, minimising harm, and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity during data collection.

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion

This section analysed, presented, and interpreted the data collected from the field survey. Out of the 150 questionnaires distributed, 141 were successfully completed and retrieved. Therefore, the analysis is based on the retrieved questionnaires (N = 141). Additionally, six in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with students, tertiary institutions' staff from three tertiary institutions.

##### 4.1 Section A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section focuses on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Understanding the socio-demographic profile provides a foundation for analysing and interpreting the results.

**Table 1.1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

S/N	Variables	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1.0	Gender	Male	82	58.2
		Female	59	41.8
		Total	141	100
1.2	Age	18-27	62	44.0
		28-37	33	23.4
		38-47	29	20.6
		48-57	11	7.8
		58 and above	6	4.2
		Total	141	100
1.3	Marital Status	Single	79	56.0
		Married	48	34.0
		Divorced	13	9.2
		Widowed	01	0.8
		Total	141	100
1.4	Number of children	No children	79	56.
		1-3	54	38.3
		4-6	02	1.4
		7-9	04	2.9
		10 and above	02	1.4
		Total	141	100
1.5	Highest Educational Qualification	Quranic education	01	0.7
		Primary education	01	0.7
		Secondary education	101	71.6
		OND/NCE	23	16.4
		First Degree/HND	11	7.8

		Postgraduate	03	2.1
		Others, specify	01	0.7
		Total	141	100
1.6	Religion	Islam	113	80.1
		Christianity	28	19.9
		Total	141	100
1.7	Ethnic Group	Hausa	31	22.0
		Fulbe	15	10.6
		Bade	21	14.9
		Ngizim	08	5.8
		Kanuri	16	11.3
		Kare Kare	11	7.8
		Bole	16	11.3
		Others	23	16.3
		Total	141	100
1.8	Occupation	Student	104	73.8
		Farming	06	4.2
		Artisan	02	1.4
		Civil servant	16	11.3
		Business	08	5.8
		Petty trading	02	1.4
		Others, specify	03	2.1
		Total	141	100
1.9	Average Monthly Income	No income	60	42.6
		Below N10,000	35	24.8
		N10,001 – N30,000	20	14.2
		N30,001 –N60,000	12	8.5
		N60,001-N100,000	7	5.0
		N100,001-N150,000	5	3.5
		N150,001 and above	2	1.4
		Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the above dataset, there are more males (58.2%) than females (41.8%). The majority of the respondents fall within the 18-27 age range (44.0%), followed by those aged 28-37 (23.4%). Older age groups make up a smaller portion, with only 4.2% of respondents aged 58 and above. Having young people dominating the sample reflects the structure of tertiary institutions. According to YEIP (2018), the Z Generation has the particularity to have been born with access to the Internet. Young people are used to instant messages and virtual conversations compared with older generations. Regarding marital status, a significant portion of the respondents are single (56.0%), while 34.0% are married. A smaller percentage is divorced (9.2%), and only 0.8% are widowed. When it comes to children, over half of the respondents (56.0%) do not have children, while 38.3% have 1-3 children. Few respondents have larger families, with just 2.9% having 7-9 children. In terms of educational qualifications, the majority have secondary education (71.6%), followed by those with an OND or NCE (16.4%). A smaller portion of respondents holds a first degree or HND (7.8%), and only 2.1% have postgraduate qualifications. The respondents are predominantly Muslims (80.1%), while 19.9% are Christian.

Ethnically, the respondents are diverse, with the largest groups being Hausa (22.0%) and Bade (14.9%), followed by Fulbe (10.6%) and smaller numbers from other ethnic groups,

including Ngizim, Kanuri, Kare Kare, Bole, and others. This is because Yobe State has diversity, but the stated ethnic groups have been there for centuries, as also noted by Adole (2015). Regarding occupation, a large majority (73.8%) are students, with smaller groups engaged in farming (4.2%), civil service (11.3%), and business (5.8%). Other occupations, such as artisan work, petty trading, and unspecified jobs, are less common. In terms of income, a substantial portion of the respondents (42.6%) report having no income, while 24.8% earn below N10,000. The income distribution is skewed toward lower earnings, with only a small number (1.4%) earning above N150,000 per month. Overall, this dataset reveals a young, predominantly male, low-income group with a high percentage of students and a diverse ethnic composition.

