

## **Title: The Influence of Trait Emotional Intelligence on Interpersonal problems in a Student Population: The Moderating Role of Self-concept**

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**Abstract:** Generally, people, students inclusive, bring a diverse set of interpersonal problems (social avoidance, non-assertiveness, intrusiveness, over-accommodation, vindictiveness, coldness and self-sacrifice) to their social interactions. These interpersonal problems are thought to be trait patterns that may be potential sources of danger for functional social encounters and general wellbeing. In Nigeria, some negative consequences of interpersonal problems include intergroup distrust, aggression, school bullying, hate speech, ethnic conflict, social intolerance and prejudice. Thus, there is need to understand the psychosocial factors that impinge on interpersonal problems of university students. Hence, this study investigated the extent to which self-concept moderated the influence of emotional intelligence on interpersonal problems among 450 students (male=232, female=218) within the age range of 18 and 35 in a Nigerian University. The study concluded that emotional intelligence, self-concept and value preferences are psychosocial resources that could be adopted when designing intervention to address interpersonal problems among undergraduates. Results showed that self-concept moderated the roles of trait emotional intelligence on overall interpersonal problems and the dimensions of interpersonal problems. In order to promote effective social functioning and general wellbeing, it is recommended that stakeholders concerned with students' wellbeing should inculcate these psychosocial factors into the designing of interventions aimed at punctuating interpersonal problems.

[Damilola Fisayo ADEBAYO & Oluyinka A. OJEDOKUN. **Title: The Influence of Trait Emotional Intelligence on Interpersonal problems in a Student Population: The Moderating Role of Self-concept.** *Rep Opinion* 2019;11(12):80-88]. ISSN 1553-9873 (print); ISSN 2375-7205 (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/report>. 12. doi:[10.7537/marsroj111219.12](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsroj111219.12).

**Keywords:** interpersonal problems, emotional intelligence, self-concept, trait, undergraduates.

### **1. Introduction**

It is generally known that human are relational beings. Nonetheless, previous studies (e.g., Saleem, Ihsan & Mahmood, 2014) attested that people, including university students are likely to experience recurrent difficulty in relating with others, a phenomenon known as interpersonal problems (Horowitz, Rosenberg, & Bartholomew, 1993). These problems are usually brought into social encounters and are possible reasons why people would seek psychotherapy (Horowitz, Rosenberg & Bartholomew, 1993). This is because to a large extent, among young adults, interpersonal problems may degenerate into mental health problems (Boehnke, 2015; Carter, Kelly & Norwood, 2012) such as isolation and social withdrawal (Davila & Beck, 2002), depression (Daley, Rizzo & Gunderson, 2006), self-injurious behaviours like suicidal ideation and increased nicotine or alcohol use (Adrian et al., 2011; Lenz, 2004; Weitzman, 2004). Hence, finding ways to punctuate interpersonal problems among diverse population is a challenge for researchers and policy makers.

Among diverse samples, research on interpersonal problems across different countries has mostly focused on the dimensions and nature of

interpersonal problems (e.g., Boehnke, 2015; Horowitz, 2004; Saleem et al., 2014, Wilson et al., 2013), while some investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal problems, but there is yet to be documented studies on the moderating role of self-concept in the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and interpersonal problems among student population. This study is therefore designed to fill the lacuna. The importance of conducting this study bothers on designing strategies that can mitigate the occurrence of interpersonal problems and inform the modality of the psychotherapeutic interventions for an incidence of interpersonal problems among young adults.

The findings from the trend of research on interpersonal problems postulate that people bring interpersonal problems into their social encounters because of their personality traits. For instance, Nysaeter, Langvik, Berthelsen, and Nordvik (2009) established a link between the dimensions of interpersonal problems and the five-dimension personality traits. In other words, among interactants, interpersonal problems are exhibited because of underlying personality traits which invariably may become a natural way of relating with others.

