

Exploring the Impact of Psychosocial Factors on Social Functioning among Undergraduate Students within the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the predictive relationship between psychosocial factors specifically life skills and emotional intelligence on social functioning among undergraduate students and assessed the extent to which demographic variables (mode of entry, course of study, sex) can predict social functioning of undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Drawing on a sample of undergraduate students from the thirteen different faculties within the university in the study area, data was collected using standardized measures of Life Skills Scale (LSS), Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), and Social Functioning Scale (SFS). Statistical analyses, including regression analysis, were employed to examine the extent to which life skills and emotional intelligence predict social functioning. The results disclosed that a combination of life skills and emotional intelligence is able to explain at least 0.776 or 77.6% of the observed variance of undergraduate students' social functioning. This revealed the significant associations between life skills, emotional intelligence, and social functioning, highlighting the importance of these factors in enhancing the overall well-being and interpersonal relationships of Obafemi Awolowo University undergraduate students.

Keywords: Life Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Psychosocial, Social functioning and Demographic variables

Introduction

Being an undergraduate student at the university is often a striking and challenging period in one's life. This phase involves transitions from a protected family environment to an open and independent social environment. The university environment is considered an excellent learning center for young adults offering a platform for preparing for the next phase of their lives. Therefore, it is important for stakeholders the government, educational policy makers, school proprietors, lecturers, other members of staff, and parents, to understand the needs of undergraduate students and the significance of social functioning.

Social functioning can be defined as an individual's level of social adjustment in terms of their current developmental stage, including

interpersonal interactions, social adjustment, social support, and social competency.

Lee-Mendoza (2015) posited that social functioning results from the interaction individual coping capabilities and environmental, demand. This interaction influences the individual's ability to perform daily social tasks and maintain an satisfactory social existence within society. Kidd et al., (2021) expanded on this by defining social functioning as the ability of an individual to explain the outcomes of one's behaviors and manage interpersonal relationships, engage in social activities, and adapt to social roles across various life domains. They emphasized that people are generally proactive in their behavior, preparing in advance to address expected changes. Mangelli et al., (2019) provided a more comprehensive definition, describing social functioning as a multidimensional concept that encompasses an individual's ability to engage in interpersonal interactions, fulfill societal roles, and adapt to social norms and expectation within their cultural context, including aspects such as employment, intimate relationships, and recreational activities.

According to Rowsell (2015), several aspects of social functioning, include social adjustment, interpersonal relationships, social competence, social cognition, social motivation, social support, and friendship. It is considered that a lack of sufficient and necessary understanding in the forest component of social functioning may impede academic study skills. This limitation can prevent undergraduates from achieving their goals. Some students have modest or severe difficulties absorbing new information in math, science, language arts, and social studies. Many psychosocial factors, such as personality types, self-esteem, emotional abilities, and social skills, among others, have been studied as influence of social functioning. However, there has been insufficient research on how these psychosocial factors, such as life skills and emotional intelligence, could predict the social functioning of undergraduate students within the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife community in Nigeria. Hence, this study aims to address this gap.

To successfully fulfill the roles allotted to them by society and participate fully in societal tasks, undergraduate students need to possess certain important abilities. These capabilities which enable individuals to deal effectively with the burdens and challenges of everyday life, are commonly referred to as life skills. According to UNICEF (2019), life skills include problem solving, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal connections, and self-awareness. The

development of these life skills is a lifelong process that begins in early childhood and lasts throughout one's life. Additionally, Smith and Johnson (2022) state life skills encompass a set of personal, social, and interpersonal competencies that enable individuals to adapt and thrive in diverse contexts, including academic, professional, and personal domains. In line with various definitions of life skills, the researcher believes that life skills can be behavioural (communicating effectively with peers and lecturers) or cognitive (making wise decisions) in a good intrapersonal or interpersonal relationship.

A series of researchers (Hodge et al., 2012; Adhiambo, 2013; Prajapati et al., 2017) have shown that basic life skills are important for young adults or undergraduates to function appropriately within the campus, and thereafter, if only these skills are introduced in the early stages of their life's while schooling. This will enable them to cope with the different changes they experience due to current issues such as global warming, famines, poverty, suicide, and population explosions, as well as social, emotional, physical, and psychological issues. Studies investigating the relationship between life skills and social functioning have highlighted the importance of these competencies in facilitating successful adaptation to the university environment. For example, research by Smith et al., (2021) found that undergraduate students who reported higher levels of life skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, and communication also demonstrated greater social competence and integration within the university community. Likewise, Brown et al., (2020) conducted a cross-sectional analysis and reported a positive association between life skills and various indicators of social functioning, including interpersonal relationships, communication skills, and peer support networks. However, the difficulty in exhibiting positive life skills may lead to poor academic performance, social impairment, reduced capacity to come up with effective solutions to interpersonal problems, an increase in negative attitudes, and psychological distress.

