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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND FEAR OF PERFORMANCE FAILURE AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTHEAST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. Five research questions were answered with five corresponding null hypotheses formulated and tested at 0.05 significance level. The study adopted the correlational research design. One thousand, one hundred and fifty second year undergraduates were used in the study. Two sets of questionnaires 'Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EIQ)' and 'Fear of Performance Failure Questionnaire (FOPFQ)' were used for data collection while the reliability of the instruments were established using Cronbach's alpha method and the alpha co-efficient gotten were 0.74 for EIQ and 0.78 for FOPFQ. The findings of the study revealed that the components of emotional intelligence have low positive relationship with fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. The null hypotheses were also rejected since emotional intelligence cannot be entirely neglected in seeking to address undergraduates fear of performance failure. This implies that the influence of emotional intelligence on fear of performance failure is significant enough to be valuable for students' progress. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that lecturers should ensure during instructional delivery to intimate university undergraduates on the need to train themselves and imbibe emotional intelligence. This will go a long way to help them to conquer fear of performance failure. It was also recommended that during orientation programmes, the university administration should try their best to intimate undergraduates on the need not to see examinations as a do or die affair. They should be encouraged to give maximum effort and should be rewarded when they accomplish it.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Fear of Performance Failure, Mood Regulation, Self-Awareness, Internal Motivation, Interpersonal Skill, and Empathy Response

Introduction

The university, as an institution, is responsible for providing students with new learning opportunities and experiences that are important for their development. However, undergraduate programmes could be tough. This is evident from the fact that these students go through the process of adapting or adjusting to a new socio-cultural setting. Nonetheless, university life is not easy, especially with the extra burden of meeting high social, economic, and intellectual expectations (Panahi, Yunus & Panahi, 2016). Regardless, the overall goal of university education is to provide students with skills that will help them live and contribute to the growth of society. But given that these competencies and skills are nurtured in a demanding learning condition, students could often exhibit certain fear when they are faced with examinations, a situation referred to as fear of performance failure.

Fear of performance refers to anxiety when confronted with a circumstance that requires one to perform (directly or indirectly) in order to achieve a positive outcome. Fear of (performance) failure refers to the continuous and unreasonable fear that one experiences when confronted with performance situations, particularly when thinking excessively about failing to meet the standards and goals set by oneself or others. It comprises a continual and overpowering sense of dread that comes with pursuing life goals (Dey, Thander & Ray, 2023). It comes with extreme worry, negative thoughts and hesitation or unwillingness to work toward a task or goal. According to Nahkla (2019), undergraduates who experience this (fear of performance failure) frequently believe they will fail academically, even if their belief is unfounded. This has constituted substantial detrimental effects on students' mental health.

More importantly, research has documented that students' emotional intelligence are critical components to students' coping with stress and mental wellbeing. Emotional intelligence is one's ability to manage his/her emotions and those of others. It is the ability to recognize, understand and manage our emotions as well those of others effectively and positively (Goleman, 2020; Varthana, 2023: Makama et al, 2019). It consists of components such as mood regulation, self-awareness, internal motivation, inter-personal relationship and empathy response. Researchers have demonstrated that emotional intelligence has a significant direct effect on lowering burnout and stress (McEown et al, 2023; Yusoff et al, 2021), and positively linked to students' positive psychological characteristics, psychological well-being, and academic achievement (Shengyao et al, 2024). Despite the growing emphasis on emotional intelligence (EI) as a crucial factor in managing academic stress, there is a significant gap in understanding its role in fear of performance failure among university undergraduates in Southeast Nigeria.

