

# Dilemma Of Classroom Adjustment Among Children With Albinism (Cwa) In Selected Secondary Schools In Imo State

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**Abstract:** *Albinism is a heritable condition where an individual has deficiency in the gene that produces melanin – the skin colouring pigment that shields the skin from direct, harmful rays of the sun. However, some harmful and unfounded cultural philosophies against children with albinism (CWA) in Nigeria, have made them suffer labelling and prejudice, thereby affecting their adjustment in school. This study investigated the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism (CWA) in selected secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the conduct of the study. The population comprised all secondary school students from the randomly selected schools in Imo State, Nigeria. A sample of 202 students was drawn for the study. Simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting five schools each from the three political zones, then purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting children with albinism (CWA) in the schools. Data were analyzed with mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (Sd), for the research questions; while hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level. Findings indicated that the challenges of classroom adjustment of CWA do not significantly differ with respect to gender and class level. On the basis of the findings, it was recommended among others that those superstitious beliefs and practices that jeopardize the existence of CWA should be abolished by the Government and religious groups and anyone found perpetrating such belief should be dealt with.*

**Keywords:** Albinism, Children with albinism, Melanin, Classroom Adjustment

## Background

In most parts of our world including Nigeria, people find it hard to understand what albinism is. For this reason, this condition has for years been surrounded by several unfounded myths and mistaken beliefs. It becomes even more composite and further amplified in parts of Nigeria principally because the fair skin of persons with albinism so significantly contrasts with others within the same community where members are predominantly black in complexion. In some parts of Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries, this condition is traditionally perceived to be something that portends evil, a curse, or some form of punishment arising due to offence one committed against the gods of the land; or retaliation from the ancestors for something wrong done by one's parents. Some people would still believe that something was wrong with the woman who gave birth to a child with albinism (CWA). She will either be blamed for having sexual intercourse with a white man or she will be said to have given birth while menstruating. For this reason, in most parts of Nigeria, children with albinism (CWA) have been regularly killed immediately they are given birth to. Several falsehoods about albinism continue to abound in many parts of Nigeria.

In some parts too, this stereotype which albinism is associated with, toggles between fear and adoration (Kromberg, 1992). For some persons therefore, an albino is positively perceived and revered as possessing some mystical powers. For others, they are seen as witches and harbingers of evil omen. For a very long period of time, the challenges of living with albinism in Africa have been in existence, with the risk growing even deeper and having a longer history so that what came into world view showed only the lean of the sufferings of people living with albinism in Africa (Nyamu, 2014). The dilemma of neither being outwardly black enough nor inwardly white enough confronts albinos with the implicit difficulty of belonging- whether they are Africans or whites (Machoko, 2013). In addition, the confusing personality implies an ambivalent view about them by society which now looks at them with fear, while some people at the same time value them because of their purported spiritual and economic powers, as well as their assumed potential immortality (Olagunju 2012). There are both internal and external pressures for albinos to surmount this distinction brought about by their colour, and this attempt often leads to a great feeling of confusion and anxiety for these albino students repeatedly struggling to make the most use of their sight.

Superstitious beliefs regarding children with albinism (CWA) predominantly revolve around their exceptionally pale looks and not really their race. Classifying them as either whites or blacks, or even African-American, does not provide adequate protection for them. As a group, they defy racial identification, thereby suggesting the need to propose a new kind of colour (Scott, 1999). This argument, in the words of Scott, will generate more confusion. They are white or African, but what differentiates them is the biological makeup that causes absence of pigmentation, and which has effect on their appearance. As a result of the foregoing argument, there seems to be a difficulty in trying to categorize albinism as a disability. This is because neither the society nor the albinos themselves are of the opinion as to whether albinism can be termed a disability or not. In view of this, Dlamini (2015) concluded that albinism is indeed a condition that is unique in a variety of ways. At first contact with an

albinistic person, attention is quickly drawn to the person's extraordinary looks. The unusual appearance, such as excessive brightness of hair and skin, especially of persons with oculocutaneous albinism is very striking even right from birth. The colour of the newborn often becomes very much lighter than that of other members in the family and this often turns to be a source of worry, especially among blacks and nonwhites, as it stands in sharp disparity to the colour of other family members (Waugh, 2004). This may lead to early childhood taunting and name-calling by strangers who will often pass hurtful and callous comments about the child's appearance.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Albino/Albinism**

