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PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTE STUDENTS AS CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO PSYCHOSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

The study examines the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute students' personal characteristics as contributory factors to their psychosocial behaviour. The main data collection instrument was the questionnaire which was constructed using the modified 4- scale Likert type. Data was collected using the simple random sampling technique from a total of 404 400Level students obtained from 198 (49.01%) education science students and 206 (%=50.99) non- education science students. The sample also consists of 218 (%=53.96) males and 186 (%=46.04) females as well as 194 (48.02%) married and 210 (51.98%) single students of University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics of independent t-test, one-way analysis of variance as well as multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the data and test the stated hypotheses respectively. The results show that male DLI students are slightly more motivated and possess social control when compared to their female colleagues. Male DLI students tend to perceive stress at a lower rate when compared to the female DLI students. Male students tend to be more self-regulated than female students. With regard to self-regulation, DLI students between the age category of 26-30 years are the most self-regulated while those within the age category of 25 years and below tend to be the least self-regulated. DLI students of various marital dispositions exhibited the same level of motivation and social control, the way they perceive stress as well as the way they are self-regulated. This is an indication that students who are studying under the University of Lagos DLI programmes are not in any way affected by their marital status or gender thus making them viable for the programmes and giving an assurance that it would not potentially affect their studies. It is recommended that the Learner Support Unit should be sensitive to the psychosocial needs of the students who fall below 25years and female DLI students especially in coping and managing stress.

Keywords: Psychosocial factors, PSFs, motivation, social control, self-regulation, perceived stress, age, marital status, gender.

Introduction

Psychosocial factors can be simply defined as social conditions influencing individual psychological factors and vice versa. It is an interaction between social (environment) and psychological (individual) factors. Social factors include general factors at the level of human society concerned with social structure and social processes that impinge on the individual. Psychological factors include individual- level processes and meanings that influence mental states. The relationship between psychological factors and the physical body can be influenced by social factors; the effect of which is mediated through psychological understanding. Examples of psychological factors include social control, self-regulation, motivation, loneliness, marriage status, social disruption, work environment, stress, and social status.

In contemporary education, psychosocial factors (PSFs) such as motivation, social interaction skills, and environmental support have been widely acknowledged as being important for academic success (Clouder et al., 2008; Lee & Shute, 2010). In recent times, comprehensive educational frameworks have been projected that describe a broader range of educational outcomes with the goal of preparing learners both for success in school and as life-long learners through the integration of academic learning and social-emotional development. Examples of these frameworks include the 21st century skills framework for 21st century learning and the universal Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which involves the integration of two interrelated strands to promote successful school performance and youth development and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotion Learning (CASEL) which illustrates the connection between social and emotional learning and improved academic performance. (Bellanca &Brandt,

2010; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Merrell & Gueldner, 2010; Sparks, 2011; Zins et al., 2004).

In Illinois, Alaska, Missouri, and New Jersey, for example, state-wide policies describe the need to incorporate psychosocial skills into educational programmes to improve students' academic performance. These programmes use grade-appropriate psychosocial standards, guidelines, curriculum modules, checklists, and more (Lantieri, 2008). The integration of PSFs changes the meaning of educational accountability from a focus on achievement testing to helping students become life-long, autonomous learners.

Additionally, studies have shown that PgSFs such as self-efficacy, motivation, locus of control, attitude toward learning, attention, persistence, use of learning strategies, and learning flexibility add incremental validity to cognitive factors, such as ability and prior achievement, in predicting future academic achievement (Grigorenko et al., 2009; Yen, Konold, & McDemott, 2004).

In another dimension, PSFs have also impacted on school completion. Rumberger and Lim (2008) reviewed studies of dropouts conducted over the past 25 years and found that PSFs such as attitude and characteristics of family and school personnel, along with prior academic achievement and learning behaviors, can differentiate between students who graduate and those who drop out of high school.

