



# PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC RECESSION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT ON STUDENTS' LEARNING AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigated the perceived influence of economic recession and psychological adjustment on students' learning among year two undergraduate students of the Faculty Education, University of Calabar, Cross River State. In carrying out the study, 200 respondents were randomly selected from a population of 2000. That is 10% of the total population of 900 males and 1100 females. Two research questions -were posed while two hypotheses were formulated. A researcher designed instrument titled "Economic Recession and Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire for Undergraduate Students" (ERPAQUS) was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validity by experts in Educational Psychology and measurement and evaluation of the University of Calabar. The reliability estimate of the instrument was established using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method to determine the internal reliability index. The data collected were analyzed using independent t-test and Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis. The study indicated that there is a significant relationship among economic recession, psychological adjustment and undergraduate students of the University of Calabar, Cross River State. It also indicated various ways the students have adopted to tackle the excruciating pains posed by the economic down turn in the country. However, the government, parents and school authority were advised to help in alleviating the sufferings of the students by providing good policy initiative to assist the students in school.

**KEYWORDS:** Economic, recession, psychological, adjustment, intellectual

## INTRODUCTION

In most cases, students' academic performance is not totally and entirely a function of their intellectual capability and ability. Some other extraneous variables such as the state of the nation's general economic condition play major role in their academic performances.

Undergraduate students are constantly influenced by multiple stressors from different aspects of their lives and the society. Life and academic stress often generate difficulties and impact on university students' mental health. University students have been stressed by intensive demands of developmental and academic tasks. With current economic

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contraction, many additional economic stressors are added to university students' existing stress levels.

A recession is a general down turn in any economy. A recession is associated with high unemployment, under-employment, slowing gross domestic product, and high inflation. Julius Shiskin (2015) sees recession as a business cycle contraction which results in general slowdown in economic activity. Macroeconomic indicators such as GDP (Gross Domestic Product), investment spending, capacity utilization, household income, business profits and inflation fall while bankruptcies and unemployment rise. Recessions generally occur when there is a widespread drop in spending. This may be triggered by various events, such as financial crisis, and adverse supply shock, external trade shock or the bursting of an economic bubble.

During an economic recession, the slowdown of the economy is associated with reduction in an hourly wage rate, number of hours worked for, and the amount of public and private funds available for schools. Such conditions affect children's educational outcomes such as school enrolment, attainment, attendance and performance (Funk Houser, 2012).

However, the reduction in adult income makes it hard for parents to bear the direct cost of education such as tuition fees, book supplies, uniform and private tutoring. Educational outcomes are consequently hampered because the student is either withdrawn from school or inadequately prepared for it. Furthermore, the reduction of income may also force parents to become more reliant on child labour, as a result, a student who prior to the recessed economy was not a child labourer will definitely become one. If the child was already a child labourer prior to the crisis, he/she may have to work longer hours. This increase in child labour hours can hamper educational outcomes because the additional labour is physical and emotional draining, and leaves fewer hours for studying (Frankenberg and Thomas, 2013).

Current economic downturn is around for the past couple of years (Catalano, 2009). The adverse impacts of economic downturn on mental health have become a social issue rather than an isolated or personal condition (Jahoda, 1988). Reports continue to reveal adverse impacts of economic stress that describe the increasing perceived stress (Cokes & Kornblum, 2010) and the potential pathological reactions to economic-induced stress (Fujita & Rao, 2010; Paton, 2011

& 2013; Sifin, 2015). Literature has supported the relationships between economic-induced stress and mental or physical health (Catalano, 1991; Catalano & Dooley, 2013).

