

**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A CORRELATE OF ACADEMIC
ADJUSTMENT OF UNDERGRADUATES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN
ANAMBRA STATE**

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Abstract

The study investigated emotional intelligence as a correlate of academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 14,101 first year undergraduates from two public universities in Anambra state. A sample of 705 respondents was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Instruments used for data collection were; Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS), and Students Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The instruments were validated by three experts in Guidance and Counseling. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha. The computation yielded co-efficient values of 0.91, and 0.81 for EIS and SACQ respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed a moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates. The findings of the study also showed a weak positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male undergraduates and a moderate positive relationship of female first year undergraduates. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that university administrators should prioritize creating a supportive campus environment that fosters academic adjustment.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Academic Adjustment, Undergraduates.

Introduction

Transition from secondary school to university often causes much stress and uncertainty for most students. The stress and uncertainty stem from a combination of not

having unrealistic expectations of the university experiences and being faced with different challenges in relation to approaches to teaching, learning, assessment, financial and social adjustment issues. Students have to be prepared to deal with their challenges by learning and internalizing the character as well as the rules and regulations that govern the institutions they are attending. However, some students enter universities with psychological and cognitive resources that support them effectively and enable them to meet these challenges, while others find it difficult to adjust to the complexities of the educational setting. The way in which students go about resolving these challenges is known as adjustment.

Adjustment is the process of altering one's behaviour to achieve a harmonious relationship with one's environment. Samtrock (as cited in Igbo et al, 2021) defined adjustment as a continuous process by which a person changes his environment in the face of need for adaptation. Similarly, Singh (2015) conceptualized adjustment as a behavioural process by which humans maintain equilibrium among various needs or between their needs and obstacles of their environment. It is used to emphasize the individual's struggle to get along and survive in his social and physical environment. In this process, the individual makes an effort to maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment. The issue of adjustment is of great importance to all individuals, especially to the students who should be helped in developing good adjustment besides intellectual progress. Merlin and Sudhesh (2023), identified four components of school adjustment: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment.

Academic adjustment is the ways and means of an undergraduate's adaptation to the university environment for achievement of success. It is the ability of students to develop coping skills and learning strategies aiming at achieving satisfactory academic success in their new environment. Olowodunonye and Irewola, (2022) defined academic adjustment as the ways and means of an undergraduate adaptation to the university environment for achievement of academic success. Thus, the amount of accomplishment students displayed in their studies shows the level of their academic adjustment. Similarly, Ikpe et al (2021) viewed academic adjustment as an individual's ability to meet academic demands, to be attentive, to participate in class activities and to become a learner capable of independent learning. The researchers define academic adjustment as the extent to which students successfully cope with various educational demands, expectations and challenges of the new academic environment. It is a person's capacity to meet academic demands, be attentive, participate in class activities and develop into a learner with a capacity for independent learning.

However, academic adjustment has been reported to be the foremost and common issues among first year university students in Nigeria (Igbo et al, 2016). As students move from secondary school to university environments, they are required to adapt to an environment that not only changes in respect to academic requirements but also in respect to personal independence. As they transit to higher institutions with the aim of achieving academic excellence, they struggle with all manner of academic adjustment problems such as overcrowded lecture halls, time management, incompatibility of student-teacher ratio, heavy assignments, semester system, inadequate resources to perform academic work, different teaching techniques, developing new study habits, absence of freedom from parental guidance and peer pressure. Inability to adapt to these challenges could lead to academic adjustment problems. Academic adjustment problems can have negative effects such as poor academic performance, academic frustration, increased stress and anxiety, dropout rate, strained relationship, aggressive behaviours, cultism, disobedience to institutional rules. It has been

observed that various factors influence academic adjustment of first year students in the university and one of them is emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, interpret, manage, assess and react to not only one's emotion but also the emotion of others. Individuals with a high degree of emotional intelligence know themselves well and are also able to sense the emotions of others. Olowodunoye and Irewole (2022) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to assess one's emotions and the emotion of others in the environment and apply it appropriately. It is being able to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use them to guide one's thinking and actions. Similarly, Azilah et al (2020) conceptualized emotional intelligence as the capacity of the "self" to manage, understand, select and control its emotion and those of others, by helping to make decisions in stressful situations, avoid states of anxiety and negative feelings, as well as better perception of one's own emotions and self-confidence. The researchers define emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and effectively express emotions in one's self and others. It involves being aware of one's own emotion, discerning the emotions of others, and using this awareness to navigate social interaction, make decisions, solve problems and manage stress.

