

ASSERTIVENESS AS PREDICTOR OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

PROF. N. J. OBIKEZE

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam
Email: nnamdiobikeze@gmail.com

PROF. A. C. IFEAKOR

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam
Email: aceeifeakor@gmail.com

&

AMADI FELICIA NGOZI-CYRIL

Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam
Email: feliciancamadi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined assertiveness as predictor of aggressive behaviour among university undergraduate students in South East Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 5,401 (1,858 students from Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, 1,801 students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and 1,742 students from University of Nigeria Nsukka) final year Faculty of Education students in the 2019/2020 academic session. A sample of 540 students was used for the study. Multistage sampling procedure was used for the study. The instruments for data collection were Students Assertiveness Scale (SAS₁) and Students Aggression Scale (SAS₂). Cronbach Alpha reliability technique was used to determine the internal consistency of the instruments which gave coefficients of 0.79 and 0.83 for SAS₁ and SAS₂ respectively. Simple Linear Regression Analysis and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used for the data analysis. The study revealed that assertiveness ($r = 0.673$; $p = 0.000$), assertiveness on male and female ($r = 0.573$ and 0.774 ; $p = 0.000$) positively and significantly predicted aggressive behaviour among university undergraduates in South East Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study recommended that Universities management should consider employing qualified psychologists to provide support for students experiencing issues related to aggressive behaviours and other related challenges.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Aggressive Behaviour, University undergraduates.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar of societal progress, recognized as a powerful tool for national development. At the University level, students are equipped with advanced academic and practical skills that are essential for various professions. Universities are valued institutions that creatively and innovatively consolidate a nation's foundations and serve as an arena where the growth and stability of future generations begin. Moreover, universities often serve as hubs for cultural diversity and intellectual exchange, promoting unity by bringing together individuals from different backgrounds and fostering an environment of collaboration. At this stage, students should learn necessary skills that allow them to adjust easily and smoothly to the rapid physical, emotional, mental and social changes (Galanta, 2018). As students transit into university life, they encounter a multitude of challenges, including demanding coursework, diverse social interactions, and increased responsibilities and as such learn some aggressive behaviours that impact negatively not only on their academic performance but also on their social life (Onukwufor, 2013).

Aggressive behaviour are actions or conducts that are intended to cause harm, injury, or distress to others. It can take various forms and can be both physical and verbal. Aggression can be driven by a range of factors and is often a complex interplay of biology, psychology, and social influences (Ekeng & Akpam, 2022). Aggressive behaviour is a very complicated behaviour with a variety of multidimensional causes. In past past, social factors were mainly the center of attention for the researchers as causes of aggression in humans. But, with recent scientific and technological advancements, researchers are now trying to explore new areas, including biological factors. In the view of Badamas (2022), aggression is a behaviour whose immediate intent is to hurt someone. It is a destructive force in social relations, and as a result is an important social issue.

The intricacies of contemporary life always cause some stress, anxiety and attacking behaviour in human beings which can lead to several anti-social behaviours among undergraduates. Warburton et al. (2016) explained that aggressive behaviours in universities are therefore one of the most troublesome social problems in the nation today. Not only does it negatively affect those involved, but it also hinders societal growth and stability. Students' engagement in aggressive behaviour is detrimental to the objectives of tertiary education which among others is aimed at contributing to national development through high level relevant manpower training and to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of individual and society (FRN, 2013). In the view of Lokoyi (2015), aggressive behaviour can be triggered by arguments, bullying, both verbally (name-calling) and physically (pushing); threatening; striking back in anger; use of strong-arm tactics (to get something they want); and engaging in physical fights. These behaviours according to Damrah (2021) could be reduced to the barest minimum through skills of assertiveness where individuals can stand up for things that matter to them while at the same time respecting the things that matter to others.

Assertiveness is a mode of personal behaviour and communication characterized by a willingness to stand up for one's needs and interests in an open and direct way. Ostrove and Crick (2016) defined assertiveness as the ability to express one's thoughts and feelings with confidence, without having to resort to passive aggressive behavior. It is a communication that encompasses a respectful acknowledgment of personal and others' boundaries, indicating a genuine commitment to achieving mutual needs and desires through collaborative efforts. Ezeilo (2015) noted that assertiveness is the expression of social boldness by which an individual claims his rights and voices out true feelings in social setting in manners that would maximize reinforcement. Assertiveness, therefore, is a skill which, if mastered right could bring about rich dividends in the future. Those who practice assertiveness lead a happy, honest, and less manipulative life as compared to aggressive and submissive individuals (Anyamene et al., 2016).

