

Learning Readiness and School Adjustment among Undergraduates of Public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between learning readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design, guided by four research questions and hypotheses. A total of 1200 first-year undergraduates were selected to represent the entire population of undergraduates in all the public Universities in Cross River, State. Participants were 583 males and 641 females. A validated instrument, Cognitive Readiness, Emotional Readiness and School Adjustment Questionnaire (CRERSAQ) was used in collecting data for the study. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was estimated using Cronbach Alpha and it ranged from .71 to .89 which adjudged the instrument to be reliable. Data collected was coded and analysed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. The result shows that there was a relationship between cognitive readiness, emotional readiness, and school adjustment. The study concluded that although poor school adjustment may be related to other factors as portrayed by many scholars, school maladjustment among undergraduates is equally affected by their lack of learning readiness. The study recommended among others that parents and lecturers should monitor first-year students' school activities during their first semester to ensure proper adjustment to their new school environment. Also, university management and national universities commission should plan academic intervention programmes for students who have low academic adjustment.

Keywords: Learning readiness, school adjustment, school maladjustment, public universities, undergraduates

Introduction

School adjustment is a process that every student undergoes as they transition from one educational level to another. It is an important aspect of the undergraduate experience, influencing academic success, emotional stability, health, and social integration, which is significant to the development of the school and society. This is because successful school adjustment enables students to remain

in college, enjoy psychological well-being, acquire knowledge, perform well academically, modify behaviour, complete studies, and instil sanity into society. Adjustment to college differs from one student to the other depending on the developmental stage of the individual (Sarkar & Banik, 2017). School adjustment, therefore, refers to the ability of an individual to develop adequate techniques to handle stress in connection with the amount of support provided by their environment (Victor-Aigbodion & Nwoke, 2017).

There is no doubt that undergraduates, especially first-year students, are facing school maladjustment in universities across the globe. Over the years, from publications, observations, and experiences, the researchers have noted that most first-year undergraduates find it difficult to adjust to the demands of the university system. This play out particularly in terms of their academic struggles and dropouts, deviant behaviours, and financial wastage. This may be due to the different types and degrees of adjustment difficulties they face, with little or no experience outside their family, and a lack of a coping mechanism. Also, the transition from a more structured secondary school environment to the freedom of the university can be overwhelming, requiring students to develop effective time management, study skills, and self-discipline (Mulaudzi, 2023).

The transition from secondary school to the university for first-year students is supposed to be smooth and successful, due to the fact that they have passed through secondary, written internal and external examinations, and gained admission into the university. It is assumed that they should be able to adjust properly to their new school environment; however, the reverse is the case, as most of them are not adjusting as expected. The transition process to the new school environment presents significant challenges for many undergraduates across public universities in Cross River State. It has been observed by the researchers that the student's poor school adjustment has led to poor academic performance, withdrawal from school, emotional instability, social unrest, and financial wastage.

The university is supposed to be a place of decency where knowledge is acquired and behaviours are modified to meet the expectations of society, but some students become worse off than when they came in. The most disturbing part of these problems is that the students who are supposed to acquire knowledge, be moulded in character through teaching and learning, and bring sanity into society are experiencing school maladjustment. If this problem is not nipped in the bud across our public universities, we will keep having dropouts and graduating students who are half-baked and incompetent to function properly in society. School maladjustment is a prevalent issue in the study area, yet very few literatures exist on these variables in the study area. It is against the foregoing backdrop that this study intends to explore learning readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored learning readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined:

1. The relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State.
2. The relationship between emotional readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State.
2. There is no significant relationship between emotional readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State.

