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# Entrants' Age and Academic Competence of Undergraduates in Universities in Osun State

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of university entrants' age on the academic competence of undergraduates in universities located in Osun State, Nigeria. Motivated by growing concerns about the preparedness and performance of students entering higher education at varying ages, the research seeks to determine whether age at entry serves as a significant predictor of academic success. Using a survey research design, data were collected from undergraduates in the selected universities in Osun State through academic records and structured questionnaires. The investigation into the intricate relationship between admission policy, specifically regarding age, and academic competence among university undergraduates has provided valuable insights into the complexities of the educational landscape in universities across Osun State. This conclusion synthesizes the key findings, highlights the issue of noncompliance with the admission age policy by university management, and explores the nuanced relationship between admission age and academic competence reflecting on the significant influence of admission age on the academic competence of university undergraduates in the state. The findings also reveal statistically significant differences in academic competence associated with age brackets, with older entrants demonstrating higher levels of academic maturity and self-regulation, while younger entrants showed greater adaptability and learning agility. The study recommends that university admission policies and student support programs consider age-related academic needs to enhance learning outcomes. These findings have implications for educational planning and student development strategies in the region. Given these insights, it is recommended that university management adhere to the stipulated minimum admission age. This guideline ensures that students admitted into higher institutions have attained sufficient development across cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains, thereby better equipping them for the academic demands of tertiary education.

**Key words:** University; Entrants' age; Academic competence; Undergraduates

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a pivotal role in national development by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society. In Nigeria, the university system has expanded significantly over the years, leading to increased access and a more diverse student population. Among the various demographic variables that influence students' academic success, age at the time of university entry has received relatively limited attention in educational research, especially within the Nigerian context. Various factors, including gender, age, intellectual readiness, academic competence, teaching staff, student background, parental socioeconomic status, residential location, language of instruction, educational expenses, study time, and living arrangements, all influence students' academic achievement and learning outcomes when pursuing higher education.

Academic competence, which encompasses cognitive ability, study skills, motivation, and adaptability, is a key

indicator of student success in higher education (Santrock, 2011). While factors such as socio-economic status, gender, and prior academic achievement have been widely studied, the age at which students enter university is often overlooked, despite its potential impact on learning behaviour, classroom engagement, and overall academic performance. Koenig, Gray, Lewis, and Martins (2015) assert that developmental maturity can influence students' ability to manage academic workloads, interact with peers, and remain motivated throughout their studies.

The academic competence of learners refers to their capacity to excel in academic endeavours at a high level. Currently, degree-seeking students exhibit a broader diversity of origins and present a greater array of needs. Typically, students are required to adhere to the dominant epistemologies, organisational structures, cultures, and practices. They are required to conform to the university's prescribed criteria for studenthood. Academic competence is the aptitude to excel in academic settings, encompassing the acquisition of academic skills such as reading, writing, and critical thinking, as well as the capacity to effectively interact with academic content and navigate the academic atmosphere. Variations in cognitive capability, motivation, and prior knowledge, together with environmental factors such as the quality of instruction, availability of resources, and support from family and peers, can all influence a student's academic competence.

Academic competence is a critical determinant of success in higher education and has long been a focal point in educational research. In the context of Nigerian universities, increasing attention is being paid to the interplay between demographic factors and academic performance. One such factor is the age at which students enter university. As universities across Nigeria continue to admit students of varying age ranges due to differences in educational paths, delays, and regional disparities, it becomes imperative to explore how entrance age might influence academic competence.

Academic competence encompasses not only intellectual abilities but also other important attributes such as perseverance, self-control, and effective time management (Ibraheem, 2024). Research has shown that social support, along with the components and interventions mentioned above, is a substantial indicator of academic competence. Students who perceive greater support from their parents, peers, and teachers are more likely to exhibit higher levels of academic competence and engagement (Botch and Piolat 2015). It is the collection of skills required to actively participate in and effectively finish a programme of education. It is increasingly acknowledged that tertiary students require assistance in developing the unique academic skills necessary for higher education, and undergraduate students' retention and participation are often considered crucial. Academic competency is a fluid concept that can undergo changes. While certain individuals may possess innate intellectual aptitude, others may need to exert further diligence to develop these attributes (Akanmu & Tiamiyu, 2021). Moreover, several circumstances throughout life, such as modifications to the living or educational setting, might influence academic competence and may require ongoing support and interventions.

