Psychosocial Predictors of Sense of Belongingness among Secondary School Students in Ibadan-North Local Government of Oyo State

Grace A. Adejuwon, Oluwunmi A. Obisesan,
Funmilola B. Olutola & Priscilla Daboh
Department of Psychology
University of Ibadan, Ibadan
gaadejuwon@gmail.com, wunmiobisesan@gmail.com, funmilolatola@gmail.com

Abstract

Over the years, increasing attention has been given to factors contributing to quality of life, well-being and general sense of belongingness of individuals with health challenges, with little or no focus on sense of belongingness among adolescents in secondary schools which has been recently researched to have effect on their health. The study, therefore, investigated psychosocial factors as predictors of sense of belongingness among secondary school students in Ibadan. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design and purposively gathered data from selected 238 secondary school students. More of the respondents 123 (51.7%) were males, while others 115 (48.3%) were females. As regards age distribution, more of the respondents 179 (75.2%) indicated to be less than 16 years old, while others 59 (24.8%) indicated to be 16 years old and above. Three hypotheses were tested using t-test for independent samples. Findings revealed that students with low level of peer pressure reported higher sense of belongingness than those with high peer pressure [t (236) = 13.01; P<.01]. However, social support (family, friends and significant others) had neither joint nor independent influence on sense of belongingness [R = .21; R^2 = .04; F (4, 234) = 1.89; P>.05]. Further analysis revealed that, when combined, coping styles (problem and emotion focused) accounted for about 22% variance in sense of belongingness [R = .47; R^2 = .22; F (2, 235) = 33.27; P<.01]; only problem focused coping independently predicted sense of belongingness (β = .38; t = 3.47; P<.01). The study has implication on peer pressure as a significant determinant of sense of belongingness among secondary school students. Therefore, secondary school managements, parents as well as guardians should endeavour to monitor their children/wards' peers as they transit from childhood to adolescence. The quality of the group of friends they keep is important. This will assist in controlling the pressure that they feel from their friends.

Keywords: Sense of belongingness, psychosocial factors, peer pressure, social support, coping styles

Introduction

Adolescents have unique characteristics, behaviours, attitude, goals and purposes. We all have connections to other adolescents, men, women, and children to establish relationships. This is where the concept of sense belonging comes in. Sense of belonging has been described in various ways. It has cognitive and affective essentials in a way that the individual's cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group he belongs results in an affective response. Hoffman *et al.* (2003) defined sense of belonging as "the subjective sense of membership and identification with the university environment" and as a reflection of the extent to which students are integrated into the campus community.

Sense of belongingness is very crucial to adolescents' development. Jerome, Stephanie and Jonathan (2017) opined that sense of belongingness is a major factor that contributes to the psychological development of an adolescent, especially when they are within their peers at school or in any group. It gives them room to express themselves freely and maximise their potentials

fully in their environment. Absence of this relationship could adversely reflect on their health and affect their general life (Osterman, 2000).

Research has shown that sense of belonging has been measured in ways that vary in precision and complexity. Single items measuring sense of belonging were used by Nora and Cabrera (1996). In the study, respondents were rated according to the extent to which they felt they belonged to their school (Gilliard, 1996). Moreover, complex measures of sense of belonging were found in research using composite measures to explain this construct. Hurtado and Carter (1997) used a measure of sense of belonging containing three items, which are relating to the extent students saw themselves as part of the campus community, the way each student felt he or she was a member of the campus community, and felt a sense of belonging to the campus community (Velásquez, 1999; Dawn, Patty, Susan, Matthew, Karen, Jeannie and Heather, 2007).

Coping styles could be described in psychological term 'as expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimise or tolerate stress or conflict. Psychological coping mechanisms are often termed coping strategies or coping skills. Unconscious or non-conscious strategies (e.g., defence mechanisms) are generally excluded. The term coping generally refers to adaptive or constructive strategies, that is, the strategies used to reduce stress levels. It could also be described as bidirectional approach to stress i.e., reactive coping is the coping response follows the stressor. On the other hand, proactive coping, is a coping response aimed at heading off a future stressor (John Moring, Robert Furman & Jaclene, 2011). McCubbin and McCubbin (1996) described coping as involving complementary efforts of individual family members which comes together in a synergistic whole and strikes a balance between demands and resources that eliminate stresses and hardships together.