In one of the African folktales, a story of the animals in the animals' kingdom is told thus: A long time ago, life was peaceful and full of fun in the animals' kingdom. Different animals organised competitions as part of the activities to keep them happy. One day a tortoise challenged a hare to a marathon race. The hare felt that the tortoise was out of his mind. Nonetheless, the race was organised by the community of animals and a date was fixed.

On the appointed date, the two competitors were called out and the race began in earnest. The fans of both animals hailed them. As the race continued the fans of the hare started mocking the fans of the tortoise because the hare was leading the tortoise by no small distance. The hare outran the tortoise with so much distance that it felt there was no use to burn its energy on the go -slowly tortoise. Hence, he decided to take a nap. While the hare was sleeping, the go- slowly animal, the tortoise crawled pass. Alas, the tortoise won the race! All the animals in the animals' kingdom hailed tortoise and the hare went away shamefully. This tale is often told to emphasize how diligence can make up for a lack of ability. Additionally, the tale illustrates how psychosocial factors (PSFs) such as diligence, self-regulation, social control and motivation are central to the development of competence in any domain of non-trivial difficulty. As in the fable, studies of expertise show that deliberate, well-structured practice is required to develop and maintain high-level of skills (Ericsson et al., 1993).

Statement of the Problem

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002), open and distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure. However, Distance Learning Education is an avenue to achieve self-fulfillment on the part of those who would have taken courses in a full-time programme but are denied the opportunity to do so based on a number of factors which could range from job demands to inability to compete effectively for the few spaces in the full-time programme as well as other inconveniences. For an adult worker and or learner, Open and Distance Learning means increased access and flexibility as well as a combination of work and education.

In spite of the rapid growth of Open Distance Learning (ODL) and its enormous benefits, learners who enroll with ODL have been shown to face many challenges ranging from individual, institutional to instructional (Bhalalusesa, 1998, 1999, Cosmas and Mbwette, 2009;Mbukusa, 2009; Mushi,2001). However, studies are rarely directed at examining the psychosocial factors based on the personal characteristics of Open and Distance learners who are already adults and having wide-ranging responsibilities. An average Open Distance learner is involved in multitasking duties which range from being a worker, wife, husband, entrepreneur, politician or community worker. It is in the light of these observations that the present study is being undertaken; to determine the Personal Characteristics of Open and Distance Learning Students as Contributory Factors to Psychosocial Behaviour

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the contributory factors of personal characteristic differences of students' gender, age and marital status to psychosocial behaviours of Distance Learning students. It addressed the following objectives.

(1) To determine the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of motivation and social control

(2) To determine the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of perceived stress

(3) To determine the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of self-regulation.

Research Questions

(1) What are the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of motivation and social control?

(2) What are the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of perceived stress?

(3) What are the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of self-regulation?

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant contribution of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of motivation and social control.
2. There will be no significant contribution of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of perceived stress.
3. There will be no significant contribution of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of self-regulation.

Methodology

A non-experimental survey type of design was employed to obtain information from Distance Learning Institute (DLI) students. The sample comprises 404 DLI 400Level students randomly obtained from 198 (49.01%) science DLI students and 206 (%=50.99) non-science students. The sample also consists of 218 (%=53.96) males and 186 (%=46.04) females as well as 194 (48.02%) married and 210 (51.98%) single students. Psychosocial Variables Questionnaire comprising demographics as Section A and Motivation and Social Control in section B, Self-Regulation in Section C as well as students' Perceived Stress in Section D formed the instrument used in the study. Perceived Stress Scale was adopted from Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein (1983) while Motivation, Self-regulation and Social Control items were adapted from Kuo, Yi-Lung (2011) and Sedlacek and Brook (1990). Motivation and Social Control consist of 20 items while Self-Regulation consists of five items. The response format for the two

developed instruments ranged from Almost Never to Almost Always on a 4-point scale. The reliability value was determined using Cronbach and gave values of 0.65 for Motivation and Social Control as well as 0.52 for Self-Regulation. Data was collected within a period of two weeks. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics of independent t-test, one-way analysis of variance as well as multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the stated hypotheses. Level of statistical significance was put at α=.05. Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) version 20.0 was used to analyse the data.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of motivation and social control?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Contributory Factors of Gender, Marital Status and Age to Motivation and Social Control

