# Yaş məhdudiyyəti tətbiqinin inkişaf etməkdə olan ölkələrin tələbələrinin təqaüd almasına təsirinin tənqidi təhlili

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Annotasiya Akademik dürüstlük bir təhsil müəssisəsinin çoxəsrlik təcrübəsi və etik siyasətidir. Bu, metodik olaraq araşdırılmışdır. Əvvəlki tədqiqatlarda əsasən qəbul prosesindən sonra tələbələrin akademik və məktəb fəaliyyətləri ilə əlaqəli davranış xarakterinə xüsusi diqqət yetirilmişdir. Bu araşdırma ədəbiyyata və gerçək dünyaya nəzəri və praktik bir töhfə verir. Müəllif araşdırmasında təqaüd almaq üçün yaş meyarı ilə əlaqəli mənfi cəhətləri, həmçinin onların hər hansı bir qurum daxilində və ya xaricində dürüstlüyə mümkün zərərini aşkar edir. Araşdırmada Afrika və Asiyanın on bir ölkəsindən olan 82 tələbə ilə seçilmiş beş ölkədə müsahibə aparıldığı bildirilir. Müəllif təqaüdalma zamanı yaş məhdudiyyətinin tətbiq olunmasının yaşlı bacarıqlı və ixtisaslı şəxsləri təqaüd almaqdan məhrum edərək bir növ diskriminasiyaya yol açdığını bildirir. Beləliklə, yaşın təqaüd üçün tələb olunan yaşa uyğunlaşdırılması bir növ müdafiə mexanizmi kimi qəbul edilir. Müəllif sonda bu cür sui-istifadə hallarının mümkün nəticələrini müzakirə edərək zəruri tövsiyələrini verir.

Açar sözlər Təqaüd, akademik dürüstlük, sui-istifadə, yaş, nəticə, Afrika, Asiya, inkişafda olan ölkələr.

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# A critical review of the effect of age restriction on scholarship for applicant from developing countries

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Abstract Academic integrity is an age-long practice and the ethical policy of educational institution. It has been methodically investigated. In prior researches, the investigations focus largely on students' nature of conducts regarding academic and school activities in general after the admissions, while being so limited in their acumens about paramount causality. This study has theoretical and practical contributions to the literature and the real world by uncovering the negativity associated with the age-limit criterion in scholarship admissions and how it jeopardizes the stability of integrity within and outside institutions. A total of 82 participants from 11 countries across 2 continents of Africa and Asia were interviewed at five selected countries. Age restriction in scholarship admission was reported to deprive and discriminate against aged competent and qualified scholarship applicants. Thus, adjustment of age to meet the required age in the scholarship has been considered as a defense mechanism overtime. Implications of this misconduct are discussed, and recommendations are provided.

Keywords Scholarship, academic integrity, misconduct, age, implication, Africa, Asia, developing countries.

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## Introduction

Over the last five decades, effectiveness of scholarships or financial aid on influencing the potential students' decision in college enrollment has been thoroughly dealt with through a long and rich history of empirical studies referred to as students price responsiveness, students price elasticity and student demand Jackson and Weathersby (1975), Leslie and Brinkman (1988). Academic scholarship is regarded as an award of financial support for students to enable them start or further their academic journey Heller (1997).

The academic financial support (scholarship) usually comes in different measures under various names such as, grant and loan Toby (2010), endowment - through endowments funds – Alias 2012, and bursaries in partial or full form of scholarships Isakhanli (2018) through which the higher education is accessible and affordable for the interested applicants, especially to the children of families who would otherwise be left out because of their financial incapability to sort financial related issues of the higher institution. According to the findings of a study, scholarships, grants and loans were identified as the three major forms of financial aid (Coonrod 2008).

"Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must be an escape from poverty." These interesting words were delivered by an American politician, Lyndon Baines Johnson who served the United State as the 36th president and frequently referred to as (LBJ). The statement was made in his great society speech in 1964 (Johnson, 1964). His ideology that financial inability should not be a barrier for students to learn really influenced the higher institution policy makers to review their policies by taking the financial status of the applicants into consideration while awarding the scholarships to the students. Measuring the overall participation rate since the year 1960's, a significant augmentation with 24.4% in a dramatical way occurred to the individuals from age 25 or older obtaining a bachelor's degree in 2000 equated to minorities of 7.7% in 1960 (US Census Bureau, 2006). Unfortunately, a widening gap in educational accomplishment between students from well-off and underprivileged families occurred over the last decade, when the United States higher education system witnessed a dramatic shift from student college funding grants to loans (Chen and DesJardins, 2007).

Profoundly, great numbers of universities around the world follow this trend of need-based approaches towards their scholarship awards. Nonetheless, it is ultimately important to set the conditions for the scholarships, as this helps the scholarships providers such as academic institutions, organizations and individuals to actualize their missions and objectives attached to the awarded scholarships.

Regardless of the special consideration for the less privileged students in

providing them with need-based scholarship awards, the conditions for the academic need-based scholarships at any institutions need to cultivate or impact effective contributions towards the enhancement of the students' academic integrity and achievement motivation at the institutions. Obviously, when the academic integrity is considered at the inception of scholarship application process, the reputations of the universities offering generous academic scholarships will not be at risks of academic misconduct and dishonesty which violates scientific principles, study or examination rules and rottenly attracts undeserved titles and rewards (Martinson, Anderson and de Vries 2005). Predictably, the scope of this study advocates that the specific age criterion for scholarship admissions should not be adopted by the colleges and universities for equal access assurance, and to make it open for competition. Also, it encourages many students or applicants from developing nations to engage in various acts of dishonesty and most especially falsification and manipulation of their birth certificates. So, the scholarship committees' decision is expected to be independent of the applicant's age. Besides, for academic scholarships to play a significant role of making higher education affordable for the indigent categories of students, age should not be considered as a determinant of the scholarships.

This study discusses the problems related to age as a condition in awarding scholarships to the candidates in some universities around the world. The possible implication of this criterion on academic integrity of the applicants from selected developing countries through their desperation towards attainment of the scholarships.

The university age specification for academic scholarship awards -where it matters as a major criterion– varies, depending on applicant's level of study. Nevertheless, the explanatory reports of most common approach among the selected universities in this study are as follow. Intended applicants for academic scholarship at any of these universities must be under a limited age ranged from an academic level to another. For example, an applicant who intends to pursue a bachelor's degree program of study must be under 25 years of age during the submission of the application, 30 years applies to master's program applicants, while 35 years is the case for those wishing to continue their doctoral programs in any of the universities.

Age restriction creates many possibilities for the compromise of academic integrity and necessitates unwanted misconducts on desperate applicant whose eligibility -to submit application for scholarship– has been dismantled because of age, by taking illegal steps to ensure reduction and adjustment of their normal age to fit with the required age in the scholarship awards. Unfortunately, it has become general phenomenon in most of these countries that, everyone is expected to have two different ages, classifying as "real age" and "official age".

According to some interviewees, countless applicants have secured scholarship admission through this illegitimate tactic. They proclaimed that sometimes, it encourages them to go beyond and use the opportunity to upgrade some other documents, interpreting it as "survival of the fittest". Humorously, various researchers have claimed that, students' engagement in several types of misconduct enable them to obtain unfair advantages over their entrants (Keith-Spiegel and Whitley 2001; Sattler, Graeff and Willen 2013).

A study found another peculiar consequence of misconduct and dishonesty among the students, which is noted as deprivation of a sense of triumph to whom deserves it, just as it feels when another one takes the gift intended for someone else (Reddiford, 1998).

It is obvious that human tends to be desperate in achieving their goals and do everything possible to outshine the barriers and obstructions on their ways. It requires personal integrity to maintain honesty and search for another appropriate opportunity. A study linked dishonesty behavior to three major factors, individual integrity, personal pressure and opportunity (Albrecht, Wernz, and Williams, 1995).