### **Theoretical Background and Literature review**

Interpersonal problems are behavioural problems that are known to be related to individuals' perceptions and behaviours (Wilson, Revelle, Stroud & Durbin, 2013) or are caused by poor psychosocial development (Cassidy, 2008; Saleem et al., 2014) and they may be sources of danger for people's functioning in social encounters. This suggests that people exhibit these problems as trait patterns when relating with others (e.g., Nysaeter et al., 2009; Glaso, Nielsen & Einarsen, 2009) in diverse modes and nature. Hence, this paper defines "interpersonal problems" as trait patterns that makes social interactions difficult for people.

The nature of interpersonal problems is often presented on a circumplex. According to Horowitz (2004), the circumplex organize interpersonal problems into two dimensions, affiliation or communion and agency or dominance/control/influence. The dimension of affiliation ranges from friendly or warm behaviour to hostile or cold behaviour. The dimension of dominance, control, or influence, ranges from dominating or controlling behaviour to yielding or relinquishing control. Thus, interpersonal problems that correspond to every combination of the two underlying factors exist: some problems reflect too much hostility (or too much friendliness); others reflect too much submissiveness (or too much dominance). A combination of the two contrasting dimensions result into eight modes of conduct which includes domineering, vindictiveness, coldness, social avoidance, non-assertiveness, exploitable/self-sacrificing, over-accommodation, and intrusiveness (Wilson et al., 2013).

Locke (2000) described the various instances of interpersonal problems. For instance, domineering behaviour includes controlling, manipulating and trying to change others; vindictiveness has to do with inability to care for others' needs, distrust and suspicion of others and tendency to seek revenge; coldness has to do with inability to express affection and love towards others; social avoidance includes feeling anxious and embarrassed in the presence of others and inability to initiate social interactions; non-assertiveness includes difficulty making needs known to others and inability to be firm with others; self-sacrifice includes being gullible, exploitable and inability to express anger for fear of offending others; over-accommodating/nurturing includes extreme care for and generosity towards others while intrusiveness includes attention seeking and inability to stay out of others' business.

Moreover, majority of studies on interpersonal problems consider the phenomenon as trait patterns. The trait approach (e.g., Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Craven & Marsh, 2008) to this study submits that

emotions and good self-concept are paramount to building social skills that can punctuate problems that people bring into social encounters. Incidentally, literature documents that interpersonal problems are connected with dysfunctional thoughts and feelings about, a perspective that may be explained by investigating the roles exerted by trait emotional intelligence being moderated by self-concept.

Emotional intelligence refers to behavioural dispositions and self-perceived abilities of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotions (Nozaki & Koyasu, 2013; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Intrapersonal emotions accounts for self-related emotions while interpersonal emotions accounts for others-related emotions. Accordingly, emotional intelligence refers to traits that measures variances in individual's emotional dispositions and self-perceptions of ability to recognize, process and utilize emotion-laden information, and is measured with self-report measurements (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Salami, 2010).

Emotional intelligence is subsumed within the domain of personality rather than within the cognitive domain because traits that account for individual differences in personality traits are also implicated in the development of individual differences in emotional intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). As a trait, emotional intelligence is a disposition that reflects personal intelligence, social intelligence, emotionality, wellbeing, sociability and other interpersonal competencies (Goleman, 1995; Shahzad, Begum & Khan, 2014). Based on this premise, trait emotional intelligence offers predictive and explanatory outcomes across all spheres of life (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). In this regard, emotional intelligence is a dispositional ability since individuals vary in the perception, processes, regulation and utilization of emotion. Besides, the ability to consistently appraise and regulate emotional traits in self and others constitutes the yardstick that measure how individuals differ in their level of emotional intelligence.