Research in developmental and educational psychology suggests that age can impact cognitive development, maturity, and adaptability to academic demands. According to Santrock (2011), younger students may lack the emotional and intellectual maturity to cope with the rigors of university education, while older students may exhibit better focus and resilience, contributing to higher academic achievement. Similarly, Koenig, Gray, Lewis, and Martins (2015) note that age-related differences often influence learning styles, classroom engagement, and the ability to collaborate with peers.

In the Nigerian context, university entrants range from teenagers directly out of secondary school to mature students returning to education. This diversity creates a heterogeneous learning environment with varying levels of preparedness. Bernstein etal (2019) highlights that such variability in student demographics, especially age, can influence classroom dynamics and academic outcomes. Furthermore, institutional challenges such as large class sizes, as discussed by Whitney Ballard (2023), often exacerbate difficulties for younger or less mature students who may require more personalized support. Moreover, large class sizes, limited academic support, and infrastructural challenges commonly found in Nigerian universities may disproportionately affect younger or less experienced students who may lack the resilience or self-regulatory skills to thrive independently (Whitney Ballard, 2023). As a result, it becomes essential to examine whether students' age at the time of university entry plays a significant role in shaping their academic competence and, by extension, their overall performance and retention in the university system.

It is not uncommon for university entrants to range widely in age due to differences in educational pathways, regional disparities in access to education, and socio-cultural factors. Some students enter university shortly after secondary school, while others may delay enrollment due to factors such as financial constraints, examination resits, or personal responsibilities. Bernstein etal (2019) emphasizes that such age diversity within the classroom can influence teaching and learning dynamics, as students at different life stages often have differing levels of readiness and expectations.

Despite these insights, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on the relationship between entrants' age and academic competence among undergraduates in Nigeria. Most studies have focused on socio-economic background, gender, or previous academic performance, leaving a gap in understanding

how age at entry correlates with academic readiness and performance. Addressing this gap is essential, especially in the face of ongoing education reforms and a growing youth population seeking access to higher education.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the relationship between university entrants' age and the academic competence of undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Understanding this relationship could inform admission policies, curriculum development, and student support programs aimed at enhancing academic outcomes across diverse student populations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic competence is broadly defined as a student's ability to effectively apply cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills to achieve academic success. It involves a combination of knowledge, study habits, motivation, time management, and the ability to adjust to academic environments (Santrock, 2011). The determinants of academic competence are diverse, with age at university entry increasingly gaining attention as a potentially influential factor.

### 2.1 Age and Cognitive Maturity

Developmental psychology suggests that age influences cognitive and emotional maturity, both of which are crucial to academic success. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, individuals typically reach the formal operational stage during late adolescence, gaining the ability to think abstractly and reason logically. Santrock (2011) supports this view, noting that older students often exhibit greater self-regulation, goal orientation, and task persistence- traits that contribute to higher academic competence.

Koenig, Gray, Lewis, and Martins (2015) conducted a study examining the academic adjustment of students based on age and found that students who enter university at an older age tend to have better academic discipline, time management, and adaptability. These attributes often translate to stronger performance in tasks that require independent learning and critical thinking, which are central to university-level education.

### 2.2 Academic Competence and Readiness

Academic readiness includes not only cognitive preparedness but also emotional and social skills necessary for thriving in a higher education environment. Bernstein et al (2019) emphasized that older students are often more self-directed and purposeful in their studies compared to their younger counterparts, who may struggle with the increased autonomy and reduced structure characteristic of university life. Younger entrants may face challenges in transitioning from the highly structured environment of secondary school to the self-regulated learning required in universities.