Assertiveness is a quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive or submissive. In the field of psychology, assertiveness is a skill and a means of communication that can be learned. In the view of Anyamene et al. (2016), unassertive people are usually unable to do anything about their condition. Consequently, they are characterized by behaviours easily pushed around by way of manipulation. Kalmoe (2015) opined that practicing assertiveness enhances the likelihood of fostering genuine relationships, cultivating self-improvement, and attaining a sense of mastery over everyday circumstances. However, asserting oneself may not necessarily guarantee happiness or fair treatment. Nonetheless, by developing an ability to express oneself, one is able to reduce stress, increase feelings of self-worth, improve decision-making abilities, and feel more self-confident in relationships. Alberti and Emmons (2015) stated that gender dynamics can influence the development and expression of assertiveness, as societal expectations often pressure individuals to conform to traditional gender roles regarding communication behaviours.

Gender roles and stereotypes can influence individuals' tendencies towards assertive behaviour, impacting how they perceive their abilities in various domains and potentially affecting their resort to aggressive behaviours when facing challenges in achieving goals through non-aggressive means. The predictive value of gender on assertive behaviour and aggressive tendencies have garnered interest among researchers in education (Skara et al., 2018; Mulhollem, 2015), with some studies indicating that males tend to exhibit more aggressive behaviours and perceive themselves as more capable in task accomplishment compared to females, while others argued against gender's influence on individuals' perceptions of their capacity to achieve tasks (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2014). In the light of these inconsistencies, this study sought to examine assertiveness as a predictor of aggressive behaviour among university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian university landscape in recent years has faced escalating issues related to aggressive behaviours among undergraduates. The primary objectives of university education, which include the training of students for national development and the inculcation of values essential for personal and societal survival, are increasingly being hindered by the prevalence of aggressive conduct within university campuses. The transformation of these institutions from centers of learning into arenas of conflict and violence has become a matter of great concern to stakeholders in education. Aggressive behaviour exhibited by university students has given rise to a multitude of physical, psychological, and social complications that not only disrupt the educational process but also have far-reaching implications for the individuals involved. These complications manifest in various forms, such as peer rejection, academic underachievement, alcohol and drug abuse, delinquency, self-harm, aggression, anxiety, and even tragic incidents like suicides. This alarming trend has caught the attention of researchers, prompting a growing interest in understanding and addressing this issue.

The complex nature of aggressive behaviour necessitates a thorough examination of the factors contributing to its prevalence among university students. While various elements such as family upbringing, parental conduct, academic pressures, societal norms, economic disparities, peer influences, and the misuse of alcohol and substances have been identified as potential influencers, the lack of assertiveness within interpersonal dynamics emerges as a pressing concern. Understanding how assertiveness, or its absence, interacts with these factors is imperative for developing targeted interventions aimed at fostering healthier communication patterns and reducing instances of aggression within university communities. The researcher therefore examined assertiveness as predictor of aggressive behaviour among university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study was to determine assertiveness as predictor of aggressive behaviour among university students in South East, Nigeria. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Determine the predictive value of assertiveness on aggressive behaviour among university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.
2. Examine the predictive value of assertiveness on aggressive behaviour of male and female undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the predictive value of assertiveness on the aggressive behaviour of university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria?
2. What is the predictive value of assertiveness on the aggressive behaviour among male and female university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Assertiveness does not significantly predict aggressive behaviour of university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.
2. Assertiveness does not significantly predict aggressive behaviour of male and female university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Methods

The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 5,401 final year university from Faculty of Education in three Federal universities in South-Eastern States, Nigeria in 2019/2020 academic session (Academic Planning Unit of the various universities). The sample for this study was made up of 540 final year students of faculties of education, 180 from Michael Okpara University, 180 from Nnamdi Azikiwe University and 180 from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Multi stage sampling technique was used to draw the sample size from the study population. The instruments used for data collection were "Students Assertiveness Scale" (SAS₁), and Students Aggression Scale (SAS₂). The instruments were divided into sections A and B. Section A has information in personal data of the respondent while section B has 30-item statement on students' assertiveness with four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) (4 points), Agree (A) (3 points), Disagree (D) (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1 point). Face and construct validity of the instruments were established by three experts; two from

Educational Psychology and one from Measurement and Evaluation. All the experts were from the Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The questionnaire reliability was ascertained through a pilot test. The data collected were analyzed with Cronbach Alpha method and coefficient values of 0.79 and 0.83 were obtained. The data collected were analyzed using Simple Linear Regression Analysis to answer the research questions; while the hypotheses formulated for this study were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Simple Linear Regression Analysis and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (F-test).

Results

The data collected were analyzed in line with the research questions and hypothesis that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of assertiveness on the aggressive behaviour of university undergraduate in South East, Nigeria?