Even though they are shielded by the University campus, university students are inevitably exposed to the distressful economic phenomena. Giving their existing academic and life stress, undergraduate students now have to spend energy to cope with the economic stress. Recession may also have altered the behavior of the students that did not interrupt their studies. In particular, there might have been an effect on the timing of graduation and on the regularity of class attendance, which are both measures of the effort exerted by the student. The youth and adult male unemployment rates have opposing effects on these outcomes as well. We expect a positive effect of an increase in the adult male unemployment rate. Parents may put pressure on their child to graduate on time so as to save money in terms of university fees or to be a more attractive candidate when entering the labour market. At the same time, an increasing youth unemployment rate may make students delay graduation, as job opportunities become scarce.

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Higher education has been placed at the centre of public debate as a result of the ongoing economic crisis. The main thrust of this debate centres around a re-justification of the role of higher education and a redefinition of its funding relationship with government.

Nevertheless, most of the discussion fails to mention the impact of the economic crisis on higher education. To the researcher, this is important because the economic crisis has changed higher education at both the micro and macro levels. The immediate shorter-term impact of the economic crisis has been at the institution micro level. Lower student numbers on certain programmes - the most expensive ones and those with lower job prospects - has led senior managers in universities to prepare for the worst by making plans to reduce staff at all levels and rationalize their portfolio of programmes.

The concept of adjustment is as old as human race on earth. Systematic emergence of this concept starts from Darwin. In those days the concept was purely biological and he used the term adaptation (Chauhan, 2006). According to Colman (2003), adjustment in psychology connotes adaptation to a particular environment or set of circumstances.

According to Chima (2012), psychological adjustment as one may simply put, is the process

of being in adaptation with the mental behavior, and characteristics of an individual. This is indicated by the absence of stress and the ability of one to maintain good mental state. Farlex (2011) sees psychological adjustment as the mental response of a person to a dreaded life situation. In the views of Egbule (2009), psychological adjustment is the efforts made by the individual to satisfy his behavior associated with crisis reaction, stress, frustration and emotional feelings in the process of trying to adjust to one problem of life or the other. A well adjusted personality is therefore evidence by the maintenance of physical health, basic needs, psychological comfort, working efficiency and social acceptance standards.

Man, among the living beings, has the highest capacities to adapt to new situations. Man as a social animal not only adapts to physical demands but he also adjusts to social pressures in the society. However, Chauhan (2006) opined that biologists used the term adaptation strictly for physical demands of the environment but psychologists use the term adjustment for varying conditions of social or inter-personal relations in the society. Thus, we see that adjustment means reaction to the demands and pressures of social environment imposed upon the individual. The demands may be external or internal to whom the individual has to react to.

Furthermore, these two types of demands sometimes come into conflict with each other and resultantly make the adjustment a complicated process for the individual. Conflict among the various needs or demands of a person present special problems of adjustment. Chauhan (2007) identified some common ways which the individual use to defend or escape from conflicts and frustration which are known as defense or adjustment mechanisms. These include but not exhaustive:

i. **Simple Denial:** The easiest way to maintain the balance of personality is to deny the fact which could create conflict in the mind. Denial helps to postpone facing a problem or a failure.

ii. **Aggression:** The meanings of the word "aggression" have been interpreted in several ways. We call a vigorous person aggressive. A person who tries to gain something from other is also called aggressive. The person who tries to dominate is also called aggressive. Aggression is a typical adjustment mechanism used as an attempt to hurt or destroy the source of frustration. The release of pent-up feelings through aggression gives relief to the person.

iii. **Compensation:** This is the act or process of making amends, or something done or given to make-up for a loss. In psychoanalysis, it is a defense mechanism in which one attempts to redress a perceived deficiency that cannot be eliminated such as physical defect, by excelling in some other way. When a person feels weak and fails in one area, he compensates in another field. He works hard to become strong and successful. Needs which are frustrated and unmet are gratified in order to release tension and conflict.

iv. **Sublimation:** it is a defense mechanism whereby a repressed or unconscious drive that is denied gratification is diverted into a more acceptable channel or form of expression, as when aggression is diverted into playing or watching violent sports or when libido is diverted into artistic or creative activity (Colman, 2003) . Chauhan (2007) noted that in successful sublimation, the direction has been deflected into new pathways creative repressed drives ways creative endeavour and that in sublimation, also, intra-psychic energy is usefully employed extra-psychically.

