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Instructors' Interpersonal Interaction with Students in a Tanzanian University: A Study of Students' Perceived Interpersonal Characteristics of Instructors

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Abstract

The study examined students' perceptions of their instructors' interpersonal characteristics. The study used a sample of 593 final-year students who completed the questionnaire. The study aimed to (i) establish the level of instructors' interpersonal interactions with final-year students, (ii) examine the relationships that exist among instructors' interpersonal characteristics, and (iii) examine how students' GPAs influence their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics. Results indicated that students scored relatively higher in the Leadership and Understanding aspects. On the contrary, students scored below the mean average in Uncertain, Admonishing, Dissatisfied, and Strict aspects. Mixed results were observed in the correlation among aspects of instructors' interpersonal characteristics. While some aspects had a positive and large correlation, as the model for instructors' interpersonal behaviour suggests, others indicated a positive correlation when the model advocates that such aspects hardly portray similar instructors' interpersonal behaviour. Regarding students' GPAs, findings indicated that students' GPAs have a significant relationship with their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics in all aspects of the influence sector, implying that students with low GPAs perceived their instructors to possess negative interpersonal characteristics. The study concludes that as instructors interact with students, it is essential to advise, encourage, and warn them politely rather than criticising, reprimanding, or correcting them in an unfriendly manner.

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Keywords

Instructors, interpersonal characteristics, interpersonal interaction, students, Tanzania

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Practitioner Notes

1. Instructors should demonstrate a high level of portraying characteristics in the proximity sectors (i.e., leadership, helpful, understanding, and student freedom).
2. Instructors should demonstrate a low level of characteristics in the influence sectors (i.e., uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing, and strict).
3. Instructors are likely to portray some characteristics in the proximity sector and some attributes in the influence sector, provided that the aspects are adjacent to one another since adjacent dimensions in the model describe instructors' interpersonal behaviours that resemble each other to a certain extent (e.g., uncertain and student freedom as found in this study).
4. Students' GPAs predict their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics in all the influence sectors (i.e., uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing, and strict), implying that students with low GPAs perceive their instructors to possess such negative interpersonal characteristics.

Introduction

Interpersonal interaction is a skill that has received considerable attention among researchers and practitioners in education. From a sociological perspective, interpersonal interaction is a term used to describe a situation in which two or more people share a mutual relationship. Instructors interact with students in classrooms, offices, laboratories, playgrounds, and along the corridors. Regardless of where the interaction occurs, ideally, meaningful instructors' interpersonal interaction with students is regarded as key to students' social and academic success (Elegbe, 2018). Interpersonal characteristics are prerequisites for positive interaction between instructors and students. Throughout their time in universities, students encounter several difficulties. One of the difficulties is interpersonal interaction with their instructors. Evidence has shown that positive instructors' interpersonal interaction with students is crucial for establishing a classroom environment conducive to teaching and learning (Hagenauer et al., 2022; Mgonda, 2019, 2021). Nonetheless, studies (Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018) have suggested that instructors have tended to be moody, harsh, and impolite, thus impairing the interaction within and outside the classroom. These negative interpersonal characteristics make students feel uneasy in class, unable to express their thoughts, and incapable of answering or asking questions for clarity if they do not understand the lesson (Elegbe, 2018).

Additionally, studies in Africa (Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Kavenuke, 2015; Paschal & Mkulu, 2020) have indicated that unfriendly relationship between instructors and students in universities exists. For instance, in Tanzania, in the study by Kavenuke (2015), students reported that their instructors are less friendly and less sympathetic to the extent that students fear meeting them to express their problems and decide to do their things independently. It has been noted that

instructors' interpersonal interaction with students has kept too much distance. The distance kept might be because the relationship between students and instructors at the university level is characterised by independent (adult-like) characteristics, making one think that students need less or no support from their instructors (Eloff et al., 2021). Nevertheless, studies focusing specifically on university students show that the interpersonal interactions between instructors and students make a difference in students' success (Al-Maktoumi & Al. Kiyumi, 2024; Elegbe, 2018; Hagenauer et al., 2022; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Leonard et al., 2024; Sundani & Mamakhere, 2021). Thus, a positive interpersonal interaction between instructors and students is necessary for effective interaction.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance attached to instructors' interpersonal interaction to students' success in university life, literature has continued to suggest that instructors' interpersonal interaction with students is weak (Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018), hence requiring refinement. Additionally, previous studies relating to instructors' interpersonal interaction with students have been conducted primarily on the West (Hagenauer et al., 2022; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Ingraham et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Roorda et al., 2011; Tormey, 2021), in Asia (Al-Hussami et al., 2011; Bai et al., 2022; Fraser et al., 2010; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Mallik, 2023; Noori et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2019; Syahabuddin et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2015) and some Africa countries such as Nigeria (Elegbe, 2018; Oduh & Agboola, 2019; Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018; Rabo, 2022; Sani, 2020), Cameroon (Safotso, 2018; Sundani & Mamakhere, 2021), and South Africa (Eloff et al., 2021; Uleanya, 2019). Only a few studies on instructors' interpersonal interaction with students have been conducted in Tanzania (Mgonda, 2019, 2021).