The pursuit of academic excellence in Nigerian universities, particularly in the Southeast region, could be accompanied by intense pressure and high expectations. Emphasis is often laid on certification demanding that students are put under immense pressure to succeed in the programmes. Given that it is one of the regions with high rate of literacy in Nigeria, parents and significant persons mount pressures exert high expectations on students. This leads to fear of

performance failure, which can significantly impede their academic progress and overall well-being. This fear, characterized by a persistent anxiety about not meeting academic standards or disappointing others, is increasingly recognized as a critical factor that undermines students' academic performance and mental health. Given the critical role that emotional intelligence can play in enhancing students' ability to cope with academic stress and related issues, it is imperative to investigate the relationship between students' emotional intelligence and their fear of performance failure. Specifically, the study determined:

1. If mood regulation, component of EI is related to fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
2. If self-awareness, component of EI is related to fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
3. If internal motivation, component of EI has any relation with undergraduates' fear of performance failure in South-East, Nigeria.
4. If inter-personal skill, component of EI is related to undergraduates' fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
5. If empathy response, component of EI is related to undergraduates' fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between mood regulation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between internal motivation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria?
4. What is the relationship between interpersonal skill and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria?
5. What is the relationship between empathy and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

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

1. There is no significant relationship between mood regulation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.

3. There is no significant relationship between internal motivation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
4. There is no significant relationship between interpersonal skill and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
5. There is no significant relationship between empathy response and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.

Methods

The study adopted the correlational descriptive research design since the researchers are interested in determining the extent the variables are related without the intention of manipulating any of the variables. The respondents comprised of 1150 second year undergraduate students for the 2023/2024 academic session in all the public universities in South-East, Nigeria. The researchers distributed 1200 copies of the questionnaire to undergraduates but only 1150 were used for the analyses because some respondents did not complete the questionnaire. The researchers utilized simple random sampling technique in selecting four public universities from southeast and the undergraduates gave their consent to the study after being sensitized by their course reps who served as research assistants.

Two instruments were used in this study for the collection of data. These sets of questionnaires include "Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire" and "Fear of Performance Failure Questionnaire". Emotional Intelligence components were measured using an instrument titled "Fear of Devaluing One's self Estimate sub scale (FDOSE)" adapted from the work of Conroy et al's (2002). Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EIQ) is a 30-item questionnaire comprising six sub-scales (mood regulation, internal motivation, self-awareness, internal motivation, interpersonal skill and empathy). It was structured on a five-point Likert scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree a little, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree a little and 5=strongly agree. In adapting the instrument for the present study, the items were restructured on a four-point scale response of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Items 1-5 in the present scale measure mood regulation; items 6-12 measures self-regulation; items 13-19 measures internal motivation, items 20-25 measure interpersonal skill while items 26-30 measures empathy. The minimum score for the scale is 30 while the maximum score is 120. Thus, scores of 60 and above was considered high emotional intelligence while scores below 60 was considered low emotional intelligence.

Fear of Performance Questionnaire (FOPQ) used in this study is a 15-item scale adapted from Conroy et al's (2002) Performance failure appraisal inventory (PFAI). The questionnaire measures fear of performance on the fronts of fear of: uncertain future, important others losing interest, upsetting important others, and of experiencing shame and/or embarrassment. Participants are to rate the extent to which each scale item for each variable applied to their experiences. FOPQ was originally developed on a five-point Likert scale anchored by the response options from: 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree. In adapting the

instrument, the instrument was then placed on a four-point Likert scale response of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The range of score for positive statements were weighted as 4, 3, 2, and 1 for SA-SD respectively, while negative statements were weighted 1, 2, 3 and 4 for SA-SD respectively. The minimum score for the scale is 15 while the maximum score is 60. Thus, scores of 30 and above was considered high fear of performance failure while scores below 30 was considered low fear of performance failure. Data collection was undertaken with the help of 5 research assistants who are school representatives of the universities used for the current study. They were briefed on the modalities for administering the instruments, EIQ and FOPQ. Two weeks was earmarked for the administration of the EIQ and FOPQ. The researchers, with the collaborative efforts of the research assistants used direct delivery approach to be able to retrieve a greater chunk of the distributed questionnaires. A total of 1150 questionnaires were retrieved and used for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: Pearson r on the Relationship between Mood Regulation and Fear of Performance Failure among University Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	R	Remark
Mood Regulation Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.39	Low Positive Relationship

Table 1 shows that there is a relationship index of 0.39 existing between mood regulation and fear of performance failure. This indicates that there is a low positive relationship between mood regulation (a component of emotional intelligence) and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates in South-East Nigeria.

