



SELF EFFICACY, SELF ESTEEM, AND GENDER AS FACTORS PREDICTING HOMESICKNESS OF FRESHMEN

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ABSTRACT

The transition from high school to college/university often involves separation from home as well as adapting to a new academic environment. For most new students, adjusting to an unfamiliar academic setting can induce homesickness. While most studies have investigated homesickness as a negative outcome of relocation, the present study extended the literature by examining the influence of self esteem, self efficacy, and gender on homesickness among freshmen in a public higher institution of learning in southwest Nigeria. The study was a cross-sectional ex post facto research, in which 306 respondents were selected using purposive sampling method. The sample comprised 193 females and 113 males, and their age ranged between 15 and 29 years with a mean of 20.13. The instrument for data collection was a well-designed self-report questionnaire that measured self efficacy, self esteem and homesickness. Three hypotheses generated from the literature reviewed were tested. Results indicated significant influence of both self efficacy $t(303) = 4.54, p < .01$, and self esteem $t(303) = 5.50, p < .01$ on homesickness. However, gender had no significant influence on homesickness. The findings were discussed alongside implications and conclusions.

Key words: self efficacy, self esteem, homesickness, fresh students

INTRODUCTION

Separation from significant others as a result of relocation from the home environment can mean a significant transition for most undergraduates because it may be their first prolonged period away from home (Beck, Taylor & Robbins, 2002). To many, the transition from secondary school to tertiary institution may appear to have come too quickly, such that the sudden departure from normality and familiarity might induce prolonged homesickness (Fisher, 1989; Fisher, & Hood, 1987 & 1988; Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985).

Homesickness has been conceptualized as a distress that emanates from an actual separation from home and significant others, or the anticipation that such separation might occur in the future (Thurber, Walton, & the Council on School Health, 2008). Available data suggests that homesickness affects a significantly high percentage of fresh students in institutions of higher learning (Thurber, et al, 2008). However, factors such as duration of separation, attachment and quality of relationship with significant others might influence the duration and severity of homesickness experienced.

Homesick persons manifest certain characteristics that distinguish them from non-homesick persons such as maladjustment outcomes including depression, and risky sexual behaviors (Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985; Zaleski, Levey-Thors, and Schiaffino, 1998). They are also more likely to report feeling lonely, and missing familiar places (such as home) and significant others, such as family and friends (Willis, Stroebe, & Hewstone (2003).

Intense longing to be re-united with familiar people and places experienced by homesick persons might be indicative of significant reduction in frequency of physical contact incidental to separation. Similarly, Thurber (1999) observed that homesick persons tend to experience home ruminations and have obsessive thoughts about attachment objects. Inability to disconnect from significant others has negative association with adjustment, psychological well-being and social functioning (Burt, 1993; Stroebe, Vliet,



Hewstone & Willis, 2002; Tochkov, Levine, Sanaka, 2010), and may induce homesickness among fresh students who ruminate about home.

Ruminations about home may occur because for most freshmen, the college or university years might be their first time of staying away from home for a prolonged period, implying that certain traits might enhance their adjustment. Self efficacy is a measure of the extent to which an individual has confidence in their ability to achieve set goals (Goetz, Cronjaeger, Frenzel, Ludtke & Hall, 2010), and this may include adaptation to a new environment.

High self efficacy facilitates association in social settings enabling individuals to feel at home in the midst of unfamiliar people that are connected with common interest (Burt, 1993; Stroebe et.al, 2002). This suggests that a high self efficacy freshman might find it easier mingling with people, and feel welcomed in a new academic environment. On the contrary, a low self efficacy freshman might have difficulties socializing with new faces, which might increase the motivation to quit the environment (Tsai, Chuang, Liang & Tsai, 2011). Similarly, self esteem, which measures the extent to which an individual feels positive about the self is another trait that has been shown to be related to homesickness (Burt, 1993; Stroebe et.al, 2002). Because they have low opinion of themselves, low self esteem persons have a higher tendency than high self esteem persons to engage in risky behaviors (Baron & Byrne, 1994), this may include truancy and self-imposed social isolation.

In view of the general dearth of literature on adjustment, which may influence well-being of freshmen, researchers have advocated for more research on homesickness in the student population (Van Heck, Vingerhoets, Voolstra, Groijters, Thijs, & Van Tilburg, 2005). The present study investigated the extent to which self efficacy and self esteem influenced homesickness, conceptualized as a strong urge to reunite with people, places and environment that one is familiar with in freshmen in a public college of education in southwest Nigeria.