For this, falsification and fabrication of data through the manipulation of birth certificates becomes natural phenomenon and general norm among most of the applicants from developing countries while striving to secure scholarship admissions into their various universities. Apparently, the process of admission at the initial stage is unfortunately based on dishonesty and misconduct. So therefore, students of such nature -if eventually admitted– are less expected to maintain academic integrity during and after completing their academic journey.

They are reversely expected to behave in negative manner after the school tenure. There are empirical evidences underpinning the notion. Fass (1990) discovered a connection between cheating while studying at school and cheating in community grounds after the school. Similarly, in another study conducted on students from communication department; it was suggested that communications specialized students who cheat in college will habitually become the next untruthful communications specialists (Todd-Mancillas, 1987).

Generally, most universities enforce a particular grade point average condition to ensure that the selection procedure of their scholarship and admission is based on merit Kronholz (2003). As a result, some of these universities rarely consider the financial background to maintain balance justification of equality among the applicants. However, making age a major criterion of scholarship awards will deprive and has been depriving many brilliant students who have been experiencing retardations to proceed with their higher education as a result of their financial incapability.

The practice of academic misconduct of data falsification is widespread,

especially in Africa. It is unsurprising that many scientific studies have dealt with the problematic nature of academic dishonesty McCabe and Trevino 1993; Lim and See 2001; Vowell and Chen 2004; Collins, Judge and Rickman 2007; Taixeira and Rocha 2008). Barnett and Dalton (1981) considered forging academic documents as one of the highly rated academic dishonesty in the universities. It has become a norm among the people. The victims of this circumstance use different ages for different purpose regardless of the consequences; what matters to them is to get their objectives achieved.

The researcher adopts reflexive approach in this study. Hertz (1997) suggested that a reflexive study is not just about reporting the "facts" of the study but should be actively extended to a constructive interpretation of the facts. For instance, ("What do I know?"), while at the same questioning how the interpretation occurred, through relevant question such as, ("How do I know what I know?").

Apparently, ethics in qualitative social research have been explored since the 1960s by social scientists (Bulmer, 1982; Homan, 1991; Kimmel, 1988; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001; Robley, 1995). Considering the sensitivity nature of this study together with the sustainability of the research ethics. To maintain anonymity, researcher decides to make the names of the universities and the countries of the control group in this study confidential. The responses of individuals were not linked directly to their respective countries.

The assessment of the nature and extent of the risks in research can be difficult. a study distinguished three types of risks that can arise in research that requires human participations: interference with bodily integrity, interference with psychological integrity and interference with self-determination and privacy Katz (1972).

The logic behind this study is not to tarnish the image of any academic institutions or individuals but to uncover this widespread misbehavior and create general awareness about the atrocity related to age criterion in awarding academic scholarships as a reflection of needs and commitments of most of the applicants from developing countries, where falsification and fabrication of data and document is possible and rampant.

This study has theoretical and practical contributions to the literature and the real world by uncovering the negativity associated with the age-limit criterion in scholarship admissions and how it jeopardizes the stability and sustainability of academic and integrity at a large form within and outside institutions.

**Academic integrity**

Academic integrity is the ethical policy of college circles which is an age-long practice in educational institution. Don McCabe was the founder of academic integrity, he is considered as the «grandfather of academic integrity», given that,

the term was coined by his authority. This includes values, such as avoidance of cheating or plagiarism, maintenance of academic standard; honesty and rigor in research and academic publishing Kirk (1996).

Academic integrity is expected to be the foundation of college or university's goal to enhance an exchange of ideas and develop new knowledge, of which individual students are expected to work with and trust one another. Avoidance of academically dishonest attitudes, such as, fabrication, falsification and plagiarism are mostly regarded as an avenue to promote the concept, academic integrity. However, in the absence of integrity, when the focus of the students is on negative behaviors to get their ambitions achieved; dialogues about integrity are centered on doubt rather than trust, growth and respect.

Referring integrity to the virtues that generate a respectable person (Meisengelde 1983) highlights the crucial role of integrity in academic institutions. Attributing virtue of ethics to academic integrity, many researchers have identified excellences in character, example of modesty as a student or researcher, humility and self-effacement as an instructor or teacher in academic related functions (Macfarlane 2004, 2007, 2009; Nixon 2004; Pring 2001).