The concept 'albino' is an expression that often generally describes both the individual and the circumstance. For that reason, using the term 'Albino' may insinuate equating the person with the condition, which is against global attempts at advancing human dignity and worth of every individual (UTSS, n.d). The expression is considered to be offensive and belittling to the victims of albinism, that is why a preferable or likely dispassionate term for them is 'Children with albinism (CWA)'; placing the child ahead of the condition, rather than calling them albinos which is derogatory.

Principally, albinism is a genetic disability present at birth. Many types of albinism exist, all of which involve lack of pigment in varying degrees. The condition, which is found in all races, may be accompanied by eye problems and may lead to skin cancer later in life. It is a genetic disorder that is not contagious and cannot be spread via body contact, blood transfusion, etc. The main gene that gives rise to albinism prevents the body from developing the usual quantity of the pigment known as "melanin". The effect of the condition is a lack of pigmentation in the hair, skin and eyes, making the victim vulnerable to sun burn and bright light. Virtually all albinos have visual impairment, with most of them being classified as being legally blind (Under the same sun, UTSS, n.d.).

Albinism, according to UNICEF Report (2011), is as a set of inherited abnormalities of melanin synthesis characterized by congenital decline or deficiency of melanin pigmentation (the body's inability to generate melanin, a photo-protective dark pigment which shields skin tissues from ultraviolet radiation (UVR) which can be attributed to the faulty production of the enzyme called tyrosinase. It is prevalent in virtually all societies – Africans, Asians, Caucasians, Indians, Aborigines, etc. The initial symptom of albinism that is imminent in children is the unconscious regular oscillation of the eyes and it is known as Nystagmus. It can come about in various forms resulting to reduction in vision from the rhythmic movement. The overall outcome is that albinistic children who have been diagnosed of this problem often tilt their heads or eyes wherever they can get their best vision. This is called the null position ([www.healthline.com](http://www.healthline.com) and [www.tsbvi.edu/seehear/winter99/albinism.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/seehear/winter99/albinism.htm), n.d).

Most of the times, diagnosis of albinism is based on careful history of pigment development and an examination of the hair, eyes and skin. However, Kivi and Solan, (2015) noted that the most accurate way to diagnose and detect defective genes that are related to albinism is through genetic testing. Another way, but less accurate according to them, include evaluating symptoms by a medical personnel or through an electroretinogram test. Through this test, the response of the cells in the eyes to light reveals eye problems associated with albinism is detected. Nwaozor (2015) also agreed that genetic test is a more correct test to determine the exact albinism; however the test is only of value for families with persons who have albinism. Therefore it may not necessarily be practically carried out for the public.

Albino is therefore a term used to describe an organism that lacks the pigment called melanin. In humans, it refers to the person who from birth, lacks the pigment that usually colours the skin, hair, and eyes, a human being who has inherited certain form of bodily (especially skin, eyes, and hair) disability from parents resulting in eye oscillation, excessive yellowish skin and hair colour, oversensitivity to sunlight and easily prone to sunburn. Albinism is transferred from parents to the child by distorted genes that do not produce adequate pigment to the eyes, hair and skin. As a result, albinos become very sensitive to the rays of sunlight, making their sight impaired. It is often easy to identify albinos because of their significant whitish look that strikingly differs from people of similar descent.

