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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND ADOLESCENTS' SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT: THE IMPLICATION OF THE TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BUEA, CAMEROON

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Abstract
The study investigated interpersonal skills as determinants of adolescents' social adjustment in the University of Buea. The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design, specifically utilizing a sample survey approach. The research focused on a population of 5,736 adolescent students across three faculties. To determine an appropriate sample size, the researchers applied the Krejcie and Morgan model, which indicated that 361 students would constitute a representative sample. The sampling process combined purposive sampling to identify the population of interest, followed by random selection of individual participants. For data collection, the researchers developed and administered a questionnaire that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The data management process began with entering the collected data into EpiData version 3.1. To ensure data quality, the researchers then conducted rigorous data cleaning and validation checks using SPSS version 23.0, which helped identify and address any invalid codes in the dataset. To establish the reliability of the research instrument, the team assessed the internal consistency of responses using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The statistical analysis employed two main tests: Chi-square analysis was used to examine and compare descriptive differences in the data, while Spearman's rho correlation test was selected for hypothesis testing due to the normal distribution of the data. This comprehensive methodological approach allowed the researchers to systematically collect, process, and analyze data while maintaining scientific rigor throughout the study. The combination of purposive and random sampling techniques helped ensure both the relevance and representativeness of the sample, while the statistical tests chosen were appropriate for the nature of the data and research objectives. The data analysis incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to examine the relationship between social adjustment and interpersonal relationships among university adolescents. The fundings yielded a statistically significant positive correlation (R = 0.411, p < 0.01) between interpersonal relationship formation and social adjustment outcomes in the university environment. This moderate correlation coefficient indicates that adolescent students who successfully establish and maintain quality interpersonal relationships demonstrate enhanced social adjustment within the university context. The strength of this correlation (R = 0.411) suggests a meaningful association between these variables, though it also indicates that other factors are likely to contribute to social adjustment outcomes. This empirical evidence underscores the importance of interpersonal relationship development as a key facilitator of successful social adaptation among adolescent university students.

Keywords Interpersonal skills, Adolescence, Social Adjustment.

INTRODUCTION

Today's youth face unprecedented challenges in navigating an increasingly complex and specialized professional environment. As Boyd and Bee (2006) observe, this complexity has necessitated extended periods of academic and technical training, with students spending considerable time in various educational institutions to acquire the specialized skills and professional competencies demanded by modern workplaces. The transition from secondary education to university represents a significant developmental milestone characterized by multiple challenges. As Santrock (2004) articulates, this transition encompasses several fundamental changes: students must adapt to larger, more impersonal institutional structures; engage with a more geographically and ethnically diverse peer group; and navigate an educational environment that places heightened emphasis on academic achievement and performance evaluation.

This educational trajectory reflects the evolving demands of the contemporary workforce, where specialized knowledge and advanced technical skills have become prerequisites for professional success. The extended duration of formal education and training represents a necessary investment in human capital development, enabling young people to acquire the multifaceted competencies required in their chosen fields. This prolonged educational journey serves not only as a period of academic advancement but also as a critical phase of professional socialization and personal development. These circumstances underscore the importance of understanding and supporting students' adaptation to higher education environments, as successful navigation of this transition period can significantly influence their academic outcomes and future career trajectories.

Different periods of life present certain typical challenges and competences that depend on developmental milestones for successful functioning. For most adolescents, the period of adolescence is a time of enormous vibrancy, discovery, innovation and hope (Lancet, 2012). According to Hall (1904), adolescents enter puberty at about 12 or 13 years and end as late as between the ages 18 to 21years. Stanley Hall's well-known axiom "sturm und drung" or storm and stress is partly rooted in this idea, as also in the frequency of mood disruptions and propensity for reckless and anti-social behavior among adolescents (Hall, 1904). According to this depiction adolescents, universally and inevitably, experience some emotional and behavioral upheaval on the way to adulthood (Arnett, 2006). Student's personal and social development is as important as their cognitive development. It is important for students to think well of themselves, to have a positive rather than a negative self-concept. As children get older, peers become more and more important (O'Neil & Celeste, 2000). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) reported in their book that the interactions with other people that constitute one's social environment provide challenges and experiences that influence one's self-esteem.