The growing interests in issues related to integrity in academic setting is surely traceable to the frequency of reported cases on academic dishonesty, fraud and misconduct world-wide. Which indeed lends the concept academic misconduct several scientific investigations from researchers (McCabe and Trevino 1993, Lim and See 2001; Rottinger, Jordan and Peschiera 2004; Vowell and Chen 2004; Collins, Judge and 2007; Teixeira and Rocha 2008).

Altbach (2004) while emphasizing the importance and roles of universities and organizations in society and globalization means suggested that lack of integrity damages the fidelity of higher education systems and institutional brands. Unfortunately, researchers declared that these transgressions are nonchalantly overlooked or trivially handled by faculty to avoid involvement in what is perceived as official procedures premeditated to arbitrate indictments of academic misconduct within their campus (McCabe, 1993; Nuss, 1984; Singhal, 1982).

Haines et al. (1986) pointed at the act of reluctancy in detecting and reporting cheating by faculty members. Nuss (1984) added that in order to confront academic dishonesty, institutions are expected to understand their roles in inspiring academic integrity and making it mandatory in collegiate experience.

Accordance to Cummings (19980), academic integrity can be interpreted as an umbrella which as academic practice is orthodoxly broken into three component functions, namely; research, teaching and service. In line to that, it is relevantly important for higher institutions to understand the importance of addressing the issues related to academic integrity from the inceptions and recruitment stages.

**Age in view of cognitive development**

In developmental psychology, issues related to the pattern of adult cognitive development and most especially intellectual development are controversial. Many cross-sectional early studies have shown that individual experiences a constant deterioration in intellectual across the adulthood stage (English and Carstensen 2014). However, longitudinal studies proved that a marked deterioration in individual's intelligence does not occur till around age 60 (Schaie and Hertzog 1983). They also acknowledged that it is an indication that the predicted deterioration and decline in individual intelligence at adulthood stage found in cross-sectional studies might be an effect of cohort which is, discrepancies in early educational skills.

Moreover, Wang and Kaufman (1993) believed that, the intellectual deterioration at the adulthood stage does not encompass both fluid and crystallized which are known as the facets of intelligence. Instead, deterioration grasps fluid aspect of intelligence which mirrors the reasoning capability and ability to process the information rather than crystalized intelligence which showcases the ability to acquire and accumulate knowledge.

Although, a researcher claimed that the speed in which the process of information occurs slows in old age of adulthood (Schaie, 1989) as it was replicated in other studies conducted by Bors and Forrin (1995) and, Salthouse (1991) reasoned that the slowing is specifically unfavorable to short-term memory. Interestingly, researchers (Fischer, Yan, & Stewart, 2003) clarify the complexity of adult cognitive development as continuum process that possess substantial activeness in cognitive development beyond that at infancy and early childhood stages. Numerous empirical evidences proclaimed that engagement in mental and physical inspiring activities effects less cognitive deterioration and minimizes impairment in later adulthood stage (Hertzog, Kramer, Wilson, & Lindenberger, 2009; Larson et al., 2006; Podewils et al., 2005), they believe that cognitive ability is not the same as physical ability, which peak in human's mid-twenty and later begin a slow degeneration.

Therefore, it is not surprising that a lot of scientific investigations have opposed the notion of cognitive deterioration at the adulthood stage. This indicates inaccuracy of age limitation in academic pursuant and, accordingly, several researchers believe that; to maintain cognitive abilities corresponding memory, the axiom "use it or lose it" could have some cogency (Ratner et al., 1987).

Apparently, what has been said about the mechanisms which connect age with academic scholarship was little. Providing cognitive theoretical reasoning enable this study to establish the fundamental progressions between both concepts. The study intends to discourse the shortcomings of earlier studies by researching the incidence of academic misconduct or misbehavior at the inception, during the

admission process and before getting admitted into the higher institutions. Moreover, the findings might help the founders and university admission and scholarship committees to form a sound basis for restructuring the scholarship criteria. In addition, the results might accentuate the need for interference and prevention steps to promote academic integrity among the potential scholarship and admission applicants, by lowering the commonness and occurrence of academic misbehavior. This paper addressed the issues and implications attached to age restriction in scholarship admission from the perspective of the applicants from developing countries, using two key research questions:

- How do applicants from developing countries regard the age-limit criterion in scholarship admission?
- How does age-limit in scholarship admission affect academic integrity?

