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Marital Status and Age as Predictors of Academic Performance of Students of Colleges of Education in the Nort- Eastern Nigeria

Bitrus Glawala Amuda[1,*], Apagu Kidlindila Bulus[2], Hamsatu Pur Joseph[2]

[1]Kashim Ibrahim College of Education, Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria
[2]Department of Education, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria
*Corresponding author: Bitrusglawala@yahoo.com

Abstract This study investigated marital status and age as predicators of students' academic performance in the North-eastern states of Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to determine the levels of academic performance of NCE students, marital status as significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education and Age as significant predictor of academic performance in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria. One question and two hypotheses were answered and tested in the study. Survey design was used in the study. A sample of one thousand two hundred out of a population of 13,529 (8,422 males and 5,107 females) NCE 2 and 3 students from six Colleges of Education in the North-eastern States, Nigeria participated in the study. The sample of the study was selected through simple random and stratified sampling techniques. The research instruments used for data collection were Study Habit and Examination Taking Technique Inventory developed by Carew and Hamman-Tukur (1996) and Proforma developed by the researchers. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis. The results revealed that the level of academic performance of NCE students of Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria was high because those that form the majority of distribution range from merit (C) to distinction (A), which stands at 66.7%, while fail and pass grades consisted of 33.3%. Marital status and age did not significantly predict academic performance in Colleges of Education in the North-eastern States of Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended that adequate attention should be given to marital and age differences in academic performance in terms of giving assignments, group work, course placement and any other academic activities in the Colleges. To improve the academic performance, teachers and counsellors should know the different study habit patterns and how to integrate them in their teaching so that the diverse study skills will be provided to the students, which will give them the opportunity to perform maximally.

Keywords: *marital status, age and academic performance*

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1. Introduction

The desire for a high level of academic performance puts a lot of pressure on students, teachers and schools and in general the education system itself. In fact, it appears as if the whole education revolves round the academic performance of students, though various other outcomes are also expected from the system. Thus, a lot of time and effort of the schools are used for helping students to achieve better in their scholastic endeavours [21]. The contemporary society cannot achieve its aim of economic growth, technical development and cultural advancement without harnessing the talents of its citizens. The National Policy on Education [7] makes the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) as the minimum qualification requirement for teachers to teach in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools.

Colleges of Education and other tertiary institutions like Universities assume the role of training and producing teachers to teach in junior secondary schools and primary schools in Nigeria. It is in the realisation of the importance of teacher education in contributing to quality of academic performance that successive administrations in Nigeria at both State and National levels have been allocating a significant part of their annual budget to education. Parents too are not left out as they are struggling to see that their children perform well in schools by giving them all the necessary support, moral and financial. The individual parents readily expend sizable proportion of their annual income on the education of their children. Majority of parents do give plenty of moral and financial support to their children to enable them do well in Schools and Colleges.

The importance of scholastic and academic performance has raised important questions for educational researchers. These include: what factors promote or predict academic performance among NCE students? How far do the different factors contribute towards academic performance? These questions are asked because the problem of low

academic performance of NCE students over the years is indeed a matter of serious concern to stakeholders. For instance, parents would like to see their children get excellent grades. Lecturers and the College authorities would feel proud if the students perform very well in their examinations. In addition, employers will be much comfortable to absorb qualified NCE teachers. NCE students upon graduation will be employed to teach in primary and junior secondary schools. If students at the NCE level are academically poor, they may not likely become good teachers. This may affect primary and junior secondary education academic performance.

Ekundayo [5] examined the influence of gender, marital status and religious affiliation, as factors of academic performance among Nigerian education majors using ex-post facto survey design. A sample of 367 education majors were randomly selected from two institutions, 96 males, 271 females and 165 married participants age range between 17 and 33 years were used in the study. The result revealed that none of gender, marital status or religious affiliation had significant influence on academic performance of the education major students. Wilson [26] found low correlation of persistence with gender and marital status, resourcefulness and all of the demographic variables, desire, marital status and educational level. Petrol [20] reported that marital status is a good predictor of the academic achievement of NCE students. Park [19] found that there was correlation between marital status and test scores.

