Investigating Interpersonal Conflict as Predictor of Psychological Adjustment among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria

Umar Jirah Fwafu

fwafuumarjirah@gmail.com
Department of Guidance and Counselling
Taraba State University, Jalingo

Aminu Sani, Ph.D

alamintsujalingo@gmail.com
Department of Educational Foundations
Taraba State University, Jalingo

Jatau Seikhan Nathan

seikfree@gmail.com
Department of Social Studies
College of Education, Zing
Taraba State

Frank Patience Olivia

ozysacct@gmail.com
Department of Social Science Education
Taraba State University, Jalingo

Abstract

This study examined interpersonal conflict as predictor of psychological adjustment among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State. The researchers formulated three research objectives and three research questions to guide the study. The study adopted the correlational research design. The population of the study was 56,080 students in 10 tertiary institutions in Taraba State. 382 respondents were sampled from 4 tertiary institutions. The instruments used for the study were Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (ICQ) and Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ). The data collated were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The result revealed that there is a significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression, stress and self-esteem among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. It was

therefore, recommended that counsellors should work in conjunction with the school management through workshops and seminars to sensitize students on the need to adjust to interpersonal conflict whenever it arises so as to avoid depression, stressful experiences and low self-esteem among them in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.
Keywords: interpersonal, conflict, predictor, psychological, adjustment

Introduction

The transition from high school to tertiary institution of learning is a major life change for many youth. Attending tertiary institution of learning offers students with learning experiences and opportunities for psychological development (Salami, 2011). However, entering the institution of higher learning may be a source of strain and an acute stressor. Because at the colleges and universities, academic demands increase and new social relations are established. However, students are often not sure of their abilities to cope with these demands (Dwyer & Cummings, 2019). Most students are bound to move away from home to attend higher institutions of learning. Such transition to higher institutions or colleges usually reduces contact and social support from friends and family members. Difficulties in handling the stressors/challenges associated with the transition may lead to conflict and increased psychological distress.

The term conflict has been used in different ways, referring to different forms of and places where conflict occurs (at home, in organizations, and on battlefields). Scholars also agree that the term conflict is synonymous with individual/group disagreements, disputes, quarrels, physical fights and confrontations (Salleh & Adulpakdee, 2012; Olu & Abosede, 2013; Shahmohammadi, 2014). According to Bazezew and Mulugeta (2017), the term 'conflict' has been used in different ways, referring to different forms of conflict (racial, ethnic, religious, political and gender), types of conflict (within an individual, between individuals, within a group and between groups) and places where conflict occurs (at home, in organizations, and on battlefields). Scholars agree that the term 'conflict' is synonymous with individual/group disagreements, disputes, quarrels, physical fights and confrontations (Salleh & Adulpakdee, 2012; Olu & Shahmohammadi, 2014). One of the most striking characteristics of human beings is the diversities. Different ways of being, thinking and existing, different needs, world views, ethical positions mark the relationships between people. In this sense, interpersonal conflicts are understood as tension that involves different interests or positions, are inherent to human relationships, and are present in various social organizations, among them, the school. However, interpersonal

conflict which involves differences arising from disagreements between individuals is the core of this study.

Interpersonal conflict is conflict that occurs between two or more individuals that work together in groups or teams (Williams, 2014). This is a conflict that occurs between two or more individuals. Many individual differences lead to interpersonal conflict, including personalities, culture, attitudes, values, perceptions, and the other differences. According to Bazezew and Mulugeta (2017), money/materials, psychological problems, political motivations, religion-related issues, sexual abuse, theft, alcoholism, ethnicity difference and interferences/intrusions were some of the major sources of interpersonal conflict among students at Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia. The result further informed that ethnic-based federal and political systems contributed to students' misconceived ethnic and political orientation, which resulted in ethnic conflict that affected the interpersonal relations among students in the university. Similarly, Abbas (2014) opined that since students with different needs, interests, goals, aims, beliefs, values, cultural identities, thoughts, attitudes, ethnic and religious origins, share the same classroom, playground, cafeteria, libraries, and lunchroom at the same time, it is obvious that conflicts between or among them are natural and unavoidable. However, the perception and association of conflicts are generally negative rather than positive. For instance, Abbas (2014) reported that not only adults but also children respond negatively to interpersonal conflicts.

