

Assessment of Academic Adjustment and Coping Strategies of Ex-militants in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme on the academic adjustment of ex-militants in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. Two objectives and research questions guided the study. Using a qualitative approach, ten ex-militants were interviewed across the region. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed to identify key themes. The study adopted a phenomenological research design, and data were collected using a semi-structured interview titled Ex-Militants' Personal Experiences, Academic Adjustments, Challenges, and Coping Strategies Interview. To ensure validity, member checking, submersion, and external validation were employed, while reliability was ensured through dependability, peer review, trustworthiness, and appraisal. Data were analysed thematically. Findings revealed that ex-militant students face major challenges in re-entering the educational system, including feeling awkward among non-militant and younger classmates, experiencing isolation due to low academic performance, and perceiving academic life as dull compared to their past militant experiences. However, they overcome these difficulties by forming close relationships with brighter peers for coaching, asking teachers for clarification, reporting discriminatory incidents, and developing peer-based support habits to enhance learning. The study recommended that schools enrolling ex-militants should create academic support programmes to ease adjustment by offering extra tutorials, counselling, and orientation sessions that promote inclusive and engaging learning experiences.

Keywords: Presidential Amnesty Programme, Educational Adjustment, coping strategies, Niger Delta Region, Ex-Militants

INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta crisis has been a major threat to socio-economic activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Niger Delta militancy can be dated back to the agitation of Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro on 23 February 1966, where 159 unemployed youths were recruited to fight the Nigerian Government with arms because of perceived marginalization of their region (Gilbert, 2010). Even though the struggle by the NDVF was quickly crushed by the Nigerian state, it is regarded as the beginning of militancy in Nigeria (Gilbert, 2010). The presidential amnesty programme was initiated to address the grievances of militants and promote peace in the region. The initiative sought to transform the course of ex-militants, offering them opportunity to education, empowerment, and social integration. The programme's objective was to provide

former militants with training, education, and employment prospects to help their transition from a life of armed conflict to normal life. In response to years of turmoil in the Niger Delta, where militant groups had attacked oil facilities, abducted foreign workers, and engaged in other violent behaviours, the amnesty programme was implemented by former President late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2009 to address the root causes of the insurgency in the area (Ekeh, 2017).

Militants who willingly gave up their weapons and decided to stop using violence were qualified for several incentives under the Amnesty Programme, including a monthly stipend, training in entrepreneurship and vocational skills, and educational opportunities (Ogbemi, 2018; Ikenga, 2012). The initiative also included provisions for the improvement of the region's infrastructure and social services, as well as the reintegration of former militants into their communities. The Amnesty Programme was initially successful in reducing violence in the Niger Delta, with many former militants taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the programme to start schooling. However, some scholars such as (Alagboso & Nwankwo, 2019; Oluwaniyi, 2011; Aghedo & Osumah, 2015) have argued that the programme fell short of delivering on some of its promises, such as the development of infrastructure and social services, and did not go far enough in tackling the core causes of the violence in the region, such as poor infrastructure, high rate of school dropout, inequality, environmental degradation and educational problems.

Notwithstanding these concerns, Nigeria's efforts to solve the problems in the Niger Delta region continue to include the amnesty Programme as a key component (Alagboso & Nwankwo, 2019). It has helped to lessen violence and encourage development in the area by providing a framework for tackling the intricate and linked problems that are the root of the conflict in the region. Much more effort must be done to address the conflict's root causes and ensure that the people of the region have a peaceful and sustainable future through educational attainment and academic adjustment.

Academic adjustments for ex-militants in Niger Delta region are essential for their successful reintegration and rehabilitation. These adjustments encompass a range of support services and programmes aimed at addressing the unique challenges faced by ex-militants as they seek to pursue formal education and skill acquisition opportunities. Factors such as lack of prior education, limited access to educational resources, psychological trauma, and economic constraints can pose barriers to their academic success. The concept of adjustment was first given by Darwin (1872),

who used it as an adaptation to survive in physical world. Ex-Militant students usually come from different backgrounds and have different norms and values. Ex-Militant students have to fit in the institutions to the norms and values which are in line with the institutions' mission, vision and core value.