		N	Mean	SD	B	R^2 Adjusted
	Variable	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic		
Gender	Male	218	2.47	0.345		
	Female	186	2.45	0.325	0.025	
Marital Status	Married	194	2.47	0.357		
	Single	210	2.45	0.315	-0.029	.002
Age	25yrs & below (1)	24	2.40	0.340		
	26-30yrs (2)	188	2.47	0.370	0.025	
	31-35yrs (3)	144	2.44	0.320		
	36yrs & above (4)	48	2.51	0.240		

Table 1 shows that male DLI students are slightly more motivated and possess social control (Mean=2.47, SD=0.345) when compared to their female

counterparts (Mean=2.45, SD=0.325). This implies that an insignificant mean difference of 0.02 exist between the male and female students. The relative contributions of gender as measured by standardized beta coefficient indicate that for every one unit change in gender there was a corresponding increase of 0.025unit in the mean score of motivation and social control of the male DLI students being the reference category. Similarly, married DLI students are slightly more motivated and possess social control when compared to their single colleagues with a positive difference of 0.02 as shown in Table 1. Thus, one unit change in the marital status of the single students being the reference category was accompanied by a decrease of 0.029 unit in their motivation and social control mean score. One unit change in the age bracket of 36 years and above of the DLI students also correspond to 0.025 unit increase in their motivation and social control being the reference category. As a result of the small differences that exist in the mean scores of motivation and social control across the levels of students' gender, marital status and age coupled with the categorical nature of the contributory variables, the joint contribution was 0.2% to the criterion variable of motivation and social control.

Research Question 2

What are the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of perceive stress?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Contributory Factors of Gender, Marital Status and Age to Perceived Stress

		N	Mean	SD	B	R^2 Adjusted
	Variable	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic		
Gender	Male	218	1.66	0.438		
	Female	186	1.76	0.474	-0.107	
Marital	Married	194	1.72	0.519		

Status					-	.008
	Single	210	1.69	0.391	0.040	
Age	25yrs & below (1)	24	1.82	0.320		
	26-30yrs (2)	188	1.69	0.470	-	
	31-35yrs (3)	144	1.71	0.450	0.054	
	36yrs & above (4)	48	1.65	0.470		

It can be seen from Table 2 that DLI male students tend to perceive a lower stress mean **score** (Mean=1.66, SD=0.438) when compared to their female colleagues (Mean=1.76, SD=0.474). Thus, a mean difference of 0.10 exist between them. The relative contributions of gender as measured by standardized beta coefficient indicate that for every one unit change in the male being the reference category for the gender, there was a corresponding decrease of 0.107unit in the mean score of perceive stress of the male DLI science education students being the reference category. Similarly, the single DLI students tend to perceive a lower stress mean score (Mean=1.69, SD=0.391) when compared to their married colleagues (Mean=1.72, SD=0.519) with a mean difference of 0.03 existing between them. The relative contributions of marital status as measured by standardized beta coefficient indicate that for every one unit change in the single DLI students being the reference category for the marital status, there was a corresponding decrease of 0.040unit in the mean score of perceive stress of the single DLI students being the reference category. With regard to age, students in the age category of 36 years and above which is the reference category tend to experience the least stress when compared to the other age categories (Mean=1.65, SD=0.470). Thus, a relative contribution of age measured by standardized beta coefficient indicate that for every one unit change in the reference category of 36 years and above, there exist a corresponding decrease of 0.054 unit in their tendency to perceive stress. Consequently, the small mean differences across the levels of gender, age

and marital status was responsible for the small variance contribution of 0.8% when the contributory factors were put together to explain perceive stress of DLI students.

