



Impact of Age at Admission on Academic Performance and School Adjustment of Undergraduates in a Public University in Nigeria

JOSEPH OLUWATAYO OSAKUADE

Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

Abstract. Nigeria is among countries of the world where younger students are now gaining admission into tertiary institutions. Recent admission age policy made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to peg admission age of new university entrants into 16 years and arguments that trailed the policy prompted this study. This study was embarked upon to empirically examine impact of admission age on performance and school adjustment of undergraduates in a Nigerian University. Descriptive survey and ex-post facto were the research designs used for this study. All newly admitted students into Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko for 2023/2024 academic session constituted the population of the study. The sample for the study comprised 240 100-level undergraduate students randomly selected from the six faculties of the university. A self-constructed validated instrument ($r = 0.79$) titled “Students Academic and Social Adjustment Questionnaire” and a proforma were used to collect data for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings indicated that majority of undergraduate students have moderate level of school adjustment 137(57.1%). Age has significant impact on academic performance ($t = 2.36, p < 0.05$) and school adjustment ($t = 2.20, P < 0.05$) of undergraduate students. Sequel to the findings of this research work, it was concluded that age has something to do with the academic performance and school adjustment of undergraduate students. It was recommended among others that mature candidates should henceforth be given admission to enter public universities in Nigeria. Special universities should be established to admit under-age students that are talented.

Keywords: Admission age, academic performance, school adjustment, undergraduate students

1. Introduction

Quality education is very essential for social, economic, political and scientific transformation of any Nation. University is the ivory tower of knowledge in which vast majority of the nation’s workforce are produced. In view of the importance accorded university education in Nigeria, there is a body (National University Commission) saddled with the responsibility of regulating all the activities of Nigeria Universities. Nigeria like the rest of the world make constant policies on their education system so as to have functional educational system for the country since education is not static. One of the education policies made recently by the Nigerian Government is the minimum entry age to enter into Universities. For quality assurance in education, admission age policy into Universities is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, it cuts across the globe (Nwaka-Nwandu, Ubainokke, Ighodaro, & Erhunmwunse, 2024).

Recent announcement by the Federal government of Nigeria to peg admission age into Universities in Nigeria to sixteen (16) years has generated a lot of controversies among the public, education stakeholders and opinion leaders. Some of the critics of this new age policy posited that such policy is likely to screen out gifted and talented students who are likely to contribute to national development in their respective fields. The gifted candidates are likely to be frustrated and slow down their pace of acceleration (Odukoya, Omonijo, Olowokere, John, & Atayero, 2019). Critics stressed further that rigid age of admission would further deepen the already existing educational inequalities in the country (Nwankwo, 2017). Empirical study conducted by Michele and Francesco (2011) reported that younger students are better academically than the older students.

The supporters of the policy opined that the students should be mature and ready to take all the academic,

social and emotional challenges associated with higher education (Premium Times, 2024). According to them, under age students do not have important life skills and maturity to handle college life pressures such as academics, social life and independent living (Nwako-Nwandu et al 2024). Some empirical studies also indicated that older students perform better academically and displayed high level of maturity than younger students (Nwaka-Nwandu et al 2024, World Bank, 2018). These high achievement level and maturity were attributed to their greater cognitive and emotional maturity.

According to Yazedjian and Toews; Smith and Rank in Obi (2012) academic requirements increase when students are newly admitted into higher institutions. These new entrants are not always sure of their capabilities to cope with these new requirements. They must be well guided and mentored to acquire coping skill strategies necessary to overcome new challenges they would encounter in the university system. Some of the challenges are the need to build good study habit in the new academic environment they found themselves, how to do their assignments and examinations, how to approach and get familiar with lecturers and other new friends they are coming in contact with.

Poor adjustment in Universities can result into poor academic performance and other forms of behavioural problems such as cultism and examination malpractice (Raju & Rahamatula, 2007). School adjustment is the one's resourcefulness to cope with challenges that characterize school life. Peter (2023) in an empirical study found out that older students showed better school adjustments than younger students. Atteraya (2021) in a separate study, reported that age has nothing to do with the school adjustment of the students

Ahmad and Rana (2023) examined academic adjustment and science learning motivation of students at university level and reported a positive association between students' school adjustment and motivation for learning sciences. It further attests to the fact that school adjustment is very crucial to students' academic performance in higher institutions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Admission age policy recently announced by the Federal Government of Nigeria to enter into Nigerian Universities has generated a lot of controversies among the public. The critics of the policy argued that some under age children perform better academically than the older ones; the policy will slow down the pace of education of the gifted

children and further widening the educational inequalities already in existence in the country. The supporters of the policy argued that academic maturity is also needed in the university apart from academic performance. Academic maturity is also needed for good academic performance to take place. Most of the school challenges always affecting younger fresh students than their older counterparts. All these submissions are merely theoretical. There is need for an empirical study that will examine the influence of admission age policy on academic performance and school adjustment of fresh undergraduate students in Nigeria. Hence the gap to be filled.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The major aim of this research work is to investigate the impact of age on performance and school adjustment of undergraduate students in a Nigerian public University.