Literature review

In a unique study that investigated the relationship between physical environment and adjustment, Breakwell (1986) concluded that physical environment influenced personal identity. The author argued this was because the physical environment enhanced distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The author's position concurred with Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff (1983) who noted that a person's cognitions, emotions, and behavioral tendencies are influenced by socialization with the physical world. Guinagh (1992) found that among college students, about 68% of freshmen and second year undergraduates reported experiencing homesickness. The author noted that 41% of them were experiencing homesickness for the first time.

Research on gender differences in homesickness has yielded mixed findings. Studies that have reported gender difference in homesickness contend that females were more likely to report been homesick than males (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 1998; Guinagh, 1992; Stroebe, Vliet, Hewstone & Willis, 2002). However, non-significant gender-homesickness influence has also been reported (Brewin, Furnham, & Howes, 1989; Fisher, Murray & Frazer; 1985; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Randall, 2004). These studies found non-significant difference between male and female, implying that both sexes were similar in homesickness.

In a study that examined the relationship between self efficacy, perceived social support, satisfaction with life and homesickness (measured as psychological adjustment) in a sample of 185 international students schooling in a Malaysian public university, Yusoff (2012) reported significant relationship between self efficacy and homesickness, such that feeling efficacious decreased the tendency of homesickness occurring. In a related study, but this time the focus was on the role of perceived social support on homesickness, it was found that perceived absence of social support significantly predicted homesickness (Urani,



Miller, Johnson, & Petzel, 2003). The outcome suggests that a non-supportive environment might increase the likelihood of an individual becoming homesick.

Closely related to this outcome is the study of Thurber, & Sigman (1998) who reported a negative correlation between self efficacy and homesickness, suggesting that the higher the level of self efficacy, the less likely the experience of homesickness. Similarly, Smith (2007) found that self efficacy correlated negatively with homesickness such that participants who reported feeling homesick had low self efficacy. Smith further reported that high self efficacy students also had better behavioral adjustments than those low in self efficacy. However, the relationship between self efficacy and homesickness has not always yielded consistent results, as some studies found positive relationship between self efficacy and homesickness (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). Research has also indicated positive correlation between self efficacy and academic performance, with findings suggesting that high self efficacy enhanced academic success (Hsich, Sullivan, & Guerra (2007).

Studies suggest a negative relationship between self esteem – homesickness (Burt, 1993; Eurelings-Bontekoe, Vingerhoets, & Fontijn, 1994; Fisher, Murray & Frazer, 1985; Smith, 2007; Stroebe et al., 2002). In a sample made of first year college students, self esteem predicted homesickness such that high self esteem freshmen were significantly lower in homesickness (Smith, 2007). Additional analysis from the study showed an inverse relationship between self esteem and emotional problems experienced by students. Thus, the finding suggests that low self esteem might be related to higher risk of emotion-induced adjustment problems such as homesickness.

Inability of low self esteem persons to initiate discussion and rapport with strangers in a new environment might increase the risk of social isolation and loneliness. To test this hypothesis, Rajapaksa & Dundes, (2003) conducted a study among a sample of international students in Malaysia. The authors found that those who had substantial difficulties establishing new friendships had a higher likelihood to report feeling homesick. Because they lacked friends to interact with in their environment, they may have felt socially isolated leading to intense feeling of loneliness. Also, the fact that high self esteem persons make more favorable impression on others (Baron & Byrne, 1994) might earn them the friendship of most people.

In summary, the findings from the literature reviewed suggest that self efficacy and self esteem are factors that are related to homesickness (Brewin et al. 1989; Fisher & Hood, 1987, 1988).

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

- i. There will be significant influence of self efficacy on homesickness such that high self efficacy freshmen will be significantly lower in homesickness compared to low self efficacy freshmen.
- ii. There will be significant influence of self esteem on homesickness such that high self esteem freshmen will be significantly lower in homesickness compared to low self esteem freshmen.
- iii. Gender will significantly predict homesickness of freshmen.