### **Melanin**

Melanin is an active absorber of light; a pigment that has the capacity to disperse more than 99.9% of absorbed Ultraviolet radiation ([Realhistoryww.com](http://Realhistoryww.com),n.d). As a result of this, it is thought that melanin shields the skin cells from damages arising from sunburn, thereby lowering the possibility of skin cancer. Melanin is the main determinant of colour of skin in humans. It is equally seen in hair, the stria vascularis of the inner ear and the coloured tissue that underlies the iris of the eye (Dunne, 2015). Melanin naturally colours the skin, hair, and the iris. It is of three main kinds which include; Eumelanin, Neuromelanin and Pheomelanin. However, Eumelanin is the largely common type and it is of two types; Brown and Black Eumelanin. It is in the

brain that Neuromelanin is located, although its function is surrounded with obscurity. Pheomelanin on the other hand is a cysteine which contains red polymer of benzothiazine units which, among other pigmentation, mainly accounts for red hair. The skin melanin is formed by melanocytes that are located in the epidermis' basal layer. Though humans in general have in their skin, a similar concentration of melanocytes, but the melanocytes in some persons and races produce quantity of melanin that is variable. In the bodies of some individuals, they either have no melanin, or an extremely small melanin synthesis. This situation is identified as albinism (Realhistoryww.com,n.d).

### **Albinism, Labeling and the Dilemma of Classroom Adjustment**

In the classroom or school in general, children with albinism (CWA) are constantly confronted with countless forms of discrimination and labelling among their peers, from teachers, and society in general. They are taunted, derided and jeered at; and this has very high negative impact on their classroom and overall school adjustment. The bodily looks of these children with albinism (CWA) usually elicit mistaken ideas which continue to promote stigmatisation and social segregation of children with albinism (CWA) in school. Wrong ideas and superstitious beliefs about albinism greatly endanger their lives and overall existence. Teachers and fellow students make caricature of them and disregard them. Apart from color, a child with albinism may experience rapidly moving eyes. All these put together, make such a child to often feel segregated and depressed, both in appearance and social conduct. Still, this perception of being different may bring about a struggling by children-albinos to behave and live as normally as they can. There are both internal and external pressures for them to surmount this distinction brought about by their colour, and this attempt may lead to a great feeling of confusion and anxiety for someone repeatedly struggling to make the most use of their sight while in school. A consequence of this is psychological denial, where these individuals with albinism may completely deny their state and lose contact with very significant aspect of themselves (UNICEF Report, 2011).

Kagore and Lund (2005), noted that different social, economic and political formation across various societies, make up the structural and institutional discrimination bringing about barriers on these persons with albinism, thereby having an effect on their psycho-social life. There are structural and institutional discrimination according to Pincus, (1994) which are situated in the policies and laws of government, social institutions such as marriage and religion, and the private sector. Also, for many persons, the distinctiveness in the appearance of children with albinism, leads to segregation and *separateness*. The United Nations General Assembly (2015) noted that further analysis and consultations are required to determine the category into which children with albinism may fall and the basis for discrimination against them. According to the Assembly, for a number of documented reports from some organizations that work with albinistic persons, they are regarded as people that are disabled. For others, discrimination is seen on the basis of skin colour.

But for Lund, as cited in Mutasa (2013), categorizing Oculocutaneous albinism (OCA) as a disability is something arguable. Kagore and Lund, (2005) averred that the physical looks of children with albinism (CWA) who have oculocutaneous albinism have apparently generated obvious discrimination and stigma. But on the contrary, these children, just like any other human being, can live functional lives and so should be allowed freedom of existence.