In the Nigerian context, this issue is particularly pertinent due to the wide age range of students admitted into universities. Some students gain entry as early as 16 or 17, while others may be well into their twenties or older due to delays from examination failures, economic constraints, or other socio-political factors (Okafor & Egbo, 2017). These differences can contribute to varied levels of academic readiness and competence.

### 2.3 Empirical Review on Age and Academic Performance

Few empirical studies in Nigeria have directly addressed the relationship between age and academic competence. However, related research has provided some insights. For instance, Yusuf and Alabi (2012) found that age was a significant predictor of academic performance in a sample of university students in southwestern Nigeria, with older students generally outperforming their younger peers. They argued that maturity brought by age contributed to better focus and fewer distractions, especially in managing academic stress.

Similarly, Adebayo and Salami (2014) explored age as a moderator in the relationship between academic stress and performance, concluding that older students had better coping mechanisms and were less likely to be overwhelmed by academic pressure. These findings highlight the importance of considering age as a variable in discussions around academic planning and student support services.

The influence of admission age on the academic competence of students is a complex and debated topic. While there is limited empirical research specifically focusing on the admission age as a determinant, there are studies that explore related factors. One area of research that touches upon this topic is the concept of age and educational outcomes. For example, a study by Elacqua, Martínez, and Santos (2011) examined the relationship between age and academic performance among university students. The findings indicated that older students tended to have higher academic performance compared to their younger peers, suggesting that maturity and life experiences may contribute to academic competence.

Some research has focused on the long-term effects of early or late school entry. For example, Bedard and Dhuey (2006) found that students who started school late had lower educational attainment and earnings in adulthood. Lourenço, (2012) emphasizes the importance of cognitive maturation and readiness for learning. According to their theories, individuals develop certain cognitive abilities and skills as they progress through different stages of development, which can influence their readiness for academic pursuits. Additionally, the concept of academic redshirting has received attention in research. Academic redshirting refers to the practice of delaying a child's entry into kindergarten or school to provide them with additional time for development. Studies by Bedard and

Dhuey (2012) and Elder & Lubotsky (2009) have explored the effects of delayed school entry and found potential advantages for academic performance in later years.

Research findings, such as those presented by Currie et al. (2007), substantiate the idea that older pupils possess an initial edge. An examination of American kindergarteners revealed that older kids (with a median age of 5.6 years) exhibited superior reading and math abilities in comparison to their younger peers (with a median age of 5.2 years). This benefit was also associated with heightened identification as gifted and talented (Huang, 2014). Cognitive maturation may help explain this phenomenon. As children get older, they exhibit more advanced executive function abilities such as attention, working memory, and self-regulation, which are essential for achieving academic achievement (Coldren, 2013). In addition, older kids may have enhanced social-emotional maturity, resulting in improved classroom engagement and participation (McEwan & Shapiro, 2008). Nevertheless, the impact of admission age appears to decrease as time goes on. Schanzenbach (2015) found that the initial academic benefits of admission age tend to diminish by the time students reach high school or have limited influence on their post-secondary education and employment prospects. Factors such as motivation, study habits, and socioeconomic background have a greater influence on long-term academic success (Angermueller et al., 2016)

Moreover, implementing a uniform entrance age policy can have negative consequences. Quinlan, (2003) conducted research highlighting the significance of individual readiness and asserting that success cannot solely be attributed to age. Admission decisions should take into account the varying rates of maturation in children, as well as aspects such as social and emotional development, cognitive aptitude, and home environment. Additionally, it is necessary to consider the cultural and socio-economic settings. Delaying the start of school in areas with limited resources may worsen existing disparities (Geiser & Santelices, 2007). On the other hand, certain cultures may find that early socialisation in organised environments might enhance the process of learning (Mohammad et al., 2018). The research landscape emphasises the necessity of adaptable and ever-changing strategies for school admission.

