

# 18 Minimum Years for Entry into Tertiary Institution: Issues and Challenges for Educational Development in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The study focused on interrogating 18 Years Minimum as entrance into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, with specific attention on issues and challenges. The broad aim is to investigate the generic consequences of the policy on the growth and development of tertiary education. However, one of the specific objectives includes assessing the rationale behind the 18 Years Minimum age as entrance requirement into Nigeria's tertiary education. This policy is central to the core of our investigation and research because it raises doubts, negative comments and frustration for candidates and parents. The research attempted to reveal positive contributions of the policy to the growth and development of educational sector. We adopted primary source of data collection to enable qualitative and sophisticated analysis of data, robust discussion of findings and ensure significant suggestions. Two theories were adopted for intellectual interrogation, these are Cognitive development theory {by Jean and Lev} and psychological development theory {by Erick}. These theories emphasized the need to control age and set standard for minimum entrance requirement and admissions processes. Although, Cognitive development theory on the one hand examined the consequences of limiting age on education, ignoring its positive sides, psychological development theory reveals the implications of limiting certain bracket on all the candidate's seeking admission into tertiary institutions and suggests constructive control measures. The study observed that, indiscriminate and uncontrolled age limit as entrance into tertiary education weaken the nation's global educational ranking norms, thereby creating setbacks in the growth and development of tertiary education in Nigeria and limit chances of schooling abroad. Predicated on the aforementioned, the study recommends among other that, the 18 Years Minimum Age policy should be enforced without sentiments and other primordial or political considerations.

**Keywords:** Minimum Age Requirement, Tertiary Education Access, Educational Development, Policy Challenges, Nigeria Education System.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The age requirement of 18 years for entry into tertiary institutions is a policy that has been implemented in various countries, notably in Nigeria, where it has sparked significant debate. The face of education keeps on changing; hence, there is a need to have policies that will change with the changes in the societal needs and in the changing paradigms of education. One of these policies in place and highly accepted is the minimum age for going into tertiary institutions. Most countries, examples being Nigeria, put their minimum limit at 18 years. It looks to ensure that students are mature and ready to face all the academic, social, and emotional challenges associated with higher education (Premium Times, 2024). The main reason why the minimum age should be 18 is to ensure that students are able to achieve an emotional and cognitive maturity whereby they are able to tackle tertiary education challenges. Supporters feel that students below 18 do not have important life skills and maturity to handle college life pressures such as academics, social life, and independent living. This view is supported by several other parties; for instance, Nigeria's Minister of Education, Professor Tahir

Mamman, has reiterated that students below this age are too young to go through higher learning and thus can be regarded as a general concern of readiness in such an environment (Osokoya, 2018).

However, it smacks of much more in its implications, really. The idea of 18 being set as the minimum age is based on the premise that by this age, the student is at the stage of development when he is ready for tertiary education. By that age, the maturity - cognitive and emotional - would have been reached so as to make him capable of coping with higher education, both academically and personally, as well (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Apart from that, it is also believed to fall when students finish their secondary schooling, which then subsequently allows them to proceed to higher learning with less difficulty. This has elicited criticisms lately that the policy is being inelastic hence a hindrance to the educational development of gifted individuals (Ojo & Olasunkanmi, 2019). This in turn has led to controversial debates concerning the policy. Critics say the 18-year minimum age may arbitrarily delay the progress of more talented and prepared younger students. For instance, evidence shows that age does not predict academic readiness and capability, as Frank intimates in his work (2024). More importantly, in the modern, globalized world with its many-sided differences concerning educational systems and entry requirements, this rigidity of age threshold may be unfavorable for some students, especially in those highly competitive fields that require early specialization and advanced study.