Adjustment is very crucial to the development of the ex-militants in the higher institutions, because it entails a process by which a person learns to interact effectively with the environment, thus developing competence to control the environment for his own needs. Wentzel (2003) affirms that students' success in school relates to how well they develop social and academic competences. Adjustment strategies are imperative to individual's healthy, satisfying, and happy life. It is indeed a continuous and endless struggle between needs of the individual and the challenges of external forces.

Thus, this study on Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme on Academic Adjustment of Ex-Militants is relevant. The resultant havoc of militancy particularly to educational sector is immeasurable; it was disastrous. Schools were burnt down, many students were either kidnapped or murdered, and many teachers were killed in the presence of their students. This study is therefore going to investigate the impacts of the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme and its influence on Academic Adjustment of Ex-Militants in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the financial and institutional support provided by the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme, many ex-militants face persistent challenges in adjusting to academic life within formal educational settings. While the programme envisions education as a tool for reintegration and empowerment, ex-militants often struggle with the transition from a non-conventional lifestyle to the structured demands of academic institutions. Personal observations by the researcher revealed that many beneficiaries exhibit signs of poor academic adjustment such as difficulty coping with academic routines, low classroom engagement, poor study habits, and challenges with time management and goal setting. These adjustment difficulties stem from multiple deep-rooted factors, including unresolved psychological trauma, lack of prior academic exposure, inadequate mentoring, and a general unpreparedness for the rigors of structured education. Financial mismanagement, particularly the diversion of educational stipends to non-academic uses like paying some faction of ex-militants to support the current administration, further undermines their

academic integration. Institutions hosting these individuals are often ill-equipped to meet their unique psychosocial and educational needs, lacking tailored orientation programmes, academic support systems, and mental health services that could ease their transition.

Furthermore, the absence of structured intervention strategies such as mentorship, counselling, and adjustment focused workshops has widened the gap between the programme's reintegration objectives and the actual academic experiences of beneficiaries. The current implementation falls short of addressing the specific adjustment challenges faced by ex-militants, resulting in limited academic engagement and underachievement, not necessarily due to lack of ability, but due to poor academic adaptation. This study is therefore necessary by the urgent need to examine the underlying factors affecting academic adjustment among ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. By identifying the root causes of their academic adjustment struggles and proposing actionable solutions, the study seeks to bridge the disconnect between policy intent and educational outcomes, ensuring that the Amnesty Programme truly empowers its beneficiaries through sustainable academic adjustment integration.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Identify the academic adjustment challenges encountered by ex-militants within the educational setting in the Niger Delta Region.
- ii. Determine the coping strategies adopted by ex-militants to address the academic adjustment challenges they encountered in educational setting in the Niger Delta Region.

Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions.

- i. What are the academic adjustments challenges encountered by ex-militants within the educational settings in the Niger Delta Region?
- ii. What are the coping strategies adopted by ex-militants to address the academic adjustment challenges encountered in educational setting in the Niger Delta Region?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was hinged on Erick Erickson's Psychosocial Theory in (1994). Erikson's curiosity for research on personality development was prompted when he noticed adjustment problems among

Indian tribes of Siox and Yurok in Central America. He hypothesized that their adjustment problem was due to their lack of being uprooted and a lack of continuity between their present lifestyle and the one portrayed in their tribal history. He suggested that their inability to break with the past and embrace modern cultural values is an ego related and cultural related conflict. This impression was reinforced during the Second World War when Erikson worked at a war veteran’s rehabilitation centre. He saw many soldiers who seemed to have lost a sense of who and what they were. Erikson suggested that they suffered identity confusion; they could not reconcile what they had left and done as soldiers with what they had known before the war (Gross, 1996).

Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory of Development is a widely recognized framework for understanding human development across the lifespan. Erikson proposed that individuals pass through eight psychosocial stages from infancy to late adulthood. Each stage presents a crisis or conflict that must be resolved for healthy psychological development (Weiten 2004). Below is a chart summarizing Erikson’s stages

Table 1: Erikson’s stages of Development

Stage	Age Range	Crisis	Virtue	Description
1	Infancy (0–1 year)	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope	Learning to trust caregivers and the world.
2	Early Childhood (1–3 years)	Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt	Will	Developing self-control and independence.
3	Preschool (3–6 years)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	Asserting control and power through directing play and social interaction.
4	School Age (6–12 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Mastering new skills; feeling competent or inadequate.
5	Adolescence (12–18 years)	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Developing a strong sense of identity and direction.
6	Young Adulthood (18–40 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Forming close relationships and meaningful connections.
7	Middle Adulthood (40–65 years)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	Contributing to society and supporting the next generation.
8	Late Adulthood (65+ years)	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Reflecting on life with a sense of fulfillment or regret.

