



Communication Styles and Assertive Skills as Correlates of Interpersonal Relationship ... (Tabitha et.al. 2021)

## **Communication Styles and Assertive Skills as Correlates of Interpersonal Relationship among Students of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined communication styles, assertive skills as correlates of interpersonal relationships among students in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto. The study employed a correlational research design and four research objectives and corresponding research questions and hypotheses were respectively analyzed. A sample of 306 undergraduate students was drawn from the population of 1500 with the aid of table for determining sample size. A questionnaire designed by the researchers and titled Communication Styles, Assertiveness Skills and Students' Interpersonal Relationship Questionnaire (CSASSIRQ) was used for data collection which was adjudged to possess content validity by experts in guidance and counselling with a reliability 'r' index of 0.72. Null hypotheses one to three were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, while null hypothesis four was subjected to regression analysis. Findings revealed that: passive communication style is positively related to interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto among others. It was recommended among others that, Teachers in higher institutions of learning should involve students in presentations that relate to improving students assertive skills of communication particularly during a public lecture for the students.

**Keywords:** Communication Styles, Passive Communication Styles, Aggressive Communication Styles, Assertive Skills and Interpersonal Relationships



## **Introduction**

Communication is essential to everything one does in life. What one says and how one says it. What one hears and how one hears it affect individual's interpersonal relationship and action. Communication is the act of discovering, sharing what is in one and another's mind, so that one may react accordingly. To communicate effectively, one must make sure that message is selected by intended recipient, and checking reaction, asking question and asking for feedback (Idowu & Esere, 2007). One might say that communication consists of transmitting information from one person to another. This is why communication has been described as the production and exchange of meaning (Olagunju & Eweniyi, 2002). Communication is the production and exchange of information and meaning by use of signs, and symbols. It involves encoding and sending messages, receiving and decoding them, and synthesizing information and meaning (Esere, 2007). Communication is much more than talking, it is what one says, how one says it, why one says it, when it is being said and what one does not say but meant and received. People communicate to satisfy needs in both work and non-work situations (Idowu & Esere, 2007). Thus communication can occur across vast distance in time and space. Communication requires that, the communicating parties share an area of commonality. The communication process is complete once the receiver has understood the messages of the sender (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2011). Communication permeates all levels of human experience and it is central to understanding human behavior. It is seen by Hybels and Weaver (2001) as any process in which people share information, ideas, and feelings which involves not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and styles. Communication is an integral part of human life activities. It is the pillar which maintains the structure of peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding in the society.

Undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto are facing a lot of challenges in identification of lecture halls and library as this may be due to the fact that they do not effectively communicate with one another. Interpersonal relationship among students' today particularly undergraduate students of SSCOEE seems to be poor and ineffective. Interpersonal relationship is a key to having success in school, but majority of UG students do not have good interpersonal relationship that will help them to succeed in their academic activities. As students, many of them fail or do not succeed in so many things they do such as College Registration, identification of lecture venues, use of libraries, issues regarding semester examinations etc. because of poor interpersonal relationship among them; ranging from polite approach to one another, team work to remedy a problem and sincerity. These and many more contribute to the perennial poor interpersonal relationship among UG students in SSCOEE Sokoto which in turn adversely affects their school and academic activities.

Communication could be verbal and non-verbal. These two types of communication are very essential among students and even among the general population. Martin (2002) stated that communication is composed of different methods: word, voice, tone verbal and non-verbal cues. Of course, some are more effective in delivering a message than others. Martin (2002) further stated that, in a conversation or verbal exchange words are 7%, effective tone of voice is 38% and effective non-verbal cues are 55% effective. By learning these effective communication skills, one can better connect with ones friends, colleagues, parents and co-workers. The effective communication styles include:



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1. Active listening: Active listening is one of the most important aspects of effective communication. Successful listening means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding how the speaker feels about what they are communicating.
  2. Use of non-verbal signals or codes that match up with your words.
  3. Use of simple words and clear unambiguous language.
  4. Avoiding ambiguous words when one is communicating with another person.
  5. Being honest and direct when one is given feedback (Robinson & Robert, 2013).
- Communication style is very important in effective interpersonal relationship among students of tertiary institution.