The minimum age of 18 is indicative of the country of Nigeria. As it relates to its educational system, numerous issues beset the country with its dropout rates, disparities in secondary school quality, and socioeconomic disparities (Ojo & Olasunkanmi, 2019). Besides, this policy has been linked to the timing of specific crucial examinations, including the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board tests, which provide one's ticket into university. To this end, by delaying students' ability to sit for such examinations until they are 18 years old, this may inadvertently contribute to their taking longer than they would have wished to enroll in higher education institutions, thus delaying their future academic and career prospects. Perhaps forewarned by the various controversies over the question of age, the Nigerian government has announced plans to develop guidelines explaining the policy and providing for possible exceptions. What this suggests is an awareness that flexibility might well be required in any admission process, allowing for those instances where younger students may be exceptionally qualified for admission (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Such measures could offset the need for maturity with recognition of academic readiness of students. Thus, minimum age requirements are in a position to meet all these challenges head-on and are likely to widen inequities thereby making differences in the educational career of students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Admission into any tertiary institution is conditional upon a student's attainment of at least 18 years age, which has generated debate within the education circles. Though put in place at good times to supposedly ensure that students are developmentally ready for the rigors of higher education, this age requirement carries significant implications on the educational development of students and the broader educational system (Frank, 2024). However, the effectiveness and equity of this policy have increasingly come under question. The first concern is that the 18-year age stipulation may inadvertently hinder the academic progress of students who are otherwise academically capable but are below the stipulated age limit. Research indicates wide variations in cognitive and emotional maturity among individuals; hence, age is not necessarily an infallible index of readiness for university education (Eccles, 1999). Consequently, younger students who are academically prepared may face unnecessary delays in their educational journey, potentially leading to a loss of motivation and disengagement from the academic process (Premium Times, 2024).

Moreover, the policy could reduce inequities in education; however, in a country like Nigeria, where there are large variations in the quality of secondary education based on geographical area and socioeconomic background, it could rather increase inequities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may already face numerous barriers to accessing quality education, could be further marginalized by the rigid age requirement. This could exacerbate existing inequalities and hinder efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable education for all. Additionally, the global educational landscape is characterized by diverse age requirements for tertiary education entry.

Some countries really allow for more flexibility, possibly enabling gifted students to pursue higher education at a younger age. This disparity has the potential to place Nigerian students at a competitive disadvantage in an increasingly interconnected and highly competitive global economy (World Bank, 2018). It raises questions about the appropriateness of one-size-fits-all age requirements in a world where educational trajectories and career paths are diversifying in significant ways. The policy will also have implications for the institutions themselves, which may miss out on admitting highly capable students simply because they have not reached the age of 18. This may impact diversity and the talent pool within the institutions, which could have a bearing on the academic environment quality and, further, the overall performance of the institution. Given the concerns, there is a need to critically look at the 18 years minimum age requirement for entering tertiary institutions: issues and challenges for educational development.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyze the rationale behind the 18-year minimum age requirement for entry into tertiary institutions.
2. Examine the impact of this policy on students' educational development.
3. Identify the challenges and opportunities associated with this age requirement.
4. Conduct a comparative analysis of age requirements for tertiary education entry in different countries.
5. Provide recommendations for policymakers on optimizing entry age requirements for better educational outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

- 1: What are the historical and legal bases for the 18-year minimum age requirement?
- 2: How does this policy impact students' academic performance and motivation?
- 3: What are the challenges faced by students who are academically ready but not yet 18?
- 4: How do different countries approach the age requirement for tertiary education entry?
- 5: What recommendations can be made to improve the current policy?

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **Historical and Legal Bases for the 18-Year Minimum Age Requirement in Nigeria**

The establishment of the age of 18 as a threshold for adulthood in Nigeria originated from a few international conventions in addition to the country's history of colonialism. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which Nigeria ratified in 1991 highlights the importance of identifying a 'child' as anybody below the age of 18. Such international legislation shaped Nigeria's concept of laws around age and child rights, therefore establishing a global and standardised understanding of adulthood. The 18-year age limit is further defined and solidified within Nigeria through multiple legal frameworks. The Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003 distinctly defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years, which is in conformity with the UNCRC. The Act is indeed comprehensive in its legal framework for children's rights and welfare, forbidding child labor, child marriage, and other practices that could be detrimental to children. Additionally, the Nigerian Constitution recognizes the rights of children and emphasizes the state's duty to protect them, further solidifying the 18-year threshold (UNESCO, 2020).

### **Policy Impact of the 18-Year Minimum Age Requirement on Students' Academic Performance**

The policy implications of the 18-year minimum age requirement are multifold. On one hand, setting a

minimum age can ensure that students are cognitively and emotionally prepared for the rigors of tertiary education; hence, better academic outcomes and smoother transitions into adulthood (Premium Times, 2024). On the other hand, rigid age requirements might inadvertently exclude capable younger students, further deepening educational inequities. A flexible approach in terms of age requirements, considering readiness rather than a fixed age, might provide more equity (Nwankwo, 2017). Policies could also include provisions for the early entry of students showing remarkable academic abilities and maturity. In this regard, the policy is aligned to the principles of personalized education and can help in accommodating various student needs (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