The structure and meaning of interpersonal behaviour has been an important component in a social set up. Interpersonal relationship forms the core of human daily activity. Hoimbeck and Leake (1999) assert that, individuals who are able to succeed handling their independence and newfound freedoms are able to make new relationship while maintaining old relationships. Studies have shown that living arrangement have impacted the social adjustment of colleges and/or university students. Adams et al.(2000),remarked that, the environment in which students live has

had a direct impact on the student's overall adjustment. Students who lived in environment that are conducive to learning and provided ample study space and opportunities for growth and interaction tend to have an easier time adjusting than students who live in other environment (Dinger, 1999). Residence halt climates have been associated with families in terms of rules boundaries and atmosphere of care and concern for other members. Students are expected to develop care and concern to other in the residential halls. The social climate has also been deemed important is assisting students to adjustment at the university. The university students belong to the categorybetween late adolescence and early adulthood. This stage of life is characterized by periods of instability considerable conflicts, anxiety and tension (Hall. 1904). Socially, adolescence is period of building a stable identity, many young people experience role confusion and blurred self-image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal skills are the student's ability to relate with others through self-esteem enhancement, meeting and making friends, anger management, cooperation and problem-solving skills as measured by the Interpersonal Skills Inventory (O'Neil & Celeste, 2000). As students experience more freedom and responsibility in college, relationships with parents and other significant people change (Baumeister, & Leary, 1995). Freshmen, as well as their parents, may fear losing aspects of their relationship with each other. Frequent calls home from freshmen are common, especially during the first few months away at college. It may be very hard to say goodbye at the end of holiday or semester breaks. It may also be difficult to readjust to rules at home, such as curfews, chores or responsibilities for younger siblings (Beyers, &Goossens, 2002). It is important to point out that parents also need to adjust during this period. They are dealing with their child becoming more independent in some ways, but still needing them too (Chipuer, 2001).

The National Center for Educational Statistics found that approximately one third of entering college students leave higher education without obtaining a degree, and most do so during their 1st year (Bradburn & Carroll, 2002). Nearly 30-40% of college students drop out without obtaining a college degree, and many of these students never return to college to complete degrees (Consolvo, 2002). Individuals who are able to succeed at handling their independence and newfound freedoms are able to make new relationships while maintaining old relationships (Holmbeck & Leake, 1999). Two constructs that have not often been considered but may potentially contribute to better adjustment in college students during their freshman year are a sense of university belonging (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002) and the quality of their friendships (Fass & Tubman, 2002). Schools are recognized as important developmental contexts for academic and socio emotional development (Eccles & Roeser, 2003) of younger students. Yet, researchers have rarely considered the school context when examining the adjustment of late adolescents as they attend college. Some researchers have suggested that the degree of affiliation that the student feels toward the university (i.e., university attachment) is linked to better social adjustment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000), lower levels of depressive symptoms, higher academic motivation, and lower attrition rates (Beyers & Goossens, 2002).

Previous studies have suggested that relationships and making meaningful connections are important for students to adjust to the college environment. Students who have been able to establish bonds in their new environment adjusted better than

students who were isolated and not as successful in establishing new friendships and relationships. The theory of attachment has been used to explain the importance of emotional bonds and healthy adjustment. Healthy individuals tend to have secure attachments to parents, guardians, and significant others in their lives. Individuals with secure attachments tend to have an easier time transitioning to college than individuals who do not have secure attachments (Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995).