#### 4.2 Section B: Extent of Cyberbullying in Tertiary Institutions of Yobe State

This section presented data that sheds light on the extent of cyberbullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State.

**Table 1.2: Whether Respondents Witnessed Cyberbullying in Their Institution**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	85	60.3
2.	No	46	32.6
3.	Unsure	10	7.1
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

A significant proportion of respondents, 60.3%, reported that they have either experienced or witnessed cyberbullying in their institution, while 32.6% stated they had not encountered such behavior. A smaller group, 7.1% were unsure. According to a male student at FCE Potiskum,

I have witnessed instances of cyberbullying in my institution, particularly in group chats where personal attacks happen. It is often hard to pinpoint the exact person behind the bullying, but the group atmosphere makes it easier for people to feel empowered to say hurtful things. There seems to be a lack of effective policies in place to address the issue. Thus, many victims suffer in silence. (A male student at FCE Potiskum, 2025).

**Table 1.2: The Frequency of Cyberbullying among Students in the Tertiary Institutions**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very common	41	29.1
2	Somewhat common	34	24.1
3	Rare	38	26.9
4	Not at all common	28	19.9
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The Table 1.2 above presents the frequency of cyberbullying among students in Yobe State tertiary institutions, whereby 29.1% of respondents indicated that it is very common, while 24.1% believe it is somewhat common. However, 26.9% stated that it is rare, and 19.9% reported that it is not at all common. In line with the above data, a non-academic staff stated that:

Cyberbullying in my institution is a growing concern. Many students use social media platforms to spread rumors or ridicule others. The problem often goes unnoticed because it mostly happens outside of the classroom, on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. (A male, non-academic staff of FUGA, 2025).

However, a male academic staff at YSU stated the following:

I do not think cyberbullying is something that is widely talked about in my school, but it definitely happens. It is not always in the form of outright bullying but more subtle, like exclusion or embarrassing someone in a private message or on a public post. The fact that it can go unreported makes it harder to tackle. (A male academic staff at YSU, 2025).

The above findings resonate with National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's (2010), who pointed out that bullying is a serious problem for it is a common occurrence. About one-third of students report being victimised by some form of bullying during the school year.

**Table 1.3: Platforms Commonly used for Cyberbullying**

S/N	Platforms Commonly used for Cyberbullying	Yes	No
a.	Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram)	116 (82.3%)	25 (17.7%)
b.	Messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram)	95 (67.4%)	46 (32.6%)
c.	Online forums and comment sections	50 (35.5%)	91 (64.5%)
d.	Email	35 (24.8%)	106 (75.8%)
e.	Other (please specify)	18 (12.8%)	123 (87.2%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above table shows the platforms used for cyberbullying. It shows that social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are the most common, with 82.3% of respondents affirming their use for cyberbullying activities. Messaging apps, including WhatsApp and Telegram, are also prevalent, being used by 67.4% of respondents for such purposes. Online forums and comment sections are used by 35.5%, while email is a less common medium, used by only 24.8%. A smaller group (12.8%) mentioned other platforms. In agreement with the above data, US Department of Health and Human Services (2012) also stated that cyberbullying is a recent development, in which Internet, cell phones and smartphones, and other digital technologies are used to bully others (e.g., rumors can be spread via Facebook).