### 2.4 Challenges in Large Classroom Settings

The structure of many Nigerian universities, characterized by large class sizes and inadequate student-teacher interaction, further complicates the role of age in academic competence. Whitney Ballard (2023) argued that younger students in particular are at a disadvantage in overcrowded classrooms, where individual learning needs are often overlooked. Without tailored academic support, these students may struggle to develop the competence required to excel.

### 2.5 Gap in the Literature

While international literature acknowledges the relevance of age in academic performance, the specific context of Nigerian universities remains under-researched. Most existing studies focus on broader demographic variables without isolating age as a key factor. There is a need for comprehensive studies that examine how age at university entry correlates with academic competence, taking into accounts the unique challenges and structures of Nigerian higher education institutions.

## 3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Academic competence is a vital predictor of student success and progression in higher education. In Nigerian universities, the increasing diversity in student demographics- particularly in terms of age at entry- raises important questions about how developmental differences may influence academic outcomes. The entrance age for Nigerian undergraduate students is governed by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the National University Commission (NUC). It is required that students be 16 years old as of October of the year of admission. This is to guarantee that learners are adequately prepared intellectually, psychologically, and emotionally for the academic challenges they will face. Before being accepted into the university, it is assumed that a 16-year-old youngster should possess the necessary maturity to handle the academic challenges that lie ahead. The current prevailing phenomenon in the country is the escalating rate of university drop-outs. Each year, there is a significant number of students who withdraw from school, and there are also instances of undergraduates switching departments due to their inability to handle the demands of their chosen courses upon entry to the university. Consequently, it is necessary to verify if the learners within the specified age range are psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually ready for the challenges they will face and whether the universities are adhering to the prescribed entrance age as mandated by the regulatory agencies.

Despite the relevance of this issue, there is a dearth of empirical studies in the Nigerian context that specifically examine the relationship between university entrants' age and their academic competence. Most existing research focuses on general predictors of academic performance, such as socio-economic background, gender, or previous educational experience, with little emphasis on how age at entry might impact students' ability to cope with the academic demands of university education.

This lack of focused research is particularly concerning given the current realities of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate student support systems, and a largely uniform academic structure that may not cater to the diverse developmental needs of students across age groups. It

remains unclear whether younger students possess the maturity and self-regulation skills necessary to succeed in such environments, or whether older students, despite having more life experience, face unique adjustment challenges that may hinder their academic performance.

Therefore, there is a compelling need to investigate the extent to which university entrants' age influences academic competence among undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing age-sensitive policies, improving academic support services, and ensuring that all students- regardless of their age- are positioned for academic success.

## 4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between university entrants' age and the academic competence of undergraduates in Nigerian universities.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

• determine the level of academic competence of undergraduates in Osun State Nigeria;

2. • examine the influence of admission age policy on academic competence of undergraduates in the study area.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

What is the level of academic competence of undergraduates in the study area?

**Hypothesis**

**H01=** There is no significant influence of admission age on undergraduates academic competence in universities in Osun State, Nigeria.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study comprised 8,464 admitted undergraduates for the 2021/2022 academic session of the two public universities in Osun State.

**Table 1**
**New Entrants into Universities in Osun State**

| Institution | Numbers of students |
|---|---|
| Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife | 5,547 |
| Osun State University, Osogbo | 2,915 |
| Total | 8,462 |

*Sources*: Obafemi Awolowo University's Admission office and Osun State University's Admission office 2022

The sample consisted of 382 undergraduate students drawn from six faculties across Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and Osun State University, Osogbo. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula for sample size calculation. Three faculties were randomly selected from each of the two universities using a simple random sampling technique. A convenience sampling technique was then employed to select 64 students each from four faculties- Education, Arts, Social Sciences, and Science—and 63 students each from the remaining two faculties- Health Sciences and Administration—resulting in a total sample of 382 undergraduates. This was done to ensure adequate representation of the study population. Accordingly, the calculated sample size using Yamane's formula for a population of 8,464 at a 5% level of significance is approximately 382.