Relationships with parents may change when students go to college, which can be a difficult transition for all involved, and cause additional stress and pressure on the students as they move through the developmental process and become adults (Mudore, 1999). The process of adjustment can be frustrating and overwhelming for many students, leading to emotional maladjustment and depression (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), which may, in turn, negatively affect college performance. High levels of social support buffer individuals from stress (Robbins, Lese, & Herrick, 1993). Attachment theory has emphasized the importance of healthy emotional bonds, and students who are able to create and maintain healthy bonds with others tend to have an easier time adjusting to college (Rice, 1995). Social adjustment may be just as important as academic adjustment, according to Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994) who studied 155 freshmen and found that "personal adjustment and integration into the social fabric of campus life play a role at least as important as academic factors in student retention".

Numerous studies conducted in the 1990s indicated that students need continued support to become involved in activities and that this improves their overall adjustment (Dinger, 1999). The transition to college is difficult for many students and students need support and encouragement to join various organizations and participate in activities to feel like they are a part of the university community (Consolvo, 2002).

Many researchers and theorists have described different emphases in the interpersonal relationships of boys and girls and have suggested that boys and girls deal differently with issues that arise in relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Putallaz &Sheppard, 1992; Rubin, 1985). The primary focus of a study by Rumbaugh & Harter (1996) was to examine the influence of friendship status on children's expectations of their reactions to anger-provoking scenarios, and how the impact of friendship might vary according to age and gender. They wanted to see if there were differences between preadolescent boys and girls in their attributions of blame in anger provoking situations and their control of anger. They found that the majority of boys took the blame themselves in anger situations, most often making self-excused attributions while girls were as likely to blame a friend as much as them self. They also measured the students' interpersonal feelings and expectations of happiness, hurt feelings and emotional distress in relation to anger-provoking scenarios. They found boys and girls reported similar levels of happiness but girls were twice as likely as boys to have higher levels of hurt feelings. Also, girls reported higher levels of emotional distress than boys did. It is interesting to note however, that although this study showed that girls seemed to be more sensitive to the relationship context than boys, it may be that girls are more comfortable in talking about their feelings and relationships than boys (Gilligan, 1982; Rubin, 1985). Rubin stated that girls may find it easier to admit events that would violate their expectations that would lead to an intense emotional experience while boys may feel more compelled to be "tough" and present themselves in a way that would not affect their interpersonal relationships.

According to Mousavii (2012), social adjustment is a skill that enables and individual to interact effectively and avoid undesirable response. The process of adjustment to campus life is a neutral phase in the maturation process of the individual and represents the transition from dependence to independence/autonomy (McBroon, 1997). Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994) suggest that social adjustment of students may be as important as academic factors in predicting persistence. Integration into the social environment was found to be an essential factor which influences one's commitment to the academic system (Tinto, 1975).

Social adjustment can be examined in terms of how well students function in their immediate environment, participation in social activities and their satisfaction with various social aspects of the university experience (Dyson, & Rank, 2006) The social environment of college requires adjustment on the part of new college students. The student has to fit within groups the student cares about, both inside and outside the university (Law, 2007; Cooke, Beewick, Barkham, Bradley, & Audin, 2006).

A person who identifies totally with being a student will care only about their place with other students, ignoring the values of any outside groups; someone who comes from a family that expects a university qualification will probably make friends in the university. The peer group is an especially powerful influence on new students' lives mostly because they have a need to replace family and community support systems with peer support systems (Law, 2007). Freshmen therefore have a strong need to be liked and accepted by one another and to influence and be influenced by one another. Kitzrow (2003) noted that going to college often represents the adolescent's first experience in establishing and maintaining the self-outside the home.

The majority of students who drop out of college do so in the first year (Rausch & Hamilton, 2006), suggesting the transition process is a significant factor in student success. Social adjustment to a college environment is one facet of student adjustment and serves as one of the most critical activities emerging adults undertake that predicts success in college and beyond (Baker & Siryk, 1989; McEwan, 2011). As defined by Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994), social adjustment is the process by which students become integrated into the campus community, build support networks, and negotiate the new freedoms afforded by college life. Student adjustment, by contrast, is a combination of students' social, personal-emotional, and academic adjustment along with their reported feelings of commitment to the institution (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Students who report difficulty socially adjusting to college are more likely to suffer from feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, & Boswell, 2006)