**Table 1.4: Most Vulnerable Groups to Cyberbullying in Tertiary Institutions**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Fresh students	41	29.1
2	International students	17	12.1
3	Students with disabilities	12	8.5
4	Male students	24	17.0
5	Female students	31	22.0
6	All students equally	16	11.3
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.4 presents the vulnerability to cyberbullying across different student groups. Freshm students are identified as the most vulnerable group, with 29.1% of respondents indicating they are most affected. Female students (22.0%) and male students (17.0%) also face considerable challenges. International students (12.1%) and students with disabilities (8.5%) are less frequently identified as targets of cyberbullying. However, a notable 11.3% of respondents feel that all students are equally vulnerable to cyberbullying. According to a female student:

As a student who has been in the institution for a while, I can say that cyberbullying is something that affects everyone, but it is most common among younger students, like fresh students. They are still trying to fit in, and social media often becomes a platform for others to take advantage of them. Girls also experience it... (A female student at YSU, 2015).

In summary, cyberbullying is prevalent in Yobe State's tertiary institutions, with social media and messaging platforms being the primary channels for such behavior.

### Section C: Effect of Cyberbullying on Victims in the Study Area

The data in this section explores the effects of cyberbullying on victims in tertiary institutions.

**Table 1.5: How Cyberbullying Affects Victims' Mental Health**

S/N	Effects of Cyberbullying on Victims' Mental Health	Yes	No
a.	Anxiety	102 (72.3%)	39 (27.7%)
b.	Depression	88 (62.4%)	53 (37.6%)
c.	Low self-esteem	95 (67.4%)	46 (32.6%)
d.	Suicidal thoughts	38 (27.0%)	103 (73.0%)
e.	Other	20 (14.2%)	121 (85.8%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Regarding mental health, Table 1.5 shows that cyberbullying has a significant impact on victims' psychological well-being. A large majority, 72.3%, reported experiencing anxiety as a result of cyberbullying, while 62.4% indicated they suffered from depression. Additionally, 67.4% of respondents noted that victims of cyberbullying experience low self-esteem. However, while 27% of victims reported having suicidal thoughts, a much larger percentage, 73%, did not experience such extreme emotional distress. A smaller proportion, 14.2%, mentioned other mental health effects, though most (85.8%) did not report any further effects. In an IDI with a female student at YSU, she stated that:

Cyberbullying has made some of my friends feel so low about themselves. I know of one girl who stopped coming to class because of the constant online harassment. It affects her self-esteem; she is mentally exhausted. It is clear that the emotional effects trickle into their academic life as well. (IDI with female student at YSU, 2025).

Similarly, a male academic staff of YSU stated that:

From my experience, students who are victims of cyberbullying often struggle with their mental health, which, in turn, affects their academic performance. Some students may not speak openly about their challenges, but it is evident when their grades drop or they start avoiding class. It is important that we, as educators, offer more support and create an environment where students feel comfortable talking about these issues. (IDI with male academic staff at YSU, Damaturu, 2025).

Also, in IDI with male student at FCE Potiskum, he gave the following remark:

When I see students getting bullied online, I feel like it affects their entire outlook on life, not just their academics. It drains their energy, and sometimes they do not even want to come to school. I know of a few students who used to be very active, but after a series of online attacks, they started failing courses and distancing themselves from everyone. It is hard to watch. (IDI with male student at FCE Potiskum, 2025).

The foregoing findings are in concord with the finding of Adams & Lawrence (2011), Owolabi (2020) and Dada (2020), who reported that bullying can have serious consequences, because students who are bullied often experience psychological problems that can last into adulthood. These problems include anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleeplessness, and suicidal thoughts. Their physical health may also suffer. In fact victims can even die.

**Table 1.6: Whether Cyberbullying Impacts Victims' Academic Performance**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	98	69.5
2.	No	28	19.9
3.	Unsure	15	10.6
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the above data, cyberbullying appears to negatively affect academic performance, with 69.5% of respondents confirming that it impacts victims' studies. A smaller group, 19.9%, did not observe any effect on academic performance, and 10.6% were unsure. A male student said:

I have seen a few friends struggle with their studies after being cyberbullied. It affects their concentration in class. They are constantly worried about what people are saying about them. Some of them even became less social and started isolating themselves. It impacts their academic performance. (IDI with male student at FUGA, 2025).

