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STRESS MANAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGDUATE STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, AKOKA, LAGOS

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Abstract
This paper investigated stress management and academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos. Four research questions and two research hypotheses guided this study. The study employed survey research design. A sample size of 377 undergraduate students in the faculty was used for this study out of a total population of 6,516 students. The research instruments used for data collection were Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Stress-Management Strategies Inventory (SMSI) and Academic Performance Proforma (APP). The data collected were analysed using frequency tables, percentage, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed among others that the level of perceived stress among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos is high; the prevalence stress management strategy used by undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education is adaptive coping strategies; and adaptive coping strategies are significantly related to academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. The study concluded that stress management and academic performance among undergraduate students are significantly related in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. The paper recommended among others that the counselling unit of the university should provide orientation services on stress management strategies for new and existing students in the Faculty of Education; and the university management should provide adequate facilities such as lecture rooms, workshops, laboratories, relaxation centres and secured social environment for students use.
Keywords: Academic performance, Adaptive coping strategies, Stress, Management and Undergraduate students

Introduction

The existence of stress and its adverse effects on workers and students have arisen the interest of researchers and scholars globally. Stress can be simply defined as any emotional, cognitive, or physical pressure which is affecting one's work, personal life, among others. It is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The stress symptoms as identified by Ongori and Agolla (2009) are lack of energy, taking over the counter medication, high blood pressure, feeling depressed, increase in appetite, restlessness, tensions and anxieties among others. However, stress can be considered negative when it is depressive; while it is positive when it enables an individual to face challenges. Stress is an identified problem in many institutions, including schools, which often leads to low morale, absenteeism, and poor academic performance among undergraduate students. Academic performance is the acquisition of knowledge assessed via grades or educational goals set by students and teachers over a defined time period (García, Sánchez, & López, 2021). It is used to measure how well students perform in their courses of study or on a given task in relation to their curriculum objectives and content. Academic performance is a vital concern for educators, policymakers, and society at large. Academic performance as affirmed by Bolarinwa and Okolocha (2016) is an important factor in learning and education and is used for assessing the overall potential measured by examinations.

Students' academic performance could be affected by stress if not well managed and this stress could be as a result of too many courses taken, overloaded assignments, clashes in lectures and examinations time-tables, bad study habits, unsupportive family circumstances, over-crowed halls of residents and lecture rooms, off campus accommodation, inadequate financial resources and so on. In line with this view, Ongori and Agolla (2009) discovered that the major causes of stress among students are academic workload, inadequate resources, low motivation and poor performance in academic work, overcrowded lecture halls and uncertainty of getting jobs after graduation from the university. All these may impair students' concentration, motivation, and performance in tertiary institutions. Taking too many courses with little units from the first year through to the final year is a source of stress, and because a degree in education earns one's double honour; and seems to be double work or courses. In addition to compulsory courses taken, elective courses are also taken in different faculties as teaching subjects as part of the requirements for students in faculty of Education. This requirement makes the students shuttle round the campus from one faculty to the other and this increased the bulk of assignments, tests, fieldwork, projects among others done by the students thereby leaving them stressed at the end of the day. This may also lead to clashes in lectures and examinations timetables and at times if not resolved, it will lead to students missing classes, spending less than allocated time for their courses during examinations so that they can meet up with the courses they are taking outside the Faculty of Education. This may lead to failure and/or poor academic performance. In addition, overcrowded, not well-ventilated and well-equipped

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lecture rooms may lead to stress and contribute to poor academic performance of the students and where the equipment are available, they are either not working or malfunctioning. All these factors coupled with the fact that some students do not know how to study and or locate useful areas on campus where they can also use for study apart from the library may affect their academic performances.

Stress among undergraduate students could also be because of inadequate finances and support from home which leads to inadequate resources to meet their daily needs at school. Equally, the problem of over-crowded, dilapidated, not well ventilated and well-equipped halls of residents is another source of stress for students who stay on campus and epileptic power supply, noisy environment and so on could also be a source of stress for students who stay off campus and these may eventually lead to poor academic performance among the undergraduate students. Hence, there is need for students to adopt effective coping or stress management strategies for improved learning and academic performance. Most students in the higher institutions of learning are experiencing stress in their daily academic activities. Hence, stress management strategies can be used by students to cope when experiencing stress in universities. Oduwaiye, Yahaya, Amadi and Tiamiyu (2017) reported that some students resort to avoidant coping, drug abuse, denial and behavioural disengagement; while others cope actively through acceptance, planning and positively reframing and taking the necessary steps to overcome academic stress. This shows that there are strategies for coping with stress among students. Generally, these coping strategies may be grouped into adaptive coping and maladaptive coping strategies. Adaptive coping strategies include active coping, planning, time-management, help-seeking, positive reframing/mindset, health behaviours and mindfulness (Sleep hygiene and regular physical activity). On the other hand, maladaptive coping strategies include avoidant coping, behavioral disengagement, and substance use (Carver, 1997). The essence of coping strategies is to enhance students' learning and to bring about improvement in their learning outcomes or academic performance.