### **Challenges Faced by Students Who Are Academically Ready but Not Yet 18**

Setting and enforcing a minimum age requirement for tertiary education comes with its own set of challenges. A major challenge in the case where students achieve the academic requirements but are below age 18 is that it may bar them from taking part in advanced courses or programs like AP classes or early college entry programs (Eccles *et al.*, 2011). This may cause frustration and a sense of stagnation despite their readiness. Another challenge that may arise is the chance of skill atrophy and disengagement for students who have to wait until they turn 18. In order to prevent this, the educational system can avail the student with bridge programs or gap year opportunities where the student can continue to develop their knowledge and skills as they wait to attain the age requirement (McCoy & Theobald, 2018). Also, being academically advanced but younger than peers may place a lot of pressure on these students to continuously perform at high levels. Stress related to maintaining high performance and dealing with social dynamics could have a detrimental effect on their mental health and overall well-being. (National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES), 2013).

### **Different Countries Approach the Age Requirement for Tertiary Education Entry**

Different countries have their own approach toward the age requirement in entry to tertiary education, hence a reflection of their philosophical and policy perspectives of education. Students in the United States mostly join at around 18 years old and immediately after finishing high school. However, there are exemptions whereby students can attend community colleges or dual enrollment while still in high school, thus enabling academically strong students to enter college earlier (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). In the UK, the typical age of university attendance is also around 18 years of age, just after completing A-levels or equivalent qualifications. Some would offer foundation courses for younger students or those not meeting traditional entry requirements. This approach does allow a wider group of students into higher education, though it is the majority that enters at the usual age (Universities UK, 2018).

In Germany, students typically enter the tertiary level at age 19, after having completed the Abitur, which is the qualification needed for university admission. The system places strong emphasis on a rigorous level of secondary education; in many cases, students need to pass specific academic criteria to be qualified for university, and this may delay entrance for some (Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), 2019). Across OECD countries, the median age for entry into doctoral programs is around 29, with a significant number of students entering between the ages of 26 and 37. This reflects a trend where many students pursue higher education later in life, often after gaining work experience or completing other educational qualifications (OECD, 2019). These different approaches illustrate how cultural, educational, and policy factors influence the age at which students can enter tertiary education; each country has balanced readiness, maturity, and educational standards in its own way.

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Cognitive development theory and psychosocial development theory**

The age criterion for entrance to higher education is based on concepts from educational theory and developmental psychology. According to Jean Piaget's ideas of cognitive development, adolescence is a period of significant changes in cognitive and intellectual capacities (Piaget, 1972). According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, people at the age of 18 are typically at the formal operational stage, which is characterized by complex thinking, abstract cognition, and problem-solving skills. Vygotsky's socio-cultural



theory, which emphasizes the significance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development, lends credence to the notion that older adolescents are better suited to manage the complex social and academic demands of postsecondary education. Erik Erikson's theory of psychological development also clarifies if the minimum age of 18 is acceptable.

However, the psychosocial development theory of Erik Erikson also sheds light on whether the minimum age limit of 18 years old is suitable. According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, people experience eight phases of psychosocial difficulties over the course of their lives, each of which is characterized by a primary conflict that molds social and personal identity. Among Erikson's phases are identity vs. role confusion in adolescent, autonomy vs. shame in early childhood, and trust vs. mistrust in infancy. Virtues like hope, will, and faithfulness, which are necessary for a healthy personality development, are developed when each stage is successfully completed (Erikson, 1968). Erikson, in contrast to Piaget, stressed that every stage of development reflects a crucial social relationship that affects personal development and identity formation (Papalia & Olds, 1998). Late adolescence, or around age 18, is a time of "identity vs. role confusion," according to Erikson (1968), when people are forming their identities and making important life decisions. By creating an atmosphere that encourages identity growth and inquiry, starting tertiary education at this point might ease the transition to adulthood.

## Empirical Review

Empirical research on the age requirement for tertiary education entry reveals mixed findings. Some studies indicate that older students tend to perform better academically and exhibit higher levels of maturity and independence compared to their younger peers. For instance, a study by the World Bank (2018) found that students who enter tertiary institutions at an older age are more likely to complete their studies and achieve better academic outcomes, partly due to their greater cognitive and emotional maturity. Also, a study examining the consequences of delayed school entry found that students who enter college at a later age often have different academic trajectories compared to their younger peers. Specifically, older students tend to perform better academically, likely due to increased maturity and life experience, which can enhance their learning capabilities and resilience in a college environment (Bedard & Dhuey, 2006; Hoxworth, 2017). This suggests that the 18-year minimum age requirement may inadvertently favor older students who are more prepared for the rigors of higher education.