According to a female nonacademic staff at FUGA:

I have noticed that some of the students who get bullied online tend to avoiding group activities. It seems like it is taking a toll on them emotionally. A lot of them feel ashamed or afraid to speak up, so they quietly withdraw. This affects their participation in daily activities, including academic work (IDI with female nonacademic staff at FUGA, 2025).

In line with the above findings, Adams & Lawrence (2011) observed that bullying victims have decline in school performance (grades, attendance, and participation in school activities).

**Table 1.7: How Likely the Victims Report Cyberbullying Incidents**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very likely	22	15.6
2	Somewhat likely	47	33.3
3	Not very likely	51	36.2
4	Not at all likely	21	14.9
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.7 shows the likelihood that victims report cyberbullying incidents. It shows that the likelihood of victims speaking up is not very high. Only 15.6% of respondents felt that victims are "very likely" to report incidents, while 33.3% said they are "somewhat likely" to do so. A larger proportion, 36.2%, stated that victims are "not very likely" to report, and 14.9% believed they are "not at all likely" to report. Chinwe (2018) also found that most victims in tertiary institutions in Nigeria do not report the case of cyberbullying to authorities.

**Table 1.8: Whether Cyberbullying Lead to Physical Harm or Violence**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	102	72.5
2.	No	39	27.5
3.	Unsure	0	0.0
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above data indicates that cyberbullying can lead to physical harm or violence. 72.5% of respondents reported that victims may experience physical harm or violence as a consequence of cyberbullying, while 27.5% disagreed. Notably, no respondents were unsure about this outcome. This finding corroborates Adams & Lawrence’s (2011) finding, who reported that bullying victims sometimes respond by lashing out in violence; many of the mass school shootings of the 1990s were committed by male students who had been bullied.

**Table 1.9: Kind of Support Systems Needed by Victims of Cyberbullying**

S/N	Support Systems Needed by Victims	Yes	No
a.	Counseling services	112 (79.4%)	29 (20.6%)
b.	Peer support groups	85 (60.3%)	56 (39.7%)
c.	Institutional protection	101 (71.6%)	40 (28.4%)
d.	Family support	96 (68.1%)	45 (31.9%)
e.	Other (please specify)	18 (12.8%)	123 (87.8%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above table showed that victims of cyberbullying require various forms of support. The data reveals a strong need for counseling services, with 79.4% of respondents agreeing that this would be beneficial. Peer support groups (60.3%), institutional protection (71.6%), and family support (68.1%) were also highlighted as essential forms of support. Only a small portion (12.8%) mentioned other forms of assistance, with the majority (87.8%) not specifying additional support types. According to a male non-academic staff at FUGA:

I think the institution should provide more counseling services to help these students cope. This is because, I worked closely with students and I have seen the effects of cyberbullying firsthand. Some of the students who have been targeted seem to have lost their confidence. They struggle with even the simplest tasks like group discussions or completing assignments. It is heartbreaking because they are so affected by the negative things said about them online. (IDI with male non-academic staff at FUGA, 2025).

In a nutshell, cyberbullying has severe consequences for victims in Yobe State’s tertiary institutions, particularly in terms of mental health and academic performance. Despite these impacts, victims are unlikely to report incidents. Additionally, the risk of physical harm associated with cyberbullying further emphasises the urgency of tackling this issue.

**Section D: Prevention Measures against Cyberbullying**

This section deals with prevention strategies against cyber-bullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State.

**Table 1.10: Whether Respondents’ Institution Implemented Policies against Cyberbullying**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	61	43.3
2.	No	59	41.8
3.	Unsure	21	14.9
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.110 presents the institutional policies against cyberbullying in Yobe State tertiary institutions. The data shows that only 43.3% of respondents confirmed that their institutions have implemented policies against cyberbullying. A nearly equal proportion, 41.8%, reported that no such policies exist, and 14.9% were unsure. An IDI respondent,

male student stated that:

I believe the university should implement stricter policies to deal with cyberbullying. It is not enough just to talk about it in seminars. We need clear consequences for those who engage in online harassment. If there were more strict rules in place and real actions taken when incidents are reported, it might help discourage others from doing the same. (An IDI with male student at FUGA, 2025).