Emotional intelligence is comprehended with four interrelated components. These include perceiving, understanding, managing and using emotions (Goyal & Khan, 2022). Perceiving emotions is the fundamental capacity to detect and identify ours and other people's emotions. Understanding emotions entails using the precise information that different emotions convey and understanding how that could influence behaviours. Each emotion informs people in a unique way about their surroundings and energizes them to take specific actions. Managing emotion means to consider the subsequent actions necessary to improve one's behaviour when one swiftly identifies emotions and comprehends their meaning. After understanding and recognizing emotions, it may lead to managing emotions in a certain way like breathing and relaxation exercises, sharing, chatting, and apologizing, among others. While using emotions entails utilizing one's emotion more than merely coping with or controlling them. It encompasses using emotion to improve our reasoning, decision-making and interpersonal interactions. Emotional intelligence has further been explained as a concept that captures a broad collection of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence is the external intelligence which an individual utilizes to comprehend and maintain relations with the other individuals. It is necessary for promoting characteristics like sympathy, empathy and strengthening powerful relationships. On the other hand, intrapersonal intelligence is internal intelligence which is used by an individual to know and understand himself which is necessary for self-awareness, self-inspiration and self-regulations. The management of interpersonal and intrapersonal emotions is important for academic adjustment of first year students in the universities. Students having emotional intelligence are more expected to regulate, understand and control emotions excellently in themselves as well as in other students.

Gender is one of the key factors that relate to academic adjustment of first year students. Gender refers to socially, culturally constructed characteristics which are ascribed to male and female in any society. Gender according to Butler (2016) referred to roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, societies and cultures. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviours of both men and women. Gender is determined by attributes such as tasks, functions, and roles of men and women in the society rather than the biological characteristics

of men and women (Oguejiofor & Ezenwanne 2020). However, the gender gap is one of the variables in the educational system that tends to influence academic adjustment of first year students due to some societal stereotypes. Research on gender differences in academic adjustment showed that male undergraduates have better academic adjustment than female students (Lathriatpull, 2018). Another study by Bhagot (as cited in Aloka, 2022) found that female undergraduates are better academically adjusted than male. While Aloka (2022) indicated no gender differences in academic adjustment among first year undergraduates.

Understanding what motivates students to adjust academically remains a critical issue to stakeholders in education. Although a good number of researchers like Ikpe et al (2021) investigated emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of university students, the problem of academic adjustment of first year undergraduates seems to persist and remains a source of worry and concern to many researchers. This has necessitated this study which investigated emotional intelligence as a correlate of academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.

Statement of the Problem

The hope of the government, parents, and university administrators is that students who join university will be successfully adjusted and acquire knowledge, skills, abilities and complete studies within the stipulated period and be ushered into the world of work. This seems not the case as some first year students encounter difficulties in their academic adjustment. However, first year students in higher institutions seem to be confronted with some academic adjustment difficulties such as overcrowded lecture halls, heavy assignments, time management, different teaching techniques, course load, developing new study habits, absence of freedom from parental control, incompatibility of student-teacher ratio. Inability to adapt to these challenges could lead to academic adjustment problems. These can have negative effects such as poor academic performance, academic frustration, increased stress and anxiety, high dropout rate, strained relationship, aggressive behaviours, cultism, disobedience to institutional rules, impact on future career, among others. Addressing academic adjustment problems earlier on through seeking support and developing effective coping strategies is crucial to mitigate these negative effects and foster a more positive and successful first year undergraduate academic adjustment. This has necessitated this study which investigated emotional intelligence as a correlate of academic adjustment among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.
2. Examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state?
2. What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.
2. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.

Literature Review

Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment. For instance, a study by Ikpe et al (2021) on emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of undergraduates showed a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment. Similarly, Melhem et al (2015) examined emotional intelligence and academic adjustment among first year university students in North Jordan. The finding revealed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment. In the same vein, McKinney (2019) explored emotional intelligence on academics and social adjustment among college students. The results indicated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic and social college adjustment among students.

Iruloh and Ukaegbu (2018) examined emotional intelligence competencies as predictors of academic adjustment of first year university students in Rivers state. Results showed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted academic adjustment of first year undergraduates. Yaday (2018) explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment of senior secondary school students of Jind. He found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment of students. The study of Jillani et al (2023) on emotional intelligence, resilience and adjustment of university students indicated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment of university students. The findings of the study also revealed a significant gender difference between emotional intelligence and adjustment of university students. Female students scored higher on emotional intelligence and university adjustment scale as compared to males. Basu (2019) investigated emotional intelligence and adjustment: an analysis of college students. The findings showed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment. Olowodunoye and Irewole (2022) explored the moderating role of emotional intelligence on the relationship between perceived stress and academic adjustment among undergraduates in Ondo state. Results showed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted undergraduates' academic adjustment. The study of Arun (2019) on the relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment of B.Ed in Government College of Education, Kozhikode indicated no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment. Goyal and Khan (2022) examined emotional intelligence and adjustment: An empirical survey. The study indicated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment of secondary school students.

Research Method

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 14,101 (6854 males and 7247 females) first year students in public universities in Anambra

state. The sample consisted of 705 (343 males and 362 females) undergraduates. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample. Two instruments used for data collection were Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) developed by Shutte et al (1998) and Students Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1984). The instruments were validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. The computation yielded coefficient values of 0.91 and 0.81 for EIS and SACQ respectively. The researcher administered the instruments to the respondents with the help of four research assistants. On the spot delivery method for administration and retrieval of the instruments was adopted. The data collected were analysed thus: Research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, while the hypotheses were tested using a test of significance of Pearson at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question one: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state?