Table 2: Pearson r on the Relationship between Self-Awareness and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	R	Remark
Self awareness Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.35	Low Positive Relationship

Table 2 reveals that a relationship index of 0.35 exists between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among undergraduates. This indicates that there is a low positive relationship between self-awareness (a component of emotional intelligence) and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates in South-East Nigeria.

Table 3: Pearson r on the Relationship between Internal Motivation and Fear of Performance Failure among University Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	R	Remark
Internal Motivation Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.29	Low Positive Relationship

As shown in Table 3, there is a low positive relationship between internal motivation (a component of emotional intelligence) and fear of performance failure among undergraduates. This is revealed in the relationship index of 0.29 which was revealed in the table as existing between the variables.

Table 4: Pearson r on the Relationship between Interpersonal Skill and Fear of Performance failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	R	Remark
Interpersonal Skill Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.35	Low Positive Relationship

The indices in the table reveal that interpersonal skill (a component of emotional intelligence) has a low positive relationship with fear of performance failure. This is based on the relationship index of 0.35 which was revealed in the table as existing between the variables.

Table 5: Pearson r on the Relationship between Empathy and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	R	Remark
Empathy Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.22	Low Positive Relationship

Table 5 shows that there is a relationship index of 0.22 existing between empathy and fear of performance failure. This indicates that there is a low positive relationship existing between empathy (a component of emotional intelligence) and fear of performance failure among undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria.

Hypotheses

Table 6: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation between Mood Regulation and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Mood Regulation Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.39	0.00	Significant

Table 6 shows that there is a significant relationship between mood regulation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The calculated r (0.39) had *P*.values<0.05. The 1st null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 7: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation between Self-Awareness and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Self Awareness Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.35	.02	Significant

Table 7 shows that there is a significant relationship existing between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The calculated r (0.35) had *P*.values<0.05. The 2nd null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 8: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation between Internal Motivation and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Internal Motivation Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.29	0.00	Significant

As shown in Table 8, there is a significant relationship between internal motivation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The calculated r (0.29) had *P*.values <0.05. The 3rd null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 9: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation between Interpersonal Skill and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Interpersonal Skill Fear of Performance Failure	1150	0.35	0.00	Significant

Table 9 shows that there is a significant relationship between Interpersonal skill and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The calculated r (0.35) had *P*.values <0.05. The 4th null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 10: Test of Significance of Pearson Correlation between Empathy Response and Fear of Performance Failure among Undergraduates

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Empathy Fear of performance failure	1150	0.22	.02	Significant

Table 10 shows that there is a significant relationship existing between empathy response and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The calculated r (0.22) had *P*.values <0.05. The 5th null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and fear of performance failure among undergraduates. The findings of the study revealed that there is a low positive relationship between mood regulation and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates in South-East Nigeria. This in essence shows that the mood of a university undergraduate before examinations has a role to play as it pertains to the handling of the nervousness of fear of performance failure. The study went further to reveal that there is a significant relationship between mood regulation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The findings of the study agree with Duru, Balkis and Duru (2024) who carried out a study on fear of failure and academic satisfaction: the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties and procrastination of undergraduates and revealed that difficulty in emotion regulation acts as a mediator in the relationship between fear of failure and procrastination. The findings of their study suggest that interventions aimed at improving the individual's emotion regulation skills may play an important role in overcoming the negative effects associated with fear of failure on procrastination and academic satisfaction. The study

further agrees with Robres, Usán, Lozano-Blasco, and Salavera (2023) who in their investigation to ascertain the relationship between academic performance and emotional intelligence revealed that emotional intelligence is a valuable variable to predict academic performance, as it was shown to have a significant moderate-high effect size.