**Table 1.11: The Measures Institutions can take to Prevent Cyberbullying**

S/N	Measures	Yes	No
a.	Implementing anti-cyberbullying policies	107 (75.9%)	34 (24.1%)
b.	Conducting awareness campaigns	103 (73.0%)	38 (27.0%)
c.	Providing counseling services	96 (68.1%)	45 (31.9%)
d.	Monitoring online activities	85 (60.3%)	56 (39.7%)
e.	Other (please specify)	23 (16.3%)	118 (83.7%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table presents the preventative measures that institutions can take against cyberbullying. From the data, a majority of respondents supported several strategies. Implementing anti-cyberbullying policies was the most favored, with 75.9% in agreement. Conducting awareness campaigns (73.0%), providing counseling services (68.1%), and monitoring online activities (60.3%) were also deemed important. A smaller proportion (16.3%) mentioned other measures, but most (83.7%) did not suggest any alternatives, indicating a preference for the aforementioned strategies. A male nonacademic staff at FUGA stated that:

Monitoring online activities is an important preventive measure. I have observed that many bullying incidents start from comments or posts made online. The institution could help by monitoring social media platforms or providing software that can help track harmful activity, but of course, this should be done while respecting privacy. If the university actively prevents harmful behavior from spreading online, it could significantly reduce cyberbullying. (A male, non-academic staff at FUGA, 2025).

Urbina (2009) also found that to reduce school violence and bullying, many school districts have adopted strict policies that specify harsh punishments. Some institutions in the United States have a common institutional policy involving zero-tolerance for weapons, a type of policy that calls for automatic suspension or expulsion of a student who has anything resembling a weapon for any reason.

**Table 1.12: The Effectiveness of Reporting Mechanisms for Cyberbullying Incidents**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very effective	29	20.6
2	Somewhat effective	59	41.8
3	Not very effective	42	29.8
4	Not at all effective	11	7.8
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.12 presents the effectiveness of current reporting mechanisms for cyberbullying. The results show mixed responses as only 20.6% of respondents viewed these mechanisms as “very effective,” while 41.8% considered them “somewhat effective.” A significant portion, 29.8%, found them “not very effective,” and 7.8% felt they were “not at all effective.” A male academic staff at YSU, Damaturu, stated that:

In my view, the institution should provide better channels for reporting cyberbullying

incidents. The current mechanisms seem ineffective, and many students are afraid to report due to lack of trust in how the matter will be handled. We need a transparent and effective reporting system and possibly even a designated office where students can go for support. (IDI with male academic staff, 2025).

**Table 1.13: Whether Education and Awareness Programmes Reduce Cyberbullying**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	114	80.9
2.	No	18	12.7
3.	Unsure	09	6.4
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.13 is a data about the importance of education and awareness programmes, whereby 80.9% of respondents believe that such programmes can reduce cyberbullying. However, 12.7% disagreed, and 6.4% were unsure. In line with the above, a male academic staff stated that:

I think awareness campaigns are really important. A lot of students do not even realise how serious cyberbullying can be. If the university organised more workshops or campaigns to educate students about the impact of cyberbullying, I think it would make a difference. It would also help create a culture where students feel they can report bullying without fear (IDI with a male academic staff, 2025).

