

## School Adjustment and Dispositional Optimism as Correlate of Academic Achievement among Undergraduate Students in Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Babangida Iro, Ph.D.

Email: [irobabangida@yahoo.com](mailto:irobabangida@yahoo.com), [irobabangida@gmail.com](mailto:irobabangida@gmail.com), [biro@noun.edu.ng](mailto:biro@noun.edu.ng)

<sup>2</sup>Sani Ahmadu Gurjiya, Ph.D.

Email: [sanigurjiya@gmail.com](mailto:sanigurjiya@gmail.com)

Tel: 07033020360

<sup>1</sup>National Open University of Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Foundations, Federal University Gusau

### Abstract

This research work investigated school adjustment, dispositional optimism as Correlate of academic achievement among undergraduate students in Nigeria. The study used survey design. The population of the study consisted of 14,756 undergraduate students out of which 378 subjects were sampled from seven conventional universities of the region (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). They consisted both male and female drawn from the faculties of Arts and Sciences. The School Adjustment Scale and Dispositional Optimism Scale were deployed to measure each of the variables, while academic achievement was obtained via students' cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses. Three research hypotheses were formulated and tested. The study did find significant relationships between school adjustment and academic achievement, dispositional optimism and academic achievement as well as school adjustment and dispositional optimism. The study recommended that school administrators should provide necessary school plant to assist students to adjust to the school environment, among others. This could be achieved through counselling, teaching, games and sporting activities.

**Key words:** School Adjustment, Dispositional Optimism and Academic Achievement

### Introduction

It is important to note that, if university students cannot effectively learn and consequently perform poorly academically, it will be difficult to achieve the goal enshrined in the National Policy on Education of the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) as relates to the objectives of the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria, as spelt out in section 1(8) of the policy. It should be noted that, undergraduate students in their peculiar circumstances may likely be exposed to various kinds of academic and psychological traits that may likely hindered their academic achievement. Some of these psychological challenges may include problems with school adjustment and dispositional optimism among others which may hamper the possibility of achieving the aforementioned goals and philosophy of education in Nigeria. No matter what, most of the undergraduate students encountered obstacles they did not anticipate during the transition to university. It remains a challenge for the students on how to adjust to university life and its academic activities.

**School Adjustment and Dispositional Optimism... (Iro & Gurjiya, 2022)**

It is sad to note that academic achievement of university students in North West Zone, Nigeria in recent times has been on the downward trend. Therefore doing well among undergraduate students remains a challenge among researchers, teachers, parents, university administrators and government at large towards ensuring and achieving the realization of the stated objectives of university education in Nigerian National Policy on Education. Quite disheartening is the fact that, student's negative feelings and failure to adjust to the university environment is still a persistent problem facing education. Today undergraduate students are facing difficulty in adjustment with the university environment. Some students look forward to university, eager to experience more freedom and adventure. Others may be enthusiastic initially, but then discover that the experiences fall short of their expectations when they don't feel happy, comfortable, or secured in their new environment. Still others know that leaving home will be difficult and therefore dread the thought of leaving for university.

The psychological traits and negative feeling of pessimist behaviours among undergraduate students may make university students to become anxious to achieve success in their academic outcome at all cost, and this may lead to various examination malpractices. In this case, the students may become more impatience, lack confidence in their studies, may not expect the best and easily get upset. Therefore, the importance of the stated problem lies in the fact that if students fail to adjust adequately to university environment, maintain high level of dispositional optimism and becoming more satisfied with their academics are likely to drop out of the system. This may therefore affect the manpower development of the nation and particularly the education of the Nigerian youth especially in the North West Zone, Nigeria. It has been a debate over the years on the falling standard of education in Nigeria of which majority of the researchers believed that education standard has fallen in Nigeria, especially in the North West Zone, Nigeria, and this motivated the researcher to investigate.

