



Older and Smarter? Investigating the Relationship Between Age and Academic Award Received

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ABSTRACT:

Recognizing student achievement through academic awards can significantly impact student success by boosting self-esteem, fostering a sense of accomplishment, and enhancing peer recognition. This positive reinforcement can be a powerful motivator for further improvement. Questions remain about whether older learners, with their potentially greater life experience and maturity, are more likely to receive higher academic awards than their younger counterparts or if younger learners, with recent preparatory education and fewer external responsibilities, are more frequently recognized. This study examines the correlation between student age and the frequency and level of academic awards received, specifically investigating whether older or younger learners are more likely to achieve higher recognition in their academic pursuits. This is a quantitative correlational study. It includes the total population of the academic awardees in a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines for the SY 2024-2025. It includes all awardees from grades 1 to 6. Pearson Correlation Coefficient (PCC) is used to analyze the data. The study reveals a significant positive correlation between age and receiving an academic award. It indicates that the older the student, the higher the academic award received. Additionally, most awardees enter formal education at the age of five or six. Age influences the receipt of awards, suggesting differentiated recognition to motivate younger learners with fewer responsibilities. In faith-based settings, integrate these insights with values like fairness to ensure equitable motivation. PCC analysis confirms the trend but warrants further study on external factors, such as preparation and parental involvement.

KEY WORDS: academic awards, older learners, younger learners, age, correlation

1. INTRODUCTION

Pursuing academic excellence is a primary objective among academics, where giving academic awards is often used to recognize student achievement. Academic awards can significantly contribute to student success by boosting self-esteem, fostering a sense of accomplishment, and enhancing peer recognition. This positive reinforcement can be a powerful motivator for further improvement (Olinger, 2018). Academic awards are also valuable investments in students' personal and academic development. They can motivate students to excel in both curricular and extracurricular activities, instill a sense of pride in students, and encourage them to meet or surpass their goals. Awards also help students set clear objectives and inspire a sense of responsibility to work harder and achieve even more (Grieshop, 2023). Basically, academic awards serve as powerful catalysts for students' success. These awards are valuable investments in students' personal and academic development, motivating them to strive for excellence in all aspects of their education. Therefore, understanding whether age influences the receipt of awards is paramount.

Based on an initial review of online articles, no study has focused on the relationship between age and receiving academic awards. Some studies have focused on factors such as socioeconomic background, gender, learning styles, and field of study, but the role of age in determining academic success and recognition remains less explored. In Canada, Dubuc, Aubertin-Leheudre, and Karelis

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(2022) discovered that different factors influence academic performance in high school students, depending on the subject, gender, and study design. In the Philippines, Lee et al. (2018) found that sex, course, weekly allowance, religious activities, and academic motivation statistically correlate with high Grade Point Average (GPA). However, Capinding (2021) concluded that age, sex, and educational environment have no direct relationship with academic performance among minority students. Questions remain about whether older learners, with their potentially greater life experience and maturity, are more likely to receive higher academic awards than their younger counterparts or if younger learners, with recent preparatory education and fewer external responsibilities, are more frequently recognized.

This study examines the correlation between student age and academic awards received, specifically investigating whether older or younger learners are more likely to achieve higher recognition in their academic pursuits. By analyzing award distribution across various age groups and educational settings, this research aims to bridge the existing gap in the literature, offering insights into how age influences academic success and the implications for educational policies and practices. The findings of this study could contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of academic recognition, ultimately informing strategies to support diverse student populations in achieving their full potential.

II. METHOD

This is a quantitative study using a Correlational design. Correlational analysis is an approach that investigates the relationship between two or more variables and assesses this relationship without manipulation (Sreekumar, 2024). This Study Utilizes a Correlational design to investigate the relationship between students' age and the academic award received. By analyzing the data from a sample of students, the study aims to determine if there is a correlation between these variables.

The awards and age data are based on the total number of academic awardees from a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines for the 2024-2025 school year. Following approval from the principal, grade-level advisers provided a list of awardees, including their corresponding ages and the awards received, without including personal identification information. This ensured ethical handling of student data in the quantitative correlational analysis.

This study employed Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (PCC). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient is a descriptive statistic that summarizes the relationship between variables in a dataset. Specifically, it describes the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. The similarity or correlation between two data objects is determined by comparing their attributes and calculating a score ranging from -1 to +1. A high score indicates a high level of similarity, while a score near zero indicates no correlation. In the context of early childhood education, this can be used to explore associations between age and academic awards.