Therefore, limited studies have focused on instructors' interpersonal interaction with students in universities in Tanzania. Thus, this study became significant as it unearthed the nature of instructors' interpersonal interaction with students, examined the relationship between the dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics, and investigated the influence of students' GPAs on their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics in the Tanzanian context. The relationship broadens our understanding of the dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics, particularly how one characteristic relates to the other regarding the instructors' decisions to master and live those interpersonal characteristics. The following research questions (hypotheses) guided the study:

- i. To what extent do instructors' interpersonal interactions with final-year students exist?
H1: There are high levels of instructors' interpersonal interaction with final-year students.
- ii. What relationships exist among instructors' interpersonal characteristics?
H2: There is a relationship among the dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics in the proximity sector (instructors' positive interpersonal behaviours)
H3: There is a relationship among the dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics in the influence sector (instructors' negative interpersonal behaviours)
H4: Instructors' interpersonal characteristics in the adjacent sectors display a relationship between them.
H5: Instructors' interpersonal characteristics in the opposite sectors do not portray a relationship between them.

iii. How do students' GPAs influence their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics?

H6: Students' GPAs significantly affect their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics (in proximity and influence sectors).

Literature

History and Nature of Interaction between Instructors and Students in Tanzania

Nonetheless, globalisation, intercultural communication, modernisation, and urbanisation have recently affected child-elder interaction, making it less formal than traditional Tanzanian societies' practices. These changes have equally been reflected in academic institutions such as schools and universities. In that regard, the changes have affected some individuals by making their interactions less formal, while others have maintained formal traditional interactions. Impliedly, higher learning institutions have formal instructors judged as strict, and less formal instructors are evaluated as helpful and friendly. Similarly, due to the internationalisation of higher education (Ge, 2022; de Wit et al., 2020), universities in Tanzania receive international students from diverse cultures. Since instructors have students from different cultures, instructors must have intercultural competencies to accommodate students from all cultures (Kavenuke & Kihwele, 2023; Portera, 2020; Portera & Milani, 2021). Therefore, instructors should balance being formal (admonishing and strict) and less formal (friendly, charming and helpful) to accommodate students from all cultures.

Historically, through African Indigenous education, children in the Tanzanian context were traditionally trained to respect elders, relatives, the community and those in authority, such as parents and teachers. Greetings, word choice, body posture, and gestures played a significant role in judging children's respect (Mfungo et al., 2022). In that era, the interaction between children and elders was formal (Mfungo et al., 2022). Thus, this culture has affected the interaction between teachers and learners from lower to higher levels of schooling. Based on the traditional child-elder interaction, it was uncommon to see children joking with elders because of their cultural training in initiation ceremonies (Seroto, 2011). Such cultural training made children grow up developing a child-elder gap, making it difficult to make jokes in formal environments such as schools and universities.

History and Characteristics of Higher Education in Tanzania

The establishment of the University College Dar es Salaam as an affiliated college of the University of London in 1961 marked the introduction of the higher education system in Tanzania (Tanzania Commission for Universities [TCU], 2019). Presently, Tanzania is home to 54 universities, of which 21 are public and 33 private (TCU, 2024). TCU and the Ministry of Education Science and Technology jointly oversee Tanzania's higher education institutions. Statistics show that the number of higher education institutes has grown significantly. Higher education in Tanzania is emphasised due to its significant role in producing competitive, knowledgeable, innovative, and creative graduates (Rupia, 2017). Following the importance of higher education, the government of Tanzania has continued to invest in higher education. The government

liberalised higher education to increase access, allowing private organisations and religious institutions to establish universities (TCU, 2019).

The government of Tanzania introduced a fee-free education policy in primary and lower secondary education in 2016 and in high school in 2020 (Ministry of Education Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). This policy increased enrollment in the secondary education cycles, leading to a higher university enrollment rate. For instance, in the University of Dar es Salaam, one of the full-fledged universities, statistics show that university-wide enrollment soared from 27,403 students in 2015/2016 to 39,034 students in the 2020/2021 academic year (University of Dar es Salaam [UDSM], 2022). Unfortunately, despite the increase in enrollment in universities, studies have indicated that universities in Tanzania suffer from inadequate physical and human resources (Istoroyekti & Surya, 2016), outdated infrastructure and learning materials (Kipesha & Msigwa, 2013), and financial resources (Kipesha & Msigwa, 2013; Mgaiwa & Ishengoma, 2023). Inadequate physical and financial resources have made teaching in higher learning institutions in Tanzania characterised by large classes (Kavenuke & Muthanna, 2021; Mwakabenga, 2022). With the increase in enrollment and inadequacy of resources, my experiences as a university teacher indicate that it is common for instructors to teach a class of more than one thousand students. This is common in courses undertaken by students from various programmes in a semester. The large classes make it challenging for instructors to interact closely with students, as it can be done in small classes where the instructor can go the extra mile to know students by their names. In a way, the large class size affects instructors-students interactive learning in higher education, hence failing to meet its target of producing graduates who can apply their knowledge and abilities to advance society and thereby contribute significantly to nation-building (Tewari & Ilesanmi, 2020). The following section provides details on the instructor-student interaction model.