Eyer's [6] study showed no significant relationship between OCLI scores and marital status for baccalaureate nursing students. Fontaine [8] indicated however, that marital status is a predictor of older adult's frequency of participation in self-directed learning activities. Proyrazi and Philip (2006) assessed the relationship among marital status, ethnicity and academic achievement in relation to the adjustment strains experienced by international students in the USA. A sample of 149 international students attending five Universities in the USA participated in the study, correlation and multiple regression analysis revealed that married international students performed better than unmarried students.

Yess [27] investigated the influence of marital status on the scholastic achievement of 240 Community College students in the US. The result revealed that marital status was an important predictor of achievement among Community College graduating students. Similarly, Egwualu and Umeora [4] investigated the effect of marriage, pregnancy and child bearing on the academic performance of Nigerian female medical students. Self-administration cross sectional questionnaire were distributed to female and male students. Academic records were examined and data obtained was analysed using the Epinto statistical software package. The result revealed that, the married female students who were older had more re-sit examinations than their male and single female counterparts. The difference was statistically significant.

Robert, Wooster and Chen [23] investigated the effect of marital status of College students on their academic performance in the USA. Data based on a sample of 374 students indicated that married students had higher grades than unmarried students. However, married students with children did not achieve higher CGPAs than those without children. Tambuwal (2012) investigated the difference between marital status, study habits and academic performance of female students in Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria. Students' GPA was used to find out the level of their academic performance. A sample of 154 female students participated in the study and the data was analysed using t-distribution. The result revealed that there was significant difference between academic performance of married and unmarried students and there was significant difference between study habits of married and unmarried students. The female married students performed better and have more effective study habits than the unmarried students. Cloyd (2010) investigated the relationship between marital status and academic performance of undergraduate students in the USA, the result showed that the married students performed better than the single students. This means that marital status influences students' academic achievement and those that are married tend to do better than the single students.

Many studies in the past have measured the differences in academic performances for graduate students by gender [4,23]. However, few of them are able to account for the graduate students' marital status because past data related to graduate students have not included this information. In addition, there is no conclusive result of the findings in respect of marital status and academic performance.

Age of the individual, as it increases usually affects the various developmental changes and subsequently affects every area of human performance [25]. In addition, it is often said that, older students, being more highly motivated and more experienced in many realms of life, should obtain higher grade point average (Sturman, 2003). Dur [3] reported that, there is no significant relationship between performance and age. Similarly, Morris [14] reported that, younger students obtain higher grades than older students, because of their relative freedom from cares. He also observed that, age of the students while he/she attended College might be of some importance about his/her academic success in College [16].

Age means how old are the students studying in Colleges of Education. Naderi. Abdullah, Aizan and Kumar (2010) investigated creativity, age and gender as predictors of academic achievement among under graduate students of American Universities. A sample of 154 (105 males and 48 females) students completed creativity test. Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the selected participants was used. Multiple regression analysis showed interaction effects between creativity, age and gender as lower predictors of academic achievement. No significant difference between CGPA and age was observed. A study carried out by Mboya (1998) in Nigeria found significant differences according to age in academic performance in English language, Science and History but not in Mathematics.

In a study conducted by Watkins and Hattie (1985) in the US reported that on entry to University mature age students possess an effective study habits approach in their tertiary study and perform better academically than their younger counterparts. In Nigeria, Ogunkola [18] investigated students' inherent characteristics (age and sex), parents' educational attainment and family size as predictors of academic achievement among secondary school students in Ogun State. One hundred Integrated Science students were selected as sample. Data generated

was subjected to multiple regression and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The result revealed that only age contributed significantly to the prediction of students' academic achievement in Integrated Science. This means that, age is a good predictor of academic achievement. However, the researcher considered only Integrated Science students using only a sample of 100. This may be the possible causes of the difference. Ng and Feldman [17] found a moderate positive relationship between age and performance. McEyoy [12] on the other hand, found that age was largely unrelated to performance. Sturman (2003) found that, age and performance took an inverted-U shape. Frisby (1991) conducted a study on medical students and the result showed that there was a significant relationship between scores in examinations and age.