v. **Identification:** This is a defense mechanism whereby one unconsciously incorporate attributes or characteristics of another person into one's own personality. This result in the unconscious taking over and transfer to oneself of various elements of others. Identification may be a conscious process, the person seems to be aware of his attempts to make himself similar to a model who has the characteristics that are supposed to reduce his anxiety.

vi. **Projection:** this is a defense mechanism in which intolerable feelings, impulses, or thoughts are falsely attributed to other people. It is the most common adjustment mechanism which is used by all people in daily life. We defend ourselves against our repressed guilt feelings by projecting them into other things and people.

vii. **Rationalization:** this has been defined as a mechanism by which the individual justifies his beliefs and actions by giving, reasons other than those who activated or motivated him. Rationalization is the most popular adjustment mechanism which is used, almost, by all persons in daily life. It is a response to reality that falsifies circumstance.

viii. **Regression:** This is an adjustment mechanism whereby a person reverts to a form of behavior thinking, or object - relationship characteristic of an earlier stage of development in order to avoid or reduce anxiety, tensions or conflict. It is "an unconscious bank tracking" either in memory or behavior which might have been successful in the past.

ix. **Repression:** This is an adjustment mechanism whereby unacceptable thoughts, feelings or wishes are banished from consciousness. Colman (2003) quoted Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) gave this brief definition that "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious". It is a motivated forgetting. Repression and suppression are differentiated by the mechanism used. In suppression we consciously decide to exclude an idea from our thoughts, our action and conversation whereas in repression, painful and anxiety producing experiences are unconsciously and automatically excluded from the conscious thought process.

x. **Reaction formation:** Colman (2003) explained it as a defence mechanism whereby a person replaces a repressive thought, feeling, or behavioural act with one that is diametrically opposed to it, as when a shy person behaves in an exhibitionist manner or a repressed homosexual denounces homosexuality. It is also called reversed formation. It is to substitute opposite reaction formation which causes anxiety.

xi. **Negativism:** This could be defined as refusal to do what is suggested or advised or a tendency to the opposite. It is partly a defense and partly an escape mechanism. The person develops strong and irrational resistance in accepting suggestions of others. The use of this mechanism is at peak at the age of two to three

years of age, though it surfaces in a milder form at adulthood.

xii. **Fantasy:** It is a fact that, mostly, we think to reduce our frustrations. Our thoughts can be a realistic effort to remove the obstacles that make us anxious. They can also provide an escape from frustration by giving us imaginary satisfaction, hungry men dream of food, unsuccessful men dream of success, fantasy is a mechanism of wishful-filling. Fantasy is at its peak in adolescence. The adolescents day dream of their future success in life, fantasy is important for creative thinking, provided that it is followed by actions. A world without fantasy would be one without music, painting, literature, drama or new ideas. Excessive fantasy without action may be harmful for the individual.

According to Kadurumba and Uzorka (2009), academic performance of a person is how such a person fares in his school work and how he/she fared after evaluating his/her learning outcomes. One's performance includes his attendance to lectures, the outcome of the measurement of what was learnt, how the person has been able to achieve considerably high from the measuring tools used by lecturers.

In other words, recessed economy can affect an undergraduate academic performance through abnormal health. If we apply this idea to a successful student, success does not only imply the absence of quackery but also presence of sound moral, social and psychological personality of a student as well as a conducive learning environment, societal esteem and other macro-social factors that can enable the student to perform at his or her best. The idea of a successful student therefore is something that calls for responsibility of not only the students concerned but also the professional regulatory authorities, government, community and stakeholders to be successful.