The term adjustment means how the individual functions effectively in the society. It refers to sound relationship between the person and the environment. Adjustment is defined as a process where one behaves in a manner to attain the state of equilibrium and harmony with oneself, others and environment. A well-adjusted person play his roles well which are expected from him in a social context and satisfies his needs. If he fails to fulfill his needs and if his behaviour deviates from the norms, then he may get disturbed which leads to maladjustment. Severe deviation from norms is also called abnormal behaviour (Gill, 2014). Adjustment can be viewed from two perspectives: adjustment as an achievement and adjustment as a process. As an achievement, adjustment means how efficiently a person performs his duties in different situations. Adjustment as a process focuses on developmental changes in an individual psychologically and socially from birth. From the early age, the child depends on his parents for fulfilling of his needs. Slowly with growth and development, a child learns to interact and adjust with the external environment. Adjustment is a continual process by which a person varies his/her behaviour to produce a more harmonious relationship between himself/herself and his/her environment (Okorodudu, 2014). It implies changes in thinking and way of life to the demands of the

situation. Based on the above definitions, adjustment could be seen as a condition or state in which one feels that one's needs have been (or will be) fulfilled and one's behaviours conform to the needs of a given environment.

Psychologists' focus on psychological adjustment of humans is found to influence humans' activities at all levels of their life in such a way that it causes different implications to the way they would behave or react with the motives in their surroundings (Mahmood & Iqbal, 2015). Psychological adjustment refers to consistency in internal operations that have to do with the thought process, emotions, skills, abilities, sense of moral and the likes. Psychological adjustment is interpreted as a continuous dynamic process that is acted and practiced by the individual to change his behaviour in order to enable him to adjust with himself and with others in the surrounding environment (Mahjob, 2020). Further, Sari (2016) explains that psychological adjustment consists of four aspects: personal, social, emotional, and family, while Zahran (2017) finds out that psychological adjustment consists of only three, they are personal, social, and emotional aspects of the individual's personality. However, the indices of psychological adjustment considered in this study include depression, stress and self-esteem of tertiary institution students in Taraba State.

Depression is a psychological mood that can interfere with one's work, sleep, concentration, memory and ability to feel interest or pleasure in activities such as eating or sex. American Psychiatric Association (2013) stated that depression is characterized by distinct episodes of loss of interest, disturbance in appetite and sleep, suicidal thinking, poor concentration, worthlessness and psychomotor agitation. According to Laurenz et al. (2014), interpersonal conflict at school or work place has been linked to various indicators of well-being, such as depressive symptoms, job satisfaction and somatic symptoms. In similar vein, Cui et al. (2022) estimated the prevalence of depression among higher education students in Nigeria and found that depression among higher education students in Nigeria is highly prevalent. A significant proportion of higher education students in Nigeria are depressed and the factors contributing to the high depression prevalence, particularly among higher education students in the Northwestern region of Nigeria could include conflict of perception, values, cultural or ethno-religious discrepancies.

Stress is the body's reaction to changes that requires physical, mental, or physiological adjustment. Stress has been reported to affect psychological and physical health of students (Dwyer & Cummings, 2019). Sisk (2007) sees stress as a state of strain, tension or pressure

and it is a normal reaction resulting from the conflicting interaction between the individual and the environment like tertiary institutions. This is similar to the position of Bazezew and Mulugeta (2017) who explained that the main cause of stress among students in the dormitory was interpersonal conflict. Students who are highly ethno-centric reject others' religion, culture or ethnic groups because they considered them as contemptible and inferior; others according to the authors include the cases of theft, taking too much alcohol, interferences/intrusions among others. In similar vein, Soniand (2017) investigated the relationship between interpersonal conflict and stress among young adults in Ghana and the results obtained pointed a significant correlation between the dimensions of interpersonal conflict and experience of stress among the young adult in Ghana.

