
Selected Soft Skills As Correlates Of Scholastic Adjustment Of Undergraduates In Rivers State Universisties

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Abstract

The study investigated selected soft skills as correlates of scholastic adjustment of undergraduates in Rivers State universities. Three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. A sample of 400 undergraduates was drawn through proportionate sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a researcher's developed questionnaire, titled: "Soft Skills, Adversity Intelligence and Scholastic Adjustment Scale (SSAISAS). The test re-test reliability method was employed to determined measure of stability of the instrument. The following correlation coefficients were obtained: $r=0.75$ for Communication Skills Scale, $r=0.76$ for Leadership Skills Scale, and $r=0.83$ for Time Management Scale and $r=0.81$ for Scholastic Adjustment Scale. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was employed for data analysis. The result showed a moderate positive correlation between communication and collaboration skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities, a strong positive correlation between leadership and adaptability skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities. Among others, it was recommended that students acquire soft or life skills such as leadership, time management and communication skills as they will enhance their scholastic adjustment and by extension their academic performance.

Keywords: Soft skills, Communication skills, Leadership Skills, Time Management, Scholastic Adjustment

Introduction

Scholastic adjustment refers to the process by which students adapt to the academic environment, including academic demands, social interactions, and extracurricular activities (Baker & Siryk, 2024). Scholastic adjustment is crucial in our culture and our education system today because every school changes its rules, its teachers and its

student's academic expectations. This also required a corresponding adjustment and modification of learning abilities in the part of the students. For Paramanik, et. al. (2014) adjustment refers to the behavioral process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium between their various needs and the obstacles of their environments. Adjustment represents the result of equilibrium, and individual adaptations which enable one to adjust in accordance to one environmental requirement. Thus, adjustment between two things means to modify one or both of them to correspond to each other for the actualization of specific objectives.

Thus, scholastic adjustment is universally psychological processes through which students cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life within the school ecosystem. This is so because students are many times trapped in numerous uncertainties regarding their lives, success and achievement in their scholastic endeavour. It is pertinent to note that in school settings, participating in school activities together with other class mate or living with other students in hostels, and halls can be very challenging facets especially when students come from diverse socio-cultural environments (Lakhani, et. al. 2017). This why researchers are concerned about students' scholastic adjustment and factors influencing it.

Soft skills play a significant role in facilitating this adjustment. Students who possess strong communication skills find it easier to interact with peers, faculty, and staff, resulting in smoother transitions and a greater sense of belonging (Riggio, 2017). Effective time management and organization skills aid in coping with the increased workload, reducing the likelihood of academic stress and burnout (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

As countries around the world strive to meet the demands of a rapidly changing job market, there is a growing recognition of the need to cultivate both technical expertise and soft skills among graduates. Nigerian universities traditionally focused on imparting theoretical knowledge; however, the evolving employment landscape necessitates a shift towards producing graduates who are well-rounded and adaptable. A study conducted by Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2020) highlighted that Nigerian graduates often face challenges in securing employment due to a lack of soft skills. Employers frequently express concerns about graduates' abilities to communicate effectively, work in teams and adapt to dynamic work environments. As industries become more competitive and innovation-driven, employers seek candidates who can not only contribute their technical knowledge but also collaborate seamlessly and navigate ambiguity.

To address this gap, educational institutions in Nigeria, including those in Rivers State, are gradually integrating soft skills development into their curricula. Workshops, seminars, and projects focusing on communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership are becoming more common. Collaborative projects and group assignments are designed to emulate real-world work scenarios, providing students with opportunities to enhance their interpersonal and communication skills. It has therefore become pertinent that an empirical understanding of the soft skills and adversity intelligence are associated with scholastic adjustment of undergraduate in Rivers State Universities.

Soft skills are a set of abilities that enable individuals to effectively interact, collaborate, and communicate with others (Dogara et al., 2020). These skills go beyond technical knowledge and are essential for personal and professional success.

In today's rapidly evolving job market, the significance of soft skills has increased exponentially due to the changing dynamics of workplaces and the growing emphasis on teamwork, adaptability, effective communication, and adversity intelligence.

In the contemporary job landscape, technical skills alone are insufficient to ensure career advancement and job satisfaction. Soft skills play a pivotal role in determining an individual's success in their chosen profession. According to a report by the World Economic Forum, critical thinking, creativity, and communication are among the top skills required by employers worldwide. These skills enable employees to navigate complex challenges, work effectively with diverse teams, and contribute meaningfully to their organizations (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Effective communication, for instance, is a fundamental soft skill that encompasses the ability to articulate ideas clearly, actively listen, and understand non-verbal cues. In an interconnected global economy, where remote work and virtual collaborations have become the norm, the ability to communicate across cultures and time zones is paramount. This skill not only fosters efficient teamwork but also facilitates relationship-building with clients and stakeholders. In addition to communication, other soft skills that will be considered in this study includes leadership, collaboration, adaptability, critical thinking, time management, and adversity intelligence.

