

ASSESSING THE PATTERNS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES
AT OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA
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Abstract

The study assessed the patterns of social interaction among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design with a population comprising all undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The sample for the study consisted of 200 respondents who were selected using purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for the study was a self-designed questionnaire titled 'Undergraduates Patterns of Social Interaction Questionnaire' (UPSIQ). The validity of the instrument was determined through face and content validity while the reliability of the instrument was determined using a test-retest method and a reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was obtained. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation, bar charts, and pie charts. The study discovered that the prevalent forms and pattern of social interaction among students is within their social circles. It was discovered that students exhibited social interaction predominantly for ecological factors while other reasons ranked biological, basic cognitive processes, characteristics and actions of others as well as cultural context in that order. The study, therefore, recommended among others that different fora where intra and inter-ethnic interactions take place should be encouraged among undergraduates.

Keywords: Social interaction, Undergraduates, Assessing, Social engagements, Perception

Introduction

A person's social role, or where he/she fit in society, is a combination of behaviour, responsibilities, rights, beliefs and social norms. These various elements combined to form complex social interactions. A social role is

determined by where an individual fits within that network. Social roles are much less rigid in human culture today, especially among undergraduates, yet they are still present. Interactions between members of an organization form continually evolving multi-relational networks. As part of this development, new networks appear or existing networks are modified. People are linked by a wide range of relationships: friendship, information exchange, emotional support, rivalry, influence, hierarchy, parenthood, sex, trust, common interests, origin, and so on. Some relationships take precedence over others depending on the goal in each setting. Organizational researchers have not only measured networks based on formal relationships, such as organizational workflows or hierarchy, but have also shown an interest in informal relationships, like advice-seeking, cooperation, support, and friendship (Lange, Agneessens & Waeye, 2004).

The concept of social interaction has been of interest as far back as human existence. Some classical definitions as put forward by King and Sorrentino, (1983) varied depending on the particular activities and problem-solving techniques (for example, issues of orientation, problems of decision), or social surroundings that are involved (for example, classrooms, family settings, psychiatric wards, Moos, 1973). It has become increasingly apparent that the complicated phenomenon of interpersonal interactions must be made understandable, especially at this time of artificial intelligence and the rise of human-machine interactions and machine intelligence (Devillers & Duplessis, 2017). This calls for a thorough yet succinct account of social interactions. The variety of social interactions that take place among people must be taken into account in the development of such a description as well as the variety of ways

that people perceive social interactions (Devillers & Duplessis, 2017). Social relationships must include social interactions.

Despite the importance of social interactions, there has not been a defined method to systematize them. So, it seems sensible that an educational model would foster student social interactions while the instructional model's scheduled learning procedures were being implemented. It might be worthwhile to study these social interactions. Several studies (Heimberg, et al, 1992; Golder, Wilkinson & Huberman, 2007; Ong, Yeap, Tan, & Chong, 2011) have shown that social interactions are crucial in creating learning environments where knowledge is shared, tasks are completed collaboratively, conversations are had, and a network of social, cognitive, and emotional connections are formed (Haythornthwaite, 2012). The dynamics of these interactions play a role in the development of both individual and group knowledge (Erkan, 2011).

Today, it is crucial for all students to develop strong professional and social networks and to communicate effectively daily. As young people describe their social experiences, descriptions of social interactions reveal what they value, given how important social contacts are to people's daily lives. The components (sets of shared traits) that young people use to characterize their social interactions using this communicative function of description is very vital (Reis, 2018). Hidi and Ainley (2008) noted that studies have focused almost exclusively on classroom/learning examples, with fewer attempts to understand students' life and their interaction outside the classroom. Goffman (2010) argued that these seemingly insignificant forms of social interaction are of major importance in sociology and should not be overlooked. Furthermore, Goffman (2010) described Social interaction as the process of reciprocal influence exercised by individuals over one another during social encounters. The social interactions people experience shape their social behaviours, according to the social interaction theory. This suggests that behaviour is influenced by the environment, particularly social groupings, to some extent. How social identities (such as race,

ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status) shape patterns of social interaction among undergraduates is great but not yet empirically verified.