Understanding how students adjust to college has long been of interest to institutions of higher education, and research has examined this process in order to advise educators of differences across diverse student populations (Hertel, 2002; Hurtado, Carter, &Spuler, 1996; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994; Owens, Lacey, Rawls, &Holbert-Quince, 2010) and to evaluate the use of certain programs or innovative steps to improve overall student adjustment(Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Mayhew, Stipeck, &Dorow, 2011).Social integration and adjustment can be measured through students' reported satisfaction with(and the quality of) informal interactions with faculty, staff, and peers (Jones, 2010; Kraemer,1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Because of the strong relationships between social adjustment, successful transition to college, and persistence, many researchers have explored predictors of social adjustment in order to enhance the student experience by way of implementing

support systems where needed (Lau, 2003; Mayhew 2011). Personal characteristics (e.g., race, self-esteem), individual behaviors (e.g., socializing with peers and faculty), and stressors in students' lives influence the level of social adjustment that students report (Chartrand, 1992; Elliott, Alexander, Pierce, & Richmond, 2009; Hays & Oxley, 1986; Hurtado1996).

METHODS

The research design used for this study was the cross-sectional survey research design particularly the sample survey. The target population was made up of adolescent students at the University of Buea. The accessible population was made up of 5736 adolescent students from the three faculties. Two complementary sampling techniques were used. These are the probability (simple random) and non-probability (purposive and convenience) sampling techniques. The purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the population. Convenient sampling was used to ensure that only respondents who were available and willing to take part in the survey were selected. The sample size was made up of 361 students determined through Krejcie and Morgan model of determining sample size for research work and was randomly selected. In gathering data, open and closed ended questionnaire were used. The purposive sampling technique was used to meet the population of interest. A Pre-designed EpiData version 3.1 was used to enter data. For consistency, data range and validation checks were performed in SPSS version 23.0 to identify invalid codes. Reliability test was performed to assess the internal consistency of responses using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient. The Chi-square was used to compare descriptively the significant differences, the Spearman's rho test was used to test hypothesis because it has normally distributed data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data collected using two open ended questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Adolescents' interpersonal relationship

Test items	Stretched				Collapsed	
	(SA)	**(A)**	**(D)**	**(SD)**	**SA/A**	**D/SD**
I have difficulties readjusting during my first year at the university	78 (23.2%)	97 (28.9%)	95 (28.3%)	66 (19.6%)	175 (52.1%)	161 (47.9%)
I feel unhappy when I left my parents for university studies	68 (21.1%)	105 (32.6%)	95 (29.0%)	54 (16.8%)	173 (53.7%)	149 (46.3%)
I always call home every day during my first year at the university	75 (22.0%)	122 (35.8%)	92 (27.0%)	52 (15.2%)	197 (57.8%)	144 (42.2%)
I found it difficult to interact when I just entered university of Buea	89 (25.9%)	126 (36.7%)	84 (24.5%)	43 (12.5%)	215 (62.7%)	127 (37.0%)
I easily interact with my teacher during my first year at the university	36 (10.5%)	144 (33.3%)	131 (38.3%)	61 (17.8%)	150 (43.9%)	192 (56.1%)

I had secured attachment with my parents and guidance	114 (33.5%)	167 (49.1%)	40 (11.8%)	19 (5.6%)	218 (82.6%)	59 (17.4%)
I easily make meaningful connections with my lecturers	45 (13.4%)	160 (47.6%)	103 (30.7%)	28 (8.3%)	205 (61.0%)	131 (39.0%)
I joined organization and participate in activities which makes me feel like am part of the university community	59 (17.1%)	111 (32.2%)	127 (36.8%)	48 (13.9%)	170 (49.3%)	175 (50.7%)
School associations makes it easier for me to make new friends	73 (21.4%)	166 (48.7%)	73 (21.4%)	29 (8.5%)	139 (70.1%)	102 (29.9%)
I have many friends during my first year at the university.	61 (17.7%)	121 (35.2%)	112 (32.6%)	50 (14.5%)	182 (52.9%)	162 (47.1%)
Multiple response set	**626 (18.5%)**	**1235 (36.4%)**	**1006 (29.7%)**	**522 (15.4%)**	**1861 (54.9%)**	**1528 (45.1%)**

