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# AGE AND ACADEMIC CLASSIFICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE NATURE OF PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY

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Most, if not all the developing countries as a matter of policy are encouraging the training of personnel in more advanced countries in addition to the training given within each country. This policy, to some extent, is an effort to make available qualified personnel in the emerging industrial and technological societies. At the same time, individuals at home and abroad constantly, on their own, undertake further studies for personal, economic and other reasons.

The population of Nigerians, for example, studying abroad has been observed to be on the increase especially in the United States of America. Open Doors (1979) ranked Nigeria third after Iran and Republic of China in population of Students in 1977/78 session. The population of Nigerian students then was estimated at 13,510.

This urge in students to seek academic achievement in other countries and the action of the home governments of these students to train them abroad have exposed the students to a variety of problems.

The students while studying abroad, often and again interact with people in the host country. The interaction could be with the students from the host country in one instance, or it could be with the people in the community in which the students live on the other. Thus, apart from coping with the academic problems, students studying in other countries, would also be expected to cope with problems resulting from such interactions. For the immediate adjustment patterns, Alao (1979) observed that some of the West African Students in the United States often relied on guidance from their "home-boys" or "home-girls".

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of age and academic classification in relation to the nature or the extent of problems encountered by the West African Students studying abroad. This is not to say that students studying in their home-countries do not have problems. This study assumes that the alien environment could be another important factor that could contribute to the nature and dimension of the problems experienced.

The subjects for this study were 206 West African students enrolled in different institutions of higher learning in Metropolitan Atlanta.

The problems encountered were identified from the response of the subjects to the Mooney Problems Checklist (1950) and to an Opinionaire designed by the writer.

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The checklist used comprised the following problems areas:-

1. Health and Physical Development.
2. Finance, Living conditions and employment.
3. Social and Recreational Activities.
4. Social - Psychological Relations.
5. Personal - Psychological Relations.
6. Courtship, Sex and Marriage.
7. Home and Family.
8. Morals and Religion.
9. Adjustment to School Work.
10. Future Vocational and Educational Adjustment.
11. Curriculum and Teaching Procedure.

The significant problems of each subject was assumed to be the problems troubling each subject most in each problem area of the Checklist. The over-all problem count troubling each subject most was derived from the addition of all the problems troubling each subject most in all the eleven problems areas of the checklist.

This score was thus obtained for all respondents and sorted into these age ranges:

- (a) Subjects under 21 years.
- (b) Subjects between 21 - 25 years.
- (c) Subjects between 26 - 30 years.
- (d) Subjects over 30 years.

The score was also sorted into these academic classifications:

- (a) Undergraduates.
- (b) Masters degree Students.
- (c) Doctorate Students.

It was further assumed here that, a subject with a greater number of problems checked would experience more problems when compared with a subject with a lesser number of checked problems.

The subjects included in this study had spent at least a semester in their respective institutions and they were drawn from the following countries:- Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra-Leone.

### *Findings and Discussion.*

The responses of the subjects to the checklist revealed that they experienced more problems in these areas:-

Social, recreational activities; Finance, Living conditions and employment; social and personal relations, future vocational and educational adjustment.

The data in Table 1 reveal that the mean of the problems of the subjects in the age range 21 - 25 years was the highest while the lowest problem mean was observed in the subjects in the age range 26-30 years.

The data further show that the mean of problems differed significantly for the students under 21 years than those between 21 - 25 years and 26 - 30 years.

TABLE 1  
Analysis of Subjects' Significant Problems  
According to Age

	Under 21 years	Between 21-25 years	Between 26-30 years	Over 30 years
M	12.636	16.565	11.871	14.230
SD	3.575	13.452	8.445	13.090
N	11	69	70	56

### *Comparisons*

	t
Under 21 years Vs. Between 21-25 years	1.98*
Under 21 years Vs. Between 26-30 years	0.50
Under 21 years Vs. Over 30 years	0.51
Between 21-25 years Vs. Between 26-30 years	2.44*
Between 21-25 years Vs. Over 30 years	0.97
Between 26-30 years Vs. Over 30 years	1.16

\* Significant at .05 level of confidence.

The data in Table 2 also reveal that the doctorate students had a lower problem mean when compared with the under-graduates or the master's degree students. More-over, the mean of the problems was found to be significant when the problems experienced by the undergraduates were compared with those of master's degree subjects.

TABLE 2

Analysis of Subjects' Significant Problems According  
to Academic classification

	Undergraduates	Masters	Doctorate
M	16.048	12.395	12.00
SD	12.348	10.771	9.656
N	105	88	13
<i>Comparison</i>			<i>t</i>
Undergraduate Vs. Masters			2.18*
Undergraduate Vs. Doctorate			1.33
Masters Vs. Doctorate			0.13

\*Significant at .05 level of confidence.

It is sometimes assumed that age is an indicator of maturity and possibly the more mature a person is the fewer the problems to be encountered, as some of these problems could be prevented in the first instance. However, the problems encountered by any age group, could depend to some extent on other factors, such as duration of stay in the country of study or marital status of subjects. Thus, the fluctuations in the means of problems of subjects in this study, according to age, would not be unexpected. Problems not only vary in count but also in intensity:

Similarly, one would expect the master's degree students and the doctorate students to be "more mature subjects" when compared with the undergraduate subjects. Whereas the undergraduate subjects had more problems enumerated, the problem of finance, living conditions and employment were found to cut across the age ranges and academic classifications. The delay sometimes in the remittance of money from the sponsors possibly had the same effect on the subjects, irrespective of age, or academic classification.

More of the younger undergraduate students (51%) and new graduate students (32%) often participated minimally in class discussions. One of the reasons given by some of the undergraduates (22%) was fear of embarrassment because of the difference in accent.



It is not uncommon to observe this initial withdrawal in other settings. However, as time progresses and as more confidence is built in such subjects, the level of interaction increases not only in the school but also with the students from the host country.

It was found that problems encountered by these students are often minimized when the students sought guidance or counselling from appropriate quarters. Tucker (1975) surveyed Foreign students' familiarity with and their participation in the supportive services at the George Washington University. She found, among other things that the subjects were not always aware of the supportive programmes provided for them at the University. Some of these subjects as also observed by Ho (1974) sought primary assistance from members of their own culture. In most cases, new students as observed by Alao (1979) initially sought guidance from those who have no counselling experience and the assistance usually given to such subjects were sometimes drawn from the helper's experience which might not be relevant to the helpees' problems.

Thus, to make the experience of these students more meaningful, during their course of study, students would have to seek help, when confronted with problems, from the Institution Counselling Centres, International Students offices or the Foreign Student Advisors or any other agency manned by people trained in the helping profession.

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