Theoretical Framework: Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour

Theo Wubbels and his associates in 1985 designed the widely used Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB) (Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). The model was developed to describe the types of interpersonal behaviours displayed by instructors (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009). This model examines instructors-student relationships using an “influence” dimension (Dominance, D; Submission, S) to measure the degree of dominance of the instructor over the interaction process and a “proximity” dimension (Cooperation, C; Opposition, O) to measure the degree of cooperation of the instructor felt by students (Wei et al., 2015; Misbah et al., 2015). Scholars (Bai et al., 2022; Den Brok et al., 2005; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005) have argued that the model has the following four characteristics:

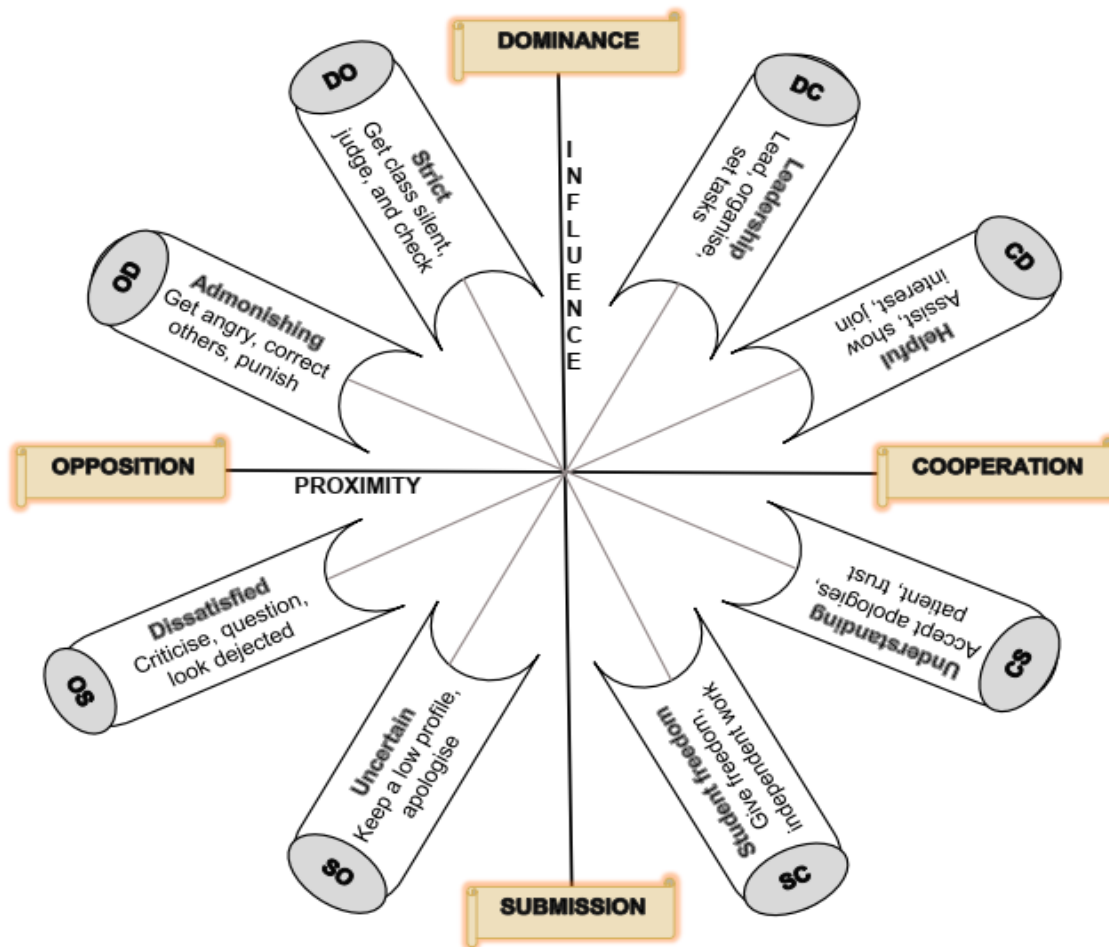
- i. There are eight (8) interpersonal behaviours, namely Leadership, Understanding, Helpful, Student freedom, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing and Strict, which circumrotate around the two dimensions axes of “influence” (Dominance, D; Submission, S), and “proximity” (Cooperation, C; Opposition, O).
- ii. The first four instructors’ interpersonal behaviours of Leadership, Understanding, Helpfulness, and Student freedom portray positive interpersonal behaviours. In contrast, the remaining instructors’ interpersonal behaviours of Dissatisfied, Uncertain,

Admonishing, and Strict portray negative interpersonal behaviours. Thus, the proximity dimension describes instructors' positive interpersonal behaviours, and the influence dimension describes instructors' negative interpersonal behaviours.

- iii. Adjacent dimensions in the model describe instructors' interpersonal behaviours that resemble each other to a certain extent (e.g. Helpful and Understanding).
- iv. Opposite dimensions in the model (e.g. Helpful versus Dissatisfied) portray different instructors' behaviour.

Figure 1

The Model of Instructors' Interpersonal Behaviour



Source: Adopted and modified from Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005)

Leadership

The 'Leadership' dimension demonstrates instructors as persons who are good leaders, pay attention to the needs of the students, explain things clearly, act confidently, and know everything that goes on in the classroom (Den Brok et al., 2005; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). In this way,

instructors with the required leadership skills should show students how to emulate them. Evidence indicates how different interpersonal instructor characteristics correlate. For instance, it was observed that positive and large associations have also been demonstrated between dimensions of Leadership and Helpful (Den Brok et al., 2005; Goh & Fraser, 1998).

Understanding

The 'Understanding' dimension depicts instructors who are patient, trustful, concerned with students' matters, willing to explain things again, and tolerant (Den Brok et al., 2005; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Maulana et al. (2011) observed that the tolerant instructor is considered the most cooperative while the directive instructor is the least cooperative due to relatively low scores on Helpful and Understanding but high scores on Strict. Thus, the tolerant instructor is likely to be Helpful and Understanding as opposed to the directive instructor, who is expected to be stricter. In other words, it is not expected that an instructor will demonstrate the characteristics of an understanding instructor while demonstrating the attributes of a strict instructor. Similarly (Bai et al., 2022) found that trust (Understanding) has a significantly positive but small correlation ($p < 0.001$, 0.47^{***}) with care (Helpful).