Trait emotional intelligence provides a comprehensive approach to personality dynamics of emotion. This approach reflects behavioural dispositions and ability to regulate emotions in self and others. In addition, trait emotional intelligence approach establish that individual differences exist in the thought, feelings and perceptions (Caspi, 1998) about meaning of interpersonal relationships (Locke, 2005). Emotional traits may therefore be connected to characteristics that are necessary for proper functioning in social encounters since traits are relatively stable across situations (Schutte et al., 2001). Trait emotional intelligence also reflects capacities to join intelligence, empathy and emotions to enhance thought and understanding of interpersonal

dynamics (Mayer, 2008) and involves assimilation, expression regulation and management of emotional information for adaptive purposes (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000).

In relation with interpersonal problems, emotional intelligence is considered as a key facilitator in interpersonal problems as it affects conducts manifested in interpersonal relations (Austin, 2005; Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007; Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). Literature (e.g., Shahzad et al., 2014) posits that emotional intelligence accounts for happiness, warm feelings for others and self-reported satisfaction in individuals which helps in healthy interpersonal relationships. Trait emotional intelligence therefore involves a number of personal (e.g., self-awareness and self-regulation) and interpersonal (motivation, empathy and social skills) capacities that reduces interpersonal problems by reinforcing mental health, increasing the ability to empathize, improving social adaptation, emotional well-being and life satisfaction. Also, emotional intelligence provides the circumstance for the improvement of social relations (Khodabakhsh & Besharat, 2011).

Consequently, individuals who report high emotional intelligence are likely to demonstrate more self-control and positively reinterpret negative events (Afolabi, 2013; Bal, Chiaburu, & Diaz, 2011). On the contrary, low trait emotional intelligence in social encounters may result to some forms of interpersonal problems including self-sacrifice, social avoidance, non-assertiveness and over-accommodation due to deficiencies in their interpersonal capacities of emotional intelligence. Overall, trait emotional intelligence may be a precursor to the incidence of interpersonal problems.

Metaj (2017) reported that emotional intelligence was negatively related with interpersonal communication while emotional intelligence was positively related with social support suggesting that emotional intelligence competencies and skills are important for quality of interpersonal relationships. Ghiabi, and Besharat (2011) found a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and four aspects of interpersonal problems including assertiveness, sociability, intimacy and responsibility, indicating that emotional intelligence can predict changes related to inability to cognitively process emotional knowledge and interpersonal problems among students. Similarly, Khodabakhsh and Besharat (2011) reported that a causal relationship exists between emotional intelligence and the quality of interpersonal relationships among university students while Brown and Schutte (2006) reported that emotional intelligence assists in reducing the fatigue and stress of difficult social encounters in university

students confirming the assertion that some individuals find social relationships as the most upsetting stressor on daily basis (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989).

Since trait emotional intelligence is likely to determine the nature of interpersonal problems that people bring into social encounters, self-concept may be a moderator in the relationship that exists between trait emotional intelligence and interpersonal problems because literature attests that people apply the rationale they possess for defining and interpreting events in order to lessen the exhibition of interpersonal problems when relating with others.

Self-concept refers to the totality of individuals' beliefs, preferences, opinions and attitudes, organized in a systematic manner towards their personal existence (Sincero, 2012). In addition, it may refer to how people think of themselves and how they should think, behave and act out our various life roles. The formation of the self-concept involves distinguishing what is directly and immediately a part of the self from the people, objects, and events that are external to one. The self-concept is also our image of what we are, what we should be, and what we would like to be. Hakelind (2007) found self-concept to be related with interpersonal problems among university students. Similarly, Ybrandt (2007) reported self-concept to be the most important factor for adjustment and for major common problem behaviours in adolescents while Roitman and Gilboa-Schechtman (2014) reported that self-concept mediated the relationship between maternal social anxiety and adolescents' social anxiety.

On the basis of the literatures reviewed, the aim of the current study is to investigate whether self-concept would moderate the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and overall interpersonal problems and its dimensions. This study that therefore hypothesized that self-concept would moderate the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and overall interpersonal problems, social avoidance, non-assertiveness, domineering, intrusiveness, over-accommodation, vindictiveness, coldness, and self-sacrifice) among university undergraduates.