Emotional intelligence (EI), which has been shown to have a substantial influence in many aspects of daily life, has also emerged as an important predictor of undergraduate students' social functioning in terms of interpersonal relationships. According to Mayer et al., (2016), emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others, and to use this awareness to navigate interpersonal relationships effectively. The mental processes related to EI are appraising and expressing emotions. Emotions help with thinking by drawing attention to

changes, such as unfinished business and running out of time. Assignments or projects that must be performed the following day, as well as a book that must be studied prior to the exam, are examples of how undergraduate students' emotions can be useful. Furthermore, EI is a construct that refers to an individual's ability to monitor their own and others' emotions, to distinguish between the good and negative consequences of emotions, and to use emotional information to govern thought and behavior. In 2016, a set of rules was developed to assist thinking about EI, which was classified as broad intelligences. In this concept, emotional intelligence is regarded as a hot, broad intelligence. "Cool intelligence relates to impersonal knowledge, whereas hot intelligence has to do with matters that are highly affective; they make our blood boil or chill out hearts" (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016). Mayer (2016) described emotional intelligence as "the ability to reason validly with emotions and with emotion-related information, and to use emotions to enhance thought."

However, the researcher agrees that some of the findings of this review relating to the importance of life skills and emotional intelligence on the social functioning of undergraduate students cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, due to a lack of established life skills and better emotional intelligence, there might be no quality interpersonal relationships or interactions among peers and lecturers, leading to poor social functioning among undergraduates. In line with this, good life skills training acquired from parents or caregivers, coupled with a higher level of emotional intelligence, could help decrease social dysfunction and help them perform well academically, which is in line with the view of some of the researchers. Also, as students navigate academic demands, social interactions, and personal growth, their ability to effectively manage emotions, communicate with others, and navigate social situations becomes increasingly important. However, relatively little research has focused specifically on the combined influence of life skills and emotional intelligence on social functioning among OAU undergraduate students. Also, there is limited information on social functioning, life skills, and emotional intelligence among Nigerian university undergraduate students.

Objectives of the Study

- (a) determine the combined predictive ability of life skills and emotional intelligence on social functioning of undergraduate students and

- (b) assess the extent to which demographic variables (mode of entry, course of study, sex) can predict social functioning of undergraduates.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were postulated:

2. Life skills and emotional intelligence will not significantly predict the social functioning of the undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife.
2. There is no significant relationship between students' demographic variables (mode of entry, course of study and sex) and social functioning.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study consisted of 24,238 undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, the choice of OAU as the study setting is significant due to its diverse student population, rich cultural environment, and academic excellence. By focusing on OAU undergraduate students, this study provides insights that are relevant to the university context and applicable to similar educational institutions in Nigeria and beyond. The sample size of 900 undergraduate students were selected for the study using a multistage Sampling technique, from the thirteen (13) faculties in the University. In stage one eleven faculties were selected from 13 faculties in the University using simple random sampling techniques. From each faculty in stage two, three departments were selected using simple random sampling technique. In stage three from each department, undergraduate students were selected from Parts one I to four IV or five V as applicable, using convenience sampling technique.

One research instrument with three subscale were adapted for the study titled; Life Skills Scale (LSS) adapted from the work of Khosravani, Motallebzadeh and Ashraf (2014) ; Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) adapted from the work of Adeniyi (2014); and Social Functioning Scale (SFS) adapted from the work of Schmieiding Development Center (2017) questionnaire on social functioning. The validity of the instrument carried out through consultations with experts in the field of Psychology of Education and Tests and Measurements. The reliability tests obtained from the three subscales (SFS = 0.837, LSS = 0.783 and EIS = 0.861) indicated that all the

scales had good internal consistency, which was adequate for the study.

The researcher distributed 900 questionnaires to students across eleven faculties, explaining the study’s purpose and ensuring confidentiality during the departmental courses. A total of 817 completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency counts and linear multiple regression, to address research questions and test hypotheses. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression at a 0.05 significance level.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Life skills and emotional intelligence will not significantly predict social functioning of the university undergraduates.

