DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS IN ADJUSTMENT AMONG CADETS OF NIGERIAN MILITARY ACADEMY

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Abstract
Training outcomes of cadets in Nigerian military academy may be well determined by their adjustment capacity. The discouraging statistics of graduation rate (59%- 63% over a 5-year period) at the Nigerian Defence Academy reflect adjustment problem. This necessitated the need to investigate dispositional factors in adjustment of cadets in the Academy. The cross-sectional study was designed as a survey using questionnaires with scales for data collection. It involved a sample size of 63 drawn from cadets in their first to the fourth year (100L- 400L). The proposition that those who score higher on core self-evaluation will significantly report better adjustment than others was confirmed (t=-10.9, df=61, p<. 001). There was no significant difference in adjustment between cadets who attended military secondary schools and those from secular (civilian) secondary schools. It implied that self-esteem, emotional stability, generalized self-efficacy, and locus of control need to be considered in policy to prepare cadets to effectively cope in the academy. It was suggested that the current selection method which does not discriminate type of secondary school attended need to be a sustained policy. Finally, assessment of the dispositional factors in cadets during skill development programme would be necessary in order to adequately prepare them on the traits because they are significant factors in adjustment.

Key words: Dispositional, Core self-evaluation, Cadets, Adjustment.

Introduction

The regimented life of military personnel differs largely from those of the civil populace. The characteristics of the military institution create an environment which is not usual for most people (Johansson, 2004). A major challenge that confronts military training institutions is the adaptation of people from diverse background to the regimented way of life. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find trainees experiencing some difficulties that interfere with their adjustment during training.

A foremost military training institution in Africa is the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), Kaduna. It was established in 1964 to train officer cadets for the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Unlike other conventional tertiary institutions where the emphasis is on academic training, cadets in the NDA are required to undergo both academic and military training simultaneously. For instance in the secular universities, students who encounter difficulty with adjustment or find the situation unsatisfactory can make their objections known, secure a change within the institution or choose to engage in alternative endeavour. But in a military institution, these options are relatively difficult and as Heyns (1958) pointed out, 'anxiety is most likely to occur when efforts to escape the danger are ineffective or impossible'.

According to Yusuf (2010), cadet training in the Academy is a stressful and difficult experience. During military training, the cadet is converted and assimilated into an organisation whose nature and primary functions are constructed around combat activities and control of violence. According to Anderson (1974), individualism gives way to collective actions and consequently, there are no individuals with personal choices, alternatives or decisions. Self-determination is diminished to the minimum, so the individual has practically no liberty for other choices than adjustment or escape from the situation.

Discipline, control and obedience are justified as essential for the functioning of a military unit. Therefore the cadet faces a highly formalised organisation which regulates most behaviours of its members who are pressured to comply and conform to the norms of the military (Hayden, 2000). In the course of indoctrination there are pervasive sets of control that cadets are only expected to accept and adapt. They are not allowed to question the status quo but only adopt a conforming orientation. The ability to conform to the military way of

life is taken as an indicator of successful military adjustment (Stouffer, 1949). Adjustment has been a popular concept in discussing psychological challenges of individuals in task and general human functioning. In this study, we view it as a coping capacity, which can be taken to mean the ability to meet the demands placed on an individual in his/her environment while remaining successful.

Training imposes demand for learning duty-related skills, dealing with supervisors, adjusting to the reality of the organisation, and developing a social identity in a unit. Particularly, a cadet is confronted with multiple training-related challenges that create anxiety such as increased information load, low task significance, lack of sleep, strict time-table and increased physical and academic demands (Britt, 1999). These organisational factors do have impact at the onset of training and may either make or break the cadet (Thompson and Hignac, 2011). Besides training-related factors, the social aspects of the military are of great concern for the cadets. Their personality qualities in terms of disposition help to define who they are as individuals.