Table 1: Simple regression analysis of assertiveness as predictor of aggressive behaviour of university undergraduate in South East, Nigeria

	R	R Square	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate	df ₁	Df ₂	Significant change
Model							
1	.673	.452	.645	5.18485	1	538	.000

a. Predictor (constant): Assertiveness of undergraduates

Table I showed the regressive analysis of assertiveness predicting aggressive behaviour of university undergraduate in South East, Nigeria. The result indicated that when the responses of respondents on assertiveness were correlated with aggressive behaviour of undergraduates, a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.673 with associated coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.452 were obtained. This coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.452 implied that 45.2% variation in aggressive behaviour of undergraduates can be attributed or explained by assertiveness

Research Question 2

What is the predictive value of assertiveness on aggressive behaviour of male and female university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria?

Table 2: Simple regression analysis of assertiveness on Aggressive Behaviour of male and female university undergraduate in South East, Nigeria.

	R	R Square	Adjusted R square	Std error of the estimate	df ₁	df ₂	Significant change
Model							
1	.573 ^a	.328	.547	5.20319	1	178	.000
1	.774 ^b	.599	.649	5.18967	1	358	.000

a. Predictor: (constant): Assertiveness of male undergraduates (N=180)

b. Predictor: (constant): Assertiveness of female undergraduates (N=360)

Result in Table 2 displayed the simple regression of assertiveness on aggressive behaviour of male and female university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria. The correlation coefficient (R) for male was 0.573 with associated coefficient of determination (R^2) for male was 0.328 were obtained. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.328 implied that 32.8% of variation in male aggressive behaviour can be attributed or explained by male assertiveness. Likewise, the correlation coefficient (R) for female undergraduates was 0.774 with associated coefficient of determination (R^2) for female was 0.599 were obtained. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.599 indicated that 59.9% in variation in female aggressive behaviour can be attributed or explained by female assertiveness.

Hypothesis 1: Assertiveness would not significantly predict aggressive behaviour among university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Table 3: Regression ANOVA Test of significance between assertiveness and aggressive behaviour among University Undergraduate Students in South East Nigeria.

Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
1	Regression	2630.473	1	2630.473	97.852	.000
	Residual	14462.060	538	26.883		
	Total	17092.533	539			

a. Dependent variables: Aggressive behaviour of undergraduates

b. Predictor: (constant): Assertiveness of undergraduates

Table 3 showed regression ANOVA between assertiveness and aggressive behaviour of university undergraduates. Result in Table 6 was indicative that the variation in aggressive behaviour among undergraduates in South East, Nigeria that can be attributed or explained by assertiveness is significant ($F(1,538) = 97.852, P = .000$). This gave the fact that associated probability value of .000 when compared with 0.05 level of significance at which the hypothesis was tested was found to be significant because .000 was less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the conclusion drawn was that assertiveness of undergraduates' is a significant predictor of aggressive behaviour of undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: Assertiveness would not predict aggressive behaviour of male and female university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Table 4: Regression ANOVA test of significance between assertiveness and aggressive behaviour among male and female university undergraduates in South East, Nigeria.

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
1 Male	Regression	86973.943	1	86973.943	3212.544	.000
	Residual	4819.035	178	27.073		
	Total	91792.978	179			
1 Female	Regression	179220.315	1	179220.315	6654.376	.000
	Residual	9641.904	358	26.933		
	Total	188862.222	359			

a. Dependent variable: Aggressive behaviour of undergraduate students

b. Predictor: (constant): Assertiveness of male undergraduates

c. Predictor: (constant): Assertiveness of female undergraduates

Analysis from Table 4 revealed regression ANOVA between assertiveness and aggressive behaviour among male and female university undergraduates in South east, Nigeria. The study result revealed that for male undergraduates the variation in aggressive behaviour among male undergraduates that can be explained or attributed by assertiveness was significant ($F(1,178)=3212.544, P = .000$). The associated probability value of .000 was less than 0.05 level of significance, hence the null hypothesis was rejected. Secondly, the result for female undergraduates revealed that the variation in aggressive behaviour among female undergraduates that can be explained or attributed by assertiveness was significant ($F(1,358) = 6654.376, P = .000$). The associated probability value of .000 was less than 0.05 level of significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected. Conclusively, assertiveness is a significant predictor of aggressive behaviour among male and female university undergraduates in South east, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that assertiveness predicted aggressive behaviour of university undergraduates in public federal universities in South East, Nigeria. This finding showed that increasing student's assertiveness can reduce their aggressive behaviour. Thus, there is a strong positive prediction between students' assertiveness and aggressive behaviour. Assertiveness is one of the essential life skills that are needed for effective interaction and communication in this modern social environment. This finding is in line with the findings of Cavalcanti and Pimental (2016) which revealed that physical aggressive behaviour proved to be positively correlated with other personality traits which assertiveness is one of them. Also Ome et al. (2014) results revealed that assertiveness continuum; assertive individuals are more predisposed to aggressive tendencies than passivity. Furthermore adaptive aggressive behaviour can facilitate social assertiveness competitiveness and success in meeting daily needs among children and adolescents.