The importance of stress management among students in tertiary institutions cannot be underestimated. Generally, stress-management training programmes show small-to-moderate improvements in well-being and academic outcomes (Regehr et al., 2013). However, active coping, planning, time-management, and help-seeking predict better grades and retention (Chemers et al., 2001; Trockel et al., 2000). Sleep hygiene and regular physical activity correlate with improved concentration and GPA (Trockel et al., 2000). Also, Pascoe et al., (2020) reported that adaptive coping (planning, active coping, support seeking) relates to higher Grade Point Average (GPA) and academic self-efficacy, whereas maladaptive coping predicts lower GPA. Studies have shown that stress has tendency to affect students' academic performance. For instance, the study by Pascoe et al. (2020) revealed that high perceived stress is associated with lower GPA and reduced cognitive performance due to attentional narrowing and impaired working memory. This implies that the level of stress perceived by students have tendency to affect their academic performance. Despite that stress may impact negatively on students' academic performance, research also shows that effective coping and self-regulation buffer stress impacts (Carver, 1997). It is against this background that this paper investigated stress management and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos.

Statement of the Problem

Many students came into the university system with strong will, determination and promising drive of making the best out of their chosen courses or careers. However, these students along the line due to their inability to cope with academic stress and some other factors, got derailed and had the table turned against them leaving at the end with nothing to show for their four or five years of academic sojourn. Due to various stress factors such as over-crowded halls of residents and lecture rooms, financial problems, off campus accommodation, unsupportive family, clashes in lectures and examinations time-tables, inadequate financial resources and so on, students' academic performance may be affected negatively leading to carry-overs, underachievement, failing compulsory courses, having extra semester or extra year, low academic performance (CGPA). However, if stress among undergraduate students is left unmanaged, if may lead to production of unemployable graduates, increase in youth unemployment and decrease in the quantity and quality of manpower needed for ensuring sustainable economic growth and development in Nigeria. Despite widespread acknowledgment that stress affects students' outcomes, empirical evidence linking specific stress-management strategies to academic performance in Nigerian universities remains limited and fragmented. Many interventions are introduced without robust needs assessments or data on which strategies most effectively predict GPA and self-efficacy across faculties and year levels. This evidence gap hampers targeted programming and efficient resource allocation. In addition, the available literature shows that little or no empirical study exists on how stress management relate to the academic performance among undergraduate students, especially in the University of Lagos, Akoka. This is the gap filled by this paper. Hence, this study investigated stress management and academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper was to investigate stress management and academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos. Specifically, this study sought to:

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1. determine the level of perceived stress among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos;
2. identify the prevalence stress management strategy used by undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos;
3. ascertain the relationship between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos
4. examine the relationship between adaptive coping strategies and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Research Questions

These questions guided this study:

1. What is the level of perceived stress among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos?
2. What is the prevalence stress management strategy used by undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos?
3. How do perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos relate?
4. What is the relationship between adaptive coping strategies and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos?

Research Hypotheses

The following main null hypotheses were tested in this study:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Ho2: Adaptive coping strategies are not significantly related to academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Methodology

This study was conducted in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos. Survey research design was adopted in the study. The population for the study was 6,516 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. A sample size of 377 undergraduate students in the faculty was used for this study. This sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane sample size calculator. Simple random sampling technique was used for selection of 300 Level and 400 Level students in five (5) randomly selected departments out of the eight in the faculty. In addition, proportionate sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the sampled undergraduate students in each of the chosen departments. Three instruments were used for data collection in this study namely: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Stress-Management Strategies Inventory (SMSI) and Academic Performance Proforma (APP) for obtaining the students' current CGPA. The current Grade Point Average (GPA) scores collected served as measures of academic performance. PSS used was student version and adapted from Cohen et al. (1983) and contained 10 items. The Stress-Management Strategies Inventory (SMSI) was adapted from Brief COPE and contained 16 items. The research instruments were subjected to face, content and construct validity. Also, the reliability coefficient of the PSS and SMSI was determined using Cronbach's Alpha reliability method; and reliability coefficients obtained were 0.85 and 0.84 for the PSS and SMSI respectively. The data collected were analysed using frequency tables, percentage and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Out of the three hundred and seventy-seven (377) copies of the research instrument administered, only three hundred and forty-seven (347) copies were completed and returned by the sampled respondents. This represents 92.0% rate of returns. Hence, 347 was used for analysis of data in this section.

Research Question 1: What is the level of perceived stress among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos?

Table 1: Level of perceived stress among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos

S/N	Level of Perceived Stress	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Very High	39	11.2
2	High	197	56.8
3	Moderate	101	29.1
4	Low	10	2.9
	Total	**347**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 shows that 39(11.2%) of the respondents perceived stress level was very high, 197(56.8%) was high, 101(29.1%) was moderate; while 10(2.9%) was low. Thus, table 1 indicates that the perceived stress level of most of the respondents was high.

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Research Question 2: What is the prevalence stress management strategy used by undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos?

