

# IMPACT OF FAMILY BOND ON THE ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF COLLEGE FRESHMEN

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## Abstract

The study investigated the impact of family bond on the academic adjustment of college freshmen. The participants were 93 freshmen drawn randomly from the total of 739 students admitted to the college of engineering in the 2016/17 academic session. Fifty-one (i.e. 55 %) of the participants male, and forty-two (about 45 %) female. The participants ranged between 14 years and 19 years ( $\bar{X}$  = 16.10, SD = .92) in age. The mastery and health subscale of the Family Inventory of Resources for Management (FIRM) developed by McCubbin, Comeau & Harkins (1991) was used as index of family bond, while the Academic Adjustment Scale developed by Anderson, Guan and Koc (2016) was used to measure academic adjustment. The data obtained was subjected to a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, and a statistically significant inverse relationship was found between family bond and academic adjustment ( $\beta$  = -.36,  $t$  = -3.71,  $P < 0.05$ ), suggesting that students from cohesive families evinced poorer academic adjustment. There also was a significant interaction between family bond and gender ( $\beta$  = -.35,  $t$  = -3.55,  $P < 0.05$ ) in predicting academic adjustment. Additionally, type of family residence, whether family residence was owned or rented, also predicted academic adjustment ( $\beta$  = -.201,  $t$  = -2.07,  $P < 0.05$ ) when age was taken into consideration. The findings suggest the need to provide on-campus environment that offer care and support to the freshman.

Keywords: Academic adjustment, Family, Family Bond, Freshmen.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Post-secondary education prepares an individual to make meaningful contribution to the socio-economic growth of any society; and in economies it offers the individual the opportunity to prepare for higher income jobs, therefore presenting the individual with opportunity to live beyond poverty and for upward social mobility. Hence, admission into the university brings great excitement for most freshmen and their families. For some others the excitement is short-lived as it soon becomes replaced with challenges of adjusting to a new environment.

The struggle to adjust to the academic environment may prove quite stressful for some persons (Clinciu, 2013), adversely impact on wellbeing, and produce symptoms of psychopathology (Kusumaningsih & Arjanggih, 2016; Agoha, Ogwa, & Evboma, 2015). Some other sequel of academic maladjustment include loneliness and differential usage of facebook (Wohn, LaRose, 2014); achievement goals (Verner-Filion & Gaudreau, 2010); Parenting Styles and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Adimora, Nwokenna, Omeje & Umeano, 2015); Student-teacher relationship quality (Zee, Koomen & Van der Veen, 2013).

Some studies (Clinciu & Cazan, 2014; Al-khatib, Awamleh & Samawi, 2012) have found that school adjustment is a major determinant of academic success. Clinical observation in the experience of one of the authors of this paper (ABC) links negative emotions to academic failure. Most of the adjustment problems and their untoward effects on academic outcome begin with first year students (Clinciu, 2013).

Some factors relating to academic maladjustment include early sexual abuse (Himelein, 1995). In a recent study (Oh & Song, 2017), parental abuse a negative effect of parental abuse was found on academic adjustment. In the study emotional/behavioral problems exerted partial mediating effect between neglect and school adjustment; and this indirect effect was stronger than parental abuse itself. In a similar Korean study, Um and Kim (2015) found a mediating role of children's perceived parental acceptance between physical abuse and academic adjustment of school children. Bowlby (1969) used the term attachment to refer to the emotional/psychological bond, or connectedness, between humans. The attachment relationship involves an exchange of comfort, care, and pleasure. He conceived attachment as durable psychological relationship established in early childhood

between humans that aids human survival (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby described the features of attachment to include that desire to be close to attachment figures, use of attachment figure as haven and secure base, and separation distress-anxious emotion that characterize separation from attachment figures.

As families represent the first point of contact between children and the larger world (Michaelson, Pickett, & Davidson, 2016), the early attachment bonds are presumably established within it. This view has long been upheld by both human (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, & Marks, 1998; Spitz, 1949) and animal studies (Harlow, 1958). A family consists of a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). McKeown, Pratschke, and Haase (2003) conceives of the family in terms of a set of relationships connecting parents to each other and to their children, even when all members do not live in the same household.

