SELF EFFICACY, LOCUS OF CONTROL AND GENDER AS PREDICTORS OF WORKERS' INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

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Abstract

This study examined the roles of self-efficacy, locus of control and gender in predicting interpersonal skills among Local Government workers in Akoko South West and Akoko North East Areas in Ondo State. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted in this study. Using accidental sampling method, a total of 220 Local Government employees (91 (41.4%) are females and 129 (58.6%) are males); their ages ranged from 18 to 65. The hypotheses were tested by using multiple regression analysis. The result revealed that self-efficacy significantly predicted interpersonal skill (β = .241, p-c 0.05) among the sample. The independent predictions of locus of control and gender were not significant. The joint prediction of self-efficacy, locus of control and gender was significant (F (3,216) = 6.645, P < 0.01). Among the demographic variables, only religious affiliation had a significant relationship with interpersonal skill (r (218) = - 0.226, P < 0.01). The study concluded that self-efficacy, locus of control and gender differences could be relied upon jointly by organizational management in order to increase the interpersonal skills of their workers.
KEYWORDS: Self efficacy, locus of control, gender, interpersonal skills, workers

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the concept of interpersonal skills (IPS) has always been considered to be critical to the performances of workers and employees. Recent trends in the workplace have extended the importance of those skills to virtually everyone in an organization (Copeland, 2007). Flattering organizational structures and the movement toward working in terms and self-directed work groups mean that every worker needs to improve his/her skills for influencing others. People now tend to fill broader roles in their organizations, rather than following specific, narrow job functions (Oliver, Hausdorf, Lievens & Conlon, 2014; Shore, Chung-Herrera, Dean, Ehrhart, Jung, Randel & Singh, 2009).

These new roles require them to perform a wider variety of tasks and interact with more people in diversity contexts. This need for people to communicate with each other in the workplace, especially cross-culturally is magnified by the increasing globalization of business interests and by the growing ethnic, cultural and gender diversity represented in today's workforce. Interpersonal skills is required for working peacefully with others, conveying verbal and non-verbal messages listening, giving and receiving feedback, communicating with diverse others and overcoming barriers to communication (Bankole, 2013).

Hammed (1999) describes interpersonal skills as the ability of an employee to effectively interact with the boss, co-worker or the customer to achieve organizational goals. Interpersonal skills can be defined broadly as "those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people". People with strong interpersonal skills are usually more successful in both their professional and personal lines. They are perceived as more calm confident and charismatic qualities that are often endearing or appealing to others. Being more aware of your interpersonal skills can help you improve and develop them.

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In the workplace, interpersonal skill is the ability to communicate with others effectively and create the special synergy where the work gets done and the office is regarded as a pleasant place to be (Zacharias, Gary, Fleischer, Savage& Devorah, 2000) with disputes and misunderstanding that occur between employees building relationship is a priority. Also the result showed that IPS has also been suggested as a key distinguishing factor between successful manager and unsuccessful manager and in teams (Hayes, 1994).

Interpersonal skills have also been found to account - for 32% of variance in peer rating of performance Neumann and Wright (1999). Personality traits are the major factors that influence interpersonal skills in individuals. Among the predictors of IPS the researchers are interested in include self-efficacy, locus of control and gender. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to investigate both the independent and joint contributions of self-efficacy, locus of control and gender on interpersonal skills of a sample of Local Government workers in Akoko area of Ondo State.

People with a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2010) believe in their ability and capability to succeed in attaining their goals. A sense of efficacy provides staying power and resilience to endure and move beyond obstacles and setbacks, and allows for a creative response to failure and disappointment. Individuals with high self-efficacy view failures and disappointments as indicators of the need to learn more or to use different problem-solving strategies. In the absence of self-efficacy, such challenges are more likely to be seen as personal flaws or lack of ability (Bandura, 1997). In other words, self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation.

Joshi, Ling and Jaeger (2004) reported two interesting findings on the relationship between self-efficacy and interpersonal skills in the area of communication skills and interpersonal relationship. They found that high sense of self-efficacy positively predict strong interactive abilities. Individuals with low self-efficacy have problem interacting with people around them. They lack confident in themselves and find it difficult to make certain decision and to stand on their words when the need be (Adebisi, 2014). Another research was conducted by Onyebuchi (2001) in which 2550 students filled the questionnaire. The result of their study indicates that self-efficacy had a significant relationship with communication skills. They stated that there should be multiple reasons why significant association is found between self-efficacy and communication skills. In two samples of undergraduates, Chen, Gully, Whiteman and Kilcullen (2000) found that cognitive ability, self-efficacy, and goals each influenced interpersonal skills. Though the results varied depending on the sample and model tested.