Table 2: Prevalence of stress management strategy used by undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos

S/N	Stress Management Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Adaptive coping strategies	278	80.1
2	Maladaptive coping strategies	69	19.9
	Total	**347**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that 278 (80.1%) of the respondents adopted adaptive coping strategies; while 69(19.9%) adopted maladaptive coping strategies. This implies that the most common stress-management strategies used by undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos is adaptive coping strategies which include active coping, planning, time management, formal help-seeking, mindfulness, and exercise. It is important to note that research questions three and four raised in this paper were hypothesised as hypotheses one and two respectively and tested in this sub-section.

Research Question 3: How do perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos relate?

$H_0$1: There is no significant relationship between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Table 3: Significant relationship between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos

		Perceived stress	Academic performance among undergraduate students
Perceived stress	Pearson Correlation	1	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	347	347
Academic performance among undergraduate students	Pearson Correlation	.459*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	347	347

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows that the calculated "r" value of 0.459 is significant since the returned p-value of 0.001 is less than the criterion level of significance of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that "There is no significant relationship between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos." was rejected. This implies that significant relationship existed between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between adaptive coping strategies and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos?

Ho2: Adaptive coping strategies are not significantly related to academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Table 4: Significant relationship between adaptive coping strategies and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos

		Adaptive coping strategies	Academic performance among undergraduate students
Adaptive coping strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	347	347
Academic performance among undergraduate students	Pearson Correlation	.715*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	347	347

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows that the calculated "r" value of 0.715 is significant since the returned p-value of 0.000 is less than the criterion level of significance of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis which stated that "Adaptive coping strategies are not significantly related to academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos" was rejected.

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Thus, adaptive coping strategies are significantly related to academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Discussion of the Findings

This study found that the level of perceived stress among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos is high. This implies that the level of stress perceived by most of the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos is high. Corroborating this finding, Agolla and Ongori (2009) in their studies on "An assessment of academic stress among undergraduate students using University of Botswana as a case study found high level of stress among the students due to contextual pressures. Similarly, Pascoe et al. (2020) reported that global research shows that many undergraduates report moderate-to-high stress.

This study revealed that the prevalence stress management strategy used by undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos is adaptive coping strategies. Supporting the finding of this study, Oduwaiye, Yahaya, Amadi and Tiamiyu (2017) reported that some students resort to avoidant coping, drug abuse, denial and behavioural disengagement; while others cope actively through acceptance, planning and positively reframing and taking the necessary steps to overcome academic stress. Also, researchers such as Trockel et al. (2000) and Chemers et al. (2001) reported that some students have adopted strategies such as active coping, planning, time-management, sleep hygiene, regular physical activity and help-seeking for better grades and retention; while Pascoe et al., (2020) reported that adaptive coping relates to higher Grade Point Average (GPA) and academic self-efficacy, whereas maladaptive coping predicts lower GPA.

This paper revealed that significant relationship existed between perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students in Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. This means that perceived stress and academic performance among undergraduate students are significantly related in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. Supporting this finding, Fortner (2002) reported a strong relationship between stress and students' academic performance. Also, Blonna (2005) found a strong relationship between stress level and mental performance. Similarly, Oduwaiye et al. (2017) reported that a significant relationship between existed the stress level and academic performance of the university students in Kwara State, Nigeria. Likewise, Pascoe et al. (2020) reported that high perceived stress is associated with lower GPA and reduced cognitive performance due to attentional narrowing and impaired working memory.

This paper also found that adaptive coping strategies are significantly related to academic performance among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. This means that adaptive coping strategies and academic performance among undergraduate students are significantly related in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos. Corroborating this finding, Carey (2006) found a strong positive relationship between stress management skills and undergraduates' academic achievement. This result also corroborates Chemers et al. (2001) who reported that adaptive coping (planning, active coping, support seeking) relates to higher GPA and academic self-efficacy, whereas maladaptive coping predicts lower GPA. Similarly, Pascoe et al., (2020) found that adaptive coping significantly related to higher GPA and academic self-efficacy among the students.

Conclusion

Students' academic performance in university depends on various factors, which include the level of the stress faced on their programmes. It reflects an interaction between stress exposure, appraisal, coping resources, and academic self-regulation. Therefore, effective stress management, particularly planning, time management, help-seeking, cognitive reappraisal, and health-behaviour regulation which have tendency to buffers the impact of stress on learning and academic performance. Consequently, it can be concluded based on the findings of this study that stress management and academic performance among undergraduate students are significantly related in the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

1. The undergraduate students should learn stress management strategies to enable them cope with the highly stressful academic environment in the Faculty of Education.
2. The counselling unit of the university should provide orientation services on stress management strategies for new and existing students in the Faculty of Education.
3. The university management should provide adequate facilities such as lecture rooms, workshops, laboratories, relaxation centres and secured social environment for students use. Existence of these facilities will reduce students' stress to the barest minimum and improve their academic performance.
4. The university management should introduce adaptive coping strategies across all levels of students in the Faculty of Education. This will enable the undergraduate students to overcome any stress they are experiencing and aid their abilities to achieve success in their academics.

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