Meanwhile, undergraduates spend a greater part of their time within the university compound. In compliance to the requirements for completing a course, a student works with a team doing assignments, laboratory reports, and other course activities (Cooper, 2002). This provides a level of different patterns of interaction among classmates. Moreover, apart from its formal aspects including lectures, homework, individual learning and communication with teachers, there is an informal aspect to the learning and teaching process including interactions among students, informal learning and non-learning, which involves sharing learning materials, working in teams or simply talking in a relaxed manner. Such patterns of interaction with fellow team members have been suggested to increase students' maturity and adaptability to work life after academic programmes (Haythornthwaite, 2012).

Observation has shown that the forms of interaction that can exist among youths are diverse. Cliques are close-knit friendship groups may be exclusive to others and spend the majority of their time together. They frequently have comparable histories, personalities, or interests. Social circles are bigger groups of friends that might share some hobbies and extra-curricular pursuits, but they are not as close-knit as cliques. A very common form of interaction among university students is a study group which is an association of students who meet regularly to prepare for assignments and tests. While they might socialize occasionally outside of class, academics are their main priority. There are also extra curriculum activity groups like party groups where teams of students mostly hang out at events and bars and party together. Sports teams are teams of students who get along because they both enjoy the same sport. There are also interest groups where teams of students are associated because they have the same interest or pastime, such as a gaming or music club. These social interactional patterns are not mutually exclusive, and many undergraduates may be involved in many social circles or groups. These might alter

as students pass through various phases of their academic careers or pick up new hobbies and connections.

Social interactions assist in shaping how we act and who we are in various situations (Maglione, 2015). The factors affecting social interactions can be classified into five main categories. They include biological factors, basic cognitive processes, characteristics and actions of others, cultural context, and ecological variables (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2006).

Consequently, it is only logical that the educational model should encourage social relationships among students during learning processes scheduled by the instructional model. These social relationships are worth researching. Many studies have demonstrated that social relationships play a decisive role in learning environments, where learning is the result of information exchange, joint task performance, conversations, and a network of social, cognitive, and emotional connections (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles & Turoff, 1995; Haythornthwaite, 2002). The dynamics of these interactions is a factor of individual and collective knowledge building (Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Cohen & Prusak, 2001). The idea that the nature of the interaction among students, and their social relationships, has a notable influence or could even be a key factor explaining their achievement or abandonment of academic programs is widespread in education (Brass, 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Cho, Gay, Davidson, & Ingraffea, 2007). Hence, the need for this study.

This study assessed how patterns of social interaction change over time as individuals transition from high school to college, and how individuals learn to navigate new social norms and expectations. It is also important to investigate how social networks form and evolve among undergraduates, and how these networks influence patterns of social interaction.

Purpose of the Study

The ultimate aim of the study was to assess the pattern of social interaction among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. determine the perception of undergraduates on the pattern of social interaction exhibited by students at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife;
- ii. ascertain the patterns of social interaction among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife;
- iii. identify the patterns that is most prevalent among undergraduates in the study area; and
- iv. examine the reasons for such patterns of social interaction among undergraduates in the study area.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide this study:

- i. What is the perception of undergraduates on the pattern of social interaction exhibited by students at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife;
- ii. What patterns of social interaction do undergraduates exhibit at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife?
- iii. Which of the patterns is the most prevalent among undergraduates in the study area?
- iv. What are the reasons for such patterns of social interaction among undergraduates in the study area?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research design of the survey type with a population comprising all undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The sample for the study consisted of 200 respondents who were selected using purposive sampling technique. In specific terms, the respondents were purposively selected from humanity and social sciences based faculties in the university. The instrument used for the study was a self-designed questionnaire titled 'Undergraduates Patterns of Social Interaction Questionnaire' (UPSIQ). The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first part provided demographic information of respondents such as Age, Faculty, Department, Sex, Religion, and Ethnicity among others. The second section consisted of 15 items which were designed to provide information about the pattern of social interaction that O.A.U undergraduates' exhibit.

Section three comprised 5 items which were used to gather opinions on the reason O.A.U undergraduates engage in social interaction activities. The face and content validity of the instrument were done by experts in Social

Studies, and Educational Evaluation while a reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was obtained. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation, bar charts, and pie charts.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the perception of undergraduates on the patterns of social interaction exhibited by students at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife?