METHOD

Design: -This study adopted a cross-sectional ex post facto survey research design

Participants: - Participants in the study comprised of 306 students in a college of education in southwest Nigeria. Their age ranged between 15 and 29 years with a mean of 20.13. There were 193 females and 113 males; 305 were single while one was married. Family birth order showed that there were 95 first born, 89 second born, 76 third born and 46 latter born (4th, 5th). 300 respondents were satisfied with relationship with immediate family members, while the remaining 6 were less satisfied.



Instruments

Material for data collection was a questionnaire comprising of four sections. Demographic information measured included age, sex, birth order and satisfaction with relationship with family members.

Self esteem scale: Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) was used in this study to assess participants self esteem. It is a 10-item scale designed as a global measure of self esteem. RSES has been used extensively by researchers across the world and has been shown to have acceptable levels of reliability and validity (Blasovich & Tomaka, 1991). Items on the scale are rated on a 5-point Likert format with options that ranged between strongly disagree to strongly agree. For the positively worded statements, participants who indicated strongly agree scored 5, while those who indicated strongly disagreed scored 1. However, for negative statements, participants who indicated strongly agreed scored 1 while those who indicated strongly disagreed scored 5. The scores were then summed up to get the mean. Scores in the scale are interpreted such that those above the mean indicated high self esteem, while scores below the mean indicated low self esteem. The scale yielded Cronbach alpha of .67 in this study.

Self efficacy scale: Self efficacy was measured with the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1981). It is a 10-item psychometric scale that is designed to assess optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life. Items on the scale have options that ranged from, Not at all true (1) to Exactly true (4). That is, respondents who indicated exactly true to positive statements were scored 4, those who indicated not at all true scored 1. The scores were then summed and the average determined. Scores above the mean indicated high self efficacy, while scores below the mean indicated low self efficacy. The Cronbach alpha of the scale in this study is .54.

Homesickness: Homesickness was measured with homesickness scale jointly developed by Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad & Currid (1998). The scale contained 33 items written in short narratives, created for use with college students. Items in the scale cover cognitive, motivational, emotional, and behavioral elements that are associated with homesickness. It has been used by researchers across different cultures to measure homesickness among people leaving home for prolonged periods such as first year students in colleges, universities and cadets in military academy (Banning, 2010).

The items on the scale were rated on a 5point Likert-type format with options that ranged from strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), neutral (3), somewhat agree (4), strongly agree (5). Respondents' scores to all the each statement were summed, an overall score arrived at and the mean (102.91) determined. The highest possible score is 165, while the lowest possible score is 33 Scores above the mean is interpreted as an indication of high homesickness, while scores below the mean are interpreted as indicating low homesickness. Sample items in the scale include: "I can't help thinking about my home", "I visit home as often as I can." Archer et al., (1998) reported internal consistency of .88 for the scale. However, in this study, the Cronbach alpha of the scale is .82.

Procedure

Questionnaire administration was carried out one week after the fresh students had been administered their matriculation oaths. It was reasoned that by this time, most of them had spent a couple of weeks on campus, allowing for sufficient socialization from their new school environment. Ballot papers with Yes and No options written on it were used in selecting respondents from the population. Those selected were then exposed to basic information about the study such as its purpose, and were also informed that participation was voluntary. Upon given oral consent to participate in the study, questionnaires were then distributed to them. It took an average of 8 minutes to complete a set of questionnaire. Questionnaire distribution lasted five days. A total of 350 sets of questionnaires were distributed in all, however only 320 were retrieved. Of the 320 questionnaires returned, only 306 were found usable for further analyses.



Results

The present study investigated self efficacy, self esteem and gender as factors of homesickness of freshmen. Three hypotheses were tested in the study using student t-test for independent sample. The results are presented in the Tables 1, 2 & 3 as shown below.

Table 1: Summary of t-test showing the influence of Self Efficacy on Homesickness

Self efficacy	N	M	SD	Df	t	P
High	145	96.26	21.20	303	4.54	<.01
Low	160	108.94	26.86			

Table 1 showed that self efficacy influenced homesickness, $t(303) = 4.54$, $p < .01$. The result indicated that high self efficacy freshmen ($X = 96.26$; $SD = 21.20$) were significantly lower in homesickness compared to low self efficacy freshmen ($X = 108.94$; $SD = 26.86$). The hypothesis was supported as predicted.