Perhaps, it is worthy to note that the importance of personal disposition in work outcomes has been recognised for a long time (Kirkcaldy, Shepard and Furnharm, 2002). In this direction, studies have focused on broad personality traits, including core-self-evaluation (CSE) (Judge, Locke, & Kluger, 1997), which refers to the evaluation individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the environment (Judge and Bono, 2001). As a higher order concept, CSE is comprised of four lower-order traits: self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control and emotional stability (Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen, 2002). The CSE concept has emerged as a valid predictor of affective work outcomes, mainly job satisfaction (Judge and Bono, 2001).

Investigating the role of CSE in adjustment to training in a Nigerian military academy may not be out of place. Reports of several studies outside Africa support dimensions of CSE as dispositional quality in military settings. Atwater et al. (1999) indicate self esteem was positively related to male cadets' emergence from matriculation through graduation at a military college. In another study, Bradley and Nicol (2006) indicated that cadets' locus of control correlated highest with military occupation classification phase training grade, while Smither, London and Richmond (2005) found that American Military

leaders high in emotional stability were more likely to be rated by a psychologist and motivated to use the feedback.

Although enlistment into the Academy is voluntary, it is evident that several cadets are not fully prepared for the experiences during training and are not able to perform according to expectations. While some adjust to the unique environment, others have serious challenges that jeopardise their well-being and training which may lead to discontinuing the programmes.

Consequent upon poor adjustment to training, negative behaviours such as 'absent without leave (AWOL)', deviant behaviour, disciplinary problems, malingering, emotional instability, intentions to leave, high attrition rate, drug or alcohol related offences, poor academic performance, etc. are found to manifest among the cadets.

Table 1 showing Admission and Graduation Figures of Cadets in NDA over a 5- year period

Period (Academic session)	Admitted	Graduands	% Graduated	% drop out / unable to graduate normally
RC 59	254	161	63.4	36.6
RC 58	278	185	66.5	33.5
RC 57	263	172	65.3	34.7
RC 56	248	133	53.6	46.4
RC 55	290	172	59.3	40.7

Source: NDA Cadets Brigade

The table above shows a non-graduation rate that ranged between 36 and 40%. This is an indication of adjustment problem among cadets in NDA. In describing the adjustment process, it has been reported that some military trainees lack self-confidence, while others lack mental preparation for the stress and rigour (Erwin, 2002). Therefore, it becomes debatable the extent to which pre-existing personal characteristics in the individual will influence cadets' adjustment process. Importantly, not much has been documented to examine adjustment of cadets in NDA despite the above statistics that show graduation rate of between 53.6% and 66.5%. Hence, the need to examine core self-evaluation as a dispositional variable among other

factors that may play important roles in adjustment to training by cadets. This necessarily generates the questions below:

What role will the components of core self-evaluation play in adjustment? Do cadets who attended Nigerian Military Secondary Schools differ from others in their level of adjustment in the academy?

Literature Review

Perhaps, it is noteworthy to reiterate the importance of theories and empirical review in providing a starting point for expressing proposition about variables (Ekore, 2001). Holland's theory of vocational choice (Holland, 1959) conceptualised the person in broad terms that include such diverse attributes as values, interests, task and role preferences, skills, abilities, problem-solving approaches, and self-image. Collectively, these attributes constitute the personal orientation of the individual which have been classified into motoric, intellectual, supportive, conforming, persuasive, and esthetic orientation. In Holland's proposition, an individual whose personal orientation tallies with a vocational choice as the military profession would adjust effectively. In this manner, 'the person making a vocational choice in a sense 'searches' for situations which satisfies the hierarchy of adjustive orientations' (Holland, 1959).