Moreover, existing literature suggest that students who feel that they belong to learning environments report higher enjoyment, enthusiasm, happiness, interest, and more confidence in engaging in learning activities, whereas those who feel isolated report greater anxiety, boredom, frustration and sadness during the academic engagement that directly affects academic performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Perceived sense of belonging decreases the experience of stress and school-related anxiety as well as the experience of self-consciousness, especially in early adolescent years (Boekaerts, 1993; Goodenow, 1993a; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996). However, increased self-consciousness in adolescence may negatively affect students' classroom involvement due to a heightened feeling of public exposure, which stimulates the experience of negative emotions, such as embarrassment and shame. On the other hand, a sense of belonging in the learning environment may balance students' increased sense of public exposure (Goodenow, 1993a).

Peer pressure has an important influence on young people's attitudes and behaviours which has also been linked to sense of belongingness of adolescents. It involves the influence by peer group in encouraging an individual to change his or her attitude, values, or behaviour in order to conform to group norms. The ability and desire to monitor social cues is thought to regulate susceptibility to two different types of peer pressure: active peer pressure, consisting of direct offers, and passive peer pressure. Peer pressure has been discovered to influences adolescents' wardrobes, their music, their leisure activities, and their choice of friends. It is clear historically that adolescents, most especially those in secondary schools are at increased health and academic risk through the pressure experienced from peers and colleagues in school (Omigbodun, 2007; Marie, Drolet & Arcacand, 2012; Opara, 2013).

Researches have shown that perceived social supports have much impact on adolescents' sense of belongingness. Perceived social supports could be described as the perception about the prospective availability of the support when necessary. It could be from family, friends or significant others (Gonzalo & Maria, 2014; Jil & Beverly, 2005). A study carried out by Lui and Gong (2012) shed light on the extent to which social factors influence sense of belongingness among high school students in some Japanese schools. The result revealed that certain social factors such as institutional support system as well as parental factors significantly determined sense of belongingness of high school students. In fact, studies consistently reveal that students who experience a sense of belongingness in educational environments are more motivated, more engaged in school and classroom activities, and more dedicated to school (Osterman, 2000).

It is imperative to know that looking into the sense of belongingness of these secondary school students is highly important because, sense of belongingness is a vital psychological need which has to be addressed. Moreover, variety of factors had been revealed to affect their sense of belongingness in the group which they belong to and over the years, increasing attention has been given to factors contributing to quality of life, well-being and general sense of belongingness of individuals (Adults) with health challenges, with little or no focus on sense of belongingness among adolescents in secondary schools. However, limited existing and recent literature addressed sense of belongings among young adolescents in Nigeria.

This study will, therefore, fill the gap by investigating the psycho-social predictors (coping styles, social support and peer pressure) of sense of belongingness among adolescents and secondary school students in Ibadan metropolis.

The following research questions were answered at the end of the study:

1. Will peer pressure have significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students?
2. Will social support have significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students?
3. Will coping styles have significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students?

Purpose of Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate psycho-social predictors of sense of belongingness among secondary school students in Ibadan. The following specific objectives will be achieved at the end of the study;

1. To determine whether peer pressure will have significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students.
2. To examine whether social support will have significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students.
3. To understand whether coping styles will have significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study

1. Students with high level of peer pressure will significantly report lower sense of belongingness than those with low level of peer pressure.

2. Social support dimensions (family, friends and significant others) will jointly and independently predict sense of belongingness among secondary school students in Ibadan.
3. Coping styles dimensions (problem and emotion focused) will jointly and independently predict sense of belongingness among secondary school students.