The specific aims of the study are to investigate the:

- school adjustment of the undergraduate students
- impact of admission age on performance of undergraduates
- impact of admission age on school adjustment of undergraduate students

1.3 Research Question

The only research question for this study is:

- What is the school adjustment of undergraduate students?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated for this study are:

- Admission age has no significant impact on academic performance of undergraduate students
- Admission age has no significant impact on school adjustment of undergraduate students

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework serves as the pillar for understanding interrelationships among key variables in a study. Creswell and Creswell (2023) posited that theoretical framework provides a structural approach to analyze how different factors interact and influence outcomes in a study. This study is anchored on Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory (VST). This theory was propounded by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky a Soviet psychologist in the 1920's and early 1930's. The basic tenet of the

theory is that cognition cannot be separated from the social and cultural context from where it is developed (Vygotsky, 1978). Students' cognitive development and academic adjustment are influenced by their social interactions and cultural backgrounds. This implies that admission age (prior social experience and peer environment) is sacrosanct for performance and adjustment in this study.

2.2 Admission Age

Admission age could be described as the age at which students meet requirements to gain admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Age at which students enter into higher institutions is a critical factor influencing academic performance and school adjustment. Balslev and Decrave (2020) opined that older students are often seen as more prepared for the demands of higher education while younger students may experience challenges adjusting to the new academic environment.

2.3 Admission Age and Students' Academic Performance

The relationship between admission age and academic performance has become a key area for research most especially in a country like Nigeria where early entries are now common. In Nigeria, the minimum age for admission into University is officially set at 16 years. This policy was debated by educators and policy makers for long. Some people argued that students that are 16 years and above should be admitted while some posited that students below 16 years also should also be admitted. Abdulraheem and Adebayo (2020) argued that age at which students enter university affect their cognitive development, emotional regulation and overall academic outcomes.

Odetunde and Alabi (2018) conducted a longitudinal study across 3 Nigerian universities to investigate the relationship between student's age at admission and their subsequent academic performance, tracking their progress through the first two years of study. Their findings revealed consistent and significant patterns. Students admitted at or above the age of 18 consistently outperformed their younger peers, as measured by cumulative grade points average. In a similar vein, Ebong and Okereke (2019) explored the correlation between chronological age at university entry and academic results in Science and Engineering courses. The findings indicated a statistically significant relationship with older students consistently outperforming those who entered at a younger age.

However, some studies have also shown that age at admission does not have a direct deterministic effect

on students' academic performance. Instead, multiple interacting factors such as quality of teaching, student motivation and family support go a long way in determining students' academic performance (Okafor & James, 2022). This point to the fact that student may be younger, but if brought up in a rich school and home environment, he or she will excel academically than their older counterparts.

2.4 Admission Age and School Adjustment

School adjustment involves the process by which students learn to cope with the demands of their new educational settings including academic challenges, social integration and emotional wellbeing. The age at which students are admitted into school can have a significant effect on their ability to successfully navigate these challenges (Oluemi & Adegoke, 2019). For younger entrants, this sudden shift can be overwhelming and may negatively affect their adjustment and academic performance. (Nwankpa & Eze, 2021). Older students tend to have more life experiences and emotional resilience which often helps them to cope better with academic pressure and social demands. Their previous experiences can lead to better time management, goal settings, problem solving skills, enabling them to integrate more smoothly into the school environment.

Ogundele and Nwachukwu (2021) investigating the coping strategies used by students of varying ages. Older students were found to have well-developed copying strategies such as effective time management and seeking academic support. Some school of thoughts believed that the effect of admission age on school adjustment is a complex and not solely dependent on age itself, but also on students' support system and motivation. For instance, motivated younger students with strong family support may adjust as well as better than older students. Likewise, older students who lack support networks may face difficulties despite their maturity. This point to the fact that other factors such as family background, peer relationships and school resources play critical roles in mediating the influence of admission age on adjustment (Adeola & Bamidele, 2022)

3. Research Methodology

Descriptive survey and ex-post facto were the research designs upon which the study was anchored. The justification for using descriptive survey is that large sample which is representative of the entire population was used for the study. It is also ex-post facto because some of the variables of study are already on ground before the arrival of the researcher and they cannot be manipulated. The entire 100-level undergraduate students admitted

into Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko, Ondo State Nigeria for 2023/2024 academic session constituted the population. The sample comprised Two Hundred and forty (240) 100-level undergraduate students admitted into the Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko, Ondo State Nigeria for 2023/2024 academic session. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample from the population. Simple random sampling technique was used to choose 3 faculties from the existing 6 faculties. From each of the selected Faculties, 80 students were randomly selected. A self-constructed instrument titled “Students Academic and Social Adjustment Questionnaire” SASAQ, was used to collect data on school adjustment of the undergraduate students. The instrument is divided into 2 parts. The first part was focused on demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second part contained 12 items used to elicit information on undergraduate students’ academic and school adjustment. This section was structured on 4 point likert scales of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The researcher used both content and convergent validities to ensure that the instrument was valid. The first draft of the questionnaire was vetted by two experts in test and measurement colleagues from

Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko for necessary comments. Their corrections and comments were taken into consideration for the production of final draft. For the convergent validity, the researcher administered this instrument concurrently with the “Students’ Adjustment Challenges Questionnaire” developed by Jiya and Ndanusa (2022) on 20 non-participants in other faculties. Data obtained from the 2 administrations were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A correlation coefficient of 0.72 was gotten. To ascertain the level of internal consistency of the instrument, SASAQ was administered on 20 non-participating undergraduate students in other faculties not selected for this study once. Data obtained from their responses were subjected to Cronbach Alpha. A reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. A proforma was used to collect sampled students’ results in GST 101 from their various Faculties and Departments. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the affected students during their lecture hours. Their scores in GST 111 were collected from various Departments. Data collected were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question. T-test statistics was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance

4. Results

Research Question 1: What is the school adjustment of undergraduate students?

To answer this research question, data gathered from SASAQ were subjected to descriptive statistics of which the Mean is 28.19 and standard deviation is 10.95. Mean ± 1SD were computed to arrive at upper and lower bound of moderate level of school adjustment. The result is as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Level of School Adjustment of Fresh Undergraduate Students

Level of school adjustment	Intervals	Number	Percentage
High	39 – 48	67	27.5
Moderate	17 – 38	137	57.1
Low	12 - 16	36	15.0
Total		240	100

From Table 1, majority of undergraduate students admitted into Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko in 2023/2024 have moderate level of school adjustment 137(57.1%). Very few fresh undergraduate students have high and low levels of school adjustments 67(27.9%) and 36 (15.0%) respectively.

Hypothesis 1: Age has no significant impact on academic performance of undergraduate students

To test this hypothesis, data gathered from students’ scores in GST 111 were subjected to independent sample t-test. The result is as shown in Table 2

Table 2: T-test Showing Impact of Age on Fresh Students’ Academic Performance

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	p-value
16 years and above	138	54.19	14.21	238	2.36	.019
Below 16 years	102	49.57	16.03			

From Table 2, the t-calculated value is 2.36 and p-value is .019. Since p value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis earlier stated that age has no significant impact on academic performance of undergraduate students is hereby

rejected at 0.05 level of significance. It shows that age has significant impact on academic performance of undergraduate students in favour of older students that are 16 years and above (t-cal = 2.36, p<0.05).

Hypothesis 2: Age has no significant impact on school adjustment of fresh undergraduate students

To test this hypothesis, data gathered from students' responses to SASAQ were subjected to independent sample t-test. The result is as shown in table 3.

Table 3: T-test Showing Impact of Age on Undergraduate Students' School Adjustment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	p-value
16 years and above	138	29.50	10.67	238	2.20	.029
Below 16 years	102	26.38	11.12			

From Table 3, the t-calculated value is 2.20 and p-value is .029. Since p value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis earlier stated that age has no significant impact on school adjustment of fresh undergraduate students is hereby rejected at 0.05 level of significance. It shows that age has significant impact on school adjustments of undergraduate students in favour of older students that are 16 years and above (t-cal = 2.20, p<0.05).

5. Discussion of Findings

Finding from research question 1 clearly indicated that the majority of undergraduate students of Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko have moderate level of school adjustment, 137 (57.1%). Majority of them have moderate academic and social adjustments. This finding corroborates the earlier finding of Abdullah, Elias, Mahyyuddin and Uli (2009) whose study on adjustment of Malaysian University fresh students revealed that students' adjustment was at moderate level. The similarity in the two studies is not coming as a surprise. Transition from secondary to University is always accompanied with many challenges. The students are finding themselves in a new environment. Adaptability may not come easily.

Finding from hypothesis 1 showed that there was a significant influence of age on academic performance of undergraduate students in favour of older students that are 16 years and above. This finding is in line with the finding of Nwaka-Nwandu et al (2024) and World bank (2018) whose separate findings revealed that older students performed better academically than the younger students. Similarity in the two findings is expected since mature students would be better in study habits than the younger students.

Finding from hypothesis 2 revealed that there was a significant influence of age on school adjustment of undergraduate students in favour of older students that are 16 years and above as well. This finding supports the earlier finding of Peter (2023) in an empirical study, found out that older students showed better school adjustments than younger

students but contradicts the findings of Atteraya (2021) that reported that age has nothing to do with the school adjustment of the students. Mature students would find it very easy to adjust easily to various facets of school lifes than the younger ones.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this research work, it can be concluded that undergraduate students of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko Ondo State, Nigeria have moderate level of school adjustment. Admission age has significant influence on academic performance and school adjustment of undergraduate students as mature students (students that are 16 years and above) have better academic performance, academic and social adjustments than younger students that are below 16 years of age.

It is hereby recommended that:

- mature students should henceforth be given admission to public Universities in Nigeria.
- university for the gifted should be established for the gifted or talented students that are not up to 16 years so that they can be properly monitored and they would not be discouraged
- Intervention programme should be put in place by the school authority to address the issue of low or moderate school adjustment in the universities
- future researchers should expand the scope of this study to include more universities and more school subjects

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