Similarly, the core self-evaluation theory by Judge, Bono, Erez, and Thoresen (2002) offers a higher order concept representing the fundamental evaluations people make about themselves, their environments, and the relationship between themselves and their environment. The concept is manifested by four key traits of self-esteem, emotional stability or neuroticism, locus of control, and generalised self-efficacy. According to Judge et al., (1997); Judge and Bono (2001), the four core traits are conceptually related. Self-esteem is typically defined as the overall value that one places on oneself as a person (Judge and Bono, 2000). Neuroticism (emotional stability) represents the tendency to experience negative feelings such as fear, self-doubt, and depression (Judge et al., 1997). Generalized self-efficacy encompasses an individual's evaluation of his /her capacity to generate the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control and deal successfully with life's challenges (Judge et al., 1997). Finally, locus of control according to Rotter (1966) represents the perceived degree of control over the outcomes of one's actions

(Judge et al. 1997). Rotter divided individuals into two camps based on their locus of control: individuals with an internal locus of control believe they control events around them, while those with an external locus of control believe events around them are controlled by luck, chance, fate, or powerful others. The dimensions of core self evaluation indicate individual differences in personal dispositions. Individual differences have been linked with work outcomes, including various training criteria. These outcomes include training motivation (e.g., Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000), training performance (Sales & Coannon-Bowers, 2001), and transfer of training (e.g. Coloquitt et al., 2000). Research that supports dispositional influence exploits singular traits such as conscientiousness, as well as multi-dimensional frameworks such as the Five-Factor Model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and core self-evaluation.

As an individual's fundamental self-appraisal, core self-evaluation is a psychological variable that has predicted work outcomes, especially job satisfaction (Judge, Locke, & Kluger, 1997). However, the outcomes may well include adjustment in a training institution as the military. Accordingly, the present study set to investigate CSE's relation with adjustment as a training outcome. Adjustment to military life in the academy refers to the process of reducing the tensions in the trainee entry into the military (Hollingshead, 1946).

Stouffer (1949) defined adjustment as that adaptation to changing environmental demands, which minimize psychological tension or anxiety. The definition practically sees the word 'adjust' to mean to fit, cope, make correspond, adapt, and accommodate. It was further explained that the term "to adjust" as used in psychology, means that individuals must accommodate themselves in order to fit certain demands of their environment; and adjustment consists of the processes by which they manage these demands. It is obvious that adjustment can be summarized to mean 'effectiveness'.

According to Sawrey and Telford (1971), adjustment emphasises socialisation of the individual and development of coping behaviour. A review of the position takes psychological adjustment as consisting of the processes by which the individual copes with the psycho- social demands and expectations of the environment. Thus, the

individual who adequately deals with these demands and expectations can be described as well adjusted.

When people are successful in adjustment, they are able to manage demands of the environment better and minimise psychological tension and anxiety. They are also able to achieve quality of life that equals personal needs (Thompson & Gignac, 2011). In the adjustment process, the person does not necessarily have a total triumph over the environment or total surrender to it, but a striving toward an acceptable compromise (Salo, 2008).

Buddin (1998), documented the attrition patterns in the US military services from 1952-1955. The attrition rates across training bases did not depend only on the characteristics of the individual recruit but also on other factors. These attrition factor patterns indicated that institutional or "demand side" factors also play important role in determining attrition rates. Vickers et al, (1989) found substantial associations between personality traits and coping styles. It was identified in recruits going through US Navy basic training. Conscientiousness was related to active problem- solving efforts, while neuroticism was found to be related to self blame and wishful thinking. The findings link stable psychological trait to the situation. Another study by Tubiana (2006) was predicated on the need for reliable and valid measures of personality in the prediction of success in training. Results showed that the questionnaire was equivalent to the interview as a predictor of performance in military training. Martin et al. (2006) also evaluated the level of adjustment amongst soldiers in the US military using self-report. Results showed that perception of situational factors contributed to adjustment during the stress of basic training. It shows that surveys serve useful purpose in the study.

Saks (1995) conducted a longitudinal field study on moderating and mediating effects of self-efficacy on the relationship between training and the adjustment of newcomers during first year of enlistment. Results provided some support for the hypothesis that initial self-efficacy moderates the relationship between training and adjustment. Furthermore, training was strongly related to post-training self-efficacy, ability to cope, job performance, and intention to quit the profession for newcomers with low levels of initial self-efficacy. From the review of previous studies, it is pertinent to note that personal disposition of trainees has been known to play key roles in studies

carried out in the west. However, not much has been done to consider core self-evaluation as a key personality trait in explaining the attrition rate in military training schools especially in developing countries.