Assertiveness is a particular mode of communication. Borland's medical Dictionary (2014:233) defines assertiveness as a form of behavior characterized by a confident declaration or affirmation of a statement without need proof; this affirms the person's rights or point of view without either aggressively threatening the rights of another (assuming a position of dominance) or submissively permitting another to ignore or deny one's rights or points of view.

Assertive communication skill involves respect for the boundaries of oneself and others. It also presumes an interest in fulfillment of needs and wants through cooperation. According to William and Fisher (2008), assertive communication of personal options, needs and boundaries has been conceptualized as the behavioural middle ground, lying between ineffective passive and aggressive responses (William, 2013). Assertiveness concerns are being able to express feelings, wishes, want and desires appropriately and in an interpersonal skill. In all, an individual interaction with other people, whether at home or at school with students or colleagues, assertiveness can help to express oneself in a clear, open and reasonable way, without undermining the rights of one or others. It is important to be assertive in order to reduce depressed feeling, frustrated, anxious and violent. It also helps to maintain good relationship with people. Inge (2011) listed few points in order to help individual to be more assertive, though the skills needs to be practice too in to order to be effective while communicating. The skills suggest that one:-

1. Understands oneself first
2. Ensures that one's voice is under control
3. Understands that it is okay to say a 'no'
4. Maintains a direct eye contact with the other person
5. Listens carefully and understand what the speaker is saying (Inge, 2011).

Adapting the above listed assertive skills; it could help tertiary institution students to be more effective in their relationship with others within and outside the school environment. These skills need to be practiced in their day to day transaction with one another in order to master it. The components of communication are peoples, codes, channels, feedback, encoding and decoding and noise (Pearson, 2003).

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a theory of communication developed by Giles and Ogay, (2007). It argues that "when people interact they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures, to accommodate others" (Turner & West, 2010). It explores the various reasons why individuals emphasize or minimize the social differences between oneself and one's interlocutors through verbal and nonverbal communication. This theory is concerned with the links between "language, context and identity" (Gallois, et.al. 2005). It focuses on both the intergroup interpersonal that lead to



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accommodation as well as the ways in which power, macro and micro-context concerns after communication behaviour (Gallois, et.al. 2005). There are two main accommodation process described by this theory. They are convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to the strategies through which individual adapt to each other's communicative behaviour in order to reduce the social difference (Giles, & Ogay, 2007).

Meanwhile, Divergence refers to the instance in which individual accentuate the speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and their interlocutors (Giles, & Ogay, 2007). Some times when individual try to engage in convergence they can also end up over-accommodating and despite their good intentions their convergence can be seen as condescending. The first assumption indicates that people bring their past experience to conversation.' Therefore, communication is not only influenced by situational conditions and initial reactions but the "social-historical context in which the interaction is embedded" (Giles & Ogay, 2007). The second assumption is concerned with how people perceive and evaluate a conversation. Perception is "the process of attending to and interpreting a message and evaluation is the "process of judging a conversation" (Turner & West, 2010).

The importance of language and behaviour is illustrated in the third assumption since one is indicators of social status and group belongings. When two people who speak different languages try to have a conversation, the language one agrees to communication with is more and likely to be the same used by the higher status person. This idea of "Salient social membership" negotiation is well illustrated in the situation of an interview as the interviewee usually makes all efforts to identify with the interviewer by accommodating the way he speaks and behaves so that he or she can save more chance to secure the job (Giles & Ogay. 2007). The last assumption puts emphasis on social appropriateness and norms. Here norms are denned as "expectation of behaviors that individuals feel should or should not occur in a conversation" (Turner & West, 2007). There expectation gives guidance to people behaviours, helping them to figure out the appropriated norms that are perceived socially.