Erikson’s psychosocial theory provides a useful framework for understanding the academic adjustment of ex-militants benefiting from the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme. Most participants fall within the stages of Identity vs. Role Confusion and Intimacy vs. Isolation, though elements of Industry vs. Inferiority also appear due to disrupted childhood experiences. During Identity vs. Role Confusion, many ex-militants who joined militancy in adolescence are now reconstructing their identities through education. The amnesty programme enables them to redefine themselves from agitators to productive citizens, fostering academic engagement and

personal growth. In Industry vs. Inferiority, gaps in formal education often cause feelings of inadequacy, but educational support helps rebuild confidence and competence, strengthening their sense of purpose. At the Intimacy vs. Isolation stage, reintegration into academic settings encourages social connectedness, peer relationships, and interpersonal trust, all of which enhance both academic and social adjustment. For older ex-agitators in Generativity vs. Stagnation, contributing positively to their communities and mentoring others signifies successful reintegration. Erikson's theory helps explain how the Amnesty Programme promotes psychosocial development by addressing identity confusion, building competence, fostering social ties, and encouraging societal contribution thereby supporting sustainable reintegration and academic adjustment among ex-militants.

REVIEW OF RELATED EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Fabeku and Fasanmi (2024) investigated the transition challenges and adjustment of first-year university students in Nigeria. Using a quantitative survey design, they found that institutional orientation, social support, and academic preparedness significantly influence students' adjustment into higher education. The study emphasizes the importance of structured support mechanisms for students undergoing transitions, a finding relevant for ex-militant students re-entering tertiary institutions. Obasoro, Adeniji, Akingbulu, and Adepoju (2024) examined mental health strategies among tertiary students in Nigeria, exploring how psychosocial support, institutional culture, and stigma impact academic performance. The study employed a cross-sectional survey across multiple institutions and found that students with better access to mental health and counselling services demonstrated higher academic adjustment. Similarly, Odofin and Agamugoro (2023) explored the role of social support and coping strategies in academic adjustment among junior secondary school boarders in Delta State. Their quantitative analysis revealed that students who relied on peer networks and structured coping mechanisms exhibited better adaptation to academic demands. Chigbu, Ekejiuba, Nnadi, Ahaneku, and Okpala (2024) examined how socio-political and economic uncertainties influence coping strategies among students in South-East Nigerian tertiary institutions. Using survey methodology, the study found that peer support, resilience-building, and institutional facilitation mitigated the negative effects of uncertainty on academic engagement. Although this study did not target ex-militants, its

findings underscore the critical role of supportive social and institutional networks in coping with stress during educational transitions.

Abdullahi and Onapajo (2024) studied the reintegration of ex-combatants in Northeastern Nigeria, focusing on social acceptance, programme design, and psychosocial barriers. Their qualitative approach revealed that ex-combatants face social stigma and psychological challenges that affect their reintegration outcomes. While not focused on tertiary education, the study highlights the importance of supportive frameworks in facilitating successful transitions for formerly conflict-involved individuals. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the significance of institutional support, peer networks, and psychosocial coping strategies in academic adjustment. However, there remains a notable gap in research that specifically examines ex-militant students in tertiary institutions within the Niger Delta region, focusing simultaneously on their academic adjustment and coping strategies. Most existing studies either address general student populations, focus on socio-economic reintegration, or investigate coping and adjustment separately. Additionally, few studies consider institutional variations such as public versus private, university versus polytechnic or generate actionable, policy-oriented recommendations for educational reintegration. Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to explore academic adjustment and coping strategies among ex-militant students across multiple tertiary institutions in the Niger Delta, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their educational reintegration experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of ex-militants adjusting to academic life and coping within tertiary institutions. The design is appropriate as it focuses on how individuals perceive and give meaning to their experiences, consistent with Creswell's (2013) view that phenomenology captures the essence of shared experiences. A qualitative approach was employed, using in-depth interviews to identify adjustment challenges and coping strategies. The study population comprised about 8,000 ex-militants enrolled in the educational units of the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme. Using purposive sampling, three states—Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Rivers were selected from the nine Niger Delta states based on their relevance to the study objectives (Creswell, 2014). Official reports from the Amnesty Office (2024) show that 3,500 ex-militants are currently enrolled in these states. A total of ten ex-militants who benefited from the programme were selected as