Helpful

The 'Helpful' dimension portrays instructors who are charming, humble, friendly, and loving to students and can make jokes with them (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). A study by Den Brok et al. (2005) showed a positive correlation between Helpful, Understanding and Student freedom.

Student freedom

The correlation between Student freedom and other dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics has been established. For instance, in the study by Bai et al. (2022), findings showed that approval of the students and their characteristics—an aspect of Student freedom—was small and negatively ($p < 0.001$, -0.24^{***}) correlated with care—an aspect of helpfulness. The findings contradict the model which emphasises that Student freedom and Helpful dimensions must have a positive correlation because they are both toward the same end—cooperation (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

Uncertain

The 'Uncertain' dimension represents instructors who are unsure, undetermined, and hesitant. These are instructors who tend to act as if they do not know what to do, hence depending much on students to advise them what to do (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Such instructors are characterised by a limited ability to make final decisions during teaching, especially when the topic has divided opinions. Student learning becomes easy when they receive relevant and explicit support from instructors. This implies that Uncertain in instructors is likely to affect students' learning. In support of this, Wei et al. (2009) observed that the correlation between Uncertain and student achievement was significant at the 0.01 level.

Admonishing

The 'Admonishing' dimension represents instructors who get angry quickly, intolerant, reprimanding, short-tempered, and quick to correct students when they break a rule (Hadi &

Tanumihardja, 2017a; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Studies have indicated a negative correlation between Admonishing, Dissatisfied, and Strict dimensions (Den Brok et al., 2005; Goh & Fraser, 1998). The correlation reflects the interpersonal instructors' behaviour model. A negative correlation is expected since all dimensions are toward the same end—opposition (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). A study by Wei et al. (2015) found that teachers were more Uncertain, Dissatisfied, and Admonishing. These interpersonal characteristics continue to suggest that they correlate.

Dissatisfied

Literature has indicated that a lack of trust in students characterises Dissatisfied instructors. Dissatisfied instructors usually think students cheat and cannot do things well on their own because they assume students know very little. Dissatisfied instructors tend to criticise students in front of others (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). In learning, criticising students in front of others is discouraged because students lose interest in trying, limiting self-confidence development. A negative correlation has been observed between the Dissatisfied, Admonishing and Strict dimensions (Den Brok et al., 2005; Goh & Fraser, 1998). Again, the findings in this study mirror the interpersonal instructors' behaviour model. A negative correlation among the dimensions is expected because all dimensions are toward the same end—opposition (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2015).

Strict

The 'Strict' dimension describes instructors who set high standards, ensuring students keep silent in class and are always ready to listen to them. Given the high standards they set, literature has indicated that during marking, they focus on every issue, however minor it might be judged by others. Usually, it is difficult for students to make appointments with strict instructors (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). The Strict dimension varies with context and culture. In East Asia and Africa, being able to control the classroom is one of the qualities of an instructor (Ramnarain & Hobden, 2015; Sun et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2009). Hence, students highly accept the instructors' strictness, unlike in the West, where instructors emphasise student freedom and autonomy (Sun et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2015). The correlation between Strict and other dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics has been examined. Negative relationships were observed with Strict, Admonishing, and Dissatisfied dimensions (Den Brok et al., 2005; Goh & Fraser, 1998). Over again, the findings in these previous studies replicate the interpersonal instructors' behaviour model. The replication is because all dimensions are toward the same end—opposition, and thus, a negative correlation between dimensions after running a correlation is expected (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2015; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

Overall, studies have associated students' outcomes with their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics (e.g. Al-Hussami et al., 2011; Ingraham et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). However, the studies of the relationship between students' Grade Point Averages (GPAs) and students' perceptions of the instructors' interpersonal characteristics have produced mixed results (Al-Hussami et al., 2011; Ingraham et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). For instance, Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) argued that

studies that have included instructors' interpersonal characteristics in teaching indicate a significantly large and positive relationship between students' perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics and students' outcomes.

In their study, Wei et al. (2009) found that Leadership, Helpful and Understanding characteristics were positively related to students' outcomes, while Uncertain, Dissatisfied and Admonishing characteristics were negatively related to students' outcomes. Al-Hussami et al. (2011) indicated a significant difference between those with high and low scores concerning their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal relationships. The study found that students with lower academic scores rated unsatisfactory scores in the dimensions measuring instructors' interpersonal characteristics. Given these mixed results, it was deemed essential to examine the relationship between students' GPAs and their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics.

The model for interpersonal teacher behaviour was developed in the Western context, where these dimensions are bound to Western culture. For instance, with the Helpful dimension, it is common for instructors in the West to express warmth to students (Roorda et al., 2011; Tormey, 2021) as opposed to instructors in the African context (Elegbe, 2018; Eloff et al., 2021; Kavenuke, 2015; Paschal & Mkulu, 2020). Although the model is based on the Western context, it still fits the Tanzanian context since the world is globalised and higher education in Tanzania receives students from diverse cultures.

Method

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a quantitative research method. In terms of the study design, the study used a survey research design. The design necessitated the researcher to study participants' opinions (Ary et al., 2010) regarding instructors' interpersonal interaction with students.