Adebayo [1] conducted a study to determine to what extent basic performance on the part of at-risk Community College students can be predicted from norm and criterion referenced assessment results coupled with demographic information in Community College. The prediction variables for the study were students' age, sex, race, educational goals, class attendance and criterion referenced Mathematics scores. The results indicated that older students generally outperformed the younger students and female students outperformed male students both as a result of age difference. Furthermore, the variables of age and gender were significant in the prediction of 13 successful or non-successful achievements in Mathematics class.

Watkins and Hattie (1985) reported that on entry to University, mature-age students are more likely than their counterparts to possess an effective approach in their tertiary study. This may invariably improve their academic performance in the institution. In disagreement with these findings is the work of Murray-Harvey [15] who investigated academic achievement and study habits in relation to age of students and the result revealed that matured age students did not score higher on achieving motives than younger students. This means that age is not a good predictor of academic achievement. Jense [10] investigated the difference in academic achievement and learning styles of fifteen and eleven years old students in Australia, the result revealed that 15 year olds were significantly superior to the eleven year old students in academic achievement and learning style. However, the difference in the results of the studies may be due to differences in place of study and sample size.

Cullen [2] investigated factors that influence academic achievement in Australia. The factors studied include: study styles, age, gender and prior achievement at entry. The sample consisted of 445 students representing three cohorts of students who first enrolled in 1990, 1991 and 1992. All information was extracted from students' records. The results revealed that younger students have significant rate of failure and withdrawal than older students. Older students also received more distinctions than younger students. Female students achieved more credits than male students. NERC (1981) reported that for learning different subjects and skills, unless a child has reached a sufficient age of mental and physical development, one could not effectively perform these skills. McEvoy [12] found that the age was largely unrelated to performance. Mivanyi [13] found that there is insignificant relationship between age and academic achievement. This means that age difference is not a determinant of academic achievement. The findings reported by Jense [10], McEvoy [12] and Cullen [2] indicated mixed results between age and academic achievements. Some researchers found a moderate positive relationship between age and performance. While others found that age was unrelated to academic performance. This shows that age is not a good predictor of academic performance.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In spite of the numerous findings on studies that indicated the relationship between marital status, age and academic performance, however, there is still gap in our knowledge of the relationship between age in relation to variable like marital status as predictors of academic performance. While some research findings support age as predictor of academic performance, others have failed to find any relationship between the marital status and academic performance. The present study assessed marital status and age as predictors of academic performance of students in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria, which adds to the existing literature.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to determine:

1. Levels of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-eastern States, Nigeria.
2. Marital status as significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.
3. Age as significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

1.3. Research Question

The following question was answered in the study:

What is the level of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in North-Eastern States, Nigeria?

1.4. Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

H_{01}: Marital status is not a significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

Ho_2: Age is not a significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

A research design encompasses the methodology and procedures employed to conduct scientific research. The researchers triangulated survey design in the study. Survey design consists of asking a relative large number of people for information. Kerlinger [11] defined survey method as

a process that involves large and small population, samples selected and studied, in order to discover relative incidence of distribution, interrelations of sociological and psychological variables. While Jen [9] stressed that, survey design as a process of documenting the nature, scope, relationship, dimensions and directions of events, behaviour, attitudes, interest about persons or things.

Survey design was selected to conduct the study because it involves collection of information using questionnaire and using a relatively large number of people for information; and this study has met the requirement because large samples were involved.