Leadership skills are particularly pertinent for undergraduate students as they navigate their academic pursuits and campus life. These skills involve the ability to inspire, guide, and influence others toward common objectives. Effective leaders among students exhibit qualities such as communication, decision-making, and empathy (Northouse, 2018). As they engage in group projects, student organizations, and peer interactions, they can develop these skills (Judge et al., 2022), preparing them for future leadership roles. Teamwork, also conceptualized as collaboration skills hold great importance for undergraduates as they often engage in group assignments, extracurricular activities, and collaborative projects. These skills encompass active listening, conflict resolution, and shared decision-making (Katzenbach & Smith, 2023). Developing effective collaboration skills contributes to students' abilities to work harmoniously within diverse teams, mirroring the collaborative nature of the professional world (Belbin, 2010).

Furthermore, time management and organizational skills are vital for undergraduate students who must juggle academic responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments. Efficient time management enhances productivity and reduces stress (Britton & Tesser, 2021). By mastering these skills, students can excel in their studies while also maintaining a healthy work-life balance, setting the stage for future professional success (Macan et al., 2010).

As undergraduate students actively develop these soft skills, they not only enhance their academic experiences but also lay the groundwork for successful future careers and personal growth. By recognizing the importance of these skills and fostering their development, students can position themselves for a well-rounded and prosperous journey through higher education and beyond (Maren, et al., 2023).

From the foregoing, effort has been made to understand the implications of soft skills in the career and professional development of undergraduate students. Unfortunately, previous researches have overlooked how these skills are related to the scholastic adjustment of students, especially within the context of Rivers State.

Scholastic adjustment refers to the process by which students adapt to the academic environment, including academic demands, social interactions, and extracurricular activities (Baker & Siryk, 2024). Soft skills play a significant role in facilitating this adjustment. Students who possess strong communication skills find it easier to interact with peers, faculty, and staff, resulting in smoother transitions and a greater sense of belonging (Riggio, 2017). Effective time management and organization skills aid in coping with the increased workload, reducing the likelihood of academic stress and burnout (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

The relevance of undergraduate students' soft skills and their scholastic adjustment is undeniably crucial. Current evidence suggests that possessing a diverse range of soft skills positively impacts academic performance, engagement, and overall well-being (Mecan et al, 2020). As universities strive to prepare students for success in both academic and professional domains, a comprehensive approach to education that emphasizes the cultivation of soft skills is imperative. It is therefore this emerging reality that informed the conduct of this study which investigates on soft skills, adversity intelligence and scholastic adjustment of undergraduates in Rivers State universities, Nigeria

Statement of the Problem

Soft skills have emerged as indispensable components of holistic student growth. However, this skill has been found to be lacking in students, particularly undergraduates. Thus, making scholastic adjustment very difficult for students. This, if left unchecked has the capacity of grumbling our education system.

Yet amidst this, there is alarming discrepancy between the possession of soft skills and the scholastic adjustment of undergraduate students within Rivers State Universities. There is incongruent relationship between the effort put in place by government and the actual possession of soft skills by undergraduates in Rivers State. While the importance of soft skills and resilience intelligence is increasingly acknowledged for their influence on students' holistic development, a nuanced exploration of their specific impacts on the scholastic adjustment of students at the university level has not been given the needed scholarly attention it deserves.

Soft skills are highly valued by employers across various industries. Graduates who lack these skills may struggle to adapt to dynamic work environments, find innovative solutions, and effectively collaborate with colleagues. As a result, they may experience limited career opportunities and lower chances of professional advancement. Effective soft skills are associated with resilience and the ability to overcome obstacles. Without these skills, undergraduates may be more likely to experience frustration, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness when faced with challenges. This can result in a cycle of avoidance and reduced motivation to tackle difficult problems, limiting their personal growth and development.

Soft skills are closely linked to innovation, as they involve thinking outside the box and generating novel solutions. Undergraduates lacking soft skills may struggle to think critically, generate new ideas, and approach problems from different perspectives. This can hinder their ability to contribute to innovative projects, entrepreneurship, and the advancement of knowledge in their fields. Additionally, soft skills are crucial for adapting to change and navigating uncertainties. Undergraduates who lack these skills may struggle to cope with unexpected situations, technological advancements, and shifting demands in their academic and professional lives. This

can lead to feelings of insecurity, resistance to change, and an inability to effectively adapt to new circumstances. It has therefore become imperative to empirically investigate selected soft skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates in Rivers State Universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the extent of relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State universities?
2. What is the extent of relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State universities?
3. What is the extent of relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State universities?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance to further guide this study:

1. There is no significant relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State universities.
2. There is no significant relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State universities.
3. There is no significant relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State universities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The design for this study was the correlational research design. The population of this study comprised all undergraduates in the three government-owned universities in Rivers State, namely the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education with a total number of 63,753 undergraduate. From the total number of 63,753 undergraduates, the University of Port Harcourt has a total number of 25,698 registered undergraduates (Registry Unit, 2023), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education has a total of 16,628 undergraduates (Department of Academic Planning, 2022), while Rivers State University has a total of 21,427 undergraduates (Registry Unit, 2023).