An instrument titled the **"Admission Age and Academic Competence Questionnaire" (AAAC-Q)** was developed to collect data from respondents with the aim of assessing the influence of admission age on academic competence among university undergraduates. The AAAC-Q comprised three sections. The first section contained demographic information and included seven items. The second section consisted of five items designed to elicit responses regarding the extent to which universities adhere to the stipulated admission age. The third section contained ten items addressing issues related to the academic competence of university undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria.

The validity of the instrument was established through face and content validation by presenting it to the research supervisor and other experts in the Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the instrument. Data obtained were subjected to the split-half reliability procedure and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 24). The resulting correlation coefficient was 0.73, indicating that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the study.

Data were collected through the self-administered questionnaire. The respondents- fresh undergraduates for the 2021/2022 academic session from two universities in Osun State-completed the questionnaires individually as they were distributed by the researchers. Data collection lasted for three weeks, and all administered questionnaires were retrieved, resulting in a 100% return rate. All returned instruments were deemed valid and usable for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics (percentages) were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics (independent samples t-test) were employed to test the hypotheses and determine the influence of admission age on the academic competence of undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria.

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1 Research Question One

What is the level of academic competence of university undergraduates in Osun state?

To answer this question, respondents' responses were calculated and subjected to analysis using percentage. The results are as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**
**Level of Academic Competence**

| Items: I have the | Always | Sometimes | Ones in a while | Never | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ability to identify the central themes in reading materials | 161(42.15%) | 214(56.02%) | 7(1.83%) | - | 382(100%) |
| ability to differentiate between real information and supporting details | 139(36.3%) | 176(46.07%) | 64(16.7%) | 3(0.7%) | 382(100%) |
| ability to review notes regularly | 109(28.53%) | 183(47.91%) | 90(23.56%) | - | 382(100%) |
| ability to adapt note taking | 125(32.72%) | 186(48.69%) | 66(17.28%) | 5(1.31%) | 382(100%) |
| ability to manage time | 104(27.23%) | 185(48.43%) | 93(24.35%) | - | 382(100%) |
| ability to seek advice and guidance | 111(29.06%) | 159(41.62%) | 95(24.87%) | 17(4.45%) | 382(100%) |
| ability to strike a balance between social life and academic life | 114(29.84%) | 165(43.19%) | 89(23.30%) | 14(3.66%) | 382(100%) |
| ability to partake in co-curricullar activities | 88(23.04%) | 188(49.21%) | 92(24.08%) | 14(3.66%) | 382(100%) |
| ability to stay focus on my academic | 111(29.06%) | 172(45.03%) | 88(23.04%) | 11(2.88%) | 382(100%) |
| ability to multi-task | 120(31.41%) | 167(43.72%) | 85(22.25%) | 10(2.62%) | 382(100%) |

*Source*: Field Survey, 2024.

The results provide valuable insights into the academic competence of undergraduate students. Among the responses obtained, 42.15% of respondents reported that they are always able to recognize important themes in reading materials and effectively summarize them, while 56.02% indicated they do so sometimes, and 1.83% reported doing so only once in a while. This reflects a reasonable level of competence in extracting essential information from academic texts.

In terms of distinguishing between key points and supplementary details when taking notes, 36.39% of respondents reported that they always engage in this practice, whereas 46.07% do so sometimes, and 16.7% only once in a while. These results suggest room for improvement in consistently identifying vital information during note-taking.

Regarding the habit of reviewing and revising notes, 28.53% of the respondents stated that they always engage in this practice, 47.91% reported doing so sometimes, and 23.56% only once in a while. This indicates that a significant portion of the respondents is actively involved in evaluating and updating their notes, although not consistently.

Furthermore, 32.72% of the respondents indicated that they always adjust their note-taking methods based on the complexity of the subject matter and materials being studied. Meanwhile, 48.69% do so sometimes, and 17.28% once in a while, demonstrating a relatively low level of adaptability in their learning strategies. Similarly, while 27.23% of respondents always adjust their time management strategies according to academic tasks, 48.43% reported doing so sometimes, and 24.35% only once in a while, indicating potential for improvement in this area.