## 2. Methods

### Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design where the dependent variable is overall interpersonal problems and its dimensions while the independent variable is emotional intelligence and self-concept is the moderating variable.

### Participants

A total of 460 undergraduates in a Nigerian university participated in the study. The participants

were sampled from at least one department from the six faculties in the university. There were 232 females (51.6%) and 218 males (48.4%) whose ages ranged between 18 and 35 years ( $M=21.45$   $SD=3.23$ ).

### Measures

The instrument used was a questionnaire measuring the participants' socio-demographics, emotional intelligence, self-concept and interpersonal problems.

*Emotional intelligence.* The Wong and Law (2002) Emotional Intelligence Scale was used in this study. Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) is a widely used self-perceived measure of emotional intelligence and emotion-related dispositions (Libbrecht, Lievens, & Schollaert, 2010). The WLEIS consists of 16 items with four subscales based on Davies, Stankov and Roberts (1998). Each of the four subscales; the self-emotional appraisal, the others' emotional appraisal, the use of emotion and the regulation of emotion were measured with four items scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). A sample item of the items is "I really understand what I feel". A Nigerian study by Olatoye, Akintunde and Yakasai (2010) found a reliability of 0.85 among students while this present study found Cronbach alpha of 0.93. High score on this scale implies high trait emotional intelligence while low scores depict low trait emotional intelligence.

*Self-concept.* The short form of the second edition of the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS-2) adult form developed by Fitts and Warren (1996) was used in this study. The scale measures global self-concept compared with other measures of self-concept that are measures of specific self-concept. The short TSCS-2 is a multidimensional measure of self-concept in its relation to human behaviour suitable for adolescents in high school and adults (Tauschek, 2001). The short TSCS:2 consist of 20 items used in obtaining an overall total self-concept score. A sample item is "I am an attractive person", The scale has 14 positively worded items and 6 negatively worded items. The response is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= "always false" to 5= "always true". Fitts and Warren (1996) found an internal reliability score of 0.80 while this study found a Cronbach alpha of 0.71. Scores at and above the mean depict high self-concept while low scores depict low self-concept.

*Interpersonal problems.* The short version of the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP-32) developed by Barkham and Hardy (1996) was used in this study. The IIP-32 having eight sub-scales is a short version of the 127 items of the inventory of interpersonal problems by Horowitz et al. (1988). The eight subscales measured with 4 items of the scale include social avoidance, non-assertiveness,

domineering, intrusiveness, over-accommodation, vindictiveness, coldness, and self-sacrifice. The Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP) was developed in order to tap difficulties people experienced in their interpersonal relationships. Such difficulties can be experienced as things people find 'too hard' to do (e.g. Join in groups) or things which they do 'too much' (e.g. get irritated). Items are scored on a five-point scale from 0 ('not at all') to 4 ('extremely'). Sample items include; "I find it hard to socialize with other people". Norouzi, Zargar and Norouzi, (2017) noted that high scores on IIP-32 is an indication of poorer interpersonal functioning. Barkham and Hardy (1996) found the alpha for all items of the IIP-32 to be 0.90 while Klimas and Halama (2008) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.89. This study however found an overall reliability of 0.92 on the scale.

### Procedure

In recruiting samples, the various faculties of study of the students were put into consideration. Departments with the highest population in each faculty were purposively selected for adequate representation. The survey questionnaires were administered to the participants in the course of their lectures. Prior to the administration of the questionnaires, the participants were moderately briefed about the purpose of the study and were informed that their participation in the study is voluntary. To guarantee confidentiality of responses and honesty in their responses, participants were told not include any form of their identification such as their names and matriculation number. The completion of the questionnaire lasted for about 15 to 20 minutes. The questionnaires were retrieved and coded for entry into the SPSS file.