III. RESULTS

The results of this quantitative correlational study are presented and discussed below, following the order of the research questions: 1) What are the ages of the academic awardees from a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines? 2) What types of academic awards do the academic awardees receive? 3) Do older learners receive higher academic awards more frequently than younger learners? 4) Is there a statistically significant correlation between student age and types of academic awards?

Age of the Academic Awardees

One of the key variables in this study is age. This section examines the age distribution of academic awardees from a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines, highlighting the significance of understanding their age profile. Analyzing this data enhances overall comprehension of the study. This section answers SOP 1: What are the ages of the academic awardees?

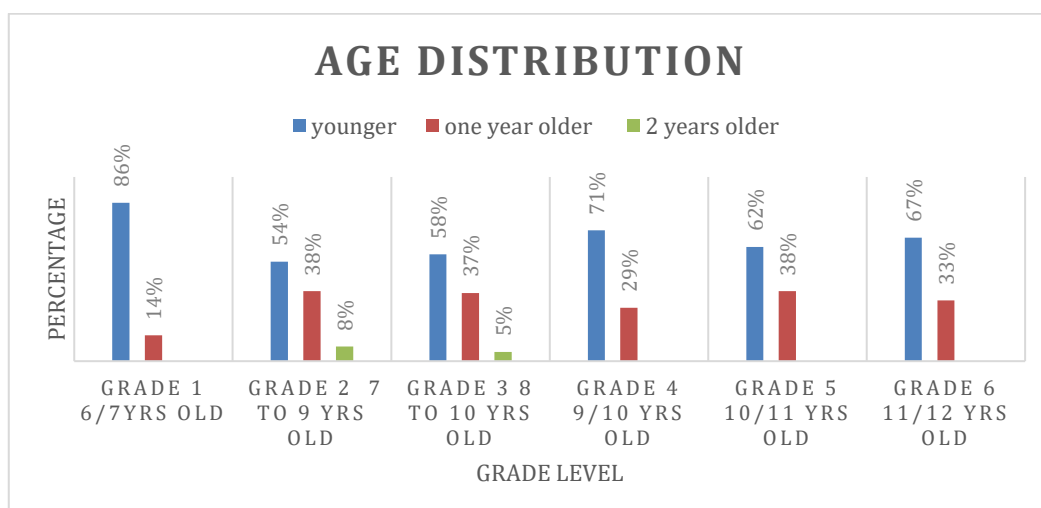


Figure 1. Percentile age distribution per grade level

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Figure 1 displays the percentile age distribution of academic awardees per grade level. It reveals that the awardee ages per grade level consist of two age groups, except for grades 2 and 3, which have three groups each. The majority of grade 1 awardees are 6 years old, grade 2 are 7, grade 3 are 8, grade 4 are 9, grade 5 are 11, and grade 6 are 11, aligning with typical age-grade norms, while fewer students are one or two years older per grade, with most at typical ages.

DepEd Order No. 015, s. The 2025 adjustment changes the cut-off age for kindergarten entry to 5 years old by October 31, positioning students for Grade 1 readiness at age 6. This aligns with the Philippine K-12 system's expectation of annual progression, where typical Grade 1 entrants are 6 years old. The policy supports age-appropriate grouping in elementary education (DepEd, 2025). Prior to the K-12 implementation and when kindergarten was not mandatory, the standard practice was to enter Grade 1 at the age of 7.

Academic Awards

The academic awards at a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines range from Category D to A, aligning with DepEd's academic excellence guidelines under DO 36s. 2016, which emphasizes high averages and no grades below 85% (Proficient Level). Pupils with 96-100% average and no grade below 85% receive Category A (equivalent to Highest Honors). Category B requires 90-95% average with the same minimum; Category C needs 85-89%; and Category D is for exactly 85% average.

