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Demographic Characteristics and Scholastic Adjustment among Public Junior Secondary School Students in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated students' demographic status and scholastic adjustment of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. The theories that underpin the study are the socio-cultural theory and social learning theory. The research adopted a descriptive research design with a population of 63,748 and a sample size of 540. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain data from the respondents, and mean rating and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions, while an independent t-test was used in testing null hypotheses. The results of the present study showed that school types, school location and gender have a significant influence on the mean ratings of students. Based on the findings, it is recommended that stakeholders in the secondary educational sector should focus on school types, school location and gender to significantly improve scholastic adjustment of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State.

Keywords: Students' Demographic Status, Scholastic Adjustment, School Types, School Location, Gender

Introduction

Teaching and learning take place in a regulated setting at school. Students, instructors, school regulations, and activities make up a formal educational environment. Children in secondary school struggle to adjust to their surroundings, both at home and at school. For instance, secondary school students have to decide whether to continue their education or drop out, how to handle the ever-increasing expectations of their friends and the school environment, and whether to attend courses. An individual's response to the internal and external demands and limitations imposed by their social environment is known as adjustment (Aghela 2015). According to Toheed (2012), adaptation is a necessary quality for people to live contentedly in this setting. He continued by describing adjustment as the process of altering one's behaviour to create a peaceful relationship with the surroundings. In the face of numerous demands and obstacles in their surroundings, humans and other animals can maintain equilibrium thanks to this behavioural process. The organism must adapt to survive in a changing environment. Thus, adjustment is a person's adaptability to his environment (Mangal, 2008).

The physical environment, the microenvironment, and the macroenvironment are the three types of scholastic adjustment that Kinanee (2010) distinguished. The physical environment of scholastic adjustment includes modifications to the buildings, facilities, types of rooms, and other elements that are currently in place. Conversely, the micro-environment shows every person the student interacts with directly, including roommates, classmates, union members, instructors, and family members. The entirety of society, including the rules and laws that an individual

must abide by, is referred to as the macroenvironment. According to Kinanee (2010), school and demographic factors may affect children's academic adjustment.

Students' academic adjustment may also be affected by their location. A person may live in an urban or rural area. According to Ezike (1997), urban regions are cosmopolitan towns or cities with a growing population and many social amenities. He continued that rural places include the countryside, remote villages, and geographic locations far from cities and towns, characterised by low population density and fewer social amenities. According to Aderinoye et al. (2007), students in rural areas lack the necessary learning resources, which can make studying dull and may even prevent a child from attending school and making academic progress. According to Owoeye and Yara (2011), students prefer attending urban schools over rural ones because of poor conditions, limited facilities, unequipped playgrounds, and a lack of books in libraries.

Another element that affects acclimation is the kind of school. There are several classifications for secondary schools, including private, public, or government-owned, mixed-sex or coeducational, single-sex, and so on. Research indicates that students in mixed schools perform better and have better academic adjustment than those in single-sex schools (Chow & Seng, 2013; Mabekoje et al., 2023). According to Chow and Seng (2013), students in mixed-sex schools strive hard to succeed in their studies because the presence of the other gender challenges them to do better academically.

Academically, students who are not well-adjusted typically perform badly in Rivers State secondary schools. They act antisocially toward their classmates and are frequently silent and secluded. Maladaptive behaviours, including fighting, truancy, bullying, test-taking fraud, school violence, cultism, absenteeism, and dropping out of school, are caused by poor academic adjustment. Therefore, this study looks at potential solutions for the issue of adjustment among secondary school students in Rivers State using the demographic and school variables suggested by the literature. Although prior studies on adjustment have been conducted (Christopher, 2016; Dhyani & Singh, 2019), they have usually concentrated on other aspects, such as climate. Despite these results, Rivers State secondary school students continue to struggle with adjustment, a topic that this study aims to address. For students, educators, parents, counsellors, the government, and organisations involved in education and child outcomes, the study's findings are crucial.