participants, in line with Creswell’s (2013) recommendation of 5–10 participants for qualitative studies to ensure data saturation. Convenience sampling was used to access this hard-to-reach population, allowing for rich insights from those willing to share their experiences. This aligns with Creswell’s (2014) justification for using convenience sampling in qualitative studies involving sensitive populations.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Size of Ex-militants selected across the three states included in the study area.

S/No.	State	No. of Ex-militants	Sample Size
1.	Akwa-Ibom	700	2
2.	Delta	1050	3
3.	Rivers	1750	5
	Total	3,500	10

Source: Presidential Amnesty Office Abuja, (2025).

Instrumentation

The study used a semi-structured interview as the main instrument for data collection. It was conducted with selected ex-militants to gain deeper insights into their academic adjustment experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. The interview, titled Ex-Militants’ Personal Experiences, Academic Adjustments, Challenges, and Coping Strategies, was adapted from Seidman (2009) to explore common themes and gather rich qualitative data.

Validity

This study considered internal and external validity. Internal validity ensured the findings accurately reflected the study variables and themes, while external validity assessed the applicability of results to contexts beyond the sample (Cole, 2024; William, 2024). Additional qualitative validity strategies included member checking, peer review, clarifying the research background and assumptions, and specifying prior orientations and engagement duration.

Member Checking: Member checking ensured that respondents confirmed the accuracy of the researcher interpretations of their opinions. This process fostered trustworthiness and transparency between the researcher and respondents, as both parties scrutinized the collected and interpreted information, further enhancing credibility.

Submersion: Submersion refers to the researcher's extended engagement in data collection. Prolonged immersion in the research setting, environment, and contact with the ex-militants to increases the likelihood of in-depth investigation and strengthens internal validity. This extended engagement facilitates a more thorough understanding and interpretation of the observed phenomenon.

External Validation (Generalization): External validation involves the potential for generalizing study findings to other contexts. Therefore, generalization is not a fixed conclusion but rather a flexible guide. This approach aligns with Erickson's (1986) concept of concrete universals, which describes how individuals generalize from specific experiences. The usefulness and applicability of research findings depend on the reader's acceptance, trust, and likelihood of referring to the findings in the future (Patton, 1991; Green & Glasgow, 2006).

Reliability

Reliability in research refers to the consistency, stability, and accuracy of data, ensuring trust and confidence in the findings. In qualitative studies, this is reflected as dependability, which emphasizes consistent processes and outcomes. This study demonstrated dependability through an audit trail, documenting all stages of the research from design and sampling to data collection, transcription, and analysis to enhance transparency and replicability. A friendly and open environment was created to encourage honest responses, while peer review added credibility by introducing multiple perspectives. Reliability was further reinforced by ensuring alignment between observations and reports. In qualitative research, while validity and reliability are important, the focus is on credibility and trustworthiness. Validity refers to the accuracy of data descriptions or interpretations, and reliability involves the appropriateness of methods used. Together, they confirm the study's suitability for its objectives and enhance the transferability and relevance of its findings.

Justification for Validity and Reliability of Questions and Interviews

While quantitative research emphasizes validity and reliability, qualitative research focuses on trustworthiness and credibility. In qualitative research, validity refers to the accuracy (credibility) of data description or explanation (Rolfe, 2006; Bear, Gaskins, Blank, & Chen, 2011; Kothari, 2004; Khan, 2014). The purpose of addressing validity and reliability in qualitative research is to ensure and demonstrate that the research approach is appropriate for the study's objective, addressing issues of trust and credibility and mitigating any doubts about the findings. Reliability,

in this context, refers to the appropriateness of the research method, including the scope and expected coverage of the study variables.