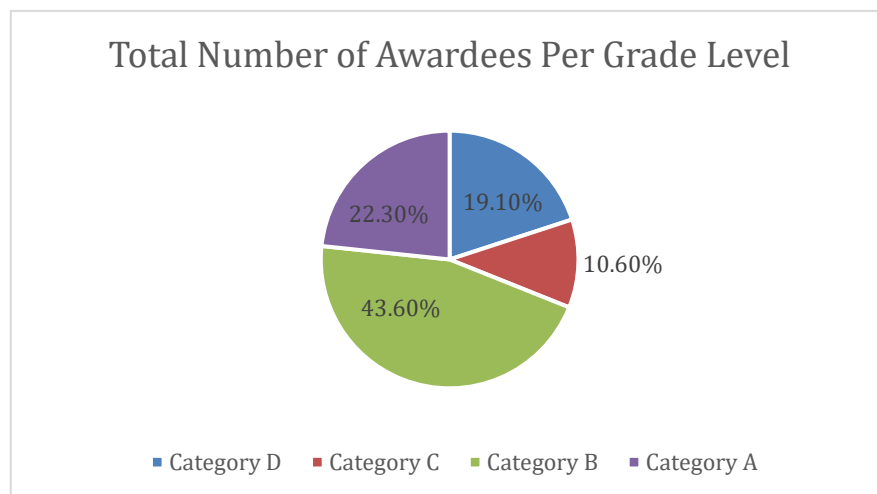


Figure 2. Frequency of academic awards

This figure shows that Category B is the most frequently received award, followed by Category A, with Category C being the least common.

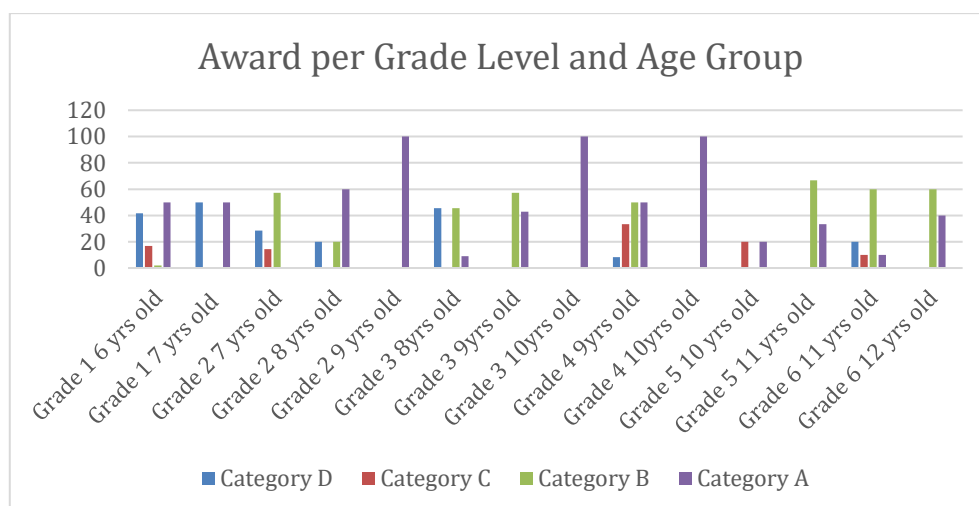


Figure 3. Award per grade level and age group

Figure 3 presents the distribution of academic awards across age groups in a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines. The data reveal that Category A awardees are predominantly older within their grade levels, while Categories D and C are more common among younger students per grade. For instance, in grade 2, among 7- and 8-year-olds, the awards received are mostly in categories B and A. In Grade 3, 9-year-olds received categories B and A; no 9-year-olds received Category D. Similar patterns hold for 11-year-olds in Grade 5 and 12-year-olds in Grade 6, with younger age groups dominating the lower categories. This supports the concept of relative age effects, where maturity advantages lead to higher recognition of achievement.

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Ydstie (2017) affirmed that “Children who start school at an older age do better than their younger classmates and have better odds of attending college and graduating from an elite institution.” He added that the advantage of older students extends into college. He noted that in the primary years, the cognitive differences between one year apart are significant. These differences may affect their learning and academic performance. Likewise, Jacobson (2017) reported that learners who started kindergarten at an older age continue to have an advantage until college.

Age Does Matter (2010) quoted Dr. David Daniel, psychology professor at James Madison University and managing editor of the journal *Mind, Brain, and Education*, who stated in the *Harvard Education Letter* that “The four-year-old has a four-year-old brain and a six-year-old has a six-year-old brain. There are certain things connecting in a six-year-old brain that are still being worked on in the four-year-old brain.” Additionally, the article emphasized that younger students are not developmentally ready and therefore do not form appropriate connections that facilitate meaningful knowledge. This report suggests that older students are mentally prepared and have established connections for meaningful learning.