School adjustment is defined by Fara, Ghazali and Syeda (2013) as a behavioural process by which an individual maintains a balance among various needs that he encountered at a given point in time. Psychologically, school adjustment, refers to the behavioural process by which humans and other animals maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacles of their environments. In addition, Schunk, Pintrich and Meece (2010) mentioned that, school adjustment has been construed historically in terms of children's academic progress or achievement. On a broader level, we might think of adjustment as involving not only children's progress and achievement but also their attitudes toward university, anxieties, loneliness, social support, and academic motivation for example, engagement, avoidance and absences. Students' interaction with the university environment involves academic achievement, personal growth and accomplishments within the classroom. Christopher and Thurber (2012) maintained that, undergraduate students develop expectations about university long before they leave home. Some students look forward to university, eager to experience more freedom and adventure. Sangeeta (2012) opined that, with regard to school adjustment in universities today, many undergraduate students are facing contradictions and hence, facing difficulty in adjustment with university environment.

Paul and Rose (2011) in their study on the selected factors influencing social and academic adjustment of undergraduate students revealed that, a successful adjustment of students to University environment enables them to complete their studies on time. However, students' failure



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to adjust to the University environment is still a persistent problem facing education. This study sought to investigate the influence of selected factors on students' social and academic adjustment at the University. The study adopted ex post facto's Causal-comparative research design. The target population was 4831 undergraduate students enrolled at Egerton. A random sample of 357 student's data was collected using closed and open ended University Students' Questionnaire (USQ) and interview schedule conducted among selected respondents.

The collected data was processed and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means and percentages) and inferential statistics (Chi square, Pearson Correlation and ANOVA). The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 15.0 for windows was used to aid in the data analysis. All tests were done at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level of significance. The findings of the study indicated that interpersonal relationships and the attitude of students towards university environment and academic programme were critical factors influencing school adjustment and academic adjustment of undergraduate students in the university.

Study in school adjustment between Arts and Sciences Chauhan and Maniya (2014) in their study on School adjustment of Higher Secondary University revealed that, the study was School adjustment level of Arts and Science students. Total 120 students were selected randomly in high university. In which 60 students (30 male and 30 females) from Arts faculty and 60 student (30 male and 30 females) from Science faculty.

After analysis was done according to key for the comparison of difference group 't' test was calculated. Interpersonal relationships affect children's academic motivation. Contended that involvement or the quality of relationships with peers and teachers is a powerful motivator noted that university learning can be promoted by learning contents that enhance student involvement with of nets. Research shows that children's lone lines and social dissatisfaction related navigation to university achievement.

The study hypothesis include: There is no difference of school adjustment level of arts male and female. There is no difference of school adjustment level of science male and female. There is no difference of school adjustment level of arts and science male students. There is no difference of school adjustment level of arts and science female students. There is no difference of school adjustment level of male and female students.

Interpretation of tables and testing of hypothesis revealed that HO1: There is no significant effect of school adjustment level between male and female of Arts group. Tested t value is 0.7692 at 0.01 levels. So, we accepted of this null hypothesis. HO2: There is no significant effect of school adjustment level between male and female from Science group. Tested t value is 1.3557 at 0.01 levels. So, we accepted of this null hypothesis. HO3: There is no significant effect of school adjustment level between male from Arts and Science group. Tested t value is 3.2154 at 0.01 levels. So, we accepted of this null hypothesis. HO4: There is significant effect of school adjustment level between female from Arts and Science group. Tested t value is 5.3198 at 0.01 levels. So, we unaccepted of this null hypothesis. HO5: There is significant effect of school adjustment level between all over male and female. Tested t value is 6.0289 at 0.01 levels. So, we unaccepted of this null hypothesis.

Dispositional optimism, on the other hand, in Scheier and Carver (1992) view, dispositional optimism is originated and derived from the Latin word 'optimum' meaning "best." Being optimistic, in the typical sense of the word, ultimately means one expects the best possible outcome



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from any given situation. In other words, dispositional optimism is a tendency to expect good things in the futures. Optimistic students are positive about events in daily life, which is usually referred to in psychology as dispositional optimism. Scheier, Carver, and Bridge (2000) in other words, believed that, it is not important why people expect good things to happen in their lives (e.g. having good luck, being favoured by God and working hard) but, what is important is the generalized optimistic orientation itself, which is a tendency of an individual to hold generalized positive expectancies even when people are confronted with adversity or difficulty in their lives, by feeling and keeping hopeful in their life. Segerstrom (2010) believed that, the future holds positive, rather than negative events or an outcome, which accompanies a number of adaptive psychological qualities, is termed to be dispositional optimism., individuals who hold positive expectations for the future are assumed to believe that good things will occur in their lives, and tend to see the desired outcomes as attainable and to persist in their goal-directed efforts. When students become more optimistic, would likely have less psychological distress, even when things do not go right in their way. They cope with stressors more actively and more adaptively and thus, makes students perform better in university. Students who are more optimistic are more likely to have more academic success as measured by GPA.