According to systems theory, originally propounded by Bertalanffy (1968), any system can be conceptualised as an open system, with inputs, outputs and a necessary feedback mechanism and can interact with its components parts, and have the ability to relate with its immediate environment. Applying this to the family, Bowen (1966) thought of the family as an emotionally interdependent unit in which thought patterns interact. These patterns of thought and emotion are so strong that they have been likened to living under the same “emotional skin”.

It follows from the foregoing that the family system provides a veritable platform for emotional bonding or attachment (Bowlby, 1988, 1969), which forms some sort of *psychological shelter* for its members into which a person may retreat mentally for comfort and safety during situations of threat. Therefore, a conscious awareness within a person that he has ‘left’ the family to an entirely new place (i.e. academic environment) may be stressful, depending on available cognitive variables like perceived social support (Agoha et al., 2015; Clinciu, 2013).

In collectivist African cultures, the family plays vital roles in the day-to-day life of the people. For instance, the patriarchal system in the culture of Igbo Biafra of southern Nigeria is entirely based on the family system. The family is inextricably involved in the entire rite of passage of the individual such as marriage, child rearing, celebrations, commencement of work-life, religious activities, and death and mourning. The family bond is so important that real or imagined absence of it may herald the onset of some sort psycho-somatic dysfunction (Michaelson et al., 2016; Ebigbo, 1986).

Family bond is used to refer to cohesiveness and healthy relationship among family members. Freshmen are newly admitted undergraduate to a college or university, without previous exposure to post-secondary education. In this study the freshmen were engineering students.

The problem of this study is that though a number of family-specific factors like parenting style (Adimora, Nwokenna, Omeje & Umeano, 2015) and perceived social support have been studied in relation to academic adjustment, not so many examinations has been conducted on family bond or cohesiveness.

The major objectives are to:-

- 1 Determine the role of family bond in the academic adjustment of undergraduate freshmen.
- 2 Determine whether family-specific conditions like residence would have impact on academic adjustment.
- 3 To evaluate the difference in the academic adjustment of male and female freshmen students.

It was hypothesised that:-

- 1 A significant relationship would be found between family bond and academic adjustment of freshmen.
- 2 A significant relationship would be found between family-specific relationship and academic adjustment of among freshmen.
- 3 Gender would significant predict the academic adjustment of freshmen.

## 2 METHODS

### 2.1 Participants

A hundred students were initially selected from the 739 newly admitted to the college of engineering through a simple random sampling procedure. Only 93 of these correctly filled their questionnaires. Fifty-one (51) of these were male, and 42 were female students. The participants ranged between 14-19 years in age ( $\bar{x} = 16.10$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ). None of the participants were previously exposed to university education.

### 2.2 Instrument

The family strength II subscale of the family inventory of resources for management (FIRM) (McCubbin, Comeau & Harkins, 1991). The subscale consists of 19 Likert-type items originally intended to measure family health. Some of the items of the instrument include *:-being physically tired much of the time is a problem in our family* (item 2), *we have to nag at each other to get things done* (item 3), *our family is well adjusted as any family in this world can be* (item 5), *certain members of our family do all the giving while others do all the taking* (item 9), and *no one could be happier than our family when we are together* (item 19). We obtained a cronbach  $\alpha = .75$ , compared to  $\alpha = .85$  obtained by the original authors. Applying the Spearman-Brown formula, we found a reliability index of  $.86$ . The Academic Adjustment Scale (Anderson, Guan & Koc, 2016) was used to measure academic adjustment. This scale has been shown to be valid and stable.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

A cross sectional survey design was adopted for the study, and the data obtained was subjected to hierarchical multiple regression analysis using the IBM SPSS-XXIII statistical analysis package. The result of the analysis is presented below.