The findings also revealed that assertiveness predicted aggressive behaviour of male and female undergraduates in federal public universities in South East, Nigeria. This implies that there is a strong positive prediction between assertiveness and aggressive behaviour of male and female students in public universities in South East Nigeria. This finding showed that gender is a significant predictor of male and female student's aggressive behavior when their assertiveness is partially considered. This also could mean that gender influence as a moderating variable existed between student's assertiveness and their aggressive behaviour. This finding is in line with the findings of Voltan-Acar et al. (2014) and Onuikwufor (2017) which showed that there is significant prediction between male and female students physical aggressive behaviour. Assertiveness is at the mid- point between passiveness and aggressiveness. It is also expressed as a social communication skill that can be learned and improve upon. Therefore, social environment and

support from the social environment are crucial to being assertive. In this way, assertiveness enables individuals to be more active, develop better social relationship and solve problems.

Conclusion

Undergraduate students in Public Universities are expected to behave well in the school to achieve their academic goals which will enable them become reasonable citizens of the country, yet research revealed that undergraduate students find university environment as a venue for killing, intimidating, kidnapping and harassing their fellow students with dangerous weapons rather than a place of learning as a result of aggressive behaviour. Some undergraduates do not behave well in the university campus and it has been shown that non-cognitive factors such as assertiveness may have an impact on their behaviour. The study was therefore set out to find out the predictive values among the two variables. The study therefore evaluated the predictive values of assertiveness on aggressive behaviour of students in South East, Nigeria. Results revealed that there is strong prediction among assertiveness and students' aggressive behaviours in the three federal Public Universities in South East, Nigeria.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Psychologists should leverage a variety of enlightenment programs such as conferences, seminars, and workshops to underscore the importance of developing assertiveness skills among students.
2. Universities should consider employing highly qualified psychologists within their management to provide support for students experiencing issues related to aggressive behaviors and other related challenges.

REFERENCES

- Alberti, R.E. & Emmons, M. I. (2014). *Your perfect right: A guide for assertive living*. San Luis Obispo.
- Badamas, O.L. (2022). Causes and preventive measures of aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ilorin metropolis: stakeholders' perception. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, 14(3), 198-210.
- Cavalcanti, J. G & Pimentel, C. E. (2016). Personality and aggression: A contribution of general aggressive model. *Journal of Estud-Psicol*. (3)10-25.
- Damrah, L. (2021). Self-assertiveness and the relationship with academic self-efficacy and student engagement of Jordanian students: A descriptive, correlational study. *International Journal of Pedagogical Innovations*, 9(1), 1-7.
- Ekeng, E. B & Akpam, E. G. (2022). Factors that influence aggressive behaviour among senior secondary school students in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 10(2), 496-509.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National policy on education*. NERDC.Sheda.
- Galata, S. (2018). Assertiveness and academic achievement motivation of adolescent students in selected secondary schools of harari peoples regional state, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 6(4), 40-46.
- Kalmoe, N. P. (2015). Trait aggression in two representative U.S. surveys: Testing the generalizability of college samples. *Aggressive Behavior*, 41, 171-188.
- Lokoyi O. L. O. (2015) Parenting styles as correlates of aggressive behaviour among in school adolescent with mild intellectual Disability. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*; 4(3): 94-100.
- Mulhollen, M. (2015). Physical aggression among college students. The role of masculinity. *M.Ed thesis of The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akor*.

- Ome, B.N., Okorie, A.O., & Azubuike, E. E. (2017). Assertiveness, self-esteem and locus of control as predictors of aggression in a Nigeria sample. *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Science*. (2)7, 1-13.
- Onukwufor, J.N (2013). Physical and verbal aggression among adolescent secondary school students in rivers state of Nigeria. *International Journal of Education Learning and Development* (2)1, 73-84.
- Voltan-Acar, N., Arıcıoğlu, A., Gültekin, F. & Gençtanırım, D. (2014). Assertiveness level of university students. *H. U. Journal of Education*, 35, 342-350.
- Warburton. W.A., Williams. K.D. & Cairns. D.R., (2016). When ostracism leads to aggression: the moderating effects of control deprivation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (42)2, 213–220.