### Data analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the extent and direction of relationship among the study variables while hierarchical multiple regression analyses was used to test the hypothesis of the study.

## 3. Results

The extent and direction of relationship among the study variables were tested. This is presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, trait emotional intelligence was significantly and positively related with overall interpersonal problems [ $r(450)=.16$ ,  $p<.01$ ], social avoidance [ $r(450)=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ], non-assertiveness [ $r(450)=.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ], vindictiveness [ $r(450)=.21$ ,  $p<.01$ ] and coldness [ $r(450)=.21$ ,  $p<.01$ ] but there was no significant relationship with domineering, intrusiveness, over-accommodating and self-sacrificing, implying that students experienced

interpersonal problems regardless of their level of trait emotional intelligence.

**Test of Hypotheses**

Nine sets of moderated regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. It was expected that that self-concept would moderate the relationship

between trait emotional intelligence and overall interpersonal problems and its dimensions including social avoidance, non-assertiveness, domineering, intrusiveness, over-accommodation, vindictiveness, coldness, and self-sacrifice among university undergraduates. The results are presented in Table 2.

Mean, SD and Inter-variable Correlations												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Overall IP	1											
2. Social Avoidance	.73**	1										
3. non-assertiveness	.74**	.73**	1									
4. Domineering	.64**	.25**	.22**	1								
5. Intrusiveness	.59**	.29**	.21**	.49**	1							
6. Over accomodating	.70**	.29**	.33**	.51**	.49**	1						
7. Vindictiveness	.75**	.66**	.64**	.21**	.26**	.39**	1					
8. Coldness	.79**	.72**	.73**	.25**	.25**	.41**	.70**	1				
9. self-sacrificing	.66**	.20**	.23**	.71**	.56**	.63**	.23**	.26**	1			
10. Trait EI	.16**	.20**	.23**	-.07	.09	.05	.21**	.21**	-.024	1		
11. Self-concept	-.07	-.02	.04	.23**	-.08	-.05	.02	.02	-.11**	.48**	1	
12. Age	.06	.03	.02	-.03	.07	.05	.06	.09	.042	.06	.01	1
Mean	56.18	7.60	7.62	4.85	6.92	7.16	8.04	8.29	5.66	60.57	71.22	21.45
SD	20.51	3.90	3.55	3.88	2.62	3.44	4.23	3.72	3.56	12.45	9.79	3.23

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Overall IP= Overall Interpersonal Problems, EI= Emotional intelligence

**Table 2: Moderated Multiple Regression of Self-concept on Interpersonal Problems**

Factors	Dependent Variables	Beta	SE	B	T	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R	F
Trait EI	Overall	2.14	.43	1.30	4.97**				
SC	Inter. Problems	1.14	.39	.54	2.94*	.29	.09	.08	14.06**
Trait EI X SC		-0.03	.01	-1.55	-4.11**				
Trait EI	Social avoidance	.32	.08	1.02	3.88**				
SC		.14	.07	.37	1.98*	.29	.09	.08	12.23**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-1.09	-2.90**				
Trait EI	Non-assertiveness	.23	.08	.92	3.51**				
SC		.13	.07	.35	1.86*	.27	.08	.07	12.41**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	.95	-2.49*				
Trait EI	Domineering	.23	.08	.74	2.78**				
SC		.10	.07	.26	1.39*	.24	.06	.05	9.44**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-1.03	-2.70**				
Trait EI	Intrusiveness	.17	.06	.80	2.99**				
SC		.08	.05	.30	1.56*	.20	.04	.03	5.86**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-.95	-2.50*				
Trait EI	Over-accomodating	.35	.07	1.28	4.81**				
SC		.25	.07	.72	3.84**	.23	.05	.05	8.44**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-1.75	-4.54**				
Trait EI	Vindictiveness	.27	.09	.79	2.98**				
SC		.12	.08	.27	1.41**	0.24	.06	.05	9.35**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-.79	-2.06*				
Trait EI	Coldness	.27	.08	.91	3.43**				
SC		.13	.07	.35	1.89**	.25	.06	.06	10.19**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-.96	-2.51*				
Trait EI	Self-sacrificing	.26	.08	.90	3.37**				
SC		.17	.07	.47	2.50**	.19	.04	.03	5.77**
Trait EI X SC		-.01	.01	-1.27	-3.28**				