Theoretical Review

The study is supported by social learning theory and socio-cultural theory. In response to behaviourism, Lev Vygotsky created a sociocultural theory. According to the hypothesis, society, classmates, and parents' relatives all play a significant part in developing higher levels of functioning. Vygotsky's primary goal was to create a fresh perspective on the social and educational issues of the day. He thought that human behaviour was influenced by more than just biological inclinations. He was the first contemporary psychologist to propose that each person's nature is influenced by their society. Three major areas of sociocultural theory are suggested by the theory: private speech, scaffolding, the zone of proximal development, psychological tools, and pretend play. Vygotsky's primary goal was to create a fresh perspective on the social and educational issues of the day. He thought that human behaviour was influenced by more than just biological inclinations.

The study was also supported by Bandura's social learning theory, which was put forward in 1977. According to the idea, people learn by seeing the actions of others (models), and they then assess the impact of those actions by looking at the ensuing positive and negative outcomes. This theory's proponents highlight that we learn the majority of what we know by observing and listening to other people. From an early age, children pay close attention to how others behave, especially those who are closest to them, such as parents, relatives, teachers, and other members of the community. They then attempt to emulate these behaviours, and what they control is exercised through cognitive or thought processes known as "perceived self-efficacy." Perceived self-efficacy is a person's belief about how capable they will be when performing a behaviour in a particular situation. A person's views, thoughts, and emotions are subsequently shaped by the results of such performances or acts.

The capacity of a student to successfully manage the expectations and pressures that the school environment places on him, both internally and externally, is known as scholastic adjustment. Scholastic adjustment, for example, entails, among other things, attending courses, paying attention in class, finishing assignments, refraining from exam cheating, getting good scores, earning high marks, and staying in school. The capacity to manage the rigours of schooling is known as scholastic adjustment (Mangal, 2008). An academically well-adjusted student perseveres through a particular task or exercise, refrains from making jokes about his academic endeavours or school-related matters, and becomes concerned when he receives poor grades or observes a general lack of performance in his academic work. A youngster who is academically well-adjusted respects the school administration, gets along well with both instructors and classmates, and refrains from any behaviour that might damage his good reputation.

According to Abdullah et al. (2009), scholastic adjustment encompasses academic success, personal development, and successes outside of the classroom, such as art, music, creativity, and leadership. It is described as an individual's engagement with their educational environment. He defines an adjusted student as one who passes their classes, gets good grades, and finally graduates. Wei and Williams (2004) defined scholastic adjustment as academic success, attentive conduct, and school attachment.

Historically, scholastic adjustment has been understood in terms of children's academic success or advancement. A person who is having difficulty meeting demands is working toward adjustment, according to Denga (2002). Researchers have contended that children's academic motivation is influenced by interpersonal ties. According to Schunk et al. (2010), a strong motivator is engagement, or the quality of a student's interactions with professors and classmates. A useful strategy for raising educational standards and boosting institutional performance is scholastic adjustment. It should come as no surprise that social discontent and loneliness have a detrimental effect on children's academic performance. According to Schunk et al. (2010), students' scholastic adjustment is influenced by four motivations: the need for approval, identity, self-improvement, and correctness. Students' approach to their obligations is significantly influenced by the social atmosphere at school. Students who don't live up to the standards of their peers and friends may find it challenging to fit in.

A school is an educational establishment created to offer classrooms and learning settings where students may study under the guidance of instructors. Secondary schools come in a variety of forms, including single-sex schools, mixed or coeducational schools, public or government-owned institutions, and private schools. "Public schools" are those that are founded and administered by governments, whereas "private schools" are those that are founded by people, organisations, and missionary groups. Public schools, single-sex schools, and mixed schools will be the main focus of this study. According to studies (Chow & Seng, 2013; Mabekoje et al., 2023), pupils in mixed schools do better than those in single-sex schools. According to Chow and Seng (2013), children at mixed schools are challenged by the presence of the opposing gender to do better academically; as a result, they work extremely hard to achieve academic success. According to Sullivan et al. (2012), pupils who attend mixed or coeducational schools often do much better than those who attend single or same-sex schools.

According to Harker (2000), proponents of single-sex schooling frequently claim that it improves academic performance because pupils are less likely to experience gender stereotypes and avoid the attraction of the opposite sex. However, proponents of mixed education contend that males do better in coeducational schools because they are surrounded by female classmates who behave better and do better academically. Yalcinkaya and Ulu (2012) discovered, however, that pupils from mixed-sex schools are less engaged in their studies than those from single-sex schools.