Table 1: Perception of undergraduates about the pattern of social interaction

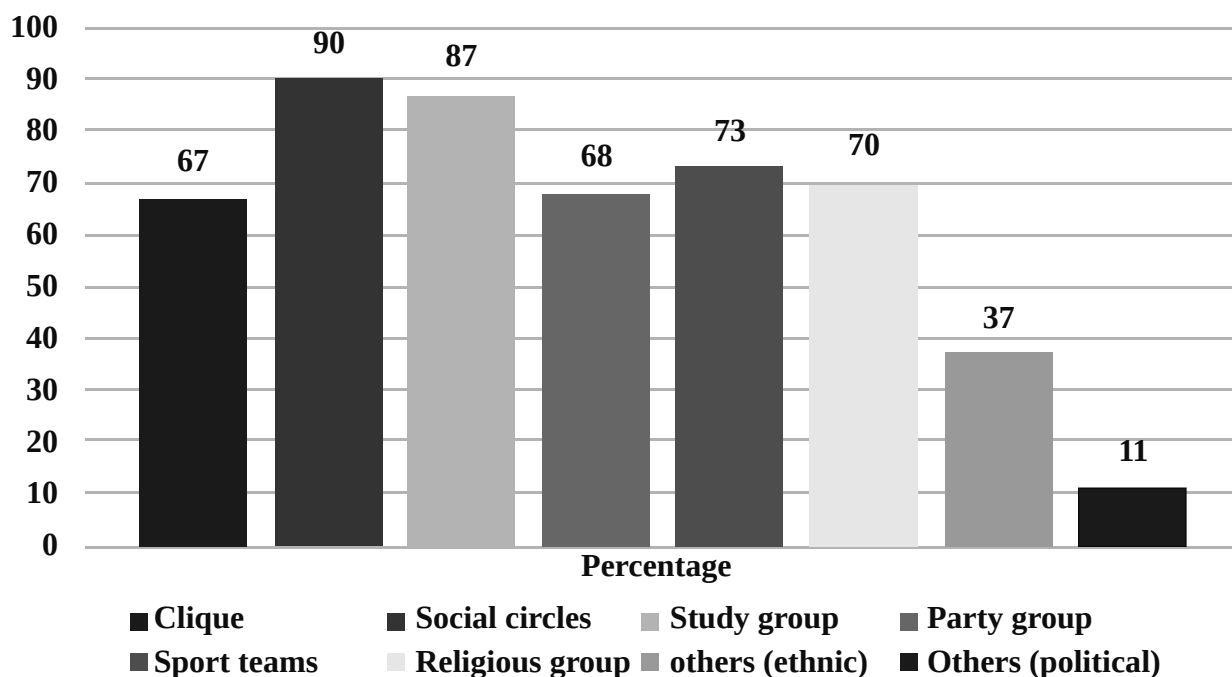
S/N	Variables	SA		A		D		SD	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Opposing my colleagues is of great advantage and benefit to me	85	42.5	77	38.5	15	7.5	23	11.5
2.	I argue with my friends because my opinion is better than theirs	71	35.5	82	41.0	23	11.5	24	12.0
3.	My opinions and ideas about an issue are the best	89	44.5	79	39.5	11	5.5	21	10.5
4.	I love interacting with other students based on their ethnic groups and race	89	44.5	73	36.5	12	6.0	26	13.0
5.	I go into a relationship because of the mutual benefits	77	38.5	81	40.5	19	9.5	23	11.5
6.	I like to engage in something because of the rewards I will receive afterward	84	42.0	73	36.3	21	10.5	22	11.0
7.	I am pleased with anything I do, only if I get a reciprocal reward	78	39.0	79	39.5	18	9.0	25	12.5
8.	Walking in groups with other students make one achieve a goal	72	36.0	68	34.0	28	14.0	32	16.0
9.	I am more productive when I do things with other people	68	34.0	71	35.5	28	14.0	35	17.5
10.	The company of my friends adds more value to me	78	39.0	81	40.5	19	9.5	22	11.0
11.	Accommodation entails working out a solution to a problem	61	30.5	83	41.5	22	11.0	34	17.0
12.	A third party is necessary for settling disagreements among students	72	36.0	67	33.5	31	15.5	30	15.0
13.	There is motivation whenever I compete with my colleagues for grades	84	42.0	62	31.0	22	11.0	32	16.0
14.	Competing with other students leads to stress	68	34.0	77	38.5	28	14.0	27	13.5
15.	Competing with other students makes me achieve my goal	75	37.5	64	32.0	37	18.5	24	12.0