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05. EI= Emotional intelligence, SC= Self-concept, inter. problem= Interpersonal problems

The results indicated that the whole model significantly predicted overall interpersonal problems with  $R=.29$ ,  $R^2=.09$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 14.06$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating that all the variables accounted for 14.6 % to variance in interpersonal problems. On the dimensions of interpersonal problems, the whole model significantly predicted social avoidance with  $R=.28$ ,  $R^2=.06$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 12.23$ ,  $p < .01$ , non-assertiveness with  $R=.27$ ,  $R^2=.08$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 12.11$ ,  $p < .01$ , domineering with  $R=.24$ ,  $R^2=.06$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 9.44$ ,  $p < .01$ , intrusiveness with  $R=.20$ ,  $R^2=.04$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 5.86$ ,  $p < .01$ , over-accommodating with  $R=.23$ ,  $R^2=.05$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 8.44$ ,  $p < .01$ , vindictiveness with  $R=.24$ ,  $R^2=.06$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 9.35$ ,  $p < .01$ , coldness with  $R=.25$ ,  $R^2=.06$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 9.35$ ,  $p < .01$  and self-sacrificing with  $R=.19$ ,  $R^2=.04$ ,  $F(3, 445) = 5.77$ ,  $p < .01$ .

The results further indicated that self-concept moderated the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and overall interpersonal problems ( $\beta = -1.55$ ,  $t = -4.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ); social avoidance ( $\beta = -1.09$ ,  $t = -2.90$ ,  $p < .01$ ); non-assertiveness ( $\beta = .95$ ,  $t = -2.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ); domineering ( $\beta = -1.03$ ,  $t = -2.70$ ,  $p < .05$ ); intrusiveness ( $\beta = -.95$ ,  $t = -2.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ); over-accommodating ( $\beta = -1.75$ ,  $t = -4.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ); vindictiveness ( $\beta = -.79$ ,  $t = -2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ); coldness ( $\beta = -.96$ ,  $t = -2.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and self-sacrifice ( $\beta = -1.27$ ,  $t = -3.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The results on the overall score of interpersonal problems and the dimensions indicated that self-concept accounted for variations on the influence of trait emotional intelligence on interpersonal problems, confirming the hypothesis that self-concept would moderate the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and interpersonal problems. This implies that self-concept attenuated an incidence of interpersonal problems based on trait emotional intelligence.

As shown in Table 1, trait emotional intelligence had a positive significant independent influence on overall score of interpersonal problems ( $\beta = 1.30$ ,  $t = 4.97$ ,  $p < .01$ ); social avoidance ( $\beta = -1.02$ ,  $t = 3.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ); non-assertiveness ( $\beta = .92$ ,  $t = 3.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ); domineering ( $\beta = .74$ ,  $t = 2.78$ ,  $p < .05$ ); intrusiveness ( $\beta = .80$ ,  $t = 2.99$ ,  $p < .05$ ); over-accommodating ( $\beta = 1.28$ ,  $t = 4.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ); vindictiveness ( $\beta = .79$ ,  $t = 2.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ); coldness ( $\beta = .91$ ,  $t = 3.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and self-sacrifice ( $\beta = .90$ ,  $t = 3.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The result confirms the hypothesis that trait emotional intelligence would have significant independent influence on interpersonal problems and its dimensions.

#### 4. Discussion

The study investigated the moderating role of self-concept in the influence of trait emotional intelligence on interpersonal problems among student population. The findings established that that the

tendency to bring interpersonal problems into social encounters based on trait emotional intelligence can be moderated by self-concept.