The sample of this study was 400 undergraduates in Rivers State. Taro Yamane formula was used to determine a sample size of 398. The researcher purposively increased it to 400 for better representation. The proportionate sampling technique will be used to draw the sample. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled Soft Skills and Scholastic Adjustment Scale (SSSAS). Two experts in Measurement and Evaluation, and Guidance and Counselling ascertained and validated the instrument (questionnaire) which the researchers employed in this study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-re-test reliability method. The copies of the instruments were administered to 20 undergraduates who did not participate in the final study. The responses of the students were subjected to statistical analysis to determine their reliability coefficient. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to correlate the scores. The obtained correlation coefficient was $r=0.75$ for Communication Skills Scale, $r=0.76$ for Leadership Skills Scale, $r=0.83$ for Time

Management Scale and $r=0.81$ for Scholastic Adjustment Scale which were deemed high enough to guarantee the reliability of the instrument for the study.

The researcher prepared 400 questionnaires. The questionnaire were distributed to 400 undergraduates in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt River, University of Port Harcourt and River state university respectively. The researcher and three trained research assistant will visit the population for the administration of the questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the corresponding null hypotheses.

Results

Research Question One: What is the extent of the relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities.

Table 1: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Communication Skills and Scholastic Adjustment

		Communication Skills	Scholastic Adjustment
Communication Skills	Pearson's Coefficient	1	.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400

The result in Table 1 shows low positive relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State ($r = .372$). While for hypothesis testing, the result shows that the relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State is significant because the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($r = .372, p < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities.

Research Question Two: What is the extent of the relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities

Table 2: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation of Leadership Skills and Scholastic Adjustment

		Leadership Skills	Scholastic Adjustment
Leadership Skills	Pearson's Coefficient	1	.469**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400

The result in Table 2 shows a moderate positive relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State ($r = .469$). While for hypothesis testing, the result shows that the relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State is significant because the

p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($r = .469, p < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities.

Research Question Three: What is the extent of the relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities

Table 4.2.5 Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation of Time Management Skills and Scholastic Adjustment

		Time Management Skills	Scholastic Adjustment
Time	Pearson’s Coefficient	1	.550**
Management	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Skills	N	400	400

The result in Table 3 shows moderate positive relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State ($r = .55$). While for hypothesis testing, the result shows that the relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State is significant because the p-value of .000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($r = .55, p < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities.

Discussion of Findings

Relationship between Communication Skills and Scholastic Adjustment

The result in table 1 of the study found a low positive correlation between communication skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities. This study is contrary to that of Ashfaque et al. (2020) who found out that student’ communication skills yielded statistically no effect on their academic achievement. Similarly, Suheir et al. (2020) in their study found out that university students have achieved a high level of communication skills in three dimensions (listening, speaking, and understanding others). It also showed a medium level in controlling emotions. Moreover, the results showed that there were no significant differences in the level of communication skills according to gender, faculty, or academic year. The difference in the present study from those in reviewed literature could be as a result of the fact that the other studies are foreign studies, while present study was locally done.

Relationship between Leadership Skills and Scholastic Adjustment

The result in table 2 of the study revealed a strong positive correlation between leadership skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities. This finding is similar to that of Murage et al. (2018) who found out that 66.3% of student leaders had leadership competence to organize welfare activities to address students’ concerns in their institutions while 33.7% lacked capability. Further, the study established that leadership skills significantly contributed to effective provision of student affairs services. Moreso, Rabeea et al. (2022) in their study that

there is significant correlation between the leadership style of principals and students' academic achievement. This similarity in results could be probably because leadership skills are developed quite early in students right from the home front.

Relationship between Time Management Skills and Scholastic Adjustment

The in table 3 result of the study found a strong positive correlation between time management skills and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities. This study is similar to that of Iqbal et al. (2020) who investigated the relationship between university students time management skills and their academic performance and found out that the university students exhibited moderate level of time management skills. No significant difference was found between the perceptions of male and female students. A positive significant moderate relationship was found between the four constructs of TMBS and students academic performance. It was concluded that the students who have good time management skills tends to have higher academic achievement and decreased time management skills could result in decreased outcomes. This result is so probably because students in rivers state universities are time managers.

Conclusion

This study has empirically shown that there is a significant relationship between selected soft skills (Communication, Time management and leadership skills) and scholastic adjustment among undergraduates of Rivers State Universities.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Lecturers should encourage the development of communication skills in students as such will enhance their scholastic adjustment and by extension their academic performance.
2. Parents should always nurture leadership skills in students to enhance independence and responsibility and accountability which will in turn promote their scholastic adjustment and by extension their academic performance.
3. Curriculum developers should develop programmes that would stimulate the development of soft skills in university students, as such will help their in and out of school endeavours.

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