(Source: Field Survey, December 2018)

Table 1 revealed the perception of respondents on the pattern of social interaction that they exhibit. With regards to the perception on social interactions' pattern, it was revealed from the table 1 that 81% of the respondents agreed they love interacting with other students based on their ethnic groups and race, while 19% of the respondents disagreed. Table 1 also shows that 79% and 21% of the respondents agreed and disagreed that they go into a relationship because of the mutual benefits, respectively. It was discovered that 70% of the respondents agreed

that being in a group with other students makes one achieve a goal, while 30% of them disagreed. Many of the respondents (69.5 %) agreed that they are more productive when they do things with other people, while 31.5% disagreed. The table 1 also shows that 73% of the respondents agreed that there is motivation whenever they compete with their colleagues for grades, while 27% of the respondents disagreed. It is evident from the above that the perception of respondents on the pattern of social interaction that they exhibit is positive.

Research Question 2: What patterns of social interaction do undergraduates exhibit at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife?



Multiple choice

Figure 1: Bar chart showing the forms and pattern of social interaction among OAU undergraduate students

Figure 1 shows the pattern of social interaction among undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Findings show that almost 90 % of the respondents belong to a social circle and they interact physically daily in their circles. This

is evident as the social circle pattern of interaction ranked highest while the study group is another important social interaction pattern from the study. About 87% of the respondents belong to study groups within and without their faculties. This implies a positive utilization of social interaction among the students as it is expected to influence their academic performance positively

Research Question 3: Which of the patterns is the most prevalent among undergraduates in the study area?

Figure 1 also shows the prevalent patterns of social that undergraduates exhibit at Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife. A significant number of the respondents exhibit interaction in sports groups (73%); religious (70%) and party

groups (68%). This finding explains the fact that extra curriculum activities are highly encouraged among undergraduate students. The pattern of social interaction is not limited to studying in a learning environment like a university

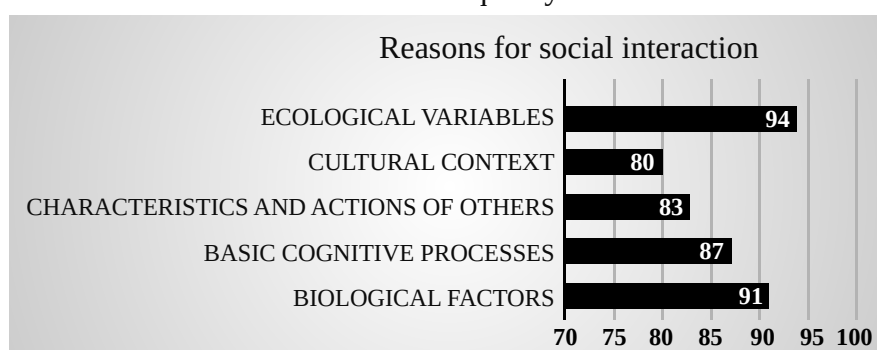
Research Question 4: What are the reasons for such patterns of social interaction among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife?

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD
		F%	F%	F%	F%
1.	I engage in social interaction because of reward purposes	71(35.5)	69 (34.5)	22 (11)	38 (19)
2.	I engage in social interaction to avoid depression	66 (33)	70 (35)	25 (12.5)	39 (19.5)
3.	I engage in social interaction accidentally	39 (19.5)	20(10)	69 (34.5)	72 (36)
4.	I engage in social interaction to make good friends	78 (39)	65 (32.5)	34 (17)	23 (11.5)
5.	I engage in social interaction to improve my quality of life	75(37.5)	76 (38)	27 (13.5)	22 (11)

Table 2: Reasons O.A.U Undergraduates Engage in Social Interaction Activities (Source: Field Survey, December 2018)

Table 2 revealed the opinion of the respondents on the reason O.A.U undergraduates engage in social interaction activities. The result shows that 70% of the respondents agreed that they engage in social interaction because of reward purposes while 30% of the respondents disagreed. It was revealed from the table that 68% of the respondents agreed that they engage in social interaction to avoid depression, while 32% disagreed. Furthermore, the result shows that 71.5% of the respondents agreed that they engaged in social interaction to make good

friends, while 28.5% disagreed. From the analysis, it can be deduced that the all the respondents believed that they engage in social interaction purposefully. Lastly, how social interaction improves the quality of life was revealed. Table 2 shows that 37.5% and 38.0% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they engage in social interaction to improve their quality of life, while 13.5% and 11.0% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that they engage in social interaction to improve their quality of life. Information presented in the table shows that a larger proportion of respondents opined that they engage in social interaction to improve their quality of life.