Method
The researcher adopted a cross-sectional research design. In cross-section design, the researcher was able to gather data from a wide range of respondents at a point in time. The dependent variable in this study is sense of belongingness, while the independent variables are coping styles, social support and peer pressure.

The study was carried out in Akinyele local government area of Ibadan. Specifically, the study was conducted in two secondary schools and two tutorial centers which are Apex tutorial, Super Elite Tutorial Center, Abadina Grammar School and Abadina College respectively. Purposive sampling technique was utilised to select participants for the study. The sample size for the study was two hundred and thirty-eight (238) secondary school students.

Procedure and Measurements
The researchers obtained approval from the management of the schools and tutorial centers prior to the day data was collected. This approval was given after submission of the proposal and purpose of the research was explained to them.

Informed consent was also filled by each participant and only those who showed interest participated in the study. Although three hundred (300) copies of questionnaire were distributed, only two hundred and thirty-eight (238) were retrieved and utilised for data analysis.

Data were gathered through the means of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into five sections; Sections A, B, C, D & E.

Section A comprised of socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, parental educational level, class of study and parental marital status.

Section B involves sense of belongingness scale. It is a ten (10) item scale developed by Vural (2013). The scale was developed to measure the level of sense of belongingness, most especially among secondary school students. The scale has a response format that ranges as follows; SD- Strongly Disagree; D- Disagree; U– Undecided; A- Agree; SA- Strongly Agree. High score shows high level of sense of belongingness, while low score signifies low level of sense of belongingness. The scale developers reported internal consistency of 0.77. In this study, the scale had an internal consistency of 0.88.

Section C is 11-item peer group pressure scale {PGPS) developed by Darcy (2000). It was developed to measure the level of peer pressure experienced by adolescents. Responses on the scale was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from very strongly disagree -1, strongly disagree - 2, disagree - 3, undecided - 4, agree -5, strongly agree – 6, very strongly agree - 7. A highest possible score of 70 and a least possible score of 10 could be obtained by any given respondent indicating high and low group pressure respectively. Cronbach alpha was .78. The authors reported test retest reliability coefficient of 0.74 for undergraduate students and 0.92 for high school students.

Section D contains Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WOCQ) developed by Folkman & Lazarus, 1985. It is a 21- item scale with full reliability (α = .94), problem-focused and emotion-focused subscales were selected for use in the present study. The reliability for each dimensions scale is as follows; Problem focused = α = .80, while emotion-focused is α = .84. Participants will indicate the extent to which they utilise each coping strategy on a 4-item Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 – Not used, 2- Used somewhat, 3- Used quite a bit, to 4- Used a great deal. The scale was found to have adequate internal consistency that ranged between 0.79 and 0.61.

Section E consists of 12-item scale of perceived social support (MSPSS). The scale was jointly developed by Grogery, Zimet, Nancy, Dalem, Sara, Zimet, Gordon & Falay (1998)**.** It is a 7 point rating scale, ranging from very strongly disagree "1" to 7 "very strongly agree". The items tended to divide into factor groups relating to the source of the social support, namely family, friends or significant other. Two reliability tests were conducted in this study; split-half coefficient part1 =.63 and part2 =.74; Spearman-Brown coefficient =.74; and Guttman split-half coefficient =.69 and Cronbach's Alpha of .72. In this study, the scale had an internal consistency of 0.80.

Data Analysis
The data collected for this study were analysed with respect to the hypotheses formulated in the study. Hypotheses one was tested using multiple regression analysis while t-test for independent samples was used to test hypothesis two.