In the classroom, the condition seems worse because children with Oculocutaneous albinism are outstandingly different in appearance as against the black pigmented population of other students among which they live ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). In view of this, it is apparent that the stigmatisation of albinos takes place at institutional and structural levels and this ambiguous scenario has generated a problem when one wants to talk about albinism. However, in addition to the attempt towards projecting a self image that is more acceptable, some CWA, through some agencies that fight stigmatisation, negotiate for a better placement and so they often refuse to conform, (Nyam, 2014). This uncertainty tends to have generated a problem especially when trying to discuss albinism and issues surrounding it. Even more problematic is the fact that this situation makes self identity and social placement somewhat complicated for these children with albinism (CWA).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Albinism is a health condition which has over the years been surrounded with lots of false explanations and beliefs as to what it is. This has given rise to several harmful, horrific and horrendous treatments meted out to persons living with albinism, but more particularly children with albinism (CWA) in schools. Sometimes, deliberate attempts are made even by parents and family members not to send their albinistic child to school. The belief is that sending such a child to school is a waste. Even those that their parents eventually send to school, suffer a lot of stigmatisation in school. Teachers and fellow students ridicule and make mockery of them. They are given different names and they are very poorly educated, particularly due to the fact that facilities are not put in place to cater for their poor sight. There is increasing tendency that educational exclusion may occur among children with albinism. These psychosocial tortures of albinos are more deeply rooted and pose great danger to their existence, particularly their education. They also appear not so well known and therefore are undermined. In view of this, the problem of this study is to find out the problem of classroom adjustment among children with albinism (CWA) in selected secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Aim and Objectives of the study**

This study aims at determining the problem of classroom adjustment among children with albinism (CWA) in selected secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Examine the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism based on gender.
2. Find out the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism based on class level.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism differ based on gender?
2. To what extent do the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism differ based on class level?

**Hypotheses**

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism with respect to gender.
2. Challenges of children with albinism do not significantly differ with respect to class level.

**Methodology**

This study was a descriptive survey. The population comprised all secondary school students in Imo State, Nigeria. A sample of 202 students was drawn for the study. The simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting five schools each from the three political zones of the State, then purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting children with albinism (CWA). The data were collected with a structured instrument by the researcher titled ‘Albino Classroom Challenge Questionnaire (ACCQ)’. It comprised 20 items on the possible classroom challenges of children with albinism (CWA). It was a four-point likert instrument with response options of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE).

A decisive mean score of 2.5 was adopted for taking decision. Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviation (Sd), were used for the research questions; and hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism with respect to gender.

**Table 1:** z-test analysis of the responses of students on anxiety disorder based on gender

Students' Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Alpha level	Decision
Male	100	2.78	0.98				0.05	
				198	0.34	1.960		Not Significant
Female	102	2.84	1.09					

The z-test analysis of the mean for the students based on gender as a factor of the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism revealed that the z-cal is 0.34 and it is less than the z-crit which is 1.960. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism with respect to gender is upheld and the alternate rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism with respect to gender.

**Hypothesis Two:** Challenges of children with albinism do not significantly differ with respect to class level.

Class Level	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Alpha level	Decision
Senior	100	2.70	1.06				0.05	
Junior	102	2.82	1.07	198	0.73	1.960		Not Significant

From the z-test analysis of the mean for senior and junior students on challenges of children with albinism with respect to class level, it was seen that the calculated z of 0.73 is less than the crit z of 1.960. Therefore, the null hypothesis that Challenges of children with albinism do not significantly differ with respect to class level is accepted, while the alternate is rejected. Therefore, Challenges of children with albinism do not significantly differ with respect to class level.

### Summary of the findings

The results of the study are summarised as follows:

1. There is no significant difference in the challenges of classroom adjustment among male and female children with albinism.
2. There is no significant difference in the challenges of classroom adjustment among children with albinism with respect to class level.

### Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Those superstitious beliefs and practices that jeopardize the existence of CWA should be abolished by the Government and religious groups. Anyone found perpetrating such belief should be dealt with.
2. Schools should organize constant programme and activities that are aimed at educating teachers and students on the actual meaning of albinism.
3. Special provision should be made by the Government to cater for children with albinism who may find it difficult to adjust in the regular classroom.

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