The findings indicated that trait emotional intelligence is evidently connected with interpersonal problems and the eight dimensions. These findings confirm the trait approach to the understanding of interpersonal problems (e.g., Nysaeter et al., 2009; Glaso et al., 2009), that these traits are relatively consistent across situations. Particularly, the findings establish the assumption that interpersonal problems emanate from dysfunctional feelings and dispositional tendencies thereby suggesting that complicated trait emotions including high trait emotional intelligence are plausible reasons why people recurrently experience difficulty in sustaining non-problematic relationships.

As found in this study, individuals who report high trait emotional intelligence are likely to bring interpersonal problems into social encounters when there are more personal than interpersonal capacities individuals. Besides, people possessing high trait emotional intelligence may be manipulative, repellent, invasive, pretentious, overbearing and sometimes socially withdrawn from others in order to maintain and protect their emotional astute thereby bringing these problems in social encounters. Specifically, high emotional intelligence provides rationale for handling others or matters in social interactions but regardless of the usefulness of emotional intelligence, daily experience of interpersonal problems may be inevitable for these individuals because emotional intelligence is a trait that is exhibited across diverse situations which may have harsh and unpleasant outcomes on other interactants. Consequently, the findings corroborates the assertion that emotional intelligence was related with the quality of interpersonal relationships (Khodabakhsh & Besharat, 2011) and some aspects of interpersonal problems that has to do with sociability, intimacy, assertiveness and responsibility (Ghiabi & Besharat, 2011). Therefore, the relatedness between trait emotional intelligence and interpersonal problems confirms theoretical proposition and trend in the literature.

The findings indicated that self-concept significantly influenced overall score of interpersonal problems and the eight dimensions. The direction indicates that high self-concept is related with high interpersonal problems. This suggests that high self-concept could be a possible reason for an incidence of interpersonal problems since self-concept captures the totality of individuals' beliefs, preferences, opinions and attitudes which may be a potential source for interpersonal problems when such persons are faced with experiences that contradicts their beliefs and

opinions. The findings negate the popular trend in literature (e.g., Hakelind, 2007) that self-concept independently attenuates interpersonal problems.

Apart from the independent contributions of trait emotional intelligence and self-concept on interpersonal problems, the findings further indicated that self-concept moderated the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and interpersonal problems in such a way that self-concept attenuated the influence of trait emotional intelligence on the overall score of interpersonal problems as well as the modes of conduct. The findings imply that people who bring interpersonal problems into social encounters are characterized by extreme levels of trait emotional intelligence and high level of self-concept. In other words, university students who recurrently experience difficulty in sustaining non-problematic relationships are individuals who possess dysfunctional feelings and thoughts about themselves, others and situations. Furthermore, it was established that high trait emotional intelligence moderated by self-concept may instigate dominance, exploitation, intrusiveness, manipulation and other uncommunal traits. This finding is consistent with research which have investigates self-concept as intermediary variable (see Roitman & Gilboa-Schechtman, 2014).

## 5. Conclusion

The current study revealed the importance of self-concept in managing difficult social encounters instigated by trait patterns among university students in Ondo state, Nigeria. The study established that moderate level and not extreme or low level of emotional intelligence moderated by self-concept are important for efficient social relationships. Regardless of the findings in this study, there are limitations. The current study was limited by its scope in that recruitment of participants was done from a single university in Ondo state which may not be adequate to reflect the true incidence of interpersonal problems in a student population.

Since the present study provided evidence that self-concept moderates the influence of trait emotional intelligence on interpersonal problems, the findings have implications for policy making, practice and future studies. It is therefore important for relevant stakeholders concerned with students' wellbeing to consider the implications of these variables in designing intervention that can punctuate interpersonal problems. Also, it is suggested that future studies should expand the scope of the work in terms of sample size for proper understanding of the processes of interpersonal problems among young adults.

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12/25/2019