From the research conducted, its findings show that the following are the psychological effects of recessed economy on the academic performance of undergraduate students of University of Calabar (Kanong, 2016). An assessment of reading culture among students in tertiary institutions found that apart from lack of reading habit, many factors - hunger, inadequately furnished library, high cost of books, inadequate instructional facilities and poverty militate against students academic performance. Many students take only a meal per day and this affects their general performance as they lack energy to read. Again, poor accommodation is also a factor affecting the students reading culture. Kanong

(2016) in his studies found that facilities in the institution such as hostel accommodation, lecture rooms, textbooks etc are grossly inadequate. Furthermore, literature points out that poor financial status affect academic performance, mental and physical well-being, and even their ability to find employment after graduation. Studies show that mental illness and rates of suicide are strongly connected to both poverty and unemployment (Bello, 1998). The poor economic conditions affecting most native communities, damage self-esteem and can result in depression, drug abuse and violence, all of which contribute to the high suicide rate.

In a depressed economy, absenteeism, which could be due to lack of transport fare to and from school, is rampant. Also, a popular avenue among some female students is prostitution. Some "professionals" among them go to the extent of renting houses off campus to attract well-to-do men. Examination malpractices range from leakages of question papers to copying, changing answer booklets, impersonation, misconduct in examination centre, approaching investigators/examiners, etc.

According to Bello (1998), economic recession has so many concomitant problems on the students' academic life which in turn impinges on his academic performance. There is therefore need to apply psychological knowledge, ideas, concepts, principles and theories in resolving psychological adjustment problems, especially among the undergraduates in this era of economic recession.

Again, ones family background have also influence on academic performance. Several researches have found that the socio-economic status, parental involvement and family size are particularly important factors that affect students' academic performance (Majorbanks, 2016). Peer pressure and peer conformity can lead to an individual participating in risk taking behaviours which have been found to have a negative indirect effect on academic performance (Santer, Messervy and Kusumaker, 2010).

However, no work has been found on the perceived influence of recession and psychological adjustment among undergraduate students of university of Calabar. Therefore, it is

important to have a clear understanding of what benefits or hinders one's educational attainment. Succinctly put, this write up first provides an economic framework for understanding how an economic recession affect the academic performance of a student in university of Calabar.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to:

- a. Determine how the economic recession affect undergraduate students of University of Calabar .
- b. Determine how psychological adjustment help students to adjust to learning in a depressed economy.

### **Research questions**

To undertake this study, two research questions were posed;

- a. What extent does economic recession affect undergraduate students of University of Calabar?
- b. How does psychological adjustment help students to adjust to learning in a depressed economy?

### **Research hypothesis**

1. There is no significant relationship between the level of economic recession faced by the students and their psychological adjustment towards recession.
2. There is no significant difference in the psychological adjustment of both males and females undergraduate students to economic recession.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey design, using questionnaire in eliciting information from the respondents. In carrying out this study, 200 respondents were randomly selected from a population of 2000 students. That is 20% of the total population of 500 males and 500 females from second year students of the University of Calabar.

**Instrumentation**

The research instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire containing 20 items based on the three research hypotheses. The items were scored on four point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The result of test scores and attendance to lectures by students in the 200 level shall be analyzed so as to elucidate their academic performance.

**Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire which was presented to experts in educational psychology and psychometrics. Their comments and observations were used to establish the content and face validity of the instrument before its administration. The reliability of the instrument was established by using test-retest method. The instrument was administered to 20 students who were not part of the main study. The administration was done twice within an interval of two weeks. The data

collected was subjected to Pearson product correlation coefficient and a correlation coefficient of 0.84 was obtained which was considered good enough for the study.

**Method of Data Collection**

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the students. The researcher retrieved the completed questionnaire on the spot to avoid losses.

**Method of Data Analysis**

The research questions were answered using the mean and standard deviations, while the null hypothesis was tested using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC).

**Results and Discussion**

Research question one: To what extent does economic recession affect undergraduate students?