The U.S. General Accounting Office claims that before the 20th century, public education was predominantly coeducational rather than single-sex for boys. Girls usually got informal education at home, whereas boys received official schooling. In the 19th century, many boys and girls attended "common" public schools, where girls gradually started to integrate (Burton & Baxter, 2018). The coeducational approach may have been influenced by the economics of teaching boys and girls together because the majority of the schools were tiny and situated in rural regions. Opponents of coeducation in secondary schools throughout the 1800s pointed to the necessity to keep females safe, healthy, and away from boys. There was also a lot of debate over the proper curriculum, including whether or not boys

and girls should study the same subjects in school given their disparate skill levels and learning preferences. Non-discrimination laws were created in 1972 to shield pupils from gender-based prejudice in the classroom (General Accounting Office, 2018).

"Location" describes human settlements that may be categorised as "rural" or "urban" based on the density of institutions, buildings, and people that have been built by humans in a given location. A geographical area located outside of towns and cities is referred to as a rural area or the countryside (WordNet Search, 2013). According to the US Department of Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration (2003), "rural" refers to any people, housing, and area that is not part of an urban settlement. Conversely, an urban area is a community with high infrastructure and population density.

Students' academic adjustment may be impacted by their location (rural or urban). For instance, Winga et al. (2018) emphasised that urban residents fared better academically than rural residents. In their study on scholastic adjustment among first-year students at a Malaysian university, Abdullah et al. (2019) discovered that just 4% of urban respondents achieved a high level of overall adjustment, whilst 70% of respondents had a moderate level. Additionally, they discovered that 26% of pupils who were categorised as having a low overall adjustment lived in rural areas.

The accessibility and calibre of education are significantly impacted by the location of schools. All students, regardless of where they live, will have equitable access to high-quality education thanks to the strategic placement of educational institutions. A child's capacity to learn and perform is impacted by the school's location, whether it is in an urban or rural area. According to Emuobome and Favour (2025), pupils' academic adjustment is impacted by both urban and rural school locations. Population, urbanisation, and migration patterns are examples of demographic shifts that impact school demands and call for a reassessment of school placements. Long-term effects on students' wellbeing may result from school placement decisions influenced by environmental factors including safety, sustainability, and accessibility to natural resources. The creation of schools is determined by government policies and educational planning initiatives.

Students' academic adjustment may be impacted by the school's location, including whether it is in an urban or rural region, the neighbourhood's economic standing, and if it is situated close to a market (Emuobome & Favour, 2025; Godstime & Joseph, 2019). The noise from the market might cause students to become distracted when a school is built next to it. He pointed out that schools in low-income neighbourhoods are frequently underfunded, which has an impact on both the learning process and the students' interests.

The variety of physical, biological, mental, and behavioural traits associated with and distinguishing between masculinity and femininity is known as gender (Haig, 2004). The phrase may refer to gender identity, sex-based social structures (such as gender roles and other social roles), or biological sex (i.e., the state of being male or female), depending on the context (Udry, 2004). Girls are often better adjusted than males, according to research on gender variations in academic adjustment. For example, Roy et al. (2011) found that female pupils adjusted to school better than male students. Kaur (2012) emphasised that girls have more adjustment capability than boys and that boys frequently struggle with scholastic adjustment. However, Mahmondi (2010) discovered that gender had no discernible impact on academic adjustment. According to Lama (2010), female students are significantly more likely than male students to struggle with scholastic adjustment.

According to Muni and Pavigrahi (1997), girls are more socially adept than boys. In another study, Gupta and Gupta (2011) found that while boys and girls adjusted in the same order in school, girls performed better in social adjustment. According to Basu (2012), secondary school pupils' gender and academic adjustment have a highly significant impact.

The physical and/or social state of being male or female is known as gender. According to Ekeh and Oladayo (2019), gender is a collection of traits that differentiate between male/masculinity and female/femininity, especially when it comes to men and women. Numerous investigations have been carried out to determine the impact of gender on students' academic adjustment. According to Bradberry and Greaves (2019), the secondary school ratio and GPA are significantly correlated. According to the study, female students had better GPAs than male students. There are no statistically significant variations in the adaptive performance of male and female students, according to Chu et al.

(2020), who looked at the impact of gender on students' performance in adjustive technique classes. According to Kaim and Romi (2025), pupils' comprehension and academic adjustment may be impacted by the distinct cognitive types of men and women. However, Adam (2017) and Huikku et al. (2022) argued that there are notable gender disparities, with males outperforming females, when examining the variables influencing students' success in the foundations of financial management.