Literature Review

Cognitive readiness and school adjustment

A link exists between cognitive readiness and school adjustment. Students who are cognitively ready adjust better to school than those who are not ready. Students with high cognitive abilities can adjust properly to school activities such as academics, social, emotional and other extracurricular school activities. On the other hand, children with low cognitive abilities may not be able to understand others' minds fully; they might concentrate on only a specific condition or cue, leading to a limited understanding of their own and others' emotions. This is because cognitive processing deficits may be related to reduced emotional and social development, where they hinder interpersonal problem-solving skills and emotional understanding. Cognitive deficits may lead to academic difficulties, and increased risk of social and emotional problems (Matthias et al., 2016). According to Vecaldo et al. (2020) a high level of school adjustment requires effective cognitive control in multiple ways. In their study 'exploring the college readiness and school adjustment of PWD K-12 graduates in Filipino, as they transition from basic to tertiary education,' they examined the students' knowledge of course content and school adjustment. Result revealed that students with low cognitive readiness will find it difficult understanding course content. This will in turn lead to poor academic adjustment and thereby influencing their overall school adjustment. Similarly, Adeola et al. (2025) observed that a lack of cognitive readiness at the point of school entrance may lead to poor school adjustment. This implies that students who are not cognitively ready for school will experience poor academic, emotional, social adjustment and poor study habits which will eventually lead to overall school maladjustment. Karim (2023) in his study posited that there is a significant positive relationship between cognitive readiness and emotional adjustment of higher secondary school students. This implies students with stronger cognitive readiness are often better at regulating their emotions, solving conflict among peers, avoid impulsive spending and balance financial demands with academic needs. Also, students with high level of emotional adjustment have a strong cognitive readiness. Furthermore, empirical review of Bierman et al. (2009) concluded that the promotion of cognitive competence in kindergarten may particularly be associated with classroom participation and prosocial behaviour. This means that cognitive readiness has a link with aggressive behaviour and the promotion of cognitive readiness enhance executive functioning skills. This implies that students who are cognitively ready are more involved in classroom participation and exhibit better behaviours among their peers.

Emotional Readiness and School Adjustment

Emotional readiness has an impact on student's school adjustment. It involves having the capacity to recognise and regulate one's emotions, cope with stress and anxiety without being overwhelmed, and also maintain a positive attitude toward learning. Emotions include sadness, happiness, anger, anxiety, self-esteem, and more. Students who are emotionally ready for school are less likely to experience depression and other mental illnesses (Anselem & Akanaeme, 2021). They can calm down when angry and can do well in difficult circumstances. Haver et al. (2025) posited that emotional readiness has been described as the ability to demonstrate self-awareness, emotional regulations and resilience in ways that support effective coping during stressful or unpredictable situation. It is about being prepared to face challenges, big or small, without losing your cool. It

includes resilience, self-regulation, empathy, and building positive relationships. Students with higher emotional stability perform better in academics, manage conflict, exhibit self-control in the face of provocation, and develop friendships (Ogbueli, 2021). They can share, cooperate with others, and follow school instructions. Emotionally stable students achieve higher academic performance and thus tend to withstand academic stress, interact with others more positively, and build greater relationships. Children with strong emotional competence are likely to experience school success and positive relationships (Afangideh, & Nwile, 2022). In their study, Hernandez et al. (2017) examines the relationship between of children's emotional readiness from their behaviour in a class room context to their school adjustment from kindergarten to first grade.

The result of the study revealed that there was a significant prediction of kindergarten children with positive emotional readiness than those of negative emotional readiness to their school adjustment. The result also showed greater teacher and peer conflict and low student engagement in kindergarten children with negative emotional behaviour. There was also negative peer acceptance during lunch and recess of children with negative emotional behaviours and positive acceptance of those with positive emotion among their peers. This implies that undergraduates who have developed positive emotional readiness are better adjusted in school. They have a better relationship with peers and teachers, which will also influence their academic, emotional and financial adjustment. Emotion is related to learning; therefore, positive emotions indirectly predict higher academic adjustment via higher peer's acceptance. On the other hand, students who experience poor school adjustment to school activities are emotionally unstable. Most of them lack self-confidence, exhibit low self-esteem, deviant behaviours, an inferiority complex, and negative attitudes toward learning. A study conducted by Udensi et al. (2024) to explain self-esteem and self-efficacy and academic adjustment of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, examined the prediction between self-esteem and academic adjustment self-esteem is a sub variable of emotional readiness and academic adjustment as an aspect of school adjustment. The results indicated that self-esteem has a significant prediction with academic adjustment of undergraduates in Awka. This implies that when self-esteem is increasing, academic adjustment will also be increasing and vice versa. Students with high self-esteem believes in their ability to succeed and this motivate them to participate actively in school and in turn foster better school adjustment. In the same vein, Hernandez et al (2017) study revealed that students with strong self-esteem can handle stress, failure or criticism better. They are less likely to be overwhelmed by school pressures or setbacks and this in turn enhances their adjustment to school.