Research Question 3

What are the contributory factors of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of self-regulation?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Contributory Factors of Gender, Marital Status and Age to Self-Regulation of DLI Students

		N	Mean	SD	B	R^2 Adjusted
	Variable	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic		
Gender	Male	218	1.89	0.532		
	Female	186	1.81	0.517	0.079	
Marital Status	Married	194	1.83	0.595		
					0.033	
	Single	210	1.88	0.453		.002
Age	25yrs & below (1)	24	1.58	0.360		
	26-30yrs (2)	188	1.93	0.580	-	
	31-35yrs (3)	144	1.83	0.460	0.030	
	36yrs & above (4)	48	1.76	0.480		

Table 3 shows that male DLI students (Mean=1.89, SD=0.532).tend to be more self-regulated than the female DLI students (Mean=1.81, SD=0.517).Thus, the relative contribution of gender as measured by the reference category was that for every one unit change in the reference category of male, there was a corresponding increase of 0.079 unit in the way they are self-regulated. Single DLI students (Mean=1.88, SD=0.453) also tend to be more self-regulated than the married DLI students (Mean=1.83, SD=0.595).The relative contribution of

marital status as measured by the reference category of single DLI students indicate that for every one unit change in the reference category of single DLI students, there exist a corresponding increase of 0.033 unit in the way they are self-regulated. With regard to age, the reference category was 36 years and above and had the least mean score in self-regulation apart from the age category of 25 years and below. The relative contribution of age as measured by the reference category was that for every one unit change, there exist reductions of 0.030 unit in the way they are self-regulated.

Hypothesis 1

There will be no significant contribution of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of motivation and social control.

Table 4: One-Way Analysis of Variance of Contributions of Age, Gender and Marital Status to Motivation and Social Control

Variable	$F_{(3, 400)}$	Sig. of P	t-value	Sig. of P
Gender	.		.504	.615
Marital Status	294	.830	.504	.615
Age			-.562	.574

Significant at p<.05

Table 4 shows that students' gender, marital status and age did not significantly contribute to motivation and social control when combined together ($F_{3, 400}$ =.294, p=.830). Similarly, gender, marital status and age were not significant in their relative contributions to motivation and social control. Thus, the null hypothesis stated was not rejected as small differences generated in their scores across levels of students' gender, marital status and age did not generate enough variances to significantly contribute to motivation and social control. The inference that can be drawn is that DLI students' motivation and social control are

not affected by their personal characteristics. Put in another way, the social control and motivation of DLI students did not vary significantly based on their personal characteristics of gender, marital status and age.

Hypothesis 2
There will be no significant contribution of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of perceived stress.

Table 5: One-Way Analysis of Variance of Contributions of Age, Gender and Marital Status to Perceived Stress

Variable	$F_{(3, 400)}$	Sig. of P	t-value	Sig. of P
Gender	.		-2.150	.032
Marital Status	2.120	.097	-.785	.433
Age			-1.067	.287

Significant at p<.05

It can be observed from Table 5 that students' gender, marital status and age did not significantly contribute to perceived stress when combined together ($F_{3, 400}$ =.2.120, p=.097). Similarly, students' marital status and age were not significant in their relative contributions to perceive stress. However, there was a significant relative contribution of students' gender to perceived stress (t=-2.150, p=.032). Female DLI students' perception of stress was at a significantly higher level when compared to their male colleagues (See Table 2). Thus, that aspect of null hypothesis was rejected. The inference that can be drawn is that students' marital status and age of DLI students has nothing to do with the way they perceive stress

Hypothesis 3
There will be no significant contribution of students' age, gender and marital status to the psychosocial variable of self-regulation

Table 5: One-Way Analysis of Variance of Contributions of Age, Gender and Marital Status to Self-Regulation

Variable	$F_{(3, 400)}$	Sig. of P	t-value	Sig. of P
Gender	.		1.580	.115
Marital Status	1.233	.297	.645	.519
Age			-.598	.550

Significant at p<.05

It can be observed from Table 6 that students' gender, marital status and age did not significantly contribute to self-regulation when combined together ($F_{3, 400}$ =1.233, p=.297). Similarly, students' gender, marital status and age were not significant in their relative contributions to self-regulation Thus, the null hypothesis stated was not rejected as the differences generated in their scores across levels of gender, marital status and age did not aggregate to generate variances to significantly contribute to self -regulation. The inference that can be drawn is that DLI students' self-regulation are not affected by their personal characteristics whether collectively or in their separate contributions.