In aggregate, based on adolescent interpersonal relationship, findings revealed that (45.1%) of the adolescents easily created good interpersonal relationship with others during their first year in the university meanwhile (54.9%) of the adolescent find it difficult to create good interpersonal relationship with others during their first year in the university. For instance, 215(62.7%) and 175(51.1%) of the adolescents respectively strongly agree and agree that they it difficult to interact with other when they just entered university and had difficulties re-adjusting during their first year at the university. 173(53.7%) of the adolescents were also found to feel unhappy when they left their parents for university studies. 175(50.7%) of the students did not joined organization and participate in activities which makes during their first year in the university. And finally, 192(56.1%) of the adolescents did not interact easily with their teachers during their first year at the university.

Table 2: Students' own opinions on how they were relating with others during their first years in the university

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Groundings</u>	Sampled quotations

Good/very friendly	110	"I had good interpersonal relationship especially with friends and course mates" "Very well". "I was very friendly' "I make friends easily" "Well, it was good because I love making new friends". "Having many of my former school mates made my interaction easier".
Difficult	91	"It was very difficult considering the fact that we met new faces and new people". "I was to myself and found it difficult to interact". "I was scared of meeting new people". "It was not easy for me accepting people from different background and cultures". "Relating with others was not quite easy". "It was not easy because I had to deal with many people with different characters". "Given the many new persons from diverse background and different attitudes, it was challenging at first".
Timid	65	"Very timid" "I was quite shy' "From the start, I was very quiet". "I feel reserved". "I found it really hard to leave with new people, making new friends and to start studying in strange environment".
Easily	56	"Easily". "I relate with others easily".
Unfriendly	56	"Unfriendly".
Through group presentations	32	"Through doing group work such as exposes and group assignments". "Through group work". "I could easily relate through group meetings and assignments". "I relate with others mostly through group presentations".

Lecture period	2	"During lectures in "Amphi" when I would be know what a lecturer hard said'. "Lectures and tutorial occasions".
Through association	2	"I relate with students through students association'.
On social media	1	"I relate with others through social media".

When students were asked on how they were relating with others during their first year at the university, findings revealed although some students easily relate and created good relationship with others during their first year at the university, some of the adolescents were not. For instance, some of the students find it difficult and timid relating with others while some were unfriendly. Some of the students related with others during group presentation and a very few through associations and during lecture period.

Table 3: Interpersonal Relationship versus adolescents' social Adjustment

Was able to create good interpersonal relationship with others at their first year in the university	Test statistics	Socially adjusted well during the first year in the university		Total response
		Strongly agree/Agree	Disagree/ strongly disagree	
Strongly agree/agree	N	12129	6046	18175
	%	66.7%	33.3	100%
Disagree/strongly disagree	N	8983	5934	14971
	%	59.4%	40.6	100%
Total	N	21183	12166	33349

$\chi2=8.09df=1$, P=0.040

when the social adjustment of adolescents was compared between by their ability to create good interpersonal relationship with others at their first year in the university, findings revealed that adolescents that did not find it difficult to create good interpersonal relationship with others at their first year in the university, (66.7%) of them were found to significantly and socially adjusted in the teaching learning context more than adolescents that had difficult to create good interpersonal relationship with others at their first year in the university, (59.4%) and this difference in proportion was significant (P=0.041, <0.05).