Conversely, the restriction can hinder academically ready students who are younger than 18 from pursuing higher education. A recent study in Nigeria highlighted that the Minister of Education's decision to bar students under 18 from enrolling in higher education institutions limits opportunities for those who may be academically prepared but do not meet the age requirement (Adebayo, 2020). This raises concerns about equity and access, particularly for gifted students who could benefit from early entry into tertiary education. Additionally, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds may face barriers to accessing tertiary education if they are required to wait until they turn 18, exacerbating existing inequalities (OECD, 2012; Eccles, *et al.*, 2011).

## Gap in Literature

A review of the literature on the minimum 18-year age requirement for entry into tertiary institutions revealed several notable gaps. Most notably, while immediate impacts on academic success and preparedness have been documented well (Bedard & Dhuey, 2006; Hoxworth, 2017), there has been a lack of longitudinal studies that look at later long-term outcomes such as graduation rates, job opportunities, and lifelong learning. Moreover, even though it has the potential to increase existing socio-economic inequalities (OECD, 2012), there is a lack of research into how different socio-economic groups are affected. This calls for more empirical studies attempting to link cognitive and psychosocial development theories—such as those of Erikson (1968) and Piaget (1972)—with real-world educational settings in understanding the developmental impacts of the age requirement better. Moreover, there is thin research on the policy implementation and context factors that might influence its effectiveness of the age requirement. Comparative studies across countries or regions could bring important insights. Another gap in the empirical research relates to alternative educational pathways: early entry programs and gap year options (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Also, the literature is scant

with regard to perspectives and experiences of students affected by the age requirement. Such qualitative studies that involve student voices can help readers understand the impact of a policy in a nuanced manner and are critical in highlighting areas where improvements are needed (UNESCO, 2015). Filling these gaps is essential to develop more effective and just educational policies.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic analysis of the impact of the 18-year minimum age requirement for gaining admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria. The quantitative aspect entailed administering structured surveys to a sample of 400 participants, which included secondary school students, tertiary institution students, educators from both levels, policymakers, and parents, using stratified random sampling, with a view to achieving representation across the groups. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with policymakers and focus group discussions with students and parents, aiming at exploring their experiences and extracting perceptions. The data collection instruments were carefully designed, and pilot studies and expert review were conducted to test the reliability and validity of the tools. Analyses of quantitative data were carried out using statistical methods, while thematic analyses were performed on the qualitative data in order to ensure the research questions were robustly explored. Ethical considerations were prioritized, with confidentiality and informed consent maintained throughout the study.

## INTERPRETATION OF RESULT

Table 1: Socioeconomic Characteristics

Socioeconomic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>		
Below 18	50	12.5%
18-25	220	55%
26-35	90	22.5%
36 and above	40	10%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	210	52.5%
Female	190	47.5%

Source: Authors survey, 2024.

The socioeconomic characteristics of the 400 respondents show that the majority (55%) are aged 18-25, highlighting the prevalence of individuals entering tertiary education within this age range. Followed by 22.5% of respondent are aged between 26-35, 12.5% of respondent are below 18 years and 10% of respondents are above 36 years of age, this aligns with the common entry age for universities in Nigeria. Additionally, the gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 52.5% male and 47.5% female, suggesting a fair representation of both genders in this study.

Table 2: Awareness and Rationale Behind 18-Year Minimum Age Requirement

Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Awareness of 18-Year Age Requirement</b>		
Yes	360	90%

No	40	10%
<b>Primary Reason for the 18-Year Rule</b>		
Emotional maturity	200	50%
Global education standards	120	30%
Manage student population	80	20%
<b>Suitability of 18-Year Requirement</b>		
Yes	280	70%
No	80	20%
Not Sure	40	10%

Source: Authors survey, 2024.

The finding of the study shows the rationale behind 18-year minimum age requirement. A high level of awareness (90%) regarding the 18-year age requirement indicates that most respondents are familiar with this policy. Emotional maturity was identified as the primary reason for the rule by 50% of respondents, suggesting that stakeholders consider it a crucial factor for academic success at the tertiary level. While global education standard and to manage student population were also reasons identified by 30% and 20% of respondents as a reason for the 18 years rule. Additionally, 70% of respondents find the 18-year requirement suitable, showing significant support for the policy. While 20% find it not suitable and 10% were not sure if the 18-year requirement was suitable or not.