Relationship of Age and Academic Award Received

This section examines the correlation between age and receipt of various academic awards from a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines. Specifically, it answers whether there is a statistically significant correlation between student age and types of academic awards.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of age and type of academic

Correlation Matrix			
		Age	GPA
Age	Pearson's r	—	
	Df	—	
	p-value	—	
GPA	Pearson's r	0.231	—
	Df	92	—
	p-value	0.025	—

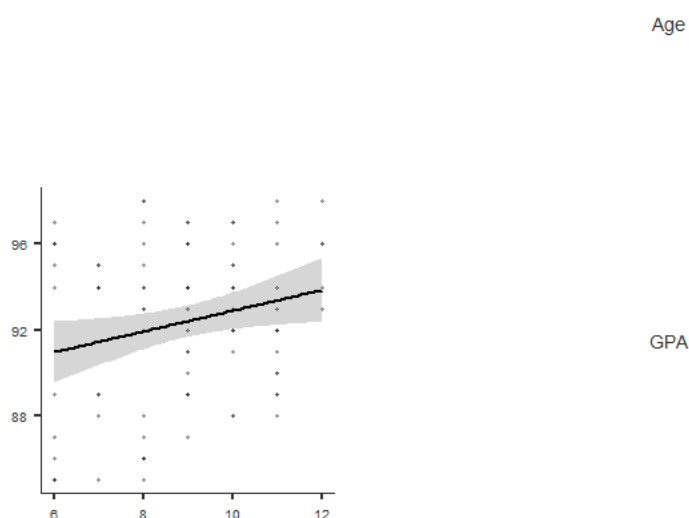


Figure 4. Plot of the correlation between age and academic awards based on GPA

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Table 1 and Figure 4 illustrate the relationship between age and the number of academic awards received. Table 1 presents the results of a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (PCC) analysis, which assesses the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. Pearson's r (p): 0.025 suggests a statistically significant positive correlation between age and academic awards received at the conventional $\alpha = 0.05$ level ($p < 0.05$). A value close to 0 indicates a weak or no correlation, whereas a value closer to 1 (or -1) represents a stronger positive (or negative) relationship. This indicates that the older participants received significantly more awards than the younger ones, and this pattern is unlikely to be due to random chance alone (less than 2.5% probability under the null hypothesis of no relationship).

Figure 4 illustrates a significant positive correlation between age and the number of awards received, indicating that as students age, they are more likely to receive academic recognition. This trend may suggest that age is correlated with academic recognition, potentially due to developmental factors, experience, or accumulated learning over time, positioning older students to excel and receive awards more frequently. According to cognitive development theories, such as those proposed by Piaget, older students may also exhibit more sophisticated cognitive abilities that enhance their academic performance.

Older children are generally more knowledgeable than younger children. Hopkins (2020) agrees that “younger children have less mature cognitive abilities than older children.” This positive effect was substantial and statistically significant, indicating that relative age within a cohort has a significant impact on academic outcomes. These older students had a clear advantage over their younger classmates in terms of both objective assessments and subjective teacher evaluations.

IV. DISCUSSION

The cognitive development theory proposed by Jean Piaget supports the notion that children progress through four distinct stages of learning. Sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages explain how children develop knowledge and intelligence (Cherry, 2024). Piaget explains that children's cognitive development changes as they interact and gain experience with their environment. Children acquire new knowledge as they progress from one developmental stage to the next. Additionally, children become more intelligent and mature as they progress through the final stage of development. It shows that the acquisition of knowledge and intelligence is age-related.

The relationship between students' age and their academic achievement has garnered significant attention in educational research. The studies reviewed present two contrasting ideas: older students academically outperform younger students, and younger students perform better than older students. These two contrasting ideas are discussed below.

Aransi (2018) indicated that older students tended to perform better in Economics compared to their younger counterparts. This could be attributed to greater maturity, more experience, and possibly better study habits. However, the relationship between age and academic performance was not strong enough to be statistically significant. Although a trend emerged showing that older students performed better, this was not consistent across all cases.

The study also highlighted that many other factors likely influenced academic performance, such as teaching methods, individual motivation, and personal abilities. Overall, while age appeared to have some effect on performance, it was not a decisive factor, suggesting that a range of influences contributed to students' success in Economics.