Dickens (2009) in a study of correlation between general self-efficacy and interpersonal skills of public servants in Kenya he administered his research questionnaire to about 450 workers in a multinational company. The result of his findings indicated that general self-efficacy relates most positively with interpersonal skill. He also stated in his findings that workers with different self-efficacy will have remarkable differences in their ability to talk with people, communication and make friends. In another study Olatunji (2013) on the relation among adolescent's interpersonal stress, self-efficacy and social interaction. The 425 participants were extracted randomly among students of a higher institution in Nigeria. The result of his findings indicated that there is significant relationship between self-efficacy and social interaction.

MacPherson (1984) did a study on the relationship between locus of control and IPS of a sample of students in Ghana. The study surveyed 198 students comprising 97 men and 72 women. The result of his finding showed that there is a positive correlation between internal locus of control and host communication competence, and a negative correlation between external locus of control and host communication competence. MacPherson (1984) also argued that locus of control is an important personality type that functions like self-efficacy.

He noted that training in interpersonal skills can lead to an increase in self-efficacy, but did not affected locus of control as measured by Rotters's 1966 scales. Developing these soft-skills involve the interaction between individual self-efficacy, locus of control and training (Labbat & Noorbakch, 2001). According to Hayes (2002) interpersonal skills have been reviewed as one of the most important aspect of human resources management and employees productivity. According to Adeola (1984) an individual can have great influence on his/her work and interpersonal skills. A person with an internal locus of control would see challenges as opportunity for learning and professional growth. In contrast, a person with an external locus of control would ignore these challenges because he/she believes that learning would not have any impact on him/her.

Studies carried out by Kater, Gail and Furman (2001) examined interpersonal skills ratings influence by gender in a clinical skill assessment using standardized patients (SP) in their research, the IPS scores and SP characteristics for 79, 999 patient encounters were studied. The non-significant interaction between SP gender and candidate gender provide some evidence that male and female candidates are being assessed equivalently by male and female SPs. This result confirmed that combined with the extremely weak relationship between gender (candidate or SP) and IPS ratings, provides additional support for the fairness and defensibility of the IPS measures.

As regards the relationship between gender and interpersonal skills studies have revealed that the two constructs have no significant relationship. With respect to interpersonal relationship, men achieve and define closeness through the sharing of feeling and emotion (Wood, 1993). Also, MacPherson (1984) employed independent t-test to see if differences exist between the male and female students, interpersonal skills. Result found a significant difference between these groups, female students scored higher on IPS than males. However, Awosika (2004) investigated the influence of gender, marital status and interactive role on the level of interpersonal skills of 70 *(S2* female and 18 males) local government workers in IIe-Ife. The results showed no significant influence of gender on people's interpersonal skills. Therefore, because it has been suggested that the skills, knowledge, and motivation needed to function effectively at work go well beyond the core technical skills often measured in traditional selection contexts, (Morgeson, Reider & Campion, 2005) coupled with the problems that are seldom considered when selecting individuals to work by themselves (Jones, Stevens& Fischer, 2000), this research sets out to examine the validity of self -efficacy, locus of control and gender in predicting interpersonal skills among a sample of civil servants.

The finding of this research is expected to shed light on what predicts interpersonal skills. The research will also be relevant to all categories of civil servants, Social Health Workers, Personnel/Human Resources Managers, especially Directors of personnel in our Local Government Councils. It will help employers in making decisions about how the interpersonal skills and social skills of workers can be improved through training.

It is hoped that the research will serve as eye opener on how to improve interpersonal skill with the use of self-efficacy. It will also help individuals to have a better understanding of the relationships between self-efficacy, locus of control, gender and interpersonal skills. This research will stimulate other researchers to focus more interest on the topic of discuss. It will also serve as a foundation on which other researchers will build on. The hypotheses tested in this study are that self-efficacy, locus of control and gender would independently and jointly predict worker's interpersonal skills.