Method

The research design adopted for this study was the survey design. The design is considered appropriate because subjects' opinion, perception, attitude or beliefs is the focus of the investigation. It is primarily used to measure characteristics of a homogenous group, and it involves the use of questionnaire and /or interviews, and usually employed when researchers want to target a large sample size so that generalisation can be made about specific populations. The target population for the study was first-year undergraduates who have finished their second semester exam in public universities in Cross River, State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select two universities (University of Calabar and University of Cross River State) and 37 departments. Using the proportionate stratified and simple random sampling technique, the actual sample respondent of 1200 was drawn for the study. Two validated instruments were used to collect data for the study. The instruments were 'Cognitive Readiness and Emotional Readiness Questionnaire' and School Adjustment Scale'. The instruments were

design on a 4-likert scale format. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 70 participants and internal consistency coefficient of 0.71 to 0.89 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. This made the questionnaire overcome the cultural biasness. The researchers administered the questionnaires on the sampled respondents in the selected schools and departments. The data collected through the questionnaire was collated and statistically analysed using mean, standard deviation and Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for all continuous variables in the study

S/N	Variable	n	X	SD
1	Cognitive readiness	1200	18.21	2.76
2	Emotional readiness	1200	15.66	3.08

Hypotheses One

There is no significant relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State. The two variables involved here are cognitive readiness and school adjustment, each measured continuously and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical technique. Results of the analyses are presented in Table 2.

Results of analysis in table 2 show that the calculated r-values of .394, .129, .199, .337, and .346 for the relationship between cognitive readiness and academic adjustment, emotional adjustment, social adjustment, financial adjustment, and overall school adjustment respectively were each significant at a p-value of .001. Since .001 is less than .05 ($p < .05$), it means that there is a significant positive relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment among the undergraduates. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Correlation for the relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates (n=1200)

Variable	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r_{xy}	p-value
Cognitive readiness (X)	18.21	2.76	21851	407015			
Academic adjustment (Y ₁)	16.71	3.23	20050	347532	369305	.394*	.001
Emotional adjustment (Y ₂)	19.41	3.43	23287	466009	425496	.129*	.001
Social adjustment (Y ₃)	18.35	3.11	22025	415877	403103	.199*	.001
Financial adjustment (Y ₄)	18.14	3.63	21764	410490	400344	.337*	.001
Overall school adjustment	72.60	10.27	87126	6452340	1598248	.346*	.001

* $p < .05$

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between emotional readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates of public universities in Cross River State. The two variables of the study were emotional readiness and school adjustment, each measured continuously and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical technique. Results of the analyses are presented in Table 3.

Results of analysis in table 3 show that the calculated r-values of .402, .151, .138, .154, and .273 for the relationship between emotional readiness and academic adjustment, emotional adjustment, social adjustment, financial adjustment, and overall school adjustment respectively were each significant at a p-value of .001. Since .001 is less than .05 ($p < .05$), it means that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional readiness and school adjustment among the undergraduates. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Correlation for the relationship between emotional readiness and school adjustment among undergraduates (n=1200)

Variable	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	r_{xy}	p-value
			$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$			
Emotional readiness (X)	15.66	3.08	18796	407015			
Academic adjustment (Y ₁)	16.71	3.23	20050	347532	318836	.402	.001
Emotional adjustment (Y ₂)	19.41	3.43	23287	466009	366664	.151	.001
Social adjustment (Y ₃)	18.35	3.11	22025	415877	346567	.138	.001
Financial adjustment (Y ₄)	18.14	3.63	21764	410490	342952	.154	.001
Overall school adjustment(Y)	72.60	10.27	87126	6452340	1375019	.273	.001

* $p < .05$

Discussion

The result analysis in table 1 and 2 showed a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment with (SD = 2.76) and (r-value = .346), respectively. The study's findings indicate a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and school adjustment. This implies that the higher a student's cognitive readiness, the better their school adjustment, and the more school-adjusted they are, the higher their cognitive readiness. Students who have adjusted in one area influence their adjustment in other places through self-regulation. For example, a student who has academically adjusted can influence emotions, academic, social, and financial adjustment. This is explained by the Self-Regulation theory by Zimmerman (1990), who pointed out that self-regulated learners possess some distinctive qualities, as these learners are capable of selecting, organising, and creating favourable learning environments for themselves and even make plans and gain control over their own academic success. It therefore means that students with strong cognitive readiness can influence emotional adjustment.