According to Beaton, Kidd, Niu, and Vella (2023), being the oldest student in a grade has a significant positive effect on academic performance. Older students, who started school later due to the increased enrolment age, performed better on both standardized test scores and teacher-assessed grades. This positive effect was substantial and statistically significant, indicating that relative age within a cohort has a significant impact on academic outcomes. These older students had a clear advantage over their younger classmates in terms of both objective assessments and subjective teacher evaluations. However, the study found that the effect of being older was much smaller and often statistically insignificant. Additionally, the findings align with the literature that emphasizes developmental readiness, indicating that older students may possess cognitive and social-emotional advantages that facilitate better academic outcomes (McEwen et al., 2019).

Additionally, the research by Kocabaş and Özdemir (2024) examines the relationship between the age at which 4th-grade students in Niğde, Turkey, start their formal education and their subsequent academic performance. Through an in-depth analysis, the findings indicate a statistically significant but weak negative correlation between students' ages at the time of schooling and their academic achievements.

The research finds that student age has a significant impact on mathematics performance. Older students tend to score higher on state math assessments compared to their younger classmates. This suggests that age-related factors, such as cognitive development, maturity, and classroom experience, may help older students tackle the logical and structured challenges presented in math. This finding is crucial for educators and policymakers, as it indicates a potential need for targeted support and differentiated instruction

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for younger students in mathematics. Schools may want to consider strategies to help younger students catch up, especially in classrooms with mixed-age groups.

A recent study revealed interesting findings regarding the academic performance and motivation of high school students in Kenya. According to the study by Momanyi et al. (2015), the youngest group of students, aged 12 to 15 years, had the highest average scores in academic performance, with a mean score of 48.06. In contrast, the oldest students, aged 20 to 23 years, had the lowest average scores. The majority of the respondents in the study were aged between 16 and 19 years, falling within this age range.

The research further highlighted that the younger students, aged 12 to 15, not only performed better academically but also displayed the highest levels of academic motivation. On the other hand, the oldest students (aged 20 to 23 years) exhibited the lowest academic performance, yet still demonstrated higher motivation levels compared to their peers in the same age group. Overall, this study sheds light on how age can influence both academic performance and motivation among high school students in Kenya (Momanyi et al., 2015).

This suggests that younger students, who begin their formal education at an earlier age, generally perform better in their academic pursuits compared to their peers who start school at a later age. According to Kocabaş and Özdemir (2024), although the relationship is not overwhelmingly strong, the negative direction of the correlation suggests a potential impact of starting age on students' ability to achieve higher grades. The results emphasize the importance of considering the schooling age as a factor that may influence academic success in this specific regional context of Turkey.

The dissertation by Voyles (2020) provides a detailed examination of how age and gender impact academic performance. While age is a significant factor in math achievement, it has a limited impact on reading success, and there are no notable gender differences in either subject. These results have meaningful implications for how schools approach curriculum design, classroom management, and instructional strategies. Educators may need to focus on age-related support in math while recognizing that reading instruction can be effective for all students, regardless of their age or gender. This understanding can help create more equitable learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students.

Several studies have shown that older students perform better than younger ones. However, Gopnik et al. (2015) concluded that younger learners are more effective than older ones at learning unusual, abstract causal principles. Also, younger minds and brains are intrinsically more flexible and exploratory. Moreover, Lincove et al.'s study suggests that delaying kindergarten does not create any long-term advantages for students.

Several studies presented contrasting results. Some studies have proven that age matters, while others disagree. Several studies have confirmed that older students excel academically compared to their younger classmates. Other studies have found that younger students tend to outperform older students.

V. CONCLUSION

This study confirms a significant positive correlation between student age and receipt of academic awards at a private sectarian elementary school in the Philippines (SY 2024-2025). Additionally, older students within the same grade levels earn higher categories (A-B) more frequently than their younger peers in lower categories (C-D). Educators should implement age-adjusted recognition strategies, such as tiered awards or mentorship programs for younger students, to mitigate relative age biases and promote equity in faith-based settings elementary schools. Findings advocate for DepEd policy reviews to promote balanced motivation across age groups, thereby enhancing self-esteem without disadvantaging early entrants. Future research could explore interventions, such as differentiated instruction, to equalize opportunities.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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VII. DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no competing financial or non-financial interests relevant to this study.

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