Students' capacity to successfully adjust to the demands, expectations, and difficulties of the school environment is determined by their scholastic adjustment, which is a crucial component of their academic lives. Academically, well-adjusted kids typically demonstrate strong interpersonal relationships, improved academic achievement, and positive learning behaviours. However, a lot of Rivers State's public junior secondary school pupils struggle to adjust to school activities, which might show up as subpar academic results, erratic attendance, low engagement in class activities, and behavioural issues. According to research, kids' socioeconomic background, age, gender, class level, and area of residence may all have an impact on how well they transition academically. Students may be exposed to different experiences, opportunities, and problems as a result of differences in various demographic parameters, which may impact their capacity to manage academic obligations. For example, kids from diverse socioeconomic origins might not have equal access to educational resources, and disparities in age and gender might influence how they feel about learning and participate in school.

There is no empirical data on how students' demographic position affects the academic adjustment of public junior high school pupils in Rivers State, despite the rising concern about kids' difficulties adjusting to school. As a result, educators, school administrators, counsellors, and legislators might not have enough data to create successful solutions that deal with children's difficulties adjusting. Consequently, this study aims to examine how students' demographic position affects their academic adjustment at Rivers State's public junior secondary schools.

This study investigated students' demographic status and scholastic adjustment of public junior secondary school students in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Ascertain the mean rating of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State based on school type.
2. Determine the mean rating of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State based on location.
3. Examine the mean rating of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender.

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the mean rating of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State based on school type?
2. What is the mean rating of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State based on location?
3. What is the mean rating of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State based on gender?

The following hypotheses guided the conduct of the study

1. School type does not make any difference in the scholastic adjustment of secondary school students in Rivers State.
2. School location does not make any difference in the scholastic adjustment of secondary school students in Rivers State.
3. Gender does not make any difference in the scholastic adjustment of secondary school students in Rivers State

Methodology

A descriptive research design was used in this study. Conditions, practices, structures, existing distinctions, continuing processes, and discernible patterns are the focus of descriptive study. This sort of study does not involve any kind of

variable modification or an attempt to use the data collected to generate a fresh condition. According to data from the Rivers State Senior Secondary School Board (2023), all 63,748 junior secondary school students (JSS II) in the 52 public junior secondary schools in Rivers State made up the study's population. Because of the enormous population size, the researcher purposefully selected a sample size of 540 pupils. The researcher chose four local government areas (LGAs) from each state senatorial district to guarantee proportionate representation. To ensure a fair distribution of schools among the regions, five schools were chosen from each of these LGAs. Finally, a sample of 540 kids was obtained by purposefully selecting 20 students from each of the 27 schools. The necessity for accessibility, representativeness, and manageability in data collection supported the study's sample size selection of 540 pupils from a population of 63,748. To guarantee that all pertinent subgroups within the population were represented in the sample, the researcher used a stratified sampling strategy.

Data for the study were collected using an instrument. Respondents' personal information, including location, gender, family type, school type, parental educational level, and parental income level, was gathered using sociodemographic and educational characteristics. Students' degree of academic adjustment was assessed using the Academic Adjustment Scale (SAS). It was designed on a four-point rating scale with SA (Strongly Agree) = 1, A (Agree) = 2, D (Disagree) = 3, and SD (Strongly Disagree) = 4. It had 23 items, 12 positive and 11 negative. Experts in the field of management assessed the instrument's face and content validity prior to its distribution. The Cronbach alpha technique of internal consistency was used to assess the instrument's dependability. Thirty students who were not included in the study's sample were given the test once. The instrument produced a reliability coefficient of 0.81, which is sufficient to verify its dependability. This scale has a minimum score of 23 and a maximum score of 92. With the help of two qualified research assistants, the researcher administered the instrument to the participants. The strategy and approach to the respondents, as well as the significance of keeping their answers private, were explained to the two research assistants. This was to guarantee that participants were fully informed about the goal of the study and the benefits they might anticipate from it. Following the respondents' answers, copies of the instruments were obtained. The study analysed the questions using the mean and standard deviation, and tested the null hypotheses using an independent t-test.