Academic achievement is defined by Ebebuwa (2010) as student's examination score or GPA (Grade point average) at the end of a particular semester or programme. It could also be seen as the level of achievement in a particular field of study. Higher scores indicate better academic achievement. In addition, Joseph (2013) believes that, in the past, academic achievement was often measured more by interview. Teachers' observations made up the bulk of the assessment, and today's summation, or numerical, method of determining how well a student is performing. Grading systems came into existence in America in the late Victorian period. Aduwa (2004) reported that on determinants of students' academic success, a student's home environment, their cognitive abilities, self-esteem, self-concept, study habits and motivation affect their academic success. Post-secondary institutions, weak academic achievement and high dropout rates remain persistent problems among undergraduates. Academic achievement is the ability to study and remember facts and being able to communicate your knowledge verbally or on paper.

The theoretical framework of this study lies on the etiological model of adjustment by Stoeber (2001) which examined the causal pathways between variables correlated with school adjustment on academic achievement. This is multi-determined with a number of contributing influences, including university factors, personality factors, family factors, and environmental factors. Academic achievement was predicted by a combination of university factors and school adjustment. Similarly, the dispositional optimism theory used in this study is the self-regulation model of behaviour propounded by Carver and Scheier (1998). The theory suggested that actions are greatly influenced by expectations about their consequences. The expectations are thus the element through which dispositional optimism is linked to the model, and it helps in connecting dispositional optimism to a broader context of behaviours and emotions. In addition, the academic achievement theory of this study would be modelled on Educational Productivity theory by Walberg (1981). The theory assumes that, nine factors affect academic achievement, or three groups of nine factors based on affective, cognitive and behavioural skills for optimization of learning that affect the quality of academic achievement. Study on the differences in dispositional optimism by male/female.



### **School Adjustment and Dispositional Optimism... (Iro & Gurjiya, 2022)**

Shruti and Sunita (2014) in their study on Dispositional optimism – Pessimism among Adolescents – A Male/female Based Study reported that the whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of growth, development and learning. Although variation in pace may be encountered at different stages, this process continues to influence human being at every stage of life. Adolescence is a period when this growth, development as well as learning are believed to be at pinnacle due to transition from childhood to adulthood. During adolescent phase, there are rapid physiological, psychological, emotional, social changes as well as demands for new social roles take place. Thus, the period of adolescence is a period of dramatic challenge, during which an individual is in the process of establishing attitudes for effective participation in a society.

The study is justified giving the fact that these students were coming from post-primary institutions where students received too much scaffolding in day-to-day school activities. Ugoji (2008) opined that the concept of academic achievement has become a source of concern to researchers, especially as the academic achievement of the undergraduates is declining. The Nigerian society places great emphasis on education because it is believed to be the only avenue for national development. It is important to note that university environment requires students to take much of their academic activities. Thus, the need for proper adjustment if school achievement is to be assured by students of universities.

### **Objectives of Study**

1. To find out if there is correlation between school adjustment and academic achievement among undergraduate students in North West Zone, Nigeria.
2. To determine if there is correlation between dispositional optimism and academic achievement among undergraduate students in North West Zone, Nigeria.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant correlation between school adjustment and academic achievement among undergraduate students in North West Zone, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant correlation between dispositional optimism and academic achievement among undergraduate students in North West Zone, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The design used for this study was survey design and was used in the course of this study to guide the conduct of the study. The survey design was used to determine the nature and the strength of the relationship between the independent variable (school adjustment and dispositional optimism) and the dependent variables (academic achievement). The population of this study consisted of total number of 14,756 undergraduate students in 200 levels, 2014/2015 academic session from faculties of Arts and Sciences only. These included all the 16 conventional universities from the 7 states in North West Zone, Nigeria (University IMS/Faculty records; 2014). The sample of this study consisted of a total number of 378 respondents, from the selected universities. The sampling selection was also guided by the sample table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