An interpersonal relationship is a strong, deep or close association and acquaintance between two or more people that may range from brief duration to a long enduring relationship. According to Adegoke (2011), it means a process of understanding human relationships with emphasis on social skills, self-analysis techniques of effective communication and resolving interpersonal conflicts. Devito (2004) defines interpersonal relationship as communication that takes place between two persons who have established a relationship, the people are in one way or the other connected. Thus, relationship can occur between romantic partners, business associates, doctors and patients, counselors and counselees, and so on, it permeates our lives. Levinger in Pitan, (2017) proposed a relationship model called heterosexual adult romantic relationships but has been applied to other kinds of interpersonal development of a relationship that follows five stages:

1. Acquaintance and acquaintanceship: this is having a personal knowledge or a state of familiarity and having a relationship with a person you know just slightly, that is the situation of not too strong friendship.
2. Buildup: to build up a quality entire relationship.
3. Continuation: for a relationship to grow or continue, some friendship rules should be maintained.
4. Deterioration: This is the stage in a relationship when the connecting bonds between the partners weaken and there is drifting from each other.



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5. Termination: There are five ways to terminate a relationship. They are differentiating; circumscribing, stagnation, avoidance, and termination.

There are three major types of interpersonal relationship. They are nonverbal, written and oral interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Relationship Attribution Theory: This argues that we attempt to assign motive or cause to the behavior of another individual. It is a humanistic theory that believes that there is a direct relationship between our behavior and its causes. From the humanistic outlook of attribution theory, epistemological assumption posits that there are multiple truths or realities as opposed to only the truth. As for the ontological assumption, it states that our human nature is of free will and not predetermined. In the case of axiological assumption, values are important in studying the discipline of communication as opposed to objectivity (Pitan, 2017)

In the course of this study related empirical studies were reviewed such as Okoro (2013) where he investigated employer's assessment of effective communication competencies possessed by University Business Education graduates for successful running of business in South/South part of Nigeria. The study was guided by one research question and three hypotheses and it adopted a descriptive survey. The population comprised of 318 employers of Business Education graduates in River and Delta State. The findings of the study revealed among others that Business Education graduates are competent in ability to speak clearly with empathy, ability to display good listening skills, ability to interpret message correctly, ability to relate information appropriately to concerned parties. Akanwa and Odo (2014) presented a study which sought to determine the effect of collaborative learning on achievement of pro-social behaviours and communication skills for peace culture among science learners in Nigerian schools. A pretest, posttest, non-equivalent control group design was adopted. Eighty four (84) senior secondary two (SS 2) science students in 8 intact classes randomly selected from 4 secondary schools in Nsukka town of Enugu state of Nigeria constituted the sample. Results showed that collaborative learning method was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) better than competitive method in achieving effective pro-social behaviours and communication skills for peaceful culture among science students.

Okoro (2013) who investigated the influence of communication styles and assertiveness skills on effective interpersonal relationship among students of tertiary institutions in Kwara state. The study found that major communication styles that influence interpersonal relationships of students are facial expressions that matched how their fellow students feel not getting angry and talking softly. The study used the influence variable such as gender, institution, family type and religion. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique which comprise of purposive and simple random sampling techniques was adopted to draw a total sample of 600 students from Tertiary institutions in Kwara state. Also Renjith and Fernandez (2017) worked on assertiveness among business students which was a case study of Nizwa College of Technology, Sultan of Oman which was aimed at studying the types of assertiveness and to measure the degree among the higher education students. A sample of 102 advanced diploma students in business department was taken for the study. The analysis revealed that 52% of the advanced diploma students exhibit assertive behaviour and 19.6% are in the aggressive level.





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**Objectives of the Study**

To find out if:

1. There is any relationship between Passive Communication Style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto.
2. There is any relationship between Aggressive Communication Style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto.
3. There is any relationship between Assertive Skills and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto.
4. What is the relative contribution of passive, aggressive styles and assertive communication is more related to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated and guided the study:

1. Is there any relationship between Passive Communication Style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto?
2. Is there any relationship between Aggressive Communication Style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto?
3. Is there any relationship between Assertive Skills and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto?
4. What is the relative contribution of passive, aggressive styles and assertive communication is more related to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto?