In ascertaining the relationship between emotional intelligence and fear of performance failure among undergraduates, relevant analysis revealed low positive relationship between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. The test of significance of Pearson correlation between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among undergraduates revealed that there is a significant relationship between self-awareness and fear of performance failure among undergraduates. This in essence shows that through self-awareness, which offers an undergraduate a wide range of avenue into their strengths and weaknesses, they can identify those weaknesses that plunge them into fear of performance failure as examinations are approaching. The findings of the study correlate with Chuang and Tsai (2022) who in their study revealed that students' emotional intelligence does not directly affect students' academic achievement; however, it directly and positively impacts their learning motivation and self-efficacy. This implies that when an undergraduate is aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses (self-awareness) in the academic environment, which is consistent with self-efficacy is directly implicated in students' disposition towards academic performance, a consequence of which the student could fall into fear of performance failure when they neglect it.

Also revealed in the analysis is a low positive relationship between internal motivation and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. The test of significance of Pearson correlation between internal motivation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates revealed that that there is a significant relationship between internal motivation and fear of performance failure among undergraduates. This in essence shows that an undergraduates' attitude towards their academic performance can be internally motivated through self-conviction so as to tackle fear of performance failure. The findings of the study agree with Chuang, Huang, Lin and Chen (2022) who ascertained the influence of motivation, self-efficacy and fear of failure on the career adaptability of undergraduates and revealed that motivation and self-efficacy had a positive effect on undergraduates' career adaptability and that motivation positively affected fear of failure. However, they saw motivation as a double-edge sword, even though it improves adaptability, it can also come with an increased fear of failure. This was also in line with the findings of Raysharie, Harinie, Inglesia, Vita, Sianipar, Ongki, Pasha, Abdurrahman, Fadilla and Putri (2023) who investigated the effect of students' intrinsic motivation on academic achievement in management degree and found that students who have higher levels of intrinsic motivation tend to have better academic performance than those who have lower levels of intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, between interpersonal skill and fear of performance failure, there was a low positive relationship. This in essence shows that an undergraduate who utilizes the ability of interpersonal skill, can rarely fall into fear of performance failure since they can seek the assistance

of lecturers or fellow students to tackle difficult areas while preparing for their examination. The test of significance of Pearson correlation between Interpersonal skill and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria revealed that that there is a significant relationship between Interpersonal skill and fear of performance failure among undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria. The findings of the study agree with Wibowo, Naini and Febrianti (2022) who in their investigation on the effect of interpersonal skills and self-efficacy on self-compassion revealed that students with good interpersonal skills tend to improve their ability to self-determine, deal with unwanted behaviour, stress, deal with ambiguity as well as overcome interpersonal problems (like fear of performance failure). For them, such students, through their interpersonal skills, coping with social and academic situations is improved thereby reducing fear of performance failure.

More so, the findings of the study revealed that there is a low positive relationship existing between empathy response and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. This in essence shows that through empathy an undergraduate shows more understanding and support to their fellow students who exhibit fear of performance failure especially as examinations are approaching, fostering a sense of care and belonging where those around them are encouraged to share their struggles and learn from each other. The test of significance of Pearson correlation between empathy and fear of performance failure among undergraduates revealed that there is a significant relationship existing between empathy response and fear of performance failure among undergraduates. The findings of the study agree with Numanee, Zafar, Karim and Ismail (2020) who in their study on developing empathy among first-year university undergraduates through English language course ascertained that empathy for undergraduates remains a protective factor that drove them to behave technically when dealing with a person undergoing depression arising from fear of performance failure. For them, such empathy leads an undergraduate to understand others feeling for them and offer help for them where necessary.

Conclusion

This study has made a considerable contribution to knowledge given the fact that it has established the relationship existing between emotional intelligence and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. Based on the analysis of data, it was concluded that all the components of emotional intelligence have low positive relationship with fear of performance failure. This implies that students with emotional intelligence are not necessarily immune from the problems arising from fear of performance failure. Nevertheless, the study also revealed a significant relationship between the components of emotional intelligence and fear of performance failure among university undergraduates. Hence, education stakeholders, psychologists, lecturers should provide support that could help undergraduates irrespective of their emotional intelligence to come out from fear of performance failure.

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