Study Participants and Sampling

The study was carried out at a university college of education in Tanzania. This university college was established to nurture prospective teachers. The sample for this study comprised 593 final-year students. Final-year students were purposively sampled because they had stayed in the university college for a long time. Thus, it was assumed that they have enough experience with the instructors' interpersonal interaction compared to first- and second-year students. The sample population was reached by meeting all students who attended at least one course, which brought all students to one lecture hall. Overall, these final-year students' GPA average was 3.651. Table 1 summarises the demographic data of the study participants.

Instruments

Dependent variables

A standardised questionnaire, 'Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour (MITB)', was used. The model was first established in Dutch and comprised 77 items related to 8 dimensions (Wei et al., 2009). An Australian version of the model was later created with a 48-item selection. Numerous researchers have used the model extensively since its creation (Den Brok et al., 2005; Tormey, 2021; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). The model lists items measuring

various dimensions of instructors' interpersonal interaction with students. The adopted items were modified from a study by Wei et al. (2009). Some items were modified to fit the context and nature of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Data of the Study Participants

Characteristics (N=593)	N	%
Sex		
Males	301	50.9
Females	290	49.1
Age group		
18-20	4	7.0
21-23	304	51.3
24-26	249	42.0
27+	30	5.1
Nature of training		
Pre-service	553	95.3
In-service	27	4.7
Programme of study		
BED Arts	100	16.9
BED Science	103	17.4
B.A.Ed.	202	34.1
B.Sc.	188	31.7

Leadership dimension

The dimension of leadership was measured using a four-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). Seven items measured the dimension (e.g. "My instructor knows everything in the classroom"). After running a reliability test, all seven items were retained. The Cronbach's alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .98, while the Cronbach's alpha for this dimension in the present study was .79.

Helpful dimension

Helpfulness was measured using a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree) for items measuring the extent to which instructors' interpersonal interaction with final-year students exists. Eight items measured the dimension (e.g. "My instructors help us with our work"). The Cronbach's alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .95. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this dimension was .67.

Understanding dimension

The "Understanding" dimension was measured using a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Seven items measured the dimension (e.g. "My instructors realise when we do not understand"). The Cronbach's alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .98. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this dimension was .78.

Student freedom dimension

The "Student freedom" dimension was measured using a 4-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Seven items measured the dimension (e.g. "My instructors allow me to express

my thoughts or feelings”). The Cronbach’s alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .81. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .83.

Uncertain dimension

The “Uncertain” dimension was measured using a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Six items measured the dimension (e.g. “My instructors act like they do not know what to do”). The Cronbach’s alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .60. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .82.

Dissatisfied dimension

The “Dissatisfied” dimension was measured using a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Six items measured the dimension (e.g. “My instructors think that we cannot do things well”). The Cronbach’s alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .92. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .87.

Admonishing dimension

The “Admonishing” dimension was measured using a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Six items measured the dimension (e.g. “My instructors get angry quickly”). The Cronbach’s alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .66. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .83.

Strict dimension

The “Strict” dimension was measured using a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). Seven items measured the dimension (e.g. “We have to be silent in my instructor’s class”). The Cronbach’s alpha of the study by Wei et al. (2009) for the dimension was .82. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for this dimension was .80.

Independent variables

Independent variables such as sex, age group, nature of training, programme of study, and GPAs were included in the study. Participants were asked to indicate their age group using a four-point scale (1=18-20, 2=21-23, 3=24-26, and 4=27+). Participants were asked to indicate their programmes of study using a four-point scale where (1=BED Arts, 2=BED Science, 3=B.A.Ed., and 4=B.Sc.). In addition, participants were asked to indicate whether they are pre-service or in-service teachers using a two-point scale (1=pre-service, 2=in-service).

There is evidence that the relationship between students’ GPAs and their perceptions of the instructors’ interpersonal characteristics has produced mixed results (Al-Hussami et al., 2011; Ingraham et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Thus, students’ GPAs (examination scores/students’ outcomes) were made the most important independent variable of this study. In this respect, students were asked to include their last GPAs for their academic year when the study was conducted. In Tanzania, universities’ GPAs range from 2.0 to 5.0, where 4.4–5.0 is a first-class, 3.5–4.3 is an upper second class, 2.7–3.4 is a lower second class, and 2.0–2.6 is a pass (University of Dar es Salaam [UDSM], 2023).

Data Analysis

The software package SPSS version 26 was used to conduct data analysis. Several analyses were conducted to respond to the hypotheses developed earlier. Firstly, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to compute the frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The mean scores of less than two ($M < 2$) were considered low ratings, those with mean scores greater or equal to two but less than three ($M \geq 2 < 3$) were considered moderate ratings, while those having mean scores greater or equal to three ($M \geq 3$) were considered as high rating. Also, a reliability test was conducted to compute the internal consistency for each dimension. Thus, the reliability scores reported in this study represent the consistency between the items for each dimension. Secondly, the researcher conducted a Pearson correlation to establish the relationship between dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics. Regarding the research question on correlation, correlation estimates suggested by scholars (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016; Hemphill, 2003; Lovakov & Agadullina, 2021) were used. The scholars recommend that any correlation (r) that is < 0.2 is considered a small correlation, a correlation (r) that is $= 0.2$ to 0.3 is regarded as a medium correlation, and a correlation (r) that is > 0.3 is a large correlation. Thirdly, the researcher conducted a regression analysis to establish the influence of students' GPAs on their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics.