Table 4: Relationship between interpersonal relationship and social adjustment of adolescents

Test statistics		Interpersonal relationship	Social adjustment
Spearman's	R-value	1.000	.411**
rho P-value	.		.000
	N	352	352

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

Also, there was a significant, positive and relatively strong relationship between interpersonal relationship and social adjustment of adolescents. (P=0.000, <0.05). The positive sign of the relationship (R= 0.411**) implies that interpersonal relationship has a positive and significant effect on the social adjustment of adolescents. In other words, adolescents socially adjust well in the teaching learning context when they established good interpersonal relationship with others. This finding is supported with that from the table whereby adolescents that were found to socially adjusted well in the teaching learning context where those that created good interpersonal relationships with others. Therefore, the hypothesis which states there is no significant difference between interpersonal relationship skills and adolescents' social adjustment in the teaching and learning context was rejected and the alternative which states there is a significant difference between interpersonal relationship skills and adolescents' social adjustment in the teaching and learning context was accepted.

DISCUSSION

Interpersonal   Relationship   and   Social Adjustment

The findings revealed a significant, positive and relatively strong relationship between interpersonal relationship and social adjustment of adolescents. The positive sign of the relationship implied that interpersonal relationship has a positive and significant effect on the social adjustment of adolescent. This means that adolescent will socially adjust well in the teaching/learning context if they create good interpersonal relationship with others. This is in congruence with Dinger (1999) who argued that students need continued support to become involved in activities and that this improves their overall adjustment. The transition to college is difficult for many students and students need support and encouragement to join various organizations and participate in activities to feel like they are a part of the university community (Consolvo, 2002). Activities served not only as a coping mechanism, but also in assisting students in making new friends and finding their place in the university community. Thus making them to adjust socially well.

Again, adolescents reportedly agreed that they find

it difficult to interact with others and also difficulty re-adjusting to new life at their first year at the university. This is in line with Holmbeck & Leake (1999) who said that individuals who are able to succeed at handling their independence and newfound freedoms are able to make new relationships while maintaining old relationships. Thus, gaining a better understanding of what factors may promote positive adjustment in the first year of college is warranted Pratt (2000). Also, Two constructs that have not often been considered but may potentially contribute to better adjustment in college students during their freshman year are a sense of university belonging (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002) and the quality of their friendships (Fass& Tubman, 2002). Schools are recognized as important developmental contexts for academic and socio emotional development (Eccles & Roeser, 2003) of younger students. Yet, researchers have rarely considered the school context when examining the adjustment of late adolescents as they attend college. Some researchers have suggested that the degree of affiliation that the student feels toward the university (i.e., university attachment) is linked to better social adjustment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2000), lower levels of depressive symptoms, higher academic motivation, and lower attrition rates (Beyers & Goossens, 2002).

Furthermore, majority of adolescents did not interact with their teachers during their first year at the university. Previous studies have suggested that relationships and making meaningful connections are important for students to adjust to the college environment. Students who have been able to establish bonds in their new environment adjusted better than students who were isolated and not as successful in establishing new friendships and relationships. The theory of attachment has been used to explain the

importance of emotional bonds and healthy adjustment. Healthy individuals tend to have secure attachments to parents, guardians, and significant others in their lives. Individuals with secure attachments tend to have an easier time transitioning to college than individuals who do not have secure attachments Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, (1995).

CONCLUSION

There is need for the university to encourage social activities that can facilitate effective interpersonal relationships among students. The university as well should increase the level of publicity of guidance and counseling programme and its services in the universities so as to assist students in coping and adjusting to university life. Also, guidance and counseling should be considered as a major course for all first year students.

The parents should educate their children on some of the life challenges they will face during their first year at the university. Also, they should monitor their children's behaviors when they come back from break to know if they are socially able to represent them in meetings or when they are no more. The students should try as much as possible make use of the counseling services available for them. They should get involved in activities like joining school clubs so as to be able to interact and relate well with others. They should also posses' positive attitudes towards others in the school environment so as to socially adjust well.

All these are in line with Moser (1963), who posits that new students should be assisted to adjust to the new environment. He asserts that orientation of new students should be done is conjunction with continuing students. Interpersonal relationship has an effect on students self esteem which indeed affects the students overall adjustment at the university. Student may need to be assisted to develop skills of solving these difficulties and

uncertainties. One way of assisting students to develop the interactive skills may be through timely and adequate orientation. (Kyalo & Chumba, 2011).

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