**Research Hypotheses**

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated and guided the conduct of the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between Passive Communication Style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOES Sokoto.
2. There is no significant relationship between Aggressive Communication Style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOES Sokoto.
3. There is no significant relationship between Assertive Skills and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOES Sokoto.
4. Passive, aggressive communication styles do not relatively contribute to interpersonal relationship amongst undergraduate students in SSCOES Sokoto

**Methodology**

The research design adopted for the study is correlational research. The population of this study was 1,500 undergraduate students in affiliation with Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto. This population is heterogeneous, because it consists of both male and female students. Their age range starts from 25-40 years, some are married while others are single, they are of various ethnic groups such as Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo as well as other ethnic groups found in Nigeria.

The sample for this study is 306 UG students which were derived from the total population of 1500 through the Research Advisor (2006) table of sampling. Proportionate



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sampling technique was employed to determine the sample of each student's category since there is disparity in their population (UG1=31, UG2=99, UG3=98 and UG4=78). The researcher used random sampling technique via lucky-dip to select the respondents during data collection.

A questionnaire designed by the researchers and titled Communication Styles, Assertiveness Skills and Students' Interpersonal Relationship Questionnaire (CSASSIRQ) was used. To obtain the validity of the instrument, the researchers exposed the instrument to experts/reviewers in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education & Extension Services, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto for validation in terms of content, construct and criterion related validity. The following indexes were obtained 0.68, 0.69 and 0.71 was obtained respectively. Based on their assessment the test items were adjudged to possessed validity. The instrument was considered fit for this study. To obtain the reliability of the instrument, the researchers subjected the instrument to test re-test at the interval of three weeks between the first and the second administration. After the second administration, the two set of scores were subjected to Pearson product moment correlation coefficient 'r' and a reliability index of 0.72 was obtained. This was considered reliable enough for use and the researchers adopted the instrument for use in this study. Data collected from the study were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) for hypotheses one to three and Multiple Regression Analysis was used for hypothesis four at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between Passive Communication Style and Interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto.

**Table 1: Relationship between Passive Communication Style and Interpersonal Relationships of Undergraduate Students**

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r-Cal	P- value	Decision
Passive Communication Style	306	15.62	2.306	.255	.001	Significant
Interpersonal Relationships	306	15.52	2.841			

$\alpha = 0.05$

From the Table 1, it can be seen that a positive relationship exist between passive communication style and interpersonal relationship with a calculated r-value of .255,  $.001 < 0.05$ . This indicates that there is a positive relationship between passive communication style and interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto because the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis which states there is relationship between no passive communication style and interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto was rejected. This implies that, passive communication style is related to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto.



## Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between Aggressive Communication Style and Interpersonal Relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto.

**Table 2: Relationship between Aggressive Communication Style and Interpersonal Relationships of Undergraduate Students**

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r-Cal	P- value	Decision
Aggressive Communication Style	306	13.05	3.630	-.625	.000	Significant
Interpersonal Relationships	306	15.52	2.841			

$\alpha = 0.05$

From Table 2, it can be seen that a negative relationship exist between aggressive communication style and interpersonal relationship with a calculated r-value of  $-.625$ ,  $.000 < 0.05$ . This indicates that there is a negative relationship between aggressive communication style and interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto because the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis which states there is no significant relationship between aggressive communication style and interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto was rejected. This implies that, aggressive communication style is related to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto.

## Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between Assertive Skills and Interpersonal Relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto.

**Table 3: Relationship between Assertive Skills and Interpersonal Relationships of Undergraduate Students**

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r-Cal	P- value	Decision
Assertive Skills	306	15.62	2.306	.492	.000	Significant
Interpersonal Relationships	306	13.05	3.630			

$\alpha = 0.05$

From Table 3, it can be seen that a positive relationship exist between assertive skills and interpersonal relationships with a calculated r-value of  $.492$ ,  $.000 < 0.05$ . This indicates that there is a positive relationship between assertive skills and interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto because the p-value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis which states there is no assertive skills and interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto was rejected. This implies that, an assertive skill is related to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto.





#### Hypothesis 4

Passive, aggressive communication styles do not relatively contribute to interpersonal relationship amongst undergraduate students in SSCOIE Sokoto.

**Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis on Interpersonal Relationships**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE	F	B	T	P-value
Passive Communication Style	.255	.065	.042	2.755	11.466	.315	3.383	.047
Aggressive Communication Styles	.657	.431	.022	2.155	61.795	.544	10.242	.067
Assertive Skills	.571	.314	.060	2.032	21.675	.565	9.324	.001

A look at the squared part correlations revealed that passive communication style accounted for 65% of the variance in interpersonal relationship  $R^2_{adj} = .042$ ,  $F(1, 305) = 11.466$ ,  $P < .05$ . Aggressive communication style accounted for 4.31% of the variance in interpersonal relationship  $R^2_{adj} = .022$ ,  $F(2, 304) = 61.795$ ,  $P > .05$ . While Assertive skills accounted for 3.14% of the variance in interpersonal relationships  $R^2_{adj} = .060$ ,  $F(3, 303) = 21.675$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, the significant results of the procedure indicated that an assertive skill was able to account for significant amount of variance in the dependent variable (interpersonal relationship). Although passive and aggressive communication is a related variable to interpersonal relationships, analysis of regression coefficients indicated that assertive skills,  $\beta = .565$ ,  $t = 9.324$ ,  $P < .05$  emerged as the significant predictor. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. This indicated that an assertive skill is better related to interpersonal relationship of undergraduate students in SSCOIE Sokoto.

#### Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one indicates that, there is a positive and high significant relationship between passive communication style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOIE Sokoto. This is in line with the study by Okoro (2013) where he investigated employers assessment of effective communication competencies possessed by University Business Education graduates for successful running of business in South/South part of Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed among others that Business Education graduates are competent in ability to speak clearly with empathy, ability to display good listening skills, ability to interpret message correctly, ability to relate information appropriately to concerned parties.

Hypothesis two indicates that, there is a negative and high significant relationship between aggressive communication style and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOIE Sokoto. The finding in this study contradict that of Akanwa and Odo (2014) who presented a study which sought to determine the effect of collaborative learning on achievement of pro-social behaviours and communication skills for peace culture among science learners in Nigerian schools. They found that there collaborative learning method was significantly related to competitive method in achieving effective pro-social behaviour and communication skills. A protest, posttest, non-equivalent control group design was adopted. Eighty four (84) senior secondary two (SS 2) science students in 8 intact classes randomly selected from 4 secondary schools in Nsukka town of Enugu state of Nigeria



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constituted the sample.

Hypothesis three indicates that, there is a positive and high significant relationship between assertive skills and interpersonal relationships of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto. This agreed with the study by Okoro, (2013) which investigated the influence of communication styles and assertiveness skills on effective interpersonal relationship among students of tertiary institutions in Kwara state. The study found that major communication styles that influence interpersonal relationships of students are facial expressions that matched how their fellow students feel not getting angry and talking softly. The study used the influence variable such as gender, institution, family type and religion. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique which comprise of purposive and simple random sampling techniques was adopted to draw a total sample of 600 students from Tertiary institutions in Kwara state.

Hypothesis four indicates that, assertive skills was more related to interpersonal relationships than passive and aggressive communication styles of undergraduate students in SSCOE Sokoto. This finding is supported by the study of Renjith and Fernandez (2017) which related that, most of the students (52%) exhibited assertive skill of communication as relate to interpersonal relationship than any other communication skill. It also revealed that major assertiveness skills which influence interpersonal relationship of students of tertiary institutions are speaking in clear tone of voice, speak directly and not hurting the feeling of their fellow students.

### **Conclusion**

It was concluded that passive communication style was related to interpersonal relationship of students and aggressive communication style was related to students' interpersonal relationships negatively.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made;

1. A special programmers such as debate, reading news and reports aimed at improving students passive communication styles should be introduced and conducted by teachers likewise Guidance & Counselling unit of the college. This is with view to improving student's passive communication styles.
2. Guidance & Counselling unit should make it part of its programme to create awareness on the effects of aggressive communication styles among students.
3. Teachers in higher institutions of learning should involve students in presentations that relate to improving students assertive skills of communication particularly during a public lecture for the students.
4. Having found that assertive skill had more contribution to interpersonal relationship than passive and aggressive communication skills, counsellors could give priority in developing assertive skills of communication among students particularly during counselling programme and classroom interaction

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