The finding further showed a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and emotional adjustment (r-value .129) and was significant at a p-value of .001, since .001 is less than .05 ($p < .05$). This is because students with strong cognitive readiness can analyse stressful situations, reframe challenges, and apply coping strategies to cope in their new school environment. The finding is in line with a study by Karim (2023) that examined the relationship between cognitive readiness and emotional adjustment among higher secondary students, and the result revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between cognitive readiness and emotional adjustment of higher secondary school students. Also, students with strong cognitive readiness can adjust academically.

Findings from the analysis of hypothesis one also revealed a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and academic adjustment with (r-values of .394) and significant at a p-value of .001, Since .001 is less than .05 ($p < .05$). This implies that students with strong cognitive readiness may have good knowledge of course content, think critically and solve problems in learning which in turn makes it easier for them to cope with academic demands like course work, assessment and independent study. Moreover, students with strong cognitive readiness may also adjust socially. Analysis revealed a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and social adjustment with (r-values of .199), significant at a p-value of .001. Since .001 is less than .05 ($p < .05$), this indicates that students with strong cognitive readiness can think critically and make sense of peer expectations, resolving conflicts rationally, and engaging in teamwork, which may enhance their social adjustment. Furthermore, students with strong cognitive readiness may easily adjust financially. Analysis shows a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and financial adjustment (r-values of .337), significant at a p-value of .001. This is because students with strong cognitive readiness are more likely to plan, avoid impulsive spending, and balance financial demands with academic needs. On the other hand, students with weak cognitive readiness may experience academic struggles, low grades, high dropout rates, emotional instability, poor relationships with peers, and poor financial and managerial ability. Undergraduates with weak cognitive readiness should not be exposed to new skills before they indicate readiness and interest. Undergraduates with strong cognitive readiness are less likely to drop out of school.

The finding is in agreement with a study by Vecaldo et al. (2020) who explored the college readiness (knowledge of course content) and school adjustment in Northern Philippines. The result indicates that there is a negative relationship between knowledge of understanding and school adjustment. Knowledge of course content is an aspect of cognitive readiness and related to academic adjustment. This is explained by Bond (2008), whose findings revealed that academic adjustment is apparently more dependent on cognitive development than on the age of a child. Students with poor knowledge of course content may have weak cognitive readiness and poor academic adjustment compared to students with strong cognitive readiness. The finding implies that as cognitive readiness decreases, school adjustment increases; this may be due to the presence of other variables (emotions, social, and financial) which may be interfering with how cognitive readiness turns into adjustment. Students' poor knowledge of course content indicates weak cognitive readiness, which may, in turn, lead to poor academic adjustment and thereby affect their overall school adjustment negatively.

The finding is also in line with Adeola et al. (2025), who investigated the relationship between the age of university entrants and their intellectual readiness for undergraduate education in Nigerian universities. The result showed that younger entrants were found to face significantly more

academic and psychological challenges, including difficulties with complex concepts, stress, and poor emotional preparedness. Conversely, older students exhibited greater intellectual readiness, including better coping mechanisms and academic adaptation. The study concludes that intellectual readiness, not merely chronological age, should be prioritised in admission decisions. This implies that students who gained admission below the stipulated age may not have developed the intellectual abilities to cope with the school demands. This also implies that students should not be given tasks above or below their intellectual abilities, as this may result in school maladjustment.