Method

Participants

Using accidental sampling technique, a total of 231 participants were sampled from Akoko South West and Akoko North East Local Government Areas of Ondo State. Out of these, only 220 completely filled and returned the copies of the questionnaire. These ones comprised of 91 (41.4%) females and 129 (58.6%) males. Their ages ranged from 18 to 65. Also, 104 (47.3%) of the participants were single, 113 (51.4%) were married, 2(9%) were divorced and 1 (.5%) claimed he is separated. Their educational qualifications also varied as 78 (35.5%) had BSc, 37 (16.8%) had HND, 45 (20.5) had OND, 36 (16.4%) had NCE, while the remaining 24 (10.9%) had SSCE qualifications. Their religious affiliation revealed that 186 (84.5%) were Christians, 30 (13.6) were Muslims, 3 (1.4%) were into traditional form of religion while 1 (0.5%) did not indicate his religion. In addition, their length of services ranged between 5-31 years and above.

Instrument

Relevant data were gathered through the use of validated questionnaire. This comprised of four sections (Section A-D). Socio-demographic information tapped includes sex, age, marital status, educational qualification, religious affiliation and length of service.

Interpersonal Skill

Interpersonal skill was measured with interpersonal skill scale developed by Okurame (2002). It was developed to measure the interpersonal skills among individuals within work or group settings. The scale was rated on a Likert response format ranging from 1 - strongly disagree, to 5 - strongly agree with a mid-point of 3- indifferent. Sample item within the scale is "I communicate by giving relevant and understanding response". Higher score than the mean score indicate higher level of interpersonal skills; while score lower than the mean score indicate lower level of interpersonal skills. To validate the reliability of the construct for the study setting, a pilot test was conducted with 50 participants and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.706 was found. Based on the reliability, the scale items were adopted for this research.

Locus of Control

Locus of control was measured using the Nowicki-Strickland adults' locus of control scale (N-SLCS). The 40 item questionnaire was developed by Nowicki and Strickland in 1973. A response format of Yes and No was used in the scale and higher score than the mean score indicate high locus of control. Sample item in the scale is; "Do you believe that you can stop yourself from catching cold?" The scale assesses the extent to which an individual has external locus of control or internal locus of control. The instrument has been standardized among Nigerian sample by Jaiyeola (1992). The authors reported six week interval test retest reliability co-efficient of 0.63 and 0.66. Clients who scored 0.25 and 0.28 higher than the norm indicate external locus of control while scores lower than the norms indicate internal locus of control. In the course of this study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.57 was established for the scale.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was measured with a 21-item self-efficacy scale. The scale was developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1993) to assess general sense of perceived self - efficacy with the aim to predict coping with daily hazards as well as adaptation after experiencing all kind of stressful life events. The scale has a Likert response format ranging from 1- "Not at all true" to 4- "Exactly true". A sample item is "I feel responsible for my own life". The consistency reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained in the present research work.

Procedure

Prior to the administration of the questionnaire to participants, the researchers sought and obtained permission from management in the two Local Government Councils that participated in the' study. The purpose of the study was explained to participants as they were also given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of their identities and responses. In addition, the respondents were told that there was no right or wrong answers and so such should try to be as honest as possible in their responses. Using accidental sampling technique, 231 copies of the questionnaire were administered but only two hundred and twenty were found valid and useful for the analysis. It took exactly 3 weeks to administer and retrieve the copies of the questionnaire from the respondents. This is because many claimed that they were either too busy to fill or that they forgot them at home.

Design/Data analysis

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of self-efficacy, locus of control and gender on interpersonal skills. This is because participants across various units/department of each local government council were sampled. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses, because the statistic gives information concerning the independent and joint contributions of the independent variables on the dependent variable. All analyses were conducted using SPSS 17.0 software.

Results

To test for the direction and extent of relationship that exist among the study variables, Pearson Product Moment correlation was conducted and the result is presented on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix showing the Relationship among the Study

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	-	-	1								
2. Marital Status	-	-	.418**	1							
3. Educational Qualification	-	-	-.169*	-.088	1						
4. Religious Affiliation	-	-	-.015	.071	.061	1					
5. Length of Service	-	-	.252**	.200**	-.150*	.047	1				
6. Self-Efficacy	62.64	11.175	-.057	.023	-.060	.014	.006	1			
7. Locus of Control	17.35	4.280	-.045	-.158*	.111	.043	-.038	-.109	1		
8. Gender	-	-	-.072	-.219**	-.080	.023	.014	.087	-.101	1	
9. Interpersonal Skills	64.25	7.381	-.044	-.109	-.031	-.226**	-.038	.257**	-.094	.146*	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results in Table 1 indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and IPS [r (218) = 0.257, P < 0.01]. This implies that the more adequate the self-efficacy of a worker is, the higher his/her interpersonal skills tend to be. The relationship between locus of control and interpersonal skills was not significant [r (218) = -0.094, P>0.05]. Gender also has a significant relationship with workers interpersonal skills [r (218) = 0.146, P < 0.05]. From the demographic variables considered in the study on their level of relationship with IFS, only religious affiliation was found to have significant relationship with IPS [r (218)= - 0.226, p< 0.01].