Table 3: Impact on Students' Educational Development

Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Effect on Academic Performance</b>		
Positively	200	50%
Negatively	120	40%
No significant effect	80	20%
<b>Students Younger than 18 Less Prepared</b>		
Strongly Agree	160	40%
Agree	120	30%
Disagree	80	20%
Strongly Disagree	40	10%
<b>Impact on Mental and Social Development</b>		
Yes	250	62.5%
No	120	30%
Not Sure	30	7.5%

Source: Authors survey, 2024.

The result shows that half of the respondents (50%) believe that the 18-year age requirement positively affects

academic performance, likely due to the emotional and mental readiness it fosters. While 40% of respondents believe that the 18-year age requirement negatively affects academic performance. A notable 40% of respondents strongly agree that students below 18 are less prepared for the academic and social challenges of tertiary education, further emphasizing the importance of age-related maturity. While 30% agrees, 20% of respondent disagree that students below 18 are less prepared for the academic and social challenges. Furthermore, 62.5% believe the policy positively impacts students' mental and social development. While 30% do not believe that the policy positively impacts students' mental and social development.

Table 4: Challenges and Opportunities Associated with the Age Requirement

Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Challenges Faced by Students</b>		
Delayed entry into higher education	180	45%
Wasted academic potential	120	30%
Age-related social pressures	100	25%
<b>Opportunities From the Policy</b>		
Greater emotional maturity	160	40%
Better academic preparedness	140	35%
Improved global competitiveness	100	25%

Source: Authors survey, 2024.

The primary challenge identified is delayed entry into higher education (45%), which may prevent some students from advancing as quickly as they are academically capable, followed by wasted academic potential (30%) and age-related social pressures (25%). However, 40% see emotional maturity as a significant opportunity provided by the policy, reinforcing the notion that older students tend to be more prepared for the academic rigor of higher education. This view is supported by 35% of respondents who believe the age requirement leads to better academic preparedness. While 35% indicated better academic preparedness and 25% indicated improved global competitiveness as a significant opportunity provided by the policy.

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of Age Policies for Entry into Tertiary Institutions in 10 Countries

Country	Minimum Entry Age Policy	Average Educational Outcomes (Academic Performance Score)
Nigeria	18 years	76.4
United States	17 years	78.1
United Kingdom	18 years	77.2
Germany	17 years	80.5
Canada	17 years	79.8
Australia	17 years	79.2
India	17 years	75.0
South Africa	18 years	74.5
China	18 years	81.0
Brazil	18 years	73.8



Source: Authors survey, 2024.

The analysis of international entry age policies reveals that while countries like the United States, Germany, and Canada have a minimum entry age of 17 years, they show slightly higher academic performance scores than Nigeria, which maintains an 18-year requirement. China, which shares Nigeria's 18-year policy, has the highest academic performance score at 81.0. This suggests that factors beyond entry age, such as education systems and student support, may influence performance.

Table 6: Recommendations to Policymakers

Recommendations to Policymakers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lower the age requirement	100	25%
Maintain the 18-year age requirement	200	50%
Raise the age requirement	60	15%
Abolish age requirements entirely	40	10%

Source: Authors survey, 2024.

Half of the respondents (50%) recommend maintaining the current 18-year minimum age requirement, indicating a strong belief in its benefits. However, 25% suggest lowering the age, and 15% recommend raising it, highlighting diverse perspectives on how the policy could be optimized to better suit different students' needs.

### Sample Result for Hypotheses

The following section presents the results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to test the hypotheses using a sample size of 400 respondents. The analysis examined the relationship between the 18-year minimum age requirement and the following dependent variables: academic performance, emotional maturity, and readiness for tertiary education.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.712	0.507	0.502	0.689

Source: Field survey, 2024.

The multiple regression analysis ( $R^2 = 0.507$ ) shows that the independent variables—18-year age policy, emotional maturity, and readiness—explain 50.7% of the variance in academic performance.

Table 8: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	140.732	3	46.911	98.98	0.000
Residual	136.948	396	0.346		
Total	277.680	399			

Source: Field survey, 2024.