2.2. Population and Sample

The population for this study was 13,529 NCE students of the six randomly selected Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria. These include Borno, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe States. The Colleges of Education are Kashim Ibrahim College of Education Maiduguri, Borno State, Federal College of Education Yola, Adamawa State, College of Education Zing, Taraba State, College of Education Azare, Bauchi State, Federal College of Education Technical Gombe, Gombe State and College of Education Gashua, Yobe State. The enrolment figures from these Colleges of Education indicated that NCE two and three regular students stand at 13,529, made up of 8,422 males and 5,107 females in 2012/2013 academic session. The sample size selected through simple and stratified random sampling techniques for the study were 1,200, which is 15% of total population. That is, 200 students from each College of Education in the North- Eastern States were involved in the study.

2.3. Research Instrument

The research instrument adopted for this study was Study Habits and Examination Techniques Inventory (SHETI) Form P, developed by Carew and Hamman-Tukur (1996). The items on the SHETI are scored on a scale of 1 to 5, representing the intensity of the characteristics exhibited by the respondents. Depending on the content of an 'Almost Never' response may fetch five or one. For example, an "Almost Never" response to an item that suggests effective studying fetches one point while the same response to an item that suggests ineffective studying fetches five points. The Study Habits and Examination Techniques Inventory consists of two forms P and Q with each of the two having 40 items randomly spread across six sub-scales. The sub-scales are (a) planning and organisation of the time for study (b) motives and habits (c) learning and remembering strategies (d) note-taking (e) planning and preparing for assignments, and (f) examination techniques. Form, P. has its corresponding answer sheet. The respondents are expected to mark "X" in the circle on the answer sheet where appropriate. The instrument used for collecting data on students' academic performance (CGPA) was a proforma developed by the researchers. Test re-test method was used to obtain the reliability coefficient(r) of the instrument. The coefficient r obtained was 0.724. Based on the Cronbach's Alpha reliability obtained the inventory was adjudged suitable for the study.

2.4. Method of Data Analysis

Due to the nature of the information collected which constituted continuous data, research question was analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency counts, mean and standard deviation) to find out the level of students' academic performance in the six Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern, Nigeria. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

3. Results

The data were analysed and the results were presented and discussed in accordance with the research question and hypotheses raised in the study.

3.1. Research Question

What is the level of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North- Eastern States, Nigeria?

To answer this research question, frequency distribution and percentages were used. The levels of students' academic performance in the Colleges of Education approved by NCCE are 00 - 0.9 Fail; 1.00 - 2.49, Pass; 2.5 - 3.49, Merits; 3.5 - 4.49, Credit and 4.5 - 5.00, Distinction. The results are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of academic performance of students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Students' level of Academic Performance (CGPA) (N = 916)

S/N	CGPA	Frequency	Percentages
1	00-0.9 F- Fail	65	7.1
2	1.0-2.49 P- Pass	259	28.3
3	2.5- 3.49 C-Merit	400	43.7
4	3.5- 4.49 B-Credit	171	18.7
5	4.5-5.00 A-Distinction	21	2.3

The results in Table 1 revealed that the highest frequency distribution of students' academic performance in Colleges of Education in the North- Eastern States, Nigeria is Merit (2.5 to 3.49) 43.7%. This was followed by Pass (1.00 - 2.49) 28.35% and the least was Distinction (4.50 - 5.00) 2.3%, and 00.0 – 0.9 Fail with 7.1%. This means that 68.7% of the students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States had Merit and above, only 31.3% had Pass and Fail grades.

Figure presents the frequency distribution of students' academic performance in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States. The result showed that the highest frequency was number three, which is Merit (C), followed by number two, that is Pass grade, while the lowest is number five Distinction (A).