Multiple responses

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents according to the reasons they exhibit social interaction with other undergraduates

Figure 2 shows 94% of the respondents interact because of ecological needs that is environmental factors. They believe it is a life essential to interact daily. Also, 91% of the respondents believed that interaction is necessary because of biological factors while 87% interacts because of basic cognitive processes and 80 % based on cultural context. All these factors explain why interaction continually takes place among undergraduates. The most important identified reason is ecological variables.

Discussion of Findings

The result from the study indicated that the majority of the respondents have a positive perception of the patterns of social interaction exhibited by students at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. This is evident in their interactive behavior of being in the company of friends, engaging in collaborative work with colleagues, mutually interacting with one another and loving to interact with students from other ethnic groups. This finding corroborates the works of Djatnika (2000) that a positive pattern of social interaction is a vital aspect of maintaining lasting relationships and harmonious conditions among students most especially undergraduates in tertiary institutions.

The result from the study shows that the patterns of social interaction among OAU undergraduates include among others, opposing their colleagues to achieve great advantage and to benefit them, arguing with friends because their opinion is better than theirs, interacting with other students based on their ethnic group and race and walking in groups with other students to achieve a goal. This corroborates the submission of Cooper (2002) that in compliance with the requirements for completing a course, a student works in a team doing assignments, laboratory reports and other course activities. This provides a level of interaction among classmates.

Meanwhile, results show the patterns of social interaction that were most prevalent among OAU undergraduates. It was revealed that interaction with friends and competing with their colleagues

for grades, getting reciprocal rewards or mutual benefits and allowing a third party in settling disagreements are the most prevalent social interaction among OAU undergraduates. In essence, students tend to get serious and concentrate on campus when they compete with their classmates. This will boost their performance and also help them to identify the kind of company of friends that will add value to their academic performance (Lambert, Arnold, Kelvin & Apple, 2003). In fact, it was noted from the findings that students are more productive when they do things with their colleagues thus, emphasizing the importance and advantage of mutual interactions. This is an informal aspect of the learning and teaching process, which involves sharing learning materials, working in teams or simply talking in a relaxed manner. Such patterns of interaction with fellow team members have been suggested to increase student maturity and adaptability to work life after academic programmes (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001).

Lastly, results show the reason OAU undergraduates engaged in social interaction. Findings from the result show that students engaged in social interaction because of reward. Students engage in social interaction to avoid depression and social interaction improves the quality of life. Social interaction has been viewed as a form of activity that may involve two or more personalities, groups or social systems that mutually influence one another. This supports the findings of Djatnika (2000) that one of the most determining factors in achieving high Grade Point Average is the intelligence and how responsible peer group one interact with. That is, students perform well when they relate with their mates, they tend to emulate their peers that read and concentrate on their studies. Hence, positive social interaction is a vital aspect of maintaining a harmonious condition among students most especially undergraduates.

Conclusion

The study discovered that students do have social and collaborative engagement. It also provided evidence for other studies that suggested social interaction is highly connected to learning ability. To develop and promote social interaction and collaborative learning, it is advised that

rebranding through the use of social media should be adopted. Future studies should examine the influences on teachers' social interaction and collaborative learning practices in the learning environment. More work should be done on online learning techniques leveraging the existing socio-physical interaction among students in universities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, it was recommended that higher institutions need to provide platforms where students can come together and learn more about positive social interaction. While person-to-person interaction is important, online interactions that can aid effective learning should be put in place to avoid abruptness of interaction when a situation like COVID-19 comes where distancing is encouraged. Moreso, a different forms of fora where inter and intra-ethnic interaction takes place should further be encouraged. This should be part of the school curriculum. Undergraduate students should learn to accommodate people of other ethnic groups to promote unity. Furthermore, government through the Ministry of Education should provide training for both the lecturers and school authorities, this will enlighten them more about dealing with the students.

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