Self-esteem on the other hand is seen as the emotional evaluation individuals make about themselves, which is generally in the form of approval or disapproval. It indicates the extent to which persons believe themselves to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. It is a positive or negative attitude of the individual towards himself in the face of strain like interpersonal conflict (Arslan & Uslu, 2017). If an individual has a positive attitude in self-assessment, his self-esteem would be high; if he has a negative attitude, then his self-esteem would be low. The authors noted that in a situation where the students feel interpersonal conflicts to mean fewer acceptances and more rejection, they are likely to have a negative effect on their feelings of themselves, thus lowering self-esteem. In like manner Yang et al. (2020) opined that interpersonal conflict negatively correlated with self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the favorability of family relationships. According the authors, interpersonal conflict and break-ups are likely indications of low acceptance and a heightened risk of rejection, consequently leading to low self-esteem.

A useful theoretical framework for understanding adjustment to college is the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; 1992). According to social cognitive theory, human motivation and action are extensively regulated by forethought. This anticipatory control mechanism (forethought) involves three types of expectancies: (1) situation-outcome expectancies, in which consequences are cued by environmental events without personal action; (2) action-outcome expectancies, in which outcomes flow from personal action; and (3) perceived self-efficacy, which is concerned with people's beliefs in their capabilities to perform a specific action required to attain a desired outcome. Situation-outcome expectancies represent the belief that the world changes without one's personal engagement. This means environmental factors, such as conflict, social support and stress, can influence adjustment to college. Action-outcome expectancies include options to change the environment and cope with adjustment problems. In this study, action outcome

expectancies are represented by appropriate behaviours that ensure adjustment in the face of conflict while personal factors (self-efficacy expectancies) are represented by depression, stress, self-esteem and emotional intelligence.

The above depicts that for students in tertiary institutions of learning to achieve their predetermined goals, they must be properly adjusted to the psychological constructs like aggression, depression, stress and self-esteem, which seem to emanate from interpersonal conflicts. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Taraba State in particular are being confronted with countless challenges from internal and external sources which influence the kind of quantity of interpersonal conflicts that arise within the institutions.

Statement of the problem

The researchers observe that there are many causes of interpersonal conflict among students in the tertiary institution in Taraba State. These could include differences in cultural perceptions, religious view, political affiliation, gender, interest, values, opinion, sporting activities, bed space, tap water, discipline, tribe, age, psychological makeup, social background, among others. Mostly, there is a strong burst of the occasional emotional effect on their behaviour which seems to affect their level of adjustment to aggression, depression and self-esteem.

Higher institutions are replicas of tension and divisions in the larger society arising from differences in cultural background, diverse political orientation, gender differences and religious backgrounds. Thus, among tertiary institutions in Taraba State, the researchers have observed with great concern the existence of friction, unhealthy rivalry, physical insults, discriminations, quarrels, provocations, insults, hostility, rudeness, belittling and threats in tertiary institution campuses which have become regular characteristics of students in those tertiary institutions.

The above disheartening situations have been worrisome for the researchers because of their obvious negative implication on the students, the parents, the teachers, the school, and the society at large. It is against this backdrop that the researchers sought to examine inter-personal conflict as a predictor of psychological adjustment among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine inter-personal conflict as predictor of psychological adjustment among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

2. Find out the relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

3. Identify the relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria?

2. What is the relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria?

3. What is the relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The researchers adopt a correlational design for the study. Correlational design is one that investigates one or more characteristics of a group to discover the extent to which the characteristics relate together (Maryln & Jim, 2011). There are ten tertiary institutions in Taraba state spread across the three Senatorial Districts. The Central Zone has Taraba State Polytechnic, Suntai and Federal Polytechnic, Bali; the Northern Senatorial District has College of Agriculture, Jalingo; College of Education, Zing; School of Nursing, Jalingo; Muashat College of Health, and Taraba State University, Jalingo; The Southern Senatorial District has College of Health Technology, Takum; Federal University, Wukari and