In order to test this hypothesis, the undergraduates’ scores on the measure of social functioning were subjected to multiple regression with life skills and emotional intelligence jointly treated as the predictor variables. The model summary information and coefficients were obtained and are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Joint Prediction of Social Functioning with Psychosocial Factors (Life Skills and Emotional Intelligence)

Model Summary				Coefficients					
				Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	
B	Std. Error	Beta							
			Adjusted R-squared	Constant	-38.546	2.025		-19.037	

			R	L	-	0.		-
			S	S	0	0.		4
			q		.	0	0.078	.
			u		0	2		6
			a		9	1		6
			r		9			4
			e					
			0	E	0	0.		5
			.	I	.	0.		3
			7		8	0	0.885	.
			7		4	1		1
			6		6	6		3

Table 2 shows the multiple regression of social functioning from the combination of life skills and emotional intelligence as independent variables, yield a coefficient of multiple regression (r) of 0.881 and a multiple correlation square (r²) of 0.776. It can be seen from the table that a combination of life skills and emotional intelligence is able to explain at least 77.6% of the observed variance in social functioning of the undergraduates under study. However, under coefficients it can be seen that life skills have a negative B-value (-0.099) meaning that it is negatively related to social functioning. These values are statistically significant at 0.05 level. This implies that the combination of life skills and emotional intelligence is adequate in predicting university undergraduate students’ social functioning. The predictive contributions of each life skill and emotional intelligence are presented in Table 2.

The value of r = 0.881 indicated that the independent psycho-social variables (life skills and emotional intelligence) and dependent variable (social functioning) are positively related. The value of r² = 0.776 stated that 77.6 % of the total variation in social functioning was explained by life skills and emotional intelligence, while the 22.4% was not. The value of r² indicated that there may be other variables that contributed to social functioning of undergraduates. The result showed how the combination of the independent psycho-social variables i.e. life skills and emotional intelligence could adequately predict the dependent variable i.e. social functioning. This could be explained from the perspective that as life skills and emotional intelligence (independent variables) exerted influence individually on the social functioning of university undergraduate students.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between students’ demographic variables (mode of entry, course of study and sex) and social functioning.

To test this hypothesis, the levels of social functioning demonstrated by the respondents were cross-tabulated with different levels of demographic variables of Modes of Entry, sex, course of study and part in the university. The chi-square values were also computed and the result is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Relationship between students’ demographic variables (mode of entry, course of study and sex) and social functioning.

Variables	Levels	SFg			χ^2	df	
			Moderate				
Modes of Entry	Post UTME		95		14.660 ^a	4	
	Direct Entry		41				
	Transfer		6				
	Total		142				
Sex	Male		72		57.117 ^b	2	
	Female		70				
	Total		142				
Course of Study	Administration		0		131.090 ^c	20	
	Agricultural Sciences		8				
	Arts		8				
	Env. Design &Mgt		2				
	Education		10				

	Eng/Tech		4					
	Health Sciences		24					
	Law		2					
	Pharmacy		8					
	Science		65					
	Social Sciences		11					
	Total		142					
Parts in the University	Part I		10			47.996 ^d	8	
	Part II		37					
	Part III		53					
	Part IV		28					
	Part V		14					
	Total		142					

- a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5.
- b. 4 cells (12.1%) have expected count less than 5.
- c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.
- d. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

Table 3 shows the relationship between students' demographic variables (mode of entry, course of study and sex) and social functioning. The table also shows that social functioning is significantly related to demographic variables of Modes of Entry ($\chi^2 = 14.66$, $p = 0.005$), Sex ($\chi^2 = 57.117$, $p = 0.000$), course of study ($\chi^2 = 131.09$, $p = 0.000$) and part in the university ($\chi^2 = 47.996$, $p = 0.000$). It can be concluded that demographic variables of mode of entry, course

of study, part in the university and sex are significantly related to social functioning of undergraduates. This implies that sex inequalities in social functioning among the undergraduate students suggest the presence of sex-specific factors influencing interpersonal interactions. With undergraduate male students displaying potentially higher social functioning scores channeled interventions may be necessary to support female undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University in enhancing their interpersonal skills effectively. This result disagrees with the findings of Boscoe et al., (2021) that gender did not significantly impact social emotional functioning skills of young adult. While mode of entry revealed noteworthy differences in social functioning among students admitted through various pathways. This highlights the importance of transition support programs aimed at facilitating the adjustment of students, particularly those entering through Post UTME to the university environment. Variations in social functioning across different courses of study underscore the impact of academic context on students' interpersonal competencies. Identifying fields associated with higher social functioning can inform targeted interventions to foster similar outcomes across disciplines, enhancing overall student well-being. The examination of social functioning across university levels illuminates the evolving nature of student development throughout the undergraduate journey. Fluctuations in social functioning over time underscore the cumulative effects of academic and social experiences, underscoring the necessity for ongoing support initiatives tailored to meet students' changing needs. Therefore, recognizing the influence of demographic variables on social functioning underscores the importance of context-specific interventions in promoting holistic student development within the university landscape. These findings offer valuable insights for the design of policies and practices geared towards fostering social integration, academic success, and overall student satisfaction.