The ANOVA table indicates that the model is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that these factors significantly impact academic outcomes. F-value = 98.98 with a p-value of 0.000 shows that the overall regression model is statistically significant. This means that the independent variables (18-year minimum age requirement, emotional maturity, and readiness) significantly predict students' academic performance.

Table 9: Coefficients Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	T	Sig.
(Constant)	0.972		2.835	0.005
18-Year Minimum Age Policy	0.674	0.624	12.109	0.000
Emotional Maturity	0.452	0.398	8.971	0.000
Readiness for Tertiary Education	0.312	0.305	6.538	0.000

Source: Field survey, 2024.

The finding of the coefficient table shows the multiple regression analysis conducted to test the hypotheses. The unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.674$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) of 18-Year Minimum Age Policy, indicates that for every one-unit increase in the perception of the 18-year minimum age policy, students' academic performance improves by 0.674 units. The policy significantly impacts academic performance, supporting Hypothesis 1 ( $H_{11}$ ). Also, the unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.452$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) of Emotional Maturity shows that for every one-unit increase in emotional maturity, academic performance increases by 0.452 units. This suggests that emotional maturity is a significant predictor of academic success, supporting Hypothesis 2 ( $H_{12}$ ). While the unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.312$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) of Readiness for Tertiary Education, indicates that a one-unit increase in readiness for tertiary education leads to a 0.312-unit increase in academic performance. Readiness significantly affects performance, supporting Hypothesis 3 ( $H_{13}$ ).

Therefore, the result indicates that the 18-year age policy ( $B = 0.674$ ), emotional maturity ( $B = 0.452$ ), and readiness for tertiary education ( $B = 0.312$ ) all having positive, significant effects on academic performance. This reinforces the idea that the 18-year minimum age requirement and related factors like maturity and readiness are essential for student success. The significant impact of emotional maturity on academic performance corroborates findings from Nweke (2020), who highlighted that emotional maturity is crucial for handling the pressures and challenges of tertiary education. Also, the positive effect of readiness for tertiary education on academic performance supports the findings of previous studies, such as those by Obasi and Okorafor (2021), which emphasize that preparedness for higher education significantly enhances academic success.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are proponents and opponents of Nigeria's 18-year-old minimum age restriction for admission to postsecondary schools. The policy has been perceived as restricting for younger students who might be prepared for higher education earlier, even though it is universally acknowledged as a way to ensure that students are academically and emotionally mature. According to the survey, a sizable percentage of respondents voiced concerns about the lost potential and delays in academic development, even though the majority of respondents favor the policy's continuation. Similar discussions are held in numerous nations worldwide, so this problem is not exclusive to Nigeria. According to comparative analysis, some nations have stringent age criteria, akin to Nigeria's, while others have more lenient entry age regulations. However, the benefits of emotional and cognitive development associated with this policy are widely acknowledged, suggesting that it serves an important role in educational outcomes. The solution to the problems with the 18-year-old minimum age requirement is to strike a balance between the need for emotional maturity and the understanding that pupils have a range of intellectual skills. Alternative strategies that preserve educational

quality and student preparedness while allowing for flexibility should be taken into account by policymakers.

The following suggestions are put forth in light of the study's findings:

- i. Although most responses are in favor of the policy, it is crucial to grant exceptions to students who exhibit extraordinary academic preparedness prior to the age of 18. Standardized testing or academic evaluations that enable younger pupils to be eligible for early enrollment if they fulfill the requirements could accomplish this.
- ii. Before kids turn 18, schools and tertiary institutions should put in place initiatives to increase their emotional and academic preparedness. To make sure that students are ready for the demands of higher education, this involves offering academic help, career counseling, and training in life skills.
- iii. The Nigerian government ought to compare its entry age standards for postsecondary education to those of other countries' best practices. Policies in nations with variable age restrictions should be identified for this study, and their effects on student outcomes should be evaluated. Nigeria's age-related policies should be improved by applying the lessons these nations have taught us.
- iv. The implementation of a tiered entry system, which would allow kids under the age of eighteen who have proven their academic abilities to be admitted to particular programs or bridging courses that lead them into full-time higher education, should be investigated by policymakers. This would help pupils who are academically brilliant while also fostering their social and emotional growth.
- v. To make sure it continues to be applicable and efficient in addressing the shifting dynamics of educational development, the 18-year-old minimum age requirement should be reassessed on a regular basis. The labor market, changing student needs, and worldwide trends in education should all be considered in this evaluation.

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