Results

The study's findings are presented per the research questions delineated earlier. Very specific to the research questions, the findings are presented as follows:

Instructors' interpersonal interaction with final-year students

The research question investigated the extent to which instructors' interpersonal interaction with final-year students exists. The hypothesis was that there would be high levels of instructors' interpersonal interaction with final-year students. On the one hand, findings indicated that students scored relatively higher in the Leadership and Understanding dimensions. Impliedly, it means that instructors possess leader-instructor characteristics, such as explaining things clearly and knowing everything in the classroom. Also, the findings communicate those instructors possess the characteristics of an understanding instructor, such as listening with interest, showing trust, being patient, and accepting apologies.

Table 2

Mean Scores for Dimensions Measuring Instructors' Interpersonal Characteristics

	Leadership	Helpful	Understanding	Student freedom	Uncertain	Dissatisfied	Admonishing	Strict
<i>Mean</i>	3.01	2.89	3.07	2.99	2.30	2.17	2.36	2.70
<i>SD</i>	.391	.531	.486	.551	.649	.701	.650	.604

On the other hand, findings indicated that the rest of the dimensions scored below the mean average, with the Dissatisfied dimension scoring the lowest mean score. This implies that instructors show Uncertain, Admonishing, Strict, and Dissatisfaction characteristics, such as

looking dejected, criticising students, and showing dissatisfaction with students. Thus, hypothesis (H1) is accepted for the Leadership and Understanding dimensions.

Table 3

Mean Scores of Instructors' Interpersonal Characteristics Dimensions and their Items

	Min	Max	M	SD
Leadership	1	4	3.01	.391
My instructors pay attention to the needs of students	1	4	3.19	.728
My instructors explain things clearly	1	4	3.26	.636
My instructors act confidently	1	4	3.38	.677
My instructors talk devotedly about their subject	1	4	3.07	.666
My instructors know everything in the classroom	1	4	2.79	.805
My instructors are good leaders	1	4	3.20	.688
My instructors rarely pay attention to me in class	1	4	2.20	.882
Helpful	1	4	2.89	.531
My instructors help us with our work	1	4	2.95	.795
I will keep in touch with my instructors after graduation	1	4	2.89	.876
My instructors are someone we can depend on	1	4	2.89	.796
My instructors have a sense of humour; they are charming	1	4	3.13	.735
My instructors can take a joke	1	4	2.94	.799
My instructors' classes are pleasant	1	4	2.99	.694
My relationship with my instructors is friendly	1	4	3.07	1.462
My instructors do not like me	1	4	2.22	1.343
Understanding	1	4	3.07	.486
My instructors trust us	1	4	2.92	.770
If we disagree with our instructors, we can discuss it	1	4	2.90	.803
My instructors are willing to explain things again	1	4	3.17	.727
If we have something to say, our instructors will listen	1	4	3.23	.682
My instructors realise that when we do not understand	1	4	3.03	.781
My instructors are patient	1	4	3.15	.661
My instructors are concerned with the welfare of students	1	4	3.06	.726
Student freedom	1	4	2.99	.551
We can decide some things in our instructors' classes	1	4	2.98	.760
We can influence our instructors	1	4	2.98	.722
My instructors allow me to express my thoughts or feelings	1	4	3.05	.770
I feel comfortable opening up to my instructors	1	4	3.00	.749
My instructors accept criticism from students	1	4	2.86	.844
My instructors encourage me to ask when I do not understand	1	4	3.17	.769
I am free to show my thoughts to my instructors	1	4	2.91	.826
Uncertain	1	4	2.30	.649
My instructors seem unsure/undetermined	1	4	2.43	.875
My instructors are hesitant	1	4	2.37	.862
My instructors act like they do not know what to do	1	4	2.08	.899
My instructors let us tell them what to do	1	4	2.47	.890
My instructors are unsure of what to do when we fool around	1	4	2.21	.862
It is easy to make a fool out of my instructors	1	4	2.22	.981
Dissatisfied	1	4	2.17	.701

My instructors think that we cheat	1	4	2.18	.878
My instructors think that we do not know anything	1	4	2.07	.893
My instructors criticise me in front of the class	1	4	2.15	.949
My instructors think that we cannot do things well	1	4	2.18	.938
My instructors seem dissatisfied	1	4	2.28	.881
My instructors lack trust in me	1	4	2.13	.909
Admonishing	1	4	2.36	.650
My instructors get angry unexpectedly	1	4	2.06	.862
My instructors get angry quickly	1	4	2.18	.922
My instructors are too quick to correct us when we break a rule	1	4	2.70	.875
My instructors are intolerant	1	4	2.31	.933
It is easy to be reprimanded by my instructors	1	4	2.49	.842
My instructors are short-tempered	1	4	2.43	.899
Strict	1	4	2.70	.604
I do not have much contact with my instructors outside of classes	1	4	2.71	.932
We have to be silent in my instructors' classes	1	4	2.88	.865
My instructors' tests are hard	1	4	2.81	.858
My instructors' standards are very high	1	4	2.88	.795
My instructors are strict when marking tests/exams	1	4	2.87	.878
I am afraid of my instructors	1	4	2.31	.976
It is troublesome to make an appointment with my instructors	1	4	2.45	.952

To understand how students scored on individual items measuring instructors' interpersonal characteristics with students, the mean scores and standard deviation for individual items were computed. Overall, students scored low in all the items measuring the dimensions of Dissatisfied, Admonishing, Uncertain, and Strict (see Table 3).