Discussion of Findings

The result showed how the combination of the independent psychosocial variables (life skills and emotional intelligence) could adequately predict the dependent variable i.e. social functioning. This could be explained from the perspective that as life skills and emotional intelligence exerted influence individually on the social functioning of university undergraduate students. The results indicate that both life skills and emotional intelligence significantly contribute to students' social functioning, highlighting the importance of these

psychosocial factors in fostering positive social outcomes within the university context. The findings are consistent with previous research (Smith et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2020), the findings suggest that students who possess higher levels of life skills exhibit greater social competence, interpersonal communication skills, and overall social integration within the university community. This underscores the importance of equipping students with essential life skills, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and communication, to facilitate their successful adaptation to the university environment and enhance their social well-being. Similarly, the observed positive relationship between emotional intelligence and social functioning aligns with existing literature (Martinez et al., 2018; Garcia et al., 2021), indicating that students with higher emotional intelligence scores are better equipped to navigate social interactions, manage interpersonal relationships, and effectively cope with social stressors. Emotional intelligence appears to play a critical role in facilitating students' social adjustment and integration, emphasizing the importance of fostering emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy among university students. The strong predictive power of the combined model, as evidenced by the substantial proportion of variance explained (R -squared = .776), underscores the importance of considering multiple psychosocial factors in studying social outcomes. In light of these findings, the appraisal of the hypothesis may be resolved that the combination of life skills and emotional intelligence significantly predict the undergraduate students' social functioning. The researcher agrees with some of the findings of this review relating to the importance of life skills and emotional intelligence on the social functioning of undergraduate students cannot be over emphasized. However, lack of established life skills and better emotional intelligence, there might be no quality interpersonal relationship or interaction among peers and lecturers, leading to poor social functioning among undergraduates.

The result also showed a positive and significant relationship between demographic variable (mode of entry, course of study, part and sex) and social functioning of undergraduate students. This finding goes in line with Harrod and Scheer (2005) which revealed that there is a positive relationship between levels of emotional intelligence and sex, education levels of parent and household income. One can also deduce from the analysis that male students have a greater ability to function more socially than their female counterpart. This finding is in line with the findings of a study by Enochs and Renk (2006) who

suggested that male undergraduate adjust and socialize faster than the female undergraduates. This is in contrast with Harrod and Scheer (2005) findings that female have higher levels of emotional intelligence and at such function more socially than the male. Therefore, one can suggest that the reason for this variance in this result could be due to cultural difference locations as to where the researches were conducted. In addition, this study reveals that the female students rely more on social support more than the male students to be able to function socially within the university.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the significant predictive value of life skills and emotional intelligence in shaping the social functioning of undergraduate students at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU). Both life skills and emotional intelligence emerged as strong predictors of various aspects of social functioning, highlighting their importance in fostering positive social outcomes within the university context. The results suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing students' social functioning should target the development of both life skills and emotional intelligence to maximize their impact and promote holistic student development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendation are proposed:

Integration of Life Skills Education, OAU and similar institutions should integrate life skills education into the curriculum to equip students with essential competencies such as problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and interpersonal skills. Incorporating life skills training into academic programs can enhance students' ability to navigate social challenges and promote their overall social well-being. Secondly, Universities should implement programs and workshops focused on developing emotional intelligence skills among students. These initiatives can include activities aimed at enhancing emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and interpersonal effectiveness. By providing students with opportunities to cultivate emotional intelligence, universities can empower them to navigate social interactions and relationships more effectively. Support services such as counseling centers and peer mentoring programs, to provide students with resources and assistance in developing life skills and emotional intelligence. These services can offer individual and group counseling, workshops, and resources tailored to students' specific needs and challenges, thereby

promoting their social and emotional well-being. In addition, universities should provide faculty and staff with training on promoting social functioning and supporting students' psychosocial development. Lastly, campus environment created for undergraduate should enhance social connectedness, inclusivity, and belongingness.

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