## 3 RESULT

*Table 1. Predictors of freshmen academic adjustment*

Model	Variable	B	serr	$\beta$	t	p
1	Family Bond	-.22	.06	-.36	-3.70	.000
2	FBxGender	-.13	.04	-.33	-3.36	.001
	AgexType of residence	-.14	.07	-.20	-2.07	.04

Table 1 above is a display of the predictors of academic adjustment in the study. As can be seen from the table, family bond moderately correlated with academic adjustment ( $\beta = -.36$ ,  $t = -3.70$ ,  $P < .05$ ) in support of our first hypothesis. Participants from healthy families tended to have more difficulty adjusting to their academic environment. Although gender did not significantly predict academic adjustment as hypothesised, it interacted with family bond. Similarly, a significant interaction effect was observed between age and type of family residence.

## 4 DISCUSSION

In line with the literature reviewed, our study found a moderate correlation between family bond or cohesiveness and students' academic adjustment. But unexpectedly, people from healthier, more cohesive families tended to have lower mean adjustment scores. This is shown in the figure below.

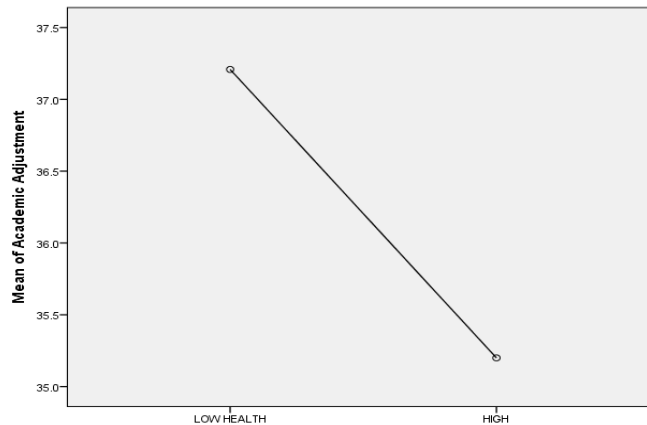


Figure 1: Mean Plot of academic adjustment on family Bond (Health)

It is intuitively alluring to think that people from healthy, cohesive families would develop better internal psychological stability, and thus become better adjusted to new academic environment. But this is not the case with the participants in this study. We nevertheless think that the finding is quite consistent with theory. As discussed in earlier sections of this paper, the family provides psychological security and shelter for the individual; depending then on other individual characteristics like gender, and the factors driving family cohesion, leaving a cohesive family may present issues of adjustment for the individual, especially with greater divergence between the new social environment and home. For instance, a tightly bonded family, protective may limit the interactive opportunity of their young members in such a way that they fail to learn how to adjust to people and environments that a diverse from the individual's own. This would pose trouble of adjustment if encountered later in places like school intended to become the student's new home.

The foregoing accounts for the interaction effect of gender with bonding in academic adjustment. The Nigerian culture is such that female children are more shielded from society than the male. Consequently, male children tend to adapt more easily to new social and physical environments as shown in this study. Similarly, people from families that own their houses showed poorer adjustment compared with those whose family live in rented apartment. Typically, people who own their own apartments tend to be richer, thus providing better physical and socioeconomic environments which are not readily available at school, whose environment better approximate the poorer condition of the socioeconomically less privileged students.

#### 4.1 Conclusion

In summary, family bond though thought to promote healthy psychological development, may have negative impact on the initial adjustment of college freshmen. This may difficulty in adjustment may arise from relatively great divergence between the warm, protective, and perhaps more physically equipped home environment and the school environment.

#### 4.2 Recommendations

This study brings to the fore the importance of psychosocial environment in university adjustment. It is important that a certain level of psychological maturity that comes with age be attained before admission into the university. Moreover, counsellors and academic advisers are to be more supportive of their students, especially minority students, and those with outstanding peculiarities.

#### 4.3 Limitations of the study

The study did not include older students. Comparing older and newer students of same gender and socioeconomic status would have given a clearer picture of the effect of family bond on academic adjustment. Besides, a larger, more academically diverse sample would be necessary for future study.

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