Results
Table 1: Descriptive of Demographic Information

SN	Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Sex	Male	123	51.7
		Female	115	48.3
2	Age	Less than 12 years	179	75.2
		12 years and above	59	24.8
3	Family background	Monogamous	173	72.7
		Polygamous	65	27.3
4	Class of Study	JSS 1	45	18.9
		JSS 2	94	39.5
		JSS 3	99	41.6
5	Parental marital status	Married	189	79.4
		Divorced	23	9.7
		Separated	12	5
		Widowed	3	1.3
		Single parent	11	4.6
6	Ethnicity	Yoruba	189	79.4
		Igbo	35	14.7
		Hausa	1	0.4
		Others	13	5.5
7	Parental Educational qualification	No formal edu	22	9.2
		Primary	36	15.1
		SSCE	92	38.7
		ND/NCE	52	21.8
		HND/University	28	11.8
		Postgraduate	8	3.4
	Total		**238**	**100**

Table 1 presents results on socio-demographic information of respondents. It is shown on Table 1 that more of the respondents 123 (51.7%) were males, while the other 115 (48.3%) were females. As regards age distribution, more of the respondents 179 (75.2%) indicated to be less than 12 years old, while the other 59 (24.8%) indicated to be 12 years old and above. As regards family background, more of the participants 173 (72.7%) indicated to be from monogamous family, while the other 65 (27.3%) indicated to spring from a polygamous family. As regards class of study, more of the respondents 99 (41.6%) indicated to be JSS 3 students, 94 (39.5%) were JSS 2 students, while the other 45 (18.9%) were JSS 1 students. Ethnicity distribution revealed that more of the respondents 189 (79.4%) indicated to be from Yoruba ethnic group, 35 (14.7%) indicated to be from Igbo background, 13 (5.5%) indicated belonging to other ethnicity, while the other individual signified to belong to the Hausa ethnic group. Finally, as regards parental educational qualification, more of the respondents 92 (38.7%) indicated that their parent were SSCE holders, 52 (21.8%) signified ND/NCE holders, 36 (15.1%) parents were primary school certificate holders, 28 (11.8%) were HND/University degree holders, 22 (9.2%) parents had no formal education, while the other 8 (3.4%) parents were postgraduate certificate holders.

Hypothesis One
Students with high level of peer pressure will significantly report lower sense of belongingness than those with low level of peer pressure. This was tested using t-test for independent samples and the result is presented on Table 2;

Table 2: T-test for Independent Summary Table Showing the Influence of Peer Pressure on Sense of Belongingness

Dependent	Peer Pressure	N	Mean	SD	T	df	P
	High	132	25.24	5.35			
Sense of Belongingness					13.01	236	<.01
	Low	106	34.26	5.27			

Table 2 presents result on the influence of peer pressure on sense of belongingness among secondary school students. It is shown that peer pressure had significant influence on sense of belongingness [t (236) = 13.01; P<.01]. Further, students with low level of peer pressure reported higher sense of belongingness (Mean = 34.26; SD = 5.27) than those with high peer pressure (Mean = 25.24; SD = 5.35). This confirms the stated hypothesis, hence it was retained in this study.

Hypothesis Two
Social support dimensions (family, friends and significant others) will jointly and independently predict sense of belongingness among secondary school students in Ibadan. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented on Table 3;

Table 3: Multiple Regression Summary Table Showing Social Support as Predictors of Sense of Belongingness

Dependent	Predictors	β	t-value	P	R	R^2	F	P
	Family	.15	1.76	>.05				
Sense of Belongingness	Friends	.09	1.08	>.05	.21	.04	1.89	>.05
	Significant others	.11	1.23	>.05				

Table 3 presents result on the joint and independent influence of social support (family, friends and significant others) on sense of belongingness among secondary school students. It is shown that social support (family, friends and significant others) had neither joint nor independent influence on sense of belongingness [R = .21; R^2 = .04; F (4, 234) = 1.89; P>.05]. This negates the stated hypothesis, hence it was rejected in this study.