In a similar vein, the findings of the analysis of hypothesis two indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional readiness with school adjustment. This implies that the higher the emotional readiness of students, the higher their school adjustment. This could also mean that the better school adjustment of students, the higher their emotional readiness. The study findings analysis showed a positive relationship between emotional readiness and school adjustment with ($SD= 3.08$) and ($r\text{-value} .273$), respectively. This indicates that emotionally ready students may influence their emotional adjustment. The analysis further showed that there is a positive relationship between emotional readiness and emotional adjustment ($r\text{-values of} .151$) and a $p\text{-value of} .001$, and $.001$ is less than $.05$ ($p<.05$). Emotions and learning are closely related; an emotionally stable student gains more from learning than a student who is not happy. An emotionally stable student may be able to control feelings of outbursts, manage failures and frustrations, and overcome feelings of anxiety in times of challenges and difficulties without being overwhelmed.

Also, students with high emotions readiness can adjust academically, from the analysis, it showed that there is a positive relationship between emotional readiness and academic adjustment with ($r\text{-values of} .402$) and $.001$ and $.001$ is less than $.05$ ($p<.05$). This may be because they can overcome anxiety, manage stress, meet up in academic demands and this in turns leads to academic success. They can also adjust socially because emotionally ready students display self-confidence, good social behaviours, and develop positive relationships with others, which may lead to collaborative learning and better school adjustment. Analysis revealed a positive relationship between emotional readiness and social adjustment with ($r\text{-values of} .138$, and a $p\text{-value of} .001$ and $.001$ is less than $.05$ ($p<.05$). The finding is in line with a study by Hernandez et al. (2017) who in their study examines the relationship between children's emotional readiness from their behaviour in a class room context to their school adjustment. The result shows a significant prediction of children with positive emotional readiness than those with negative emotional readiness for their school adjustment. Also, there was greater teacher and peer conflict and low student engagement in children with negative emotional behaviour. There was also negative peer acceptance during lunch and recess of children with negative emotional behaviours, and positive acceptance of those with positive emotions among their peers. This implies that students with negative emotions are associated with school maladjustment, such as conflict and negative peer acceptance, while positive emotions are crucial for school adjustment.

Furthermore, emotionally ready students may adjust financially. Analysis of findings showed a positive relation between the variable with an $r\text{-value of} .154$, and a $p\text{-value of} .001$, and $.001$ is less than $.05$ ($p<.05$). This is because they have high self-esteem, high self-confidence, and they do not engage in impulsive spending to please others or to belong to a certain clique. They spend their money more on school-related items, manage their resources wisely, and so do not easily fall into financial hardship.

The finding supports a study by Udensi et al. (2024) to explain self-esteem and self-efficacy and academic adjustment of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The results indicated that self-esteem has a significant prediction of academic adjustment. Self-esteem is an aspect of emotional readiness that explains how a student feels about themselves, the value that they place on themselves, and what the student feels they can do. So, students with high self-esteem believe in their ability to succeed, and this motivates them to participate actively in class work and activities, which leads to academic adjustment and, in turn, fosters better school adjustment. The finding also agrees with Hernandez et al. (2017), who found that there is a positive correlation between students with high self-esteem and a high level of adjustment to college.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between learning readiness, and school adjustment among undergraduates of public Universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Obtained results of the study showed that there was a positive relationship between cognitive readiness and emotional readiness and school adjustment. The implication of this is that the higher a student's cognitive readiness and emotional readiness, the better their school adjustment, and the more school-adjusted they are, the higher their cognitive readiness and emotional readiness. The findings have implication for universities administrators who should give adequate consideration when admitting students into the higher institutions. The study concludes that intellectual readiness and emotional readiness not merely chronological age, should be prioritised in admission decisions. This is because students who gained admission below the stipulated age may not have developed the intellectual and emotional abilities to cope with the school demands. It is also suggested that students should not be given tasks above or below their intellectual abilities, as this may result in poor school adjustment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1. Parents and lecturers should monitor first-year students' school activities during their first semester to ensure proper adjustment to their new school environment.
2. Lecturers should take cognizance of students' readiness, curiosity, and interest when planning class activities, assignments, and examinations.
3. Counsellors should increase the level of publicity of guidance and counselling programmes in the universities and should emphasise the need for academic advising students during orientation.
4. Furthermore, the University Administrators should plan academic intervention programmes for students who have low academic adjustment.

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