**Table 4.1:** The mean and standard deviation rating of the responses of the male and female students on the extent economic recession affect undergraduate students

S/N	Items	Male X	S.D	Remarks	Female X	S	Remarks
1	I think my parents income is affected so much by recession	3.33	0.43	Agreed	3.16	0.41	Agreed
2	Sometimes I cannot even pay my fees since the recession	3.18	0.62	Agreed	3.24	0.51	Agreed
3	I find it very difficult to get pocket money to meet my needs	3.30	0.52	Agreed	3.46	0.71	Agreed
4	Sometimes I miss lectures because of lack of transport fares to schools	2.89	0.83	Agreed	2.67	0.88	Agreed
5	I think my inability to pay my school accommodation is as a result of Recession	2.84	1.12	Agreed	2.72	1.01	Agreed
6	I think I engage in other economic activities to cope with the recession	2.76	0.94	Agreed	2.84	0.73	Agreed
7	I feel the effect of recession all the time	2.92	0.68	Agreed	2.78	0.94	Agreed
8	I think I feel the depressed as a result of economic downturn of my family	2.73	0.86	Agreed	2.81	0.90	Agreed
9	I have been missing lectures because of inability to buy reading materials	2.21	0.71	Disagreed	2.45	0.88	Disagreed
10	My rate of concentration in my academics has dropped	2.42	0.87	Disagreed	2.12	1.01	Disagreed

The analysed data on table 1 show that both the male and female students accepted items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. This was indicated by the respective mean scores of both the male and female students which ranged 2.67-3.46. The items were accepted since their respective mean scores were above 2.50. Meanwhile the table also showed that both the male and female students disagreed to item 9 and 10 as indicated

by their respective mean scores of the male and female students which ranged from 2.12-2.45, hence the items were disagreed to since the respective mean scores of the male and female students were below the cut-off mark of 2.50.

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**Research Question Two:** To what extent does psychological adjustment help students to adjust to learning in a depressed economy?

**Table 4.2:** The mean and standard deviation rating of the Male and Female students on the extent psychological adjustment help students to adjust to learning in a depressed economy

S/N	Items	Male X	S.D	Remarks	Female X	S	Remarks
1	I pretend as though there is no recession	2.11	0.84	Disagreed	1.53	0.78	Disagreed
2	I face my studies aggressively despite economic recession	3.25	0.46	Agreed	2.84	0.80	Agreed
3	Since I cannot afford social life on campus, I concentrate all my efforts to reading during recession	3.21	0.59	Agreed	3.04	0.63	Agreed
4	The economic situation is negatively affecting my level of concentration	2.78	1.15	Agreed	3.07	0.98	Agreed
5	My best in academics will surely come when recession is over	2.47	0.93	Disagreed	2.40	0.87	Disagreed
6	I usually dream good times when recession shall be over	3.04	0.53	Agreed	2.81	0.92	Agreed
7	Whether recession or no recession, I try to make myself happy	2.87	0.78	Agreed	2.71	0.86	Agreed
8	Because of recession, I emulate my friends who usually live moderate life on campus	3.03	0.76	Agreed	3.21	0.48	Agreed
9	The recession has made me to be aggressive unknowingly	2.78	0.69	Disagreed	2.65	1.02	Agreed
10	I am more serious with my studies now there is recession than before	2.34	0.93	Disagreed	2.19	0.87	Disagreed

The analysed data on table 2 show that both the male and female students agreed to items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. This was indicated by the respective mean scores of both the male and female students which ranged 2.65-3.25. The items were accepted since their respective mean scores were above 2.50. Meanwhile the table also showed that both the male and female students disagreed to items 1,5 and 10 as indicated by their respective mean scores of the

male and female students which ranged m 1.53-2.47, hence the items were disagreed to since the respective mean scores of the teachers and students were below the cut-off mark of 2.50.

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant relationship between the level of economic recession faced by the students and their psychological adjustment towards recession.