The relationship among the dimensions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics

Regarding the second research question on the relationship between instructors' interpersonal characteristics (the eight (8) dimensions), the Pearson Correlation bivariate was computed to establish the relationship among the dimensions. The findings are presented as follows:

Table 4

Correlation among Dimensions of Instructors' Interpersonal Characteristics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Leadership	1							
2 Helpful	.398**	1						
3 Understanding	.510**	.554**	1					
4 Student freedom	.432**	.534**	.733**	1				
5 Uncertain	-.036	.222*	.105**	.171**	1			
6 Dissatisfied	-.162**	.059	-.059	-.048	.601	1		
7 Admonishing	-.085*	.119**	.042	.044	.607**	.750**	1	
8 Strict	-.075	.058	-.002	.008	.348**	.427**	.540**	1

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

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

Findings indicated a significantly positive and large correlation among the dimensions of Leadership, Helpful, Understanding, and Student freedom. Thus, H2 is accepted. Also, positive but small to medium correlation estimates were noted among the dimensions of Uncertain and Helpful (medium correlation), Uncertain and Understanding (small correlation), Uncertain and Student freedom (small correlation), and Admonishing and Helpful (small correlation). Regarding the Uncertain and Student freedom dimension, H4 is accepted because Uncertain dimension is adjacent to the Student freedom dimension; thus, there is a possibility for dimensions in the adjacent sector to display a relationship between them. Nonetheless, it was expected that there would be no positive correlation between Uncertain and Helpful, Uncertain and Understanding, and Admonishing and Helpful because dimensions in the proximity sector (Helpful and Understanding) cannot have similar characteristics as those in the influence sector (Uncertain and Admonishing). Moreover, H5 is accepted because the dimensions in the opposite sector (Admonishing and Understanding) hardly portray similar instructors' interpersonal behaviour.

Moreover, findings indicated a negative but small correlation between Leadership and Dissatisfied and Admonishing dimensions. Leadership dimension in the proximity sector is expected to correlate negatively with Dissatisfied and Admonishing dimensions in the influence sector. The argument comes from the principle that the dimensions in the positive direction cannot possess characteristics similar to those in the negative direction. Such findings imply that the more instructors display Leadership characteristics, the less likely they will display Dissatisfied and Admonishing characteristics. Furthermore, a significantly positive and large correlation was observed between Admonishing and Uncertain, as well as Admonishing and Dissatisfied dimensions. Similarly, the Strict dimension was largely and significantly positively correlated with Uncertain, Admonishing, and Dissatisfied dimensions. Thus, H3 is accepted.

The influence of students' GPAs on their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics
With regard to the third research question, as stated earlier, it was hypothesised that students' GPAs significantly affect their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics (in proximity and influence sectors). Regression analysis results indicate that students' GPAs have no significant relationship with students' perceptions of their instructors' characteristics in all the proximity dimensions. On the contrary, findings showed that students' GPAs have a significant relationship with students' perceptions of their instructors' interpersonal characteristics in all the influence dimensions (i.e. Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict) (see Table 5). Thus, only H6 is accepted for Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict dimensions.

Discussion

Regarding instructors' interpersonal interaction with students, findings indicated that Uncertain, Admonishing, Strict, and Dissatisfied instructors were rated below the mean average. These findings continue to replicate earlier findings that some of the instructors in universities are moody, harsh, correct students in an unfriendly manner, criticise, judge, and strict with students (Elegbe, 2018; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Kavenuke, 2015; Misbah et al., 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). On the contrary, the findings that instructors scored relatively high mean scores in Leadership and Understanding are in line with earlier findings, which indicated that some university instructors display interpersonal

characteristics such as patience, welcoming, tolerance, trust, acting confidently, and explaining things clearly (Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Kavenuke, 2015; Maulana et al., 2011, 2013; Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Positive interpersonal characteristics between instructors and students are essential in university teaching and learning practices. Several studies (e.g. Al-Maktoumi & Al. Kiyumi, 2024; Leonard et al., 2024) have suggested that a positive rapport between instructors and students is essential in a university teaching and learning environment. Principally, instructors' positive interaction with students guarantees excellent academic success because positive interaction assures students that their instructors are willing to assist them.

Table 5

Regression Analysis Results for Hypothesis 6

Regression Weight	R²	β	t	p-value	Results
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Leadership dimension	.002	.027	.982	.327	Rejected
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Helpful dimension	.001	.021	.557	.578	Rejected
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Understanding dimension	.000	.006	.170	.865	Rejected
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Student freedom dimension	.000	-.008	-.190	.849	Rejected
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Uncertain dimension	.011	-.108	-2.263	.024**	Accepted
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Dissatisfied dimension	.009	-.107	-2.071	.039**	Accepted
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Admonishing dimension	.013	-.116	-2.445	.015**	Accepted
Students' GPA → Instructors' characteristics in the Strict dimension	.015	-.111	-2.606	.009**	Accepted

*Note: **p < .05*

The findings that there is a positive and large relationship among the areas of Leadership, Helpful, Understanding and Student freedom were expected because all these aspects move toward the same end—cooperation as the model suggests (Den Brok et al., 2005; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Misbah et al., 2015). Thus, an instructor with helpful characteristics is expected to possess understanding attributes. These findings are in line with the study by Bai et al. (2022), which found that care (Helpful) has a significant and positive relationship with trust (Understanding). In particular, Bai et al. (2022) highlighted that highly interpersonal interaction between instructors and students positively affects university students' learning and well-being. Moreover, the findings that there is a positive but small correlation between Uncertain, and Student freedom continue to support the model of instructor interpersonal characteristics. Since Uncertain is adjacent to Student freedom (possessing some characteristics of submissiveness), Uncertain instructors can, at the same time, provide freedom to students in the class (Misbah et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2009; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