**Table 1.14: The Role Parents and Guardians Can Play in Preventing Cyberbullying**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Monitoring online activities	31	22.0
2	Educating children on online safety	24	17.0
3	Encouraging open communication	20	14.2
4	All of the above	66	46.8
	Total	141	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above data shows the role of parents and guardians in preventing cyberbullying. From the table, the majority of respondents (46.8%) believe that parents should engage in all the listed activities, including monitoring online activities, educating children on online safety, and encouraging open communication. Smaller groups supported individual actions, such as monitoring online activities (22.0%), educating children on safety (17.0%), or encouraging communication (14.2%). In line with the above finding, a female nonacademic staff at FUGA mentioned that:

The role of parents in preventing cyberbullying is crucial. It is important that parents not only monitor their children's online activity but also talk to them about the risks they face. I have seen students in my care who clearly lack guidance at home, and they often become easy targets for cyberbullying. Parents and guardians need to be more involved in educating their children on responsible online behavior. (IDI with female nonacademic staff, 2025).

**Table 1.15: Institutions to Collaborate with Law Enforcement to Address Cyberbullying**

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	111	72.5
2.	No	19	27.5
3.	Unsure	11	7.8

	Total	141	100
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Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1.15 is the final one and the data indicates strong support for collaboration between institutions and law enforcement in addressing cyberbullying. A significant 72.5% of respondents agreed that such collaboration is necessary, while 27.5% disagreed, and 7.8% were unsure. A female student at YSU, Damaturu also mentioned that:

I think it is critical for the school to collaborate with law enforcement. When incidents of cyberbullying are severe, they sometimes escalate to threats of violence or personal harm. Having law enforcement involved would make students take it more seriously, and knowing that there are legal consequences might deter bullies. (An IDI with a female student at YSU, Damaturu, 2025).

In line with the above quantitative and qualitative data, FAO (2021) recommended security of private information and other safety issues due to cybercrime, identity theft and cyberbullying. This also vindicated the theory adopted (CDA). CDA can inform educational programmes that address the harmful use of language and promote digital ethics.

## 5.0 Conclusion

This study assessed the impact of cyberbullying in tertiary institutions in Yobe State. The findings indicate that cyberbullying is a significant issue, with a notable proportion of students reporting either personal experiences or witnessing such behaviors, particularly among freshmen, female students, and those engaging on social media platforms. The study also underscores the significant role that social media, messaging apps, and online forums play in facilitating cyberbullying, which often goes unreported due to a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms and fear of retaliation. The mental health effects of cyberbullying are alarming. A large number of victims experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Academic performance is also heavily affected, with victims struggling to concentrate and engage in their studies due to the emotional toll. This not only impacts the individual victims but also the broader academic environment, potentially diminishing the overall educational experience for all students.

Despite the clear negative consequences of cyberbullying, the study reveals a low likelihood of victims reporting incidents, primarily due to ineffective reporting systems and a lack of faith in institutional response. Furthermore, the study finds a pressing need for stronger institutional policies to address cyberbullying, with many respondents calling for more concrete actions, such as stricter rules, transparent reporting mechanisms, and proactive monitoring of online activities. In response to these challenges, the study identifies several key prevention strategies. There is strong support for implementing and enforcing anti-cyberbullying policies, conducting awareness campaigns, and offering counseling services. The importance of parental involvement is also emphasized. Many students lack proper guidance at home and thus become easy targets. Thus, the role of law enforcement in reducing the cases of cyberbullying is crucial for ensuring the safety and security of students.

## 5.2 Recommendations

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

1. Firstly, tertiary institutions should adopt and enforce anti-cyberbullying policies, outlining the consequences for engaging in such behavior.
2. Awareness programmes and workshops should be regularly conducted to educate students and staff about the detrimental effects of cyberbullying and how to recognise and prevent it.

3. Institutions should develop confidential and accessible reporting systems that allow students to report cyberbullying incidents easily.
4. There is need for provision of counseling services for students who have been affected by cyberbullying, like proactive mental health education to help students cope with emotional challenges.
5. Institutions should engage parents and guardians in efforts to prevent cyberbullying. Parents can educate the youngsters, monitoring online activity, and providing emotional support.
6. Faculty and non-academic staff should receive training on identifying signs of cyberbullying, offering support to affected students, and handling reports of cyberbullying appropriately.
7. Institutions should partner with law enforcement agencies to handle serious cases of cyberbullying that involve threats of violence, harassment, or criminal activity.

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