Hypotheses

a. Cadets with high Core Self-evaluation will report significantly higher adjustment than those with low scores on Core Self-evaluation

b. Cadets that attended military secondary schools will report significantly higher adjustment than cadets from non-military secondary schools.

METHODS

Research Design

The study was designed as a survey. The cross-sectional study set to investigate dispositional factors of Core Self-evaluation in adjustment to training by Cadets in a military academy.

Participants

A sample size of 63 was drawn from the population of cadets in the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA). They are at the 100 to 400 levels of study and randomly selected to participate in the study. The distribution showed that 23(36.5%) of them were in 100 level, 24(38.1%) in 200 level, 10(15.9%) at 300level, while 6(9.5%) were in 400 level. Also, 32(50.8%) attended military secondary schools while 31(49.2%) had their secondary school education in non-military schools.

Instruments

Core Self-Evaluation: The 12-item scale from Judge, Erez, Bono & Thoresen (2003) was used to assess the four traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control and emotional stability that make up Core self-evaluation (CSE). The CSE scale is scored on a 5-point Likert response format. High scores indicate higher level of CSE while lower scores reflected low level of CSE.

Adjustment: It was measured by using an adapted version of the Military Adjustment Questionnaire developed by Salo (2008) with modification to fit the setting of the current study. A Cronbach alpha

value of 0.85 was recorded. It was scored on a Yes/No response format. Scores above the mean indicate high level of adjustment while scores below the mean score indicate lower level of adjustment. The scale was labeled Cadet Adjustment Scale.

Procedure

Data collection was made possible through official letter from the university of Ibadan Psychology Department, which sought permission from the NDA authority. After gaining approval from the institution, data collection was supervised by the co-investigator. Participants were duly briefed and informed that participation is voluntary. Their names were not required and they were assured that the study was strictly for scholarship but with possible implication to guide policy and pre-training programmes for cadets.

RESULTS

The data collected was analysed with SPSS package, version 15. The hypotheses were tested using appropriate statistics and results presented in summary table. It was hypothesised that cadets with high Core Self-evaluation will report significantly higher adjustment than those with low Core Self-evaluation. This t-test result is presented below:

Table 2: Summary of t-test result comparing high and low Core Self-evaluation on adjustment

DV	Core self-evaluation	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	t	P
Adjustment	Low	33	39.55	1.99	61	-10.89	P <.001
	High	30	45.63	2.44			

As shown in table 2 above, cadets with high Core Self-evaluation significantly scored significantly higher on adjustment ($\overline{X}$ =45.63, SD=2.44) than their colleagues with low Core Self-evaluation ($\overline{X}$ =39.55, SD=1.99) [t (61) = -10.89, P<.001]. The hypothesis was confirmed.

However, the prediction that cadets who attended military secondary schools would significantly report higher level of adjustment than others was not supported. It was rejected.

Discussion

The study was designed to examine the possible influence of dispositional factors in core self-evaluation on adjustment among cadets. Those in the first year (100 level) up to the fourth year (400level) were sampled. The proposition that cadets who scored higher on core self-evaluation will report significantly higher adjustment than those with lower core self-evaluation was confirmed. The finding confirmed core self-evaluation as an important factor in adjustment of cadets in military academy. The position enjoys empirical support from previous studies; Atwater et al., (1999) and Bradley and Nicol (2006). They investigated the impact of various personality traits on military activities. The present findings also agree with the core self-evaluation theory that linked it with higher performance across different areas. Previous studies had repeatedly found personality traits associating with adjustment of military personnel in the west, but not in military training institutions in African countries. Judge et al., (1997); Judge and Bono (2001) identified the four core traits in CSE as conceptually related. Self-esteem, Neuroticism (emotional stability), Generalised self-efficacy specifically encompasses an individual's evaluation of his /her capacity to generate the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control and deal successfully with challenges. Locus of control as the fourth dimension represents the perceived degree of control over the outcomes of one's experiences. All these dimensions were found to play significant role in adjustment of Nigerian military academy cadets. For instance, Rotter identified individuals as either with internal locus of control when they believe they control events around them, or external locus of control when they believe events around them are controlled by luck, chance, fate, or powerful others.