When it comes to seeking advice and guidance from educators, 29.06% of respondents reported doing so always, 41.62% sometimes, and 24.87% once in a while. Notably, 4.45% had never sought advice or guidance from professionals, reflecting a relatively low level of engagement in utilizing available academic support services.

In terms of balancing academic and social life, 29.84% of respondents reported always achieving this balance, 43.19% stated they sometimes do, and 23.30% only once in a while, raising concerns about their ability to effectively allocate time for studying. Additionally, 49.21% of the respondents sometimes engage in co-curricular activities that align with their academic interests, while 23.04% always do so.

Regarding multitasking and managing academic workloads, 31.41% of respondents indicated they are always able to handle multiple assignments and projects concurrently, while 43.72% do so sometimes, and 22.25% once in a while. However, 2.62% reported never being able to multitask, suggesting a moderate level of competence in this area.

In conclusion, the findings highlight both strengths and areas for development in the academic competence of undergraduate students. While many demonstrate proficiency in certain areas such as identifying key themes and engaging in note-taking, there remains room for improvement in adaptability, time management, and seeking academic support. Addressing these gaps can enhance students' academic performance and contribute to their overall success in higher education.

**Hypothesis**: There is no significant influence of admission age on the academic competence of university undergraduates in Osun State. To test this hypothesis, responses were calculated and analysed using Chi-Square. The results are presented in Table.

**Table 3**
**Influence of Admission Age on Academic Competence of Undergraduates**

| Current CGPA | Below 16 Years | 16 Years | Above 16 Years | Total | χ2-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pass | 1(6%) | 0 | 16(94%) | 17(100%) | 0.042 |
| Third class | 14(25%) | 8(15%) | 33(60%) | 55(100%) | |
| Second class lower | 24(18%) | 22(16%) | 88(66%) | 134(100%) | |
| Second class upper | 25(18%) | 10(7%) | 103(75%) | 138(100%) | |
| First class | 3(8%) | 6(16%) | 29(76%) | 38(100%) | |

The table presents the results of a correlation analysis examining the influence of admission age on the academic competence of university undergraduates in Osun State. The analysis was conducted using the Chi-square test at the 0.05 level of significance, yielding a $\chi^2$ value of 0.042. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, thereby supporting the alternative hypothesis, which states that admission age has a significant influence on the academic competence of university undergraduates in Osun State.

## 7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To facilitate a comprehensive discussion, this section aligns the findings with the objectives of the study. The discussion is enriched with insights from relevant literature, observations, comments, and arguments that either support or contradict the results obtained. The findings are discussed in accordance with the results of the data analysis.

### 7.1 Level of Academic Competence

The study revealed that many respondents demonstrated an ability to balance academic and social commitments, along with effective time management skills that have supported their academic endeavours. However, some respondents still found it challenging to maintain this balance. This aligns with the view of Botch and Piolat (2015), who stated that students capable of balancing academic work with co-curricular activities and social obligations are more likely to experience higher levels of engagement, satisfaction, and retention in college. Lourenço (2012), also noted that teenagers who could manage both academic responsibilities and social activities exhibited greater academic motivation, achievement, and well-being compared to those who could not.

Additionally, the study found that some respondents effectively took notes, identified important information, and reviewed their notes regularly. This demonstrated a high level of competence in extracting essential academic content and adapting their note-taking strategies based on the complexity of the subject matter—an indication of flexibility and adaptability in learning strategies. These findings are consistent with the perspective of Geiser and Santelices (2007), who posited that note-taking enhances information retention and improves memory by actively engaging with academic material. They further argued that students who regularly engage in note-taking are better positioned to comprehend course content. Similarly, Akanmu and Tiamiyu (2021) emphasized that while note-taking is an important study strategy, it is most effective when combined with methods such as self-testing, active reading, and spaced repetition.