**Table 3:** The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) of the relationship between the level of economic recession faced by the students and their psychological adjustment towards recession

Independent variable	Independent variable Economic Recession	Dependent variables Psychological adjustment
Economic Recession	1.00	0.796* 0.000
N	200	200
Dependent variable	0.796*	1.000
Psychological adjustment	0.000	
N	200	200

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)  $p < 0.05$

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) between the level of economic recession faced by the students and their psychological adjustment towards recession shows a high positive correlation with an  $r=0.796$  which is significant ( $p<0.05$ ) at 0.05 level of significance.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of table 1 revealed that the male and female students agreed that economic recession affect undergraduate students as they think their parents income is affected so much by recession, as students sometimes cannot even pay their fees since the recession, students find it very difficult to get pocket money to meet my needs, as student miss lectures because of lack of transport fares to schools, as they also think their inability to pay my school accommodation is as a result of recession, as the students think they engage in other economic activities to cope with the recession and the students also feels the effect of recession all the time and the students also thinks they felt depressed as a result of economic downturn of my family. The findings is in consistent with the findings of Houser (2012), whose findings revealed that economic recession affects the students as students sometimes cannot even pay their fees, accommodation find it very difficult to get pocket money to meet my needs, as they miss lectures because of lack of transport fares to schools, as the student think they engage in other economic activities to cope with the recession and the students also feels the effect of recession all the time and the students also thinks they felt depressed as a result of economic downturn of my family. In a similar view, the male and female students disagreed that they have been missing lectures because of inability to buy reading materials and their rate of concentration in academics has dropped due to the effects of recession. Thus this could lead to poor academic performances of the students.

The analysis of table 2 revealed that the male and female student agreed that psychological

adjustment help students to adjust to learning in a depressed economy as they face their studies aggressively despite economic recession, as the students cannot afford social life on campus, concentrate all their efforts to reading during recession and the economic situation negatively affecting my level of concentration. The analysis of table 2 revealed that the male and female students also agreed that psychological adjustment help students to adjust to learning in a depressed economy as the students usually dream good times when recession shall be over, as whether recession or no recession the students try to make themselves happy and because of recession students emulate their friends who usually live moderate life on campus recession has made the students to be aggressive unknowingly. This findings is in agreement with the findings Wetzel, Mertens and Robken (2015) whose findings revealed that the effect of recession on psychological adjustment do include that students learn better in a depressed economy and students emulate their friends who usually live moderate life on campus as recession has made the students to be aggressive unknowingly.

The analysis of table 2 revealed that the male and female students disagreed that students best in academics will surely come when recession is over and students are more serious with their studies now there is recession than before. This findings corroborates the findings Wetzel, Mertens and Robken (2015) whose findings revealed that in time of recession students become more serious without their academic. This is as result of the fact that students need to be buoyant to meet their financial needs in other

to succeed in their academics.

The analysis of table 3 revealed that there is a significant high positive relationship between the level of economic recession faced by the students and their psychological adjustment towards recession. This findings is in agreement with the findings of Bello (2015) who revealed that the level of economic recession faced by the students correlate with their psychological adjustment towards recession.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded concludes that the economic recession influences the academic performances of the students as well as their psychological adjustment, hence there is significant positive relationship between the level of economic recession faced by the students and their psychological adjustment towards recession.

As noted by Kadurumba and Uzoka (2009), academic performance of a person is how such a person fares in his school work and how he/she fared after evaluating his/her learning outcome. From the study, it was discovered that as the students adjusted psychologically, their participation to class attendance, regular tests, periodic examination results and other school activities improved greatly.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The government, parents and school authority were advised to help in alleviating the suffering of the students by providing good policy initiative to assist the students in school. This could be done if government will re-invent bursary awards to undergraduate students, while parents should provide more pocket allowances to their wards.
2. The university needs to be equipped with adaptive behavior in other to cope with recession so as to improve on their academic achievement.
3. The university needs to provide adequate programmes that will help the students to adjust psychologically in times of recession which will enable improve on their academic performances.

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