Table 2: Summary of t-test showing the influence of Self Esteem on Homesickness

Self esteem	N	M	SD	Df	T	P
High	161	95.76	21.78	303	5.50	<.01
Low	144	110.91	26.23			

Table 2 showed that self esteem influenced homesickness, $t(303) = 5.50$, $p < .01$. The result showed that high self esteem freshmen ($X = 95.76$; $SD = 21.78$) were significantly lower in homesickness than low self esteem freshmen ($X = 110.91$; $SD = 26.23$). The hypothesis was supported as proposed.

Table 3: Summary of t-test showing Gender influence on Homesickness

Gender	N	M	SD	Df	T	P
Female	193	101.23	25.08	303	-1.53	>.05
Male	112	105.81	25.01			

Table 3 showed that although the mean for females ($X = 101.23$; $SD = 25.08$) was higher than the mean for males ($X = 105.81$; $SD = 25.01$), the difference is not statistically significant, $t(303) = -1.53$, $p > .05$. The result implies that among freshmen, females and males had comparable level on homesickness. The hypothesis was not supported.

Discussion

The hypothesis which stated that self efficacy would significantly influence homesickness was confirmed. Result revealed that there is a significant influence of self efficacy on homesickness. The finding is consistent with past studies that found that high self efficacy predicted adjustment to new environment and reduced the risk of homesickness in individuals temporarily separated from home environment, or significant others (Smith, 2007; Thurber, & Sigman, 1998; Yusoff, 2012). These studies thus lend support to the present finding.

In the current study, efficacious freshmen might have perceived themselves as being capable of handling the challenges and adapting well to a new environment. They might have done a type of cost-benefit analysis that evaluated the pros and cons of the new environment against the security, safety and other provisions of life at home (Fisher & Hood, 1987). What they received from their new environment and what they were seeking might have been at par such that absence of any disparities made it less likely that they would experience homesickness. Furthermore, their ability to connect with people might have led them to becoming members of social, religious and ethnic associations that are



commonplace in campuses of higher learning in Nigeria, thereby increasing their network of friends, thereby making them feel more confident in their new environment.

As proposed in the current study, the hypothesized relationship between self esteem and homesickness was confirmed. Self esteem significantly influenced homesickness as indicated by the result. The finding concurs with previous research that found negative relationship between self-esteem and homesickness (Burt, 1993; Eurelings-Bontekoe, Vingerhoets, & Fontijn, 1994; Fisher, Murray & Frazer, 1985; Smith, 2007; Stroebe et al., 2002). The finding is an indication that freshmen experienced positive feelings about their self-worth in their new setting in spite of being separated from family and friends. It might also be that they were able to attune themselves when they found themselves suddenly exposed to new way of life without allowing it to affect them negatively.

Lastly, it was hypothesized that gender would predict homesickness. Result did not find significant gender difference in homesickness. The finding is consistent with a number of studies that found no significant gender influence on homesickness (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 1998; Guinagh, 1992; Randall, 2004; Stroebe, Vliet, Hewstone & Willis, 2002). The fundamental issues among homesick persons which include home ruminations, missing friends and difficulty relating with a new environment might apply similarly to all irrespective of gender.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the current study is that self efficacy and self esteem are significant factors in homesickness of freshmen. The finding is an indication that the negative effect of separation on homesickness is mitigated by strong feelings of efficacy. Secondly, it also suggests that homesickness is less prevalent among people who have positive opinions of themselves. But gender is not a significant factor in homesickness, indicating that separation had similar effects on the psychological adjustment of male and female freshmen to new environment.

The finding that freshmen were vulnerable to homesickness speaks favorably for the establishment of counseling units to render psychological services related to school adjustment for distressed freshmen in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Limitations of the study

The sample for the current study was drawn from freshmen admitted in a degree awarding college of education in southwest Nigeria. Generalization of the findings might have been enhanced if samples included freshmen from colleges of education in the six-geopolitical zones of the country. In addition, the use of self-report questionnaire as the instrument for data collection in the study might have led to the problem of common method bias (Spector, 2006).

Implications and recommendations

The present study found that self efficacy and self esteem are significant factors that predicted homesickness of freshmen. It indicated that these traits prevented intense homesickness, which is an indication that they prevented escalation of feeling homesick. It is imperative therefore, to sensitize freshmen to believe in their ability as this would help enhance their capacity to adapt and associate in unfamiliar environment. It is therefore recommended that management should include topics that expose freshmen to stress management, adaptation and adjustment in their orientation package for freshmen.



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