Discussion

The first research question and the corresponding hypothesis deal with whether significant contributory factors exist in the levels of gender, marital status and age to psychosocial variable of motivation and social control. Results reveal that significant contribution did not exist whether when combined together or in separate forms. This implies that irrespective of gender, marital status and age, Distance Learning students are equally motivated as well as exhibiting no differential effect with regard to social control and motivation. Most studies are increasingly reporting no significant differences between the genders in educational outcomes. More recent findings indicate that women flourish equally like men in science when given the opportunities and a supportive and cognitively stimulating environment for effective science learning to take place (Xie &

Shauman, 2003. The findings relating to educational outcomes in which gender differences did not exist are well documented in literature (Fraser, 2009; Odogwu, Yewande & Fakorede, 2013, Parker & Collins, 2010). This finding may not be unconnected with various local, national and international programmes and projects aimed at empowering women and giving equal opportunities to both sexes. These interventions to a large extent could have led to the narrowing of gender gap in recent years.

The second research question and the parallel hypothesis focused on whether significant contributory factors exist in the levels of gender, marital status and age to psychosocial variable of perceived stress. DLI students of various age categories and marital status categories exhibited the same level in the way they perceive stress. However, gender of DLI students differed significantly in the way they perceive stress. This may not be unconnected with the role of females domestically and when this is combined with academic schedule, there is a tendency to confer on them some levels of stress. Thus, there might be a need to be considerate when dealing with the female DLI students especially in coping and managing with stress. This finding is in sharp contrast to the findings of the work conducted by Yewande and Esiobu (2014) on the influence of student and school characteristics on pre-service STM teachers' entrepreneurial abilities. In this study, the pre-service STM teachers differed on the combined entrepreneurship abilities of personal characteristics, interpersonal skills as well as critical and creativity components. Though, Anastasi and Urbina (2004) has noted with caution that at times, students with lower age category can overestimate their perception about issues. However the lowest age category here is 18-25 years and they have not in any way overestimated their perceived stress abilities.

Lastly, the third research question and the corresponding hypothesis centred on whether significant contributory factors exist in the levels of gender, marital status and age to psychosocial variable of self-regulation. Result reveal that significant contribution did not exist whether when combined together or in separate forms. This implies that irrespective of gender, marital status and age, Distance Learning students are equally self-regulated as well as exhibiting no differential effect with regard to scores in self-regulation. In conclusion, DLI students of various marital status and age inclinations exhibited the same level of motivation and social control, the way they perceive stress as well as the way they are self-regulated. This is an indication that students who are studying under the DLI, University of Lagos programme are not in any way affected by their marital status and age thus making them viable for the programme and giving an assurance that it would not potentially affect their studies. However, the study notes with caution that female DLI students are not able to cope and manage with the way they perceive stress emanating from the nexus of academic, domestic and societal expectations that tend to weigh heavily on women. Thus, there might be a need to come up with supportive strategies in this regard for the female DLI students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, since the main objective of Open Distance Learning (ODL) is to provide flexible education which is also easily accessible, the learners should be self-motivated, self-regulated and well socially adjusted to learn. Every form of stress during instructional delivery and /or assessment whether in a separated or blended mode should be minimized irrespective of the gender, age and marital status of learners. Adequate social activities to engage the age bracket of 25years and below should be planned and implemented by various institutions for this group to dissipate part of their energy. This implies that the Learner Support Unit

in Open Distance Institutions should be sensitive to the psycho social needs of students within 25years and below age bracket.

It is recommended that subsequent studies should explore the effect of psychosocial factors (PSFs) in a different population because the sample for the present study was Distance Learners in the University of Lagos, Nigeria. It is also constructive for other researchers to replicate this study in some other population to test the generalizability of the findings. Similarly, exploring other PSFs on learners' personal characteristics and academic achievements will be a worthwhile academic exercise.

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