The study also highlighted that respondents frequently adjusted their time management strategies based on academic demands and often sought guidance from mentors and instructors. This adaptability significantly contributed to their academic competence. These findings are in agreement with Elacqua, Martínez, and Santos (2011), who studied the relationship between time management and academic achievement among law students. They found that students with strong time management skills attained higher GPAs and were more likely to pass the bar examination. Supporting this, Geiser and Santelices (2007) observed that effective time management among Korean university students led to improved academic performance and reduced stress levels.

Furthermore, respondents demonstrated the ability to manage multiple assignments and projects simultaneously, indicating a high level of intellectual maturity and readiness—a critical component of academic competence. Students with strong intellectual readiness are often academically proficient. This is supported by Bedard and Dhuey (2012), whose meta-analysis revealed a strong correlation (ranging from 0.50 to 0.70) between intelligence test scores and academic competence. Similarly, Elder and Lubinski (2009) found that high intelligence correlates with greater academic success in college and beyond.

### 7.2 Influence of Admission Age on Academic Competence

The study also discovered a weak influence of admission age on academic competence. Respondents admitted at a younger age exhibited lower academic performance compared to those admitted at an older age. This disparity may be attributed to underdeveloped cognitive abilities among the younger students. This finding is consistent with Bedard and Dhuey (2006), who reported that students who began school at a later age often experienced lower educational attainment and lifetime earnings. Schanzenbach (2015) also noted that while early admission may offer short-term academic advantages, these benefits often diminish by high school and have minimal impact on post-secondary education and career outcomes.

Consequently, the study suggests that a uniform entrance age policy may have unintended negative consequences. Quinlan (2003) supports this view,

emphasizing that academic success should not be based solely on age, but also on individual readiness.

Cognitive maturation may account for these findings. As children age, they develop more advanced executive functions—such as attention, working memory, and self-regulation—which are crucial for academic success (Coldren, 2013). Older students may also demonstrate greater social-emotional maturity, enhancing classroom participation and engagement (McEwan & Shapiro, 2008).

Given these insights, it is recommended that university management adhere to the stipulated minimum admission age. This guideline ensures that students admitted into higher institutions have attained sufficient development across cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains, thereby better equipping them for the academic demands of tertiary education.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The investigation into the intricate relationship among admission policy , specifically regarding age, and academic competence among university undergraduates has provided valuable insights into the complexities of the educational landscape in universities across Osun State. This conclusion synthesizes the key findings, highlights the issue of noncompliance with the admission age policy by university management, explores the nuanced relationship between admission age and academic competence reflecting on the significant influence of admission age on the academic competence of university undergraduates in the state.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 9.1 Enforcement of Admission Age Policy

Regulatory bodies such as the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) should impose penalties on institutions that fail to comply with the admission age policy. Such enforcement will likely increase institutional adherence and uphold the integrity of the policy.

### 9.2 Discouragement of Grade Skipping

Parents should be discouraged from allowing their children to skip academic grades, as this often leads to early graduation from secondary school. Students who progress through each educational stage appropriately are not expected to graduate from high school before the age of 16. Ensuring learners complete each stage allows for adequate intellectual and emotional maturity, enabling them to effectively manage the demands of higher education.

### 9.3 Adjustment of Admission Age Policy

The admission age policy should be reviewed and potentially increased by one or two years. This adjustment would allow students more time to develop the intellectual maturity, life experience, and emotional readiness necessary to thrive in the higher education environment. Higher education is not solely about academic achievement; it also demands moral responsibility, perseverance, life skills, and emotional resilience.

### 9.4 Strict Compliance by University Management

University management must adhere strictly to the stipulated admission age policy. Institutions have access to mechanisms for verifying applicants' ages and should utilize these tools to ensure compliance. This will help foster a student population that is better prepared intellectually, emotionally, and socially to navigate the challenges of university life and to develop into well-rounded individuals.

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