Method of Data Collection

The interview was conducted using the guide, a voice recording device and a notepad for note taking. The process lasted for three days. After the interview session the researcher proceeded with transcription of data after some days. The transcribed data were analyzed using thematic data analysis, which involved identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across the data set to address the research objectives.

Ethical considerations: Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. All information provided by participants was treated as strictly private, and data were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. To further protect participants' identities, numbers were assigned in place of real names in all transcripts, notes, and reports, ensuring that personal information could not be traced back to any individual. The study also obtained ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board and the administrative offices of the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme. This approval ensured that the research design, data collection, and reporting adhered to recognized ethical standards for research involving human participants. By implementing these measures, the study safeguarded participants' rights, promoted trust, and upheld the overall integrity and credibility of the research.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected through in-depth interviews with ex-militants enrolled in the educational units of the Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta region were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed the systematic steps recommended by Creswell (2013) and Braun & Clarke (2006) to ensure rigor and credibility. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' original expressions. The researchers then read and re-read the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the data. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying significant statements, phrases, and ideas related to the research questions. These codes were grouped into categories based on similarities and patterns observed across participants'

responses. Subsequently, related categories were collated and refined into broader themes that captured the essence of participants' lived experiences. The themes were then reviewed, defined, and named to ensure they accurately represented the data and aligned with the objectives of the study. The final themes formed the framework for presenting and discussing the findings, allowing the researcher to interpret how ex-militants adjust to academic life and develop coping strategies within tertiary institutions. This thematic structure ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participants' perspectives while addressing each research question comprehensively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents the findings of the study based on research questions that guided the investigation.

Research Question 1: What are the academic adjustments challenges encountered by ex-militants within the educational settings in the Niger Delta Region?

Major themes: Main Academic Adjustment Challenges Encountered by Ex-Militants within Educational Settings in the Niger Delta Region. This study employed Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development as a theoretical lens to analyse the academic adjustment challenges experienced by ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. Erikson posits that human development occurs in eight distinct psychosocial stages, each characterized by a specific conflict that must be resolved for healthy psychological growth. Particularly relevant to this analysis are the stages of identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, and ego integrity vs. despair, as they relate to the identity transitions and social reintegration faced by ex-militants entering academic institutions.

Sub-theme: Feelings of Age Disparity and Mismatched Identity

Several ex-militants reported feelings of discomfort arising from the age differences between themselves and their classmates. According to respondent 1, he pointed out that "*they felt they were over age in the class they were enrolled in schools.*" Respondent 2 explained: "Most of my classmates were much younger, so I always thought I was in the wrong place." Respondent 3 remarked: "Sometimes I wondered if it made sense for a grown man like me to be sitting with small children to learn." This reflects psychosocial conflicts of ego integrity vs. despair and identity vs. role confusion, as many ex-militants, having spent years in militant camps, now struggle to adapt to formal schooling alongside younger peers. The shift from militant to student

identity creates insecurity and confusion, undermining confidence, reducing classroom participation, and often leading to poor academic engagement or withdrawal.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Social Awkwardness and Difficulty Integrating

Another prominent response from respondent 4, was the sense of awkwardness and discomfort felt by many ex-militants in the company of non-militant students. One participant noted that *“they felt awkward in the midst of other non-militant students at school.”* Respondent 5 said: “It was hard for me to sit freely with them. They looked at me differently because I was not like them.” Respondent 6 explained: “I was not comfortable because my mates in militancy were not here, and I was with people who did not understand my background.” This stems from cultural and experiential dissonance, as ex-militants accustomed to conflict and hierarchy struggle to adapt to the open, competitive nature of academic life. Linked to Erikson’s intimacy vs. isolation stage, their difficulty forming trusting relationships often leads to emotional isolation and poor academic adjustment.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Perceived Victimization and Trust Issues

A smaller, but equally significant, group of respondents reported experiences of victimization. Respondent 7 said they *“felt elements of victimization from some lecturers and even students.”* Respondent 8 said: “Sometimes teachers and students treated me unfairly, maybe because they knew my past.” This reflects identity vs. role confusion, where stigma from authority figures reinforced feelings of rejection. Here, education was not just an academic challenge but also a social battlefield, where perceived prejudice from others hindered learning and full participation.