Kwararrafa University, Wukari. The institutions have a combined population of 56,080 students. The sample size consisted of 382 students (respondents) from four tertiary institutions in Taraba State. The instruments used for this study were: Interpersonal Conflict Questionnaire (ICQ) and Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ). The ICQ was a 10 item questionnaire, developed by the researchers which sought to obtain data from the respondents on students' interpersonal conflicts between and among themselves and others. On the other hand, the PAQ was a 30 item questionnaire self-developed that was divided into clusters in line with the study variables such as aggressive behaviour, stress and self-esteem. The researchers employed a four-point scale with the response options of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1, to elicit opinions of the respondents. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Moment Product Correlation (PMPC).

Presentation of results

Research question one: What is the relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria?

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Table 1: The relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state

		Inter-personal conflict	Depression
Inter-personal conflict	Pearson Correlation	1	.734[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	382	382
Depression	Pearson Correlation	.734[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	382	382

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows r =.734; p = .000 < 0.05. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it means that depression has a significant positive relationship with interpersonal conflict among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State. Since the coefficient (r) is close to 1, the result implies that there is a strong relationship between interpersonal conflict and

depression among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria. That is, increase in interpersonal conflict leads to increase in depression among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria

Research question 2: What is the relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria?

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Table 2: The relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state

		Inter-personal conflict	**Stress**
Inter-personal conflict	Pearson Correlation	1	.742[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	382	382
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.742[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	382	382

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows r =.742; p = .000 < 0.05. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it means that stress has a significant positive relationship with interpersonal conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State. Since the coefficient (r) is close to 1, the result implies that there is a strong relationship between interpersonal conflict and stress among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria. That means, increase in interpersonal conflict leads to increase in stress among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria

Research question 3: What is the relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem of students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria?

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Table 3: The relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state

Correlations			
		Inter-personal conflict	**Self-esteem**
Inter-personal conflict	Pearson Correlation	1	.727**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	382	382
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.727**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	382	382

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows r =.727; p = .000 < 0.05. Since the p value is less than 0.05, it means that self-esteem has a significant positive relationship with interpersonal conflicts among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State. Since the coefficient (r) is close to 1, the result implies that there is a strong relationship between interpersonal conflict and self-esteem among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria. This result implies that, increase in interpersonal conflict leads to increase in self-esteem among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba state, Nigeria.

Discussion of the findings

The first finding reveals that there is a significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and depression among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. This finding is in line with Laurenz et al. (2014) whose finding revealed that conflict may lead to depressive symptoms, which make people even more vulnerable to conflicts, indicating a vicious circle with high psychological and economic costs. Similarly, Cui et al. (2022) findings showed that depression among higher education students in Nigeria is highly prevalent.

The second finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and stress among students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. This finding is in line with Bazezew and Mulugeta (2017) who explained that the main cause of stress among students in the dormitory was interpersonal conflict. In similar vein,

Soniand (2017) found a significant correlation between the dimensions of interpersonal conflict and experience of stress among the young adults in Ghana.

The third finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between inter-personal conflict and self-esteem among students in tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. This finding is in line with Yang et al. (2020) whose findings reveal that interpersonal conflict negatively correlated with self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the favorability of family relationships.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn: inter-personal conflict has an enormous relationship with psychological adjustment of students of tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria in the areas of depression, stress and self-esteem.

Recommendations

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

i.   Counsellors should work in conjunction with the school management through workshops and seminars to sensitize students on the need to adjust to interpersonal conflict whenever it arises so as to avoid the ugly scenario of depression.

ii.   Students should be enlighten on stress overcoming strategies through counselling in order to enable them overcome the challenges of interpersonal conflict that are stress inclined.

iii.   Students' self-esteem should be built through public lectures by school, lecturers and students so that students will become aware of the negative effect of inter-personal conflict and self-esteem in tertiary institutions.

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