In this study, two sets of measuring instruments were used; School adjustment Scale by Baker and Siryk (1989) was adapted to measure school adjustment, while dispositional optimism scale by Scheier and





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Carver (1985) was adapted to measure dispositional optimism in this study. Academic achievement of the sampled students was obtained from the faculties of Arts and sciences. To establish the validity of the instrument, experts have done the checking of the quality of the instruments. As such both face and content validity of the instruments were validated by experts and lecturers in the field of Educational Psychology and Health education, in the Departments of Educational Psychology and Counselling as well as Department of Physical and Health Education, A.B.U. Zaria, respectively. They recommended that, the instrument can be adopted for the purpose of this investigation. A pilot study was conducted to further ascertain the reliability of the school adjustment scale and dispositional optimism scale. The reliability estimate of the instruments obtained was 0.89 and 0.82 for school adjustment scale and dispositional optimism scale respectively.

The data collected was organized and analyzed by the used of simple percentage, descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation and analyzed the demographic data of the respondents. Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) was used and tested the hypotheses. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 version was used and analyzed the data at 0.05 level of significance.

**Result**

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant correlation between school adjustment and academic achievement among undergraduate students in North West Zone, Nigeria.

**Table 1: Correlation between School Adjustment and Academic Achievement among Undergraduate students**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r	p. Value
School Adjustment Score	378	66.042	9.772	376	.804	.000
Academic Achievement Score	378	3.012.896				

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

The analysis of Pearson Product Moment Correlation presented in table above, revealed a correlation of (r)= 0.804 p=.000, which is significant at 0.05, is a high positive correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The decision here is that, the HO1 is rejected. This means that, there is significant correlation between school adjustment and academic achievement. This implies that the higher the school adjustment the higher the academic achievement of students.

**Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant correlation between dispositional optimism and academic achievement among undergraduate students in North West Zone, Nigeria.

**Table 2: Correlation between dispositional optimism and academic achievement among Undergraduate students.**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r	p. Value
Dispositional optimism Score	378	38.005	4.815	376	.710	.000
Academic Achievement Score	378	3.012.896				



\*\* Correlation(r) is significant at 0.05

The analysis of this table shows that, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation revealed a correlation of  $(r) = 0.710$   $p = .000$ , which is significant at 0.05, is a high positive correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The decision here is that, the  $H_0$  is rejected. This means that, there is significant correlation between dispositional optimism and academic achievement. This implies that the higher the dispositional optimism the higher the academic achievement of students.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Analysis of hypothesis one shows a high positive correlation between school adjustment and academic achievement of students, since the correlation  $(r) = 0.804$  and  $p \leq 0.05$  level of significant. This means the higher the school adjustment, the higher the academic achievement. This study was in agreement with Paul and Rose (2011), who found similar result among university students. Students in these universities were quick to master the demand of the new environment so also adjust for better academic performance.

Result of analysis of hypothesis two shows a high positive correlation between dispositional optimism and Academic achievement of students, since the correlation  $(r) = 0.710$  and  $p \leq 0.05$  level of significant. This means the higher the dispositional optimism the higher the academic achievement. The result of the study was in line with the view of Shruti and Sunati (2014), who were able to establish that children at adolescent stage tend to see future as bright and develop high commitment to achieve goals set on their path. Undergraduate students in these universities were mostly from middle class, who are in the habit of instilling into their children to do everything possible to come out with good certificate.

On null hypothesis three however, the result shows a higher positive correlation between school adjustment and dispositional optimism, since the correlation of  $(r) = 0.593$  and  $p \leq 0.05$ . This means the higher the school adjustment, the higher the dispositional optimism of students. This finding is supported by Paul and Rose (2011) and Shruti and Sunati (2014). In their respective studies, the found that school adjustment was proportional to dispositional optimism of students.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that, there is correlation among school adjustment, dispositional optimism and academic achievement. The study further concludes that, the higher the school adjustment and dispositional optimism, the higher the academic achievement, among undergraduate students in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University management should provide an enabling environment for adequate adjustment of students.
2. Teachers in these universities should be sensitized about the challenges these new students face and should tailored their teaching activities to make students to feel at home.
3. Parents should provide moral and material support to their children to make it easier for them to adjust appropriately in school.



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