Moreover, it is unexpected that Uncertain and Admonishing have significantly small but positive correlations with Helpful, and Uncertain has significantly small but positive correlations with

Understanding. It is because the behaviours are not adjacent to one another, and the two behaviours (Uncertain and Admonishing) display negative instructors' interpersonal characteristics, and others (Understanding and Helpful) display positive instructors' interpersonal characteristics (Bai et al., 2022; Misbah et al., 2015). Thus, they were not expected to be significantly correlated. In addition, Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) argued that most research has demonstrated evident variations in scale scores on the proximity dimension (Understanding and Helpful) and influence dimension (Uncertain and Admonishing).

The findings that the aspects of Admonishing, Dissatisfied and Uncertain are significantly correlated, and the Strict aspect is significantly correlated with the aspects of Uncertain, Admonishing, and Dissatisfied is also worth a discussion. The four aspects portray negative instructors' interpersonal characteristics and are all toward the same end—opposition; hence, such findings were expected. In support of that, Wei et al. (2009) argued that instructors who are uncertain tend to be dissatisfied and admonishing. The findings replicated earlier studies (e.g. Den Brok et al., 2005), which found a negative correlation between Admonishing, Dissatisfied, and Strict dimensions. Impliedly, these kinds of instructors reflect those whom the literature (Elegbe, 2018; Hadi & Tanumihardja, 2017; Kavenuke, 2015; Misbah et al., 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2018; Wei et al., 2009) has referred to as moody, harsh, unfriendly and most of the time criticise students, hence, impairing students' university teaching and learning experiences. Furthermore, the findings that Leadership and Dissatisfied and Admonishing dimensions indicated a negative but small correlation continued to replicate earlier studies (e.g. Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005) that instructors possessing positive characteristics (Leadership) cannot simultaneously possess negative characteristics (Dissatisfied and Admonishing).

Regarding students' GPAs, findings indicated that students' GPAs have a significant relationship with students' perceptions of their instructors' characteristics in all the influence dimensions (i.e. Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict). Moreover, the findings imply that students with low GPAs perceived their instructors to possess negative interpersonal characteristics such as being uncertain, dissatisfied with students' ability, admonishing, and strict. Similar findings were observed in studies by Wei et al. (2009) and Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005), who noted that Uncertain, Dissatisfied and Admonishing characteristics were negatively related to students' outcomes. Such findings are also similar to the study by Al-Hussami et al. (2011), who found that students with lower academic scores rated unsatisfactory scores in the dimensions measuring instructors' interpersonal characteristics. The possible explanations for these findings might be that instructors have been rated in that direction because they showed dominance and control in their interaction process with students.

Furthermore, the findings that students' GPAs had a significant relationship with students' perceptions of the instructors' interpersonal characteristics in the aspects of Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict, but not in the aspects of Leadership, Helpful, Understanding and Student freedom are contrary to previous studies (e.g. Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005) which found that students' outcomes have frequently significantly influenced their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics (in influence and proximity sectors).

The Study's Implications for Policy and Practice

The fact that most of the study participants were pre-service teachers (95.3%) and only a few were in-service teachers (4.7%) has far-reaching implications. The findings imply that the number of in-service teachers in higher learning institutions in Tanzania is limited compared to pre-service teachers. The limited in-service teachers in higher learning institutions might have been caused by results presented in some earlier studies in Tanzania (e.g., Anangisye, 2011), which found that teachers do not attend in-service training because organisational cultures do not encourage continuous professional development. For teachers to be kept updated on their knowledge and skills, it is suggested that the school management release teachers with admission letters on time for their continuous professional development.

Moreover, this study highlights the importance of maintaining a positive instructor-student relationship in a university teaching and learning environment for improved students' social well-being and academic success. In that regard, all university instructors worldwide could exercise more understanding as they interact with students. Along the way, they learn to become tolerant and helpful to students and enjoy engaging them in teaching and learning. In addition, this study provides international readers with an understanding and knowledge of instructor-student relationships in universities in the Tanzanian context. Also, the study adds value to the scant body of knowledge on instructor-student relationships in Africa, particularly in Tanzanian universities where little research has been conducted.

Conclusion

From the findings and the reviewed literature, particularly on the nature of the interaction between instructors and students in Tanzania, it can be argued that some instructors might have been rated low in Uncertain, Admonishing, Strict, and Dissatisfied dimensions probably because instructors were rigid, maintaining the traditional instructor-student interaction. However, due to globalisation, internationalisation, modernisation, and urbanisation, it could be debated that while instructors must follow the set rules and regulations as they interact with students, they must also bear in mind that they are working with students from diverse cultures. Therefore, it is crucial to advise, encourage, and warn students politely rather than criticise, reprimand, or correct them in an unfriendly manner and by being harsh. The study concludes that instructors can possess adjacent characteristics but can hardly simultaneously possess negative and positive interpersonal characteristics. Additionally, instructors are not expected to possess characteristics in opposite directions. Regarding the relationship between students' GPAs and their perceptions of instructors' interpersonal characteristics, an in-depth qualitative study is recommended to explore how high or low students' grades (GPAs) can make them think of their instructors positively or negatively.

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