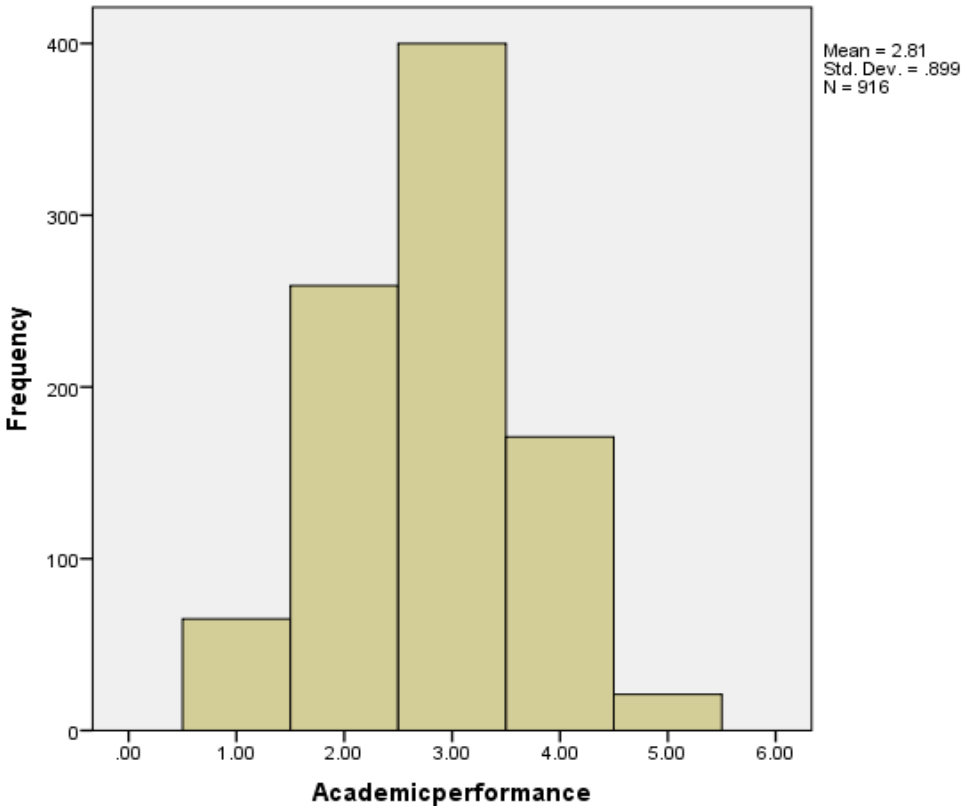

Figure 1. Histogram Showing Levels of Students Academic Performance in North Eastern States

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation of gender, age, marital status, parents' level of education by academic performance.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Age and Marital Status, by Academic Performance

S/N	Variable	Mean	N	SD
1	**Age**			
A	18-32	2.83	699	.90
B	33-40	2.79	187	.91
C	41 and above	2.50	24	.72
2	**Marital Status**			
A	Married	2.75	162	.97
B	Unmarried	2.82	749	.89

The results in Table 2 revealed that the male students had higher mean of 2.88 and standard of .93 than females with mean and standard deviation of 2.71 and .85. With respect to age distribution, 18 – 32 years had the highest mean of 2.83 and standard deviation of .90 than 33 - 40 and 41years and above. The results also indicates that the unmarried students had higher mean of 2.82 and standard deviation of .89 than the married students with mean and standard deviation of 2.75and .97.

H_{01}: Marital status is not a significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

Ho_2: Age is not a significant predictor of academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

To test these hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was used. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the results of multiple regression analysis of gender, marital status, age and fathers' and mothers' level of education on academic performance of NCE students of Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression of Marital Status and Age on Academic Performance

Predictor Variable	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)		14.333	.000
Gender	-.094	-2.856	.004*
Marital Status	-.011	-.318	.750
Age	-.045	-1.304	.193
Father s' Level of Education	.057	1.383	.167
Mothers' Level of Education	.021	.507	.612

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance.

The results in Table 3 revealed that marital status and age were not significant predictors of academic performance at P<0.05 level of significance. This means that there was no significant relationship between marital status and academic performance, age and academic performance. Therefore, null hypotheses were accepted.