Table 1: Pearson’s Correlation between Emotional Intelligence Scores and Undergraduates’ Academic Adjustment Scores in Public Universities in Anambra State.

Variable	1	2	Remark
1. Emotional Intelligence scores	1.00	0.40	Moderate Positive Relationship
2. Academic Adjustment scores	0.40	1.00	

Table 1 shows that the correlation between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment scores yielded $r = 0.40$. The value indicates that there was a moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment among first year undergraduates of public universities in Anambra. This shows that as undergraduate students’ emotional intelligence increases, their adjustment to their academic activities also increases at a moderate rate.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state?

Table 2: Pearson’s Correlation between Emotional Intelligence Scores and Academic Adjustment Scores of Male and Female Undergraduates in Public Universities in Anambra State.

Variables	1	2	Remark
Male			
1. Emotional Intelligence scores	1.00	0.37	Weak Positive Relationship
2. Academic Adjustment scores	0.37	1.00	
Female			
1. Emotional Intelligence scores	1.00	0.41	Moderate Positive Relationship
2. Academic Adjustment scores	0.41	1.00	

As shown in Table 2, Pearson's correlation between emotional intelligence scores and academic adjustment scores of male undergraduates yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.37

which shows a weak positive relationship. On the other hand, the correlation between the same variables produced $r = 0.41$ which implies a moderate positive relationship for the female undergraduates. This suggests that the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment was stronger among the female undergraduates than the male undergraduates.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.

Table 3: Significance of Pearson’s Correlation between Emotional Intelligence Scores and Undergraduates’ Academic Adjustment Scores in Public Universities in Anambra State.

Variable	1	2	p-value	Remark
1.Emotional Intelligence scores	1.00	0.40	0.000	Significant
2. Academic Adjustment scores	0.40	1.00		

As displayed in Table 3, there was a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state, $r = 0.40$, $p < 0.05$. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This suggests that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and undergraduates’ academic adjustment in public universities in Anambra state.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state.

Table 4: Significance of Pearson’s Correlation between Emotional Intelligence Scores and Academic Adjustment of Male and Female Undergraduates in Public Universities in Anambra State.

Variables	1	2	p-values	Remark
Male				
1. Emotional Intelligence scores	1.00	0.37	0.000	Significant
2. Academic Adjustment scores	0.37	1.00		
Female				
1. Emotional Intelligence scores	1.00	0.41	0.000	Significant
2. Academic Adjustment scores	0.41	1.00		

Table 4 shows there was a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and male and female undergraduates’ academic adjustment in public universities in Anambra state, $r_s = 0.37$ and 0.41 , $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was decided

that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and male and female undergraduates' academic adjustment in public universities in Anambra state.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed a moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. This showed that as students' emotional intelligence increases, their adjustment to their academic activities also increases at a moderate rate. The results of the corresponding null hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. This is in line with the findings of McKinney (2019), Iruloh and Ukaegbu (2018), Olowodunoye and Irewole (2022) who revealed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustments of university students. The findings also agree with that of Ikpe et al (2021) who found a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of university students. The moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment could be that first year students can manage their emotions reasonably well, which helps them handle typical academic stressors such as exams. However, their emotional regulation may not be strong enough to handle more intense or unexpected stressors, leading to only moderate positive effects on academic adjustment.

The findings of the study also revealed a weak positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male undergraduates and a moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of female undergraduates. The findings of the corresponding null hypothesis showed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. The findings of this study agree with that of Goyal and Ichan (2022), Jillani et al (2023) who found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female students. The reason for a weak positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment among male students may be due to societal expectations and gender norms that encourage men to suppress their emotions. As a result, male students may not utilize their emotional intelligence as effectively as they could, leading to a weaker relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment. On the other hand, the moderate positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment among female students may be due to the fact they are generally more encouraged to develop and express their emotions. As a result, female students may be more likely to use their emotional intelligence to navigate challenges of a new academic environment, leading to a stronger relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment.

Conclusion

The study investigated emotional intelligence as a correlate of academic adjustment among first year undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. Based on the findings, the study concluded that there was a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of students. The study also concluded that there was a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic adjustment of male and female students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

1. Guidance counselors should provide counselling, workshops and resources specially focused on developing emotional intelligence among first year students. They should design and implement programmes that teach students about emotional intelligence, its components and practical strategies to improve their emotional intelligence. They should also provide individual counselling sessions to address personal challenges related to emotional intelligence and academic adjustment.
2. University management should create emotional support programs, such as gender-specific counselling or peer support groups. These programmes should focus on the emotional challenges typically faced by male and female undergraduates, helping each group develop emotional intelligence in ways that suit their needs.
3. The policy makers should implement policies that require universities to develop early intervention programmes for first year students struggling with challenging dynamics or those lacking emotional intelligence.

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