To test for the predicting influence of the study variables (self- efficacy, locus of control and gender) on interpersonal skills, multiple regression analysis was conducted and the result is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Regressions showing the contributions of Self Efficacy, Locus of control and Gender on Interpersonal Skills.

Independent variables	Beta	T	R	R²	Df	F
Self-efficacy	.241	3.665**				
Locus of control	-.056	-.850	.291			
				.84	3,216	6.645**
Gender	.119	1.814				

** P < 0.01

Table 2 shows that self-efficacy significantly predict IPS independently (β= 0.241, P < 0.01). Locus of control (β = -0.056, P > 0.05) and gender (β = 0.119, P > 0.05) did not independently predict IPS among the sample. However, self - efficacy, locus of control and gender significantly and jointly predict workers' IPS [F (3,216) = 6.645, P < 0.01]. This implies that, if the three factors are combined, they will significantly predict workers' IPS. Since the independent variables do not all predict IPS, the formulated hypothesis was partially accepted. The result in the above table also indicated the variables (self-efficacy, locus of control and gender) jointly contributed about 84% in the observed total variance on interpersonal skills. This implied that only 16% variance result from other variables outside the study.

Discussion

This study examined how self-efficiency, locus of control and gender will independently and jointly significantly predict worker's interpersonal skills. Only one hypothesis was generated and tested. The hypothesis which states that self-efficiency, locus of control and gender will independently and jointly significantly predict worker's interpersonal skill was not totally supported, but the joint influence of the variables were supported by our analysis. This implies that the more adequate the self-efficacy, locus of control and gender of a worker, the higher his or her interpersonal skills tend to be. Onyebuchi (2011) who reported that correlation between general self-efficacy relates most positively with interpersonal communication. He also stated in his findings that different students with different self-efficacy will have remarkable differences in their ability to talk with people and communication and make friends. The finding also in consonance with Olatunji (2013) whose their study indicates that self-efficacy will have a significantly relationship with communication skills, they stated that there should be multiple reasons why significant association is found between self-efficacy and interpersonal skills.

Furthermore, the finding also supported the finding of Dickens (2009) in which 48 participants were used, the results of their findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between locus of control and interpersonal skills. This finding also confirmed that there is a positive correlation between internal locus of control and interpersonal skills, and negative correlation between external locus of control and interpersonal skills.

Lastly, the findings by Awosika (2004) investigated the influence of gender, marital status and interactive role on the level of interpersonal skills of 70 people (52 female and 18 males) local government workers in Ile-Ife. The results negate this study that there is significant effect of gender on people interpersonal skills. It also revealed that role performing by an individual did not affect interpersonal skills.

Based on our findings, this study recommends that several interventions at organizational levels should be put in place. These interventions should include programmes that would bring members of staff together informally. This will encourage and improve the level of interpersonal skills of the workers. Any hindrance barrier to any social interaction among and within workers should be eliminated. Such programme should take into account the religious affiliation and self-efficacy of the people involved because these variables have shown that they have significant role in interpersonal skills. This study also recommends that, local government council management should provide necessary facilities, conducive environment or organizational climate and, time to close at work, and take actions that cater for the welfare of the workers or the Co-workers to improve interpersonal skills. An additional research project within the same population sampled, using the same measuring instruments

might be of longitudinal value in evaluating the applied recommendations and the effect thereof.

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to determine the influence of self-efficacy, locus of control and gender as predictors of worker's interpersonal skills. Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were made. Self-efficacy has significantly predicted interpersonal skills independently. However, locus of control and gender did not. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between internal locus of control and interpersonal skills and negative correlation between external locus of control and interpersonal skills. Lastly, the joint prediction of self-efficacy, locus of control and gender was significant on interpersonal skills.

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