Source Field Data (2025)

Major Theme: Difficulties with Academic Skills or Knowledge Gaps

Academic reintegration for ex-militants is largely psychological. After years away from formal education, many struggle with basic academic skills and curriculum demands. Through Erikson’s stages of identity vs. role confusion and industry vs. inferiority, these challenges reflect deeper issues of self-perception and academic engagement. *“Respondent 9, responded that they always felt isolated from other students due to their low knowledge.”* Respondent 10 explained: “At times, I could not answer questions in class like others, and I felt different.” This reflects the industry vs. inferiority conflict, where ex-militants in competitive academic settings often feel inadequate due

to learning gaps. Such feelings foster self-isolation, reduced participation, and loss of confidence, as they fear judgment and avoid interaction with more capable peers.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Supportive Peer Engagement and Classroom Inclusion

“Respondent 6 said that they did not feel any difficulties, as they are being carried along by classmates.” This positive response presents a counter-narrative and a glimpse of resilience and social inclusion. According to Erikson, successful navigation of the industry vs. inferiority stage results in the development of competence and confidence. When ex-militants receive consistent academic support from classmates, they are more likely to feel capable and motivated. When classmates involve them in study groups, provide explanations, or treat them with respect, the ex-militants begin to reconstruct their self-image not as lagging learners, but as individuals who can grow and succeed. This relational support acts as a protective factor against stigma and reinforces a sense of belonging. It also suggests that, despite initial knowledge gaps, the right academic and social environment can foster positive adjustment, growth, and reintegration.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Major Theme: Impact of Past Experiences

The reintegration of ex-militants into formal education systems is not merely a process of physical relocation or policy compliance. It involves a deep psychological transition from a life defined by violence, freedom from social norms, and intense group identity to one governed by structure, discipline, and conventional expectations. This transition evokes unresolved psychosocial conflicts which Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory of Development helps to illuminate particularly those concerning identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, and ego integrity vs. despair.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Withdrawal from Addictive Habits (Nicotine and Drug Restrictions)

“Respondent 1 said that they are not allowed to take drugs or other nicotine agents.” Respondent 2 shared: *“In militancy, drugs were always around, but in school, it was banned, and I had to stop.”* This demonstrates identity vs. role confusion, as the respondent was forced to abandon old habits. Respondent 3 added: *“The fact that I could not take drugs like before made me feel uneasy in class.”* This reflects the struggle of ex-militants adapting to academic norms that forbid drug use, once common in militant camps as coping or cultural practices. Linked to ego integrity vs. despair,

they face identity conflict and loss of familiar habits, often leading to distress or withdrawal without adequate counseling and psychosocial support.

Source Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Perceived Lack of Excitement in Academic Life

“Respondent 5 said they felt that academic life is very dull compared with vibrancy when in militancy.” Respondent 6 remarked: “In militancy, life was more vibrant and adventurous. In school, it looks too serious and quiet.” This highlights identity vs. role confusion, as the respondent struggled to shift identity from a militant lifestyle to that of a student. Ex-militants often struggle with the emotional shift from a thrilling, authoritative past to a quiet, structured academic life. In Erikson’s identity vs. role confusion stage, they grapple with losing a sense of purpose and belonging, which can lead to disinterest, disengagement, or dropout without proper support.

Source Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Difficulty Relating to New Friends

“Respondent 7 said that they could not readily relate to their new friends in school.”

Respondent 8 said: “Most of them were young and behaved differently. I could not flow with them easily.” This shows role confusion, since the respondent’s life experiences diverged sharply from those of their peers. Here, the difficulty lay not in academics, but in forming meaningful social connections, which deepened feelings of isolation.

Ex-militants often face social alienation due to differing values, maturity levels, and unresolved trauma. In Erikson’s intimacy vs. isolation stage, their difficulty forming trusting relationships leads to emotional isolation and poor academic collaboration. Without mentorship or trauma-informed support, social disconnection hinders their adjustment and performance.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Research Question 2: Determine the coping strategies adopted by ex-militants to address the academic adjustment challenges encountered by ex-militants within the educational setting in the Niger Delta Region.