Results

Table 1: Statistic of the Analysis of Mean Difference of Students' Rating on their Scholastic Adjustment Based on School Type

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	Cal t-value	p-value	Remarks
Between	24.812	2	12.406	1.361	.061	Ho ₆ is Accepted p > .05
Within	4848.223	532	9.113			
Total	4873.035	534				

Level of significance = .05

According to Table 1, the computed F-value (Cal F-value = 1.361; Df = 2/534; p > .05) is not significant at the .05 level of significance. As a result, the null hypothesis is approved. The test of the null hypothesis revealed that there is no discernible difference between the mean evaluations of students' scholastic adjustment in Rivers State's public junior secondary schools according to the type of school.

Table 2: Statistics of the Analysis of Mean Difference of Students Rating on their Scholastic Adjustment Based on School Location

School Location	N	$\bar{X}$	STD	Df	Cal t-value	p-value	Remarks
Urban	348	2.56	.52	533	2.178	.001	Ho ₄ is Rejected
Rural	187	2.48	.44				p < .05

Level of significance = .05

From Table 2, the computed t-value is significant at the .05 level of significance (Cal t-value = 2.178; Df = 533; p < .05). As a result, the null hypothesis is disproved. According to the results of the hypothesis test, students' mean assessments of their academic adjustment at Rivers State's public junior secondary schools vary substantially depending on the school's location.

Table 3: Statistics of the Analysis of Mean Difference of Students Rating on their Scholastic Adjustment Based on Gender

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	STD	Df	Cal t-value	p-value	Remarks
Male Students	254	2.53	.47	533	-.222	.062	Ho ₅ is Accepted
Female Students	281	2.54	.49				p > .05

Level of significance = .05

Table 3 showed that the computed t-value is not significant at the significance level of .05 (Cal t-value = -.222; Df = 533; p > .05). As a result, the null hypothesis is approved. According to the results of the hypothesis test, there is no discernible difference in the mean evaluations of students' scholastic adjustment at Rivers State's public junior secondary schools by gender.

Discussion

Students in girls' secondary schools had superior academic adjustment, followed by students in boys' schools and students in coeducational (mixed) schools, according to the findings of study question one. The estimated F-value was not found to be statistically significant at the .05 level of significance when one-way analysis of variance was used to compare the mean evaluations of students on their scholastic adjustment in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State depending on school type. The current study's findings support those of Pahlke et al. (2014), who found no discernible variation in secondary school students' academic adjustment according to the kind of school. Additionally, the current study's findings support Uwak et al. (2020) assertion that pupils' academic adjustment in public junior secondary schools is independent of the kind of school.

According to the findings of the second study question, pupils' mean assessments of scholastic adjustment in Rivers State vary depending on where they attend school. An independent t-test of students' mean scholastic adjustment by school location revealed that the computed t-value was statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. The current study's findings align with those of Abdullah et al. (2019), who found that school location had a major impact on Malaysian children's academic adjustment. The current study's findings support those of Winga et al. (2018), who found that pupils from urban regions had better academic adjustment than those from rural areas.

In Rivers State's public junior secondary schools, female students are more academically adjusted than male pupils, according to the findings of study question three. An independent t-test of the mean assessments of male and female students' scholastic adjustment in Rivers State's public junior secondary schools revealed that the computed t-value

was not statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. The current study's findings support Zaki and Mahfooz's (2016) assertion that there is no discernible difference in the academic adjustment of male and female pupils. The current study's findings support Makwana and Kaji's (2014) assertion that gender has little influence on secondary school students' adjustment.

Conclusion

A person's ability to adapt to the requirements and features of the school is referred to as school adjustment, which is regarded as an outcome variable. It is a mental condition when a person's needs and those of their surroundings coexist peacefully. Among these are social adjustments, intellectual adjustments, emotional adjustments, and scholastic adjustments. It is a crucial idea in education and establishes how well kids learn. The current study's findings showed that while gender and school type had no significant impact on kids' mean evaluations, family type, parental education level, parental income level, and geography do.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommended as follows:

1. Counsellors and teachers should guide students in schools irrespective of their school type to improve their scholastic adjustment.
2. State government should provide social amenities and learning facilities in schools both in rural and urban areas to boost students' scholastic adjustment.
3. Parents, teachers and caregivers should expose both male and female students to learning experiences that would boost their scholastic adjustment positively.

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