In examining the attrition rate in the US Army, Vickers et al, (1989) found substantial associations between personality traits and coping styles. It was also reported among recruits in US Navy basic training. The personality trait of conscientiousness was related to active problem- solving efforts, while neuroticism was found to be related to

self blame and wishful thinking. The findings link stable psychological trait to the situation. Another study by Tubiana (2006) successfully linked personality to the prediction of successful performance in military training. Since most of the dispositional factors or personality traits identified in past studies covered conscientiousness and other dimensions in the Big- five personality factors, the present study specifically focused on the dimensions contained in the Core self-evaluation. Yet, similar findings have been obtained. This has shown the importance of personality as an inevitable point of emphasis in adjustment to military training. The 1995 investigation by Saks of the moderating and mediating effects of self-efficacy on the relationship between training and the adjustment of newcomers during their first year of enlistment is another position that corroborated the present finding. The various studies show that adjustment is a topic of concern in military organisations in almost everywhere.

However in Martin et al. (2006) evaluation of the level of adjustment amongst soldiers in the US military, perception of situational factors contributed to adjustment during the stress of basic training which the present study did not cover. Despite prior experience of military life on individuals by cadets who attended military secondary schools before entry the Nigerian Defence Academy, no significant difference was found in their level of adjustment when compared with cadets from secular secondary school background. The general perception is that graduates of military secondary schools were more likely to cope with the rigours of military training. Based on the results obtained, the hypothesis was rejected. Prior exposure was expected to play a role in their adjustment but it never did. Though previous studies that examined personality factors and adjustment of military trainees were carried out in developed and some emerging societies, development in Africa may have shown that the issue of adjustment is a common problem as it is in other climes.

A major conclusion based on the findings is that dispositional factors contained in core self-evaluation are important in the adjustment of cadets attending the Nigerian elite military academy. Prior experience in attending military secondary school is not a significant factor that enables the cadet to adjust better in the Academy.

This implies that self-esteem, neuroticism, locus of control, and generalised self-efficacy are salient dispositional factors to emphasise and develop in cadets admitted to the academy. The high rate of voluntary and involuntary attrition as reflected in the graduation rates at NDA may be attributed to deficiencies on the core self-evaluation traits among cadets. The policy of the Armed Forces Selection Board (AFSB), in selecting candidates who graduate from both military and non-military schools for admission into the Defence Academy is justified. Therefore, a major recommendation is that there is the need to emphasise a policy of pre-training personality assessment that include core self-evaluation for all cadets admitted to the Nigerian Defence Academy. Those found to be deficient in the dimensions would be exposed to personal skills training to develop adequate capacity because of the important role CSE plays in military trainees' adjustment as found in Nigeria and elsewhere. As a general policy, programme on 'developing core self-evaluation and coping skills' can be incorporated in the preliminary entry development activities for newly admitted cadets. When effectively equipped, cadets would have been well prepared to adjust in the military academy.

Limitations and Suggestion for Future Research

The findings of this study address a critical issue of adjustment to training by cadets in NDA. Apart from providing insight to adjustment of cadets and complementing existing studies on adjustment of trainees in military institutions, it has provided an African perspective to the global literature. However, there may be other variables that can be involved in adjustment that were not covered in the present study. The regimented nature of the academy made it difficult to be able to collect data from lager sample. In-depth interviews and other qualitative sources of data would have helped generalisation. Nonetheless, the findings have offered a perspective that is expected to sensitise the management of the academy on adjustment challenges that may offer explanation on the high drop-out rate. Further researches are expected and encouraged in the area to include larger sample and variables.

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