Major themes: Coping Strategies Adopted by Ex-Militants to Address Academic Adjustment Challenges

Transitioning from a militant lifestyle into formal academic institutions requires more than enrolment it demands psychosocial resilience, adaptability, and practical coping strategies to navigate the academic terrain. The responses of ex-militants suggest a growing awareness of their

academic deficiencies, coupled with intentional efforts to overcome these challenges. Erikson's psychosocial framework allows us to understand how these strategies reflect the evolving identity and sense of competence among ex-militants.

Sub-theme: How to Overcome Academic Difficulties after Leaving Militancy

“Respondent 9 echoed that by getting closer to brighter students for assistance.” Respondent 1 shared: “I tried to overcome my difficulties by getting close to my classmates who were brilliant.” This highlights peer mentoring as a way of bridging knowledge gaps. Respondent 2 said: “The brighter students helped me with areas I was weak in.” This demonstrates collaborative learning as a coping strategy.

This reflects a positive coping strategy where ex-militants seek help from more capable peers. In Erikson's intimacy vs. isolation and industry vs. inferiority stages, such collaboration builds trust, reduces feelings of inadequacy, and fosters inclusion, confidence, and academic belonging. *“Respondent 3 also said by asking their teachers questions on what they did not understand.”* This coping strategy highlights a positive shift toward academic self-advocacy. By engaging with teachers, ex-militants demonstrate a willingness to learn and take responsibility for their educational growth. From Erikson's perspective, this behaviour supports progress in the industry vs. inferiority stage, where success is defined by competence and initiative. *“Respondent 4 said they took their studies seriously.”* This motivation-driven response shows a positive psychosocial shift. In Erikson's identity vs. role confusion stage, ex-militants who take their studies seriously successfully redefine themselves, replacing the militant identity with one rooted in discipline and academic purpose.

Source: Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Social Stigma or Discrimination Related to Your Past

For many ex-militants, re-entering academic life involves not only adapting to new educational demands but also managing the social consequences of their past affiliations. Stigmatization, whether overt or subtle, can have far-reaching effects on their psychological adjustment. The responses from participants reveal a mixture of emotional, behavioural, and cognitive strategies used to cope with this layer of challenge. *“Respondent 5 said they still hide to take drugs to reduce boredom and stigma.”* This response indicates a maladaptive coping strategy, where unresolved psychological stress linked to both boredom and social exclusion is managed through secretive drug use. This reflects struggles with ego integrity vs. despair, as ex-militants fail to find meaning

in their new roles and revert to harmful past habits. Their secrecy shows awareness of social stigma, yet emotional emptiness hinders healthier coping. *“Respondent 6 also said that they focus well on their studies.”* This reflects a positive, task-focused coping strategy, showing resilience and motivation. In Erikson’s identity vs. role confusion stage, ex-militants redefine self-worth through academic adjustment and personal growth. *“Respondent 9 said they sometimes report such incidences of discrimination to their teachers.”* This reflects a healthy coping strategy, as ex-militants demonstrate self-advocacy and trust in institutional systems by reporting discrimination appropriately.

Source Field Data (2025)

Sub-theme: Routines to Improve Academic Performance

Developing consistent routines marks ex-militants’ shift from combatants to committed learners. It reflects growing discipline and competence, aligning with Erikson’s industry vs. inferiority stage. *“Respondent 4 said that they are always punctual in class.”* Punctuality reflects ex-militants’ growing responsibility and discipline, symbolizing a break from past lifestyles and alignment with societal norms of order and routine. This response points to a growing sense of responsibility and time management, essential components of academic discipline. For ex-militants, consistently arriving on time can *“Respondent 3 said that they move with brighter students to teach or coach them.”* This social learning strategy shows humility, initiative, and willingness to learn through collaboration. It reflects progress in Erikson’s identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation stages, fostering belonging and reducing alienation. *“Respondent 5 said that they always take their studies very seriously.”* This reflects a growing internalization of the student role, where education becomes a personal commitment to growth. In Erikson’s industry vs. inferiority stage, this shift builds confidence and a new pro-social identity, replacing the ex-militant self with that of a dedicated learner.