4. Discussion

The findings of research question two, which asked about the level of students' academic performance in

Colleges of Education in the North- Eastern States, Nigeria, revealed that 2.3% of the students obtained Distinction, 18.7%, 43.7%, 28.8% and 7.1% obtained Credit, Merit, Pass and Fail, respectively. This shows that the majority of the distribution range from Merit (2.5-3.49) to Distinction (4.5 – 5.00), which forms 66.7% of the distribution; only 33.3% were Fail and Pass. This implies that the students of Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria have good academic performance. A possible reason for this Failure and Pass (E) grade may be due to lack of adjustment, social problems and satisfying experiences seemed to have led to dissatisfaction and failure, resulting in an incapacitated academic performance.

This finding is consistent with earlier published results of some of the Colleges of Education's Academic Board observed for few years (KICOE 2005/2006, 2006/2007, 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and 2009/2010) revealed that quite a large number of NCE students proceed to the next level with weak grades, many carry over courses, probation and withdrawal from Colleges. The study is also consistent with Shehu [24] who found that the academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in Borno State in 2004/2005 session was average (Merit) except College of Education Bama, which was below average. Very few students showed exceptional performance Distinction (A) 2.3% and Credit (B) 18.7%, this may likely affect the quality of NCE teachers produced in the Colleges of Education to teach in primary and junior secondary schools in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria with negligible number of A- and B- grades. However, the problems of Pass and Fail grades can be improved through counselling and constant monitoring of students' academic performance by counsellors and teachers in Colleges of Education in North-Eastern States, Nigeria. This can be done by creating awareness amongst students about their studies and social activities that may tend to influence their academic performance in the College.

The study showed that marital status was not a significant predictor of academic performance of students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria. That is, marital status does not significantly predict academic performance of students in Colleges of Education. This means that one's commitment, belief, confidence and self- efficacy may tend to predict one's academic performance. This finding seems to confirm the observations made by Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory; that self-efficacy beliefs, which people hold about their capabilities directly affect how much effort they prepare to put into achieving or completing tasks. If one believes that he/she is capable of achieving something, he/she will likely stick to it until he/she succeeds. What is required are the individuals' self- efficacy and strong motives to face the task. This implies that one's marital status is not a significant determinant of academic performance. The finding was consistent with Ekundayo [5] who found that marital status had no statistical significance influence on academic performance of education major students in Nigeria. It was consistent with Eyers [6] who found that there was no significant relationship between marital status and academic performance among nursing students in the US.

With respect to age, it was not a significant predictor of academic performance of students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria. This suggests that whether the students were young or old, did not seem to tell much of their academic performance. This finding is consistent with Abdullah, Aizan and Kumar (2010) who discovered that there was no significant relationship between academic performance (CGPA) and age of undergraduate students of University of Malaya. In the same vein, Murray - Harvey [15] found no significant relationship between CGPA and age of students of Queensland University. Similarly, Mcevoy [12] found that age was largely unrelated to academic performance among College students in the US.

Contrary to this finding is the work of Cullen [2] who found that younger students have significant rate of fails and withdrawals than the older undergraduate students of Southern Cross University in Australia. Older students also received more distinctions than younger students. This shows that there was significant relationship between age and academic performance. Similarly, Wattkins and Hattie (1995) found significant relationship between age and academic performance among undergraduate students of Australia. One possible reason that may be advanced for this difference in the outcome was the differences in time of study. The earlier studies were carried out in 1995 and 2002, giving gap of 19 and12 years, respectively. This means that, the result could have been the same will not be possible. This is because variation in time and space could have allowed for change in the people's attitude.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that: Age and marital status did not significantly differ with academic performance of NCE students in Colleges of Education in the North-Eastern States, Nigeria.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for adequate counselling of students by trained counsellors and teachers in the Colleges of Education in order to improve the levels of students' academic performance in the Colleges.
2. Adequate attention should be given by lecturers/ teachers to address marital status differences in academic performance in terms of giving assignments, group work, responsibilities and any other academic activities in the Colleges.
3. In order to assist married and unmarried students that have deficient academic performance, teachers and counsellors should know the different study habit patterns and how to integrate them into their teaching so that the diverse study skills in the class will be taken proper care of and the students should be given the opportunity to perform maximally.

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