## Methodology

Given that, the objectives of this intense study aimed at decoding the views and feelings of scholarship applicants towards age-limit criterion in academic scholarship, noteworthy and substantial efforts were made to actualize that. Data from in-depth interviews on the topic of scholarship, age and integrity were used. In this study, 82 individuals from 11 countries (Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Gambia, Jordan, Syria, Ghana, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Iran and Azerbaijan) across 2 continents (Africa and Asia) were interviewed. 66 participants were granted one on one interviews using semi-structured interviews in collecting their explanations at 5 different locations/countries namely, Nigeria, Jordan, KSA, Egypt and Azerbaijan. Whilst the remaining 16 participants were interviewed via Skype, WhatsApp and Facebook messenger and all the interview conversations were recorded using telephone sound recorder (see Table 1). Semi-structured interviews enable focused dialog, underpin openness to ideas and matters raised by the interviewees (Patton 1990).

The data of the study were organized and arranged in themes and patterns. Then, the thematic coding was used for necessary familiarization (Boyatzzis 1998). Preliminary codes were assigned in a systematic way to the data to generate content description. Subsequently, the themes and patterns were critically reviewed after a proper search for the codes the various interviews, recurring ideas and language patterns that link interviewees and setting (Gibbs 2007) and, the themes and patterns were named accordingly before the production of research report.

A consent letter was presented to each interviewee of this study to confirm their readiness to participate in the study. It contains the purposes of the study, and anonymity cum confidentiality of their responses, especially the countries, colleges and universities were guaranteed.

**Table 1.** Interview Sample Framework

| Country | Continent | Location | Methods | Figure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Azerbaijan | Asia | Azerbaijan | Face-to-face | 8 |
| Egypt | Africa | Egypt | Face-to-face | 8 |
| Gambia | Africa | Azerbaijan/Saudi | Both | 7 |
| Ghana | Africa | Azerbaijan/Malaysia | Both | 7 |
| Indonesia | Asia | Azerbaijan/Indonesia | Both | 7 |
| Iran | Asia | Azerbaijan/Iran | Both | 6 |
| Jordan | Asia | Jordan | Face-to-face | 8 |
| Nigeria | Africa | Nigeria/Saudi/Egypt | Face-to-face | 12 |
| Pakistan | Asia | Azerbaijan | Face-to-pace | 6 |
| Syria | Asia | Azerbaijan/Saudi | Face-to-face | 6 |
| Zimbabwe | Africa | Azerbaijan/Egypt | Face-to-face | 7 |

## Results

Ensuing the thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews with 82 participants from two continents namely, Africa and Asia. In this study, several themes were formulated in accordance with the dimension in which the interview questions were structured. Regarding how it feels to adjust age because of admission scholarship, three themes such as, "no hard feelings", "it is just a balance justification" were transcribed. An interviewee among the category who subscribed to the theme of no hard feelings said, since it is a scholarship scheme and not a paid study. Concerning "balance justification's theme", an experiencer said, yes, it is; especially when one is from the countries that have longer primary and secondary education periods.

Subsequently, all the interviewees were asked to outline presumed positive and negative impacts of age restriction in admission scholarship. A theme was deducted from few interviewees' views on positive impact of age restriction in

scholarship admission, an interviewee responded that: "it encourages fast and early child education and besides, considering the number of undergraduate applications received by the institutions, it is only feasible to set some criteria to help manage the crowd, age perhaps is an important factor". While majority of the interviewees nullified the existence of any positive impact to age-limit in scholarship. One of them even said "there is no positive impacts of it. Age limit policy is just one type of discrimination". Other three set of themes were equally merged and systematically transcribed as "discrimination" "deprivation", and, "threat to students and moral ethics". Significantly, the hierarchical arrangement of these three themes has a lot to do with interviewees' choosiness. In line with the aforementioned themes, the following are the direct and raw quotations of some of the participants:

> "Age limit in scholarship could lead to deprivation of those who really want to learn. Moreover, the more the age in education the more students get assimilated if otherwise, there would be more read to pass without proper understanding by the students."
>
> "It prevents people from harnessing opportunities, it also limits the exchange and fostering of knowledge and ideas. It could retard personal as well as organization/societal and human resources development"
>
> "Other than the fact that it looks discriminatory, it denies a lot of people who for various financial reasons were unable to make school earlier than the stated age a good chance of having good education."
>
> "Education should not have any barrier regardless; age limit has denied quite a number of my colleagues the opportunity to further their studies despite being the most brilliant in the class".
>
> "Age limit is a threat to students' moral ethics especially the desperate students who are above the required age (set by the institutions and scholarship providers), yet they sincerely want to further their education".
>
> "Age limit kills talent".

Majority of the participants from certain countries under Asian continent said that when there is age restriction in scholarship admission, they quickly check the required age to confirm their eligibility since there is nothing, they can do to influence a change to the decision of scholarship providers. Meanwhile, a small number of interviewees from some part of African countries reported the same thing. Majority of the African participants declared that when the scholarship admission has age-limit criterion and, they have exceeded the required age, yet they tend to proceed with the application using relevant age and start thinking about solution and way out to sustain the scholarship if eventually given to them.

Although, majority of them refused to disclose and shed more light on what

they meant by solution and way out. Some few among them acknowledged that they proceeded with the application putting relevant age and effected the change in necessary documents. At the same time, this scenario was the response deducted from fewer interviewees from three countries under Asian continent. Furthermore, some interviewees from certain part of Asia admitted that they have made efforts to ensure necessary adjustment of their age to suit the common requirement of scholarship admission. Unfortunately, they could not afford the stress and expenses involved to effect that in international passport and other necessary documents. Some of them claimed that the process is presently impossible but emphasized on the fact that some people have done that successfully in the past last decade.

Based on prior experiences of the control group of this study, several colleges and universities were clearly identified during the interview sessions. Meanwhile, in maintaining the obligations of research ethics in line with what was explained to the participants in the letter of consent, the study disregards a direct disclosure of either country or university of the participants.

## Discussion

This study preliminary draws on the theory of ethical policy of academia (McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 1999) and outspreads it to social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and, moral justification theory was developed through observation, explanation and understanding (Carpiano & Daley, 2006) the reactions of applicants from developing countries towards scholarships with age restriction. According to Ferrari (1996), human observational learning is governed by numerous examples. In this study, some of the participants proclaimed that they only adjusted their ages after witnessing the positive outcomes of their contemporaries who tried and succeeded before them. There are scientific evidences (Gray et al., 1991; Hanna and Meltzoff, 1993; Hallenbeck and Kauffman, 1995) to support this notion.

Based on some of the theoretical contributions of this study, the results may have numerous practical suggestions. The findings of this study advocates that the controllers and stakeholders of higher institutions concerned should take heed of this unlawful actions that threaten stability and sustainability of academic integrity in the institutions Nuss (1984). Given that merit-based scholarship Mumper (1999) and need-based scholarship Millea, Wills, Elder and Molina (2018) are the most common bases of academic scholarships, the study hereby suggests that financial status of the applicants should be a major criterion in a need-based scholarship Coonrod (2006), while academic merit or and performance of the applicants should be prioritized in merit-based scholarship Mumper

(1999). Usually, financial incapability is often responsible for retardation of academic journey (Muhammed-Shittu, 2019) of most applicants from developing countries and most especially African. That could be one of the reasons why are age-limit criterion looks discriminatory to them on one hand, and the reason for the irrational justification of their misconducts on the other hand.

### Note

Confirmatory evidences on how data were collected from the above stipulated locations are not included but available and can be provided upon request.

### Disclosure

The author of this study received no monetary aid for authorship, there is no conflict of interest, and the research has not been published elsewhere.

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