Source Field Data (2025)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following are the summary of the major findings of the study:

1. The study found that ex-militant students face significant academic adjustment challenges, including feeling awkward and over-aged among non-militant peers, experiencing isolation due to low academic standing, and perceiving academic life as dull compared to the vibrancy of their former militant lifestyle.
2. The study revealed that ex-militant students cope with academic and social challenges by forming supportive relationships with brighter peers for guidance and coaching, actively seeking clarification from teachers, and reporting incidents of discrimination to school authorities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study focused on Assessment of Academic Adjustment and Coping Strategies of Ex-Militants in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. Thus, the findings are presented below; Finding on academic adjustment challenges encountered by ex-militants within the educational setting in the Niger Delta Region reveals that ex-militant students face major challenges in re-entering the educational system, including feeling awkward among non-militant and younger classmates, experiencing isolation due to low academic performance, and perceiving academic life as dull compared to the vibrancy of their militant past. The finding is in line with that of Fabeku and Fasanmi (2024) who states that challenges in academic adjustment among ex-militants, includes issues related to social integration, academic performance and psychological adjustment. The result of this study agrees with that of Akingbulu, and Adepoju (2024) who posited that challenges in academic adjustment among ex-militants, includes hurdles related to social integration, academic skills development and psychological adjustment. The reason for the outcome of this result is that ex-militant students often return to school much later than their peers, making them feel out of place among younger, non-militant classmates. This age difference can create social awkwardness and hinder their ability to integrate smoothly into the school environment.

Many ex-militants have experienced disruptions in their formal education, leading to poor academic foundations. This results in difficulty keeping up with class work and feelings of inferiority or isolation due to their lower academic standing. Also, the transition from a life of militancy, which may have involved constant activity, movement, and a sense of purpose or excitement, to the structured and routine nature of academic life can feel dull or un-motivating. The lack of stimulation in school compared to their previous lifestyle contributes to their

disengagement. Finding on the coping strategies adopted by ex-militants to address the academic adjustment challenges encountered by ex-militants within the educational setting in the Niger Delta Region reveals that ex-militant students overcome academic difficulties by forming close relationships with brighter peers for coaching, asking teachers questions for clarity, reporting discriminatory incidents to teachers, and developing personal habits centred around peer support to improve academic performance. This finding is in agreement with that of Adewale and Peters (2022) who found out that external support like counselling were more influential in shaping coping behaviours than gender. The study finding was also in line with Ekejiuba, Nnadi, Ahaneku, and Okpala (2024) who found out that both male and female ex-militants use similar coping mechanisms, particularly reliance on peer networks and mentorship programmes. The reason for the outcome of this result is that many ex-militant students are aware of the academic setbacks caused by their time away from formal education. This self-awareness motivates them to seek help proactively, knowing that they need extra support to catch up with their peers. They often realize that without addressing their academic weaknesses, reintegration into the school system will be difficult. Also, Ex-militants seek social acceptance and emotional support after years of isolation, forming relationships with peers to ease reintegration and reduce loneliness. Their drive to rebuild their lives through education fosters motivation, discipline, and commitment to learning. Supportive teachers also play an important role by addressing their concerns, building trust, and promoting sustained academic progress.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study found that ex-militant students face major challenges in re-entering the educational system, including feeling awkward among non-militant and younger classmates, experiencing isolation due to low academic performance, and perceiving academic life as dull compared to the vibrancy of their militant past. Also, ex-militant students overcome academic difficulties by forming close relationships with brighter peers for coaching, asking teachers' questions for clarity, reporting discriminatory incidents to teachers, and developing personal habits centred on peer support to improve academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made;

1. Schools where ex-militants are enrolled should create special academic support programmes to help ex-militant students adjust more easily by offering extra tutorials and orientation sessions that make learning more engaging and inclusive.
2. Schools where ex-militants are enrolled should build on the coping strategies of ex-militant students by setting up peer mentoring and support groups to encourage learning through friendships, teacher guidance, and shared study efforts.
3. Policymakers should establish inclusive reintegration policies with funding and monitoring frameworks for ex-militant students.
4. Institutions should provide academic support units with tutorials, orientations, and peer mentoring.
5. Universities should offer psychosocial services through counselling and life-skills programmes.

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