Hypothesis Three
Coping styles dimensions (problem and emotion focused) will jointly and independently predict sense of belongingness among secondary school students. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented on Table 4.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Summary Table Showing Coping Styles as Predictors of Sense of Belongingness

Dependent	Predictors	β	T	P	R	R^2	F	P
	Problem focused	.38	3.47	<.01				
Sense of Belongingness					.47	.22	33.27	<.01
	Emotion focused	.10	.95	>.05				

Table 4 presents result on the joint and independent influence of coping styles (problem and emotion focused) on sense of belongingness among secondary school students. It is shown that coping styles (problem and emotion focused) jointly predicted sense of belongingness [R = .47; R^2 = .22; F (2, 235) = 33.27; P<.01]. When combined, coping styles (problem and emotion focused) accounted for about 22% variance in sense of belongingness. However, only problem focused coping independently predicted sense of belongingness (β = .38; t = 3.47; P<.01). This confirms the stated hypothesis, hence was retained in this study.

Discussion
The aim of the present study was to investigate psychosocial factors affecting sense of belongingness of secondary school students in Akinyele Local Government Area in Ibadan, Oyo State.

Findings of the study revealed that the two dimensions of coping styles, problem focused and emotion had joint influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students in Oyo

State. When combined, coping styles (problem and emotion focused) accounted for about 22% variance in sense of belongingness. However, only problem focused coping independently predicted sense of belongingness. This result is similar to Roeser and colleagues (1996) in a research of the relationship between the contextual factors of school environment and students' motivational, emotional outcomes. They utilised two hundred and ninety-six eighth-grade students in the study. Students' responses to self-report questionnaire revealed that students' perceived sense of school belonging was one of the most powerful predictors of their perceived academic self-efficacy. Also, students who reported a high sense of belonging in the school environment reported less self-consciousness (e.g. nervousness and embarrassment) in their task-related engagements in the class and school than those who reported less sense of belongingness to the school.

The result also showed that students with low peer pressure reported higher sense of belongingness. The study by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) documented the research supporting the idea that belonging to a peer group is related to persistence, degree attainment, and pursuit of graduate education. Students are also influenced by their relationships with faculty, and these interactions influence students' institutional commitment, satisfaction with college, and degree attainment (Astin, 1993). The extent to which students are connected to peers and faculty has been conceptualised as social and academic integration, which is said to influence students' decisions to remain in college (Tinto, 1993). Successful integration with some aspect of the campus community is associated with students' decisions to remain in college. Thus, students unable to integrate in some manner are at risk for withdrawal from the institution (Tinto, 1993). The growing racial/ethnic diversity of college campuses has caused many scholars to question the applicability of the academic and social integration concepts to marginalised students, because integration implies that students must give up aspects of their cultural identities and adopt new values in order to persist in college (e.g., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tierney, 1992). It is clear historically that adolescents, most especially those in secondary schools are at an increased health and academic risk through the pressure experienced from peers and colleagues in school (Omigbodun, 2007; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Marie Drolet & Isabel Arcac 2012; Opara, 2013).

The result of this study also shows that social support has no significant influence on sense of belongingness among secondary school students. This contradicts the study by Walton and Cohen (2007) who explored belongingness uncertainty that socially stigmatised groups have less certainty in terms of their social bonds and are then more sensitive to things that suggest belonging may be difficult in certain environments such as academic settings. They cited research and literature showing belongingness and related concepts such as social connectedness to have significant impacts on mental and physical health. The authors hypothesised that students who were from stigmatised groups, in particular black students, usually decide to have few peer relationships in an intellectual setting.

Conclusion

Relationships among peers have been found to be very crucial in overall wellbeing of young adolescents in this study. School has been found to be one of the critical environments where they can develop a sense of belonging, therefore it is recommended that teachers, parents and psychologists should work in harmony to study each student's characteristics and monitor peer

influence on their behaviour. They should also assist adolescents in schools to cultivate sense of belongingness in other to maximise their potentials fully wherever they find themselves.

Also, enabling coping mechanisms that will assist adolescents to deal with ambiguous situations should be instilled in them. This will assist in boosting their level of sense of belongingness.

Finally, the study recommends that more studies be carried out on other psychological and social factors that influence sense of belongingness among secondary school students. This will assist in providing more practical means of boosting a sense of belongingness in adolescents.

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