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SOURCES OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The main focus of this study was to investigate sources of academic stress and coping strategies of students in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. An instrument titled Academic Stress and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (ASCSQ) was administered on 320 students of the University. The Researchers' developed questionnaire has three sections. Section A contained the demographic data while section B elicited information on sources of Academic Stress. Section C contained items on coping strategies. A reliability co-efficient of 0.72 was obtained; hence the instrument was statistically reliable. The students were stratified based on gender and age. The researchers then selected 320 respondents using simple random sampling technique. Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested using the t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical methods at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The findings of this study showed that the major source of academic stress among respondents was when there are various assignments to be completed. There were significant differences in the sources of academic stress among the respondents on the bases of gender. However, respondents did not differ in their coping strategies on the basis of gender and age. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Counsellors be provide necessary information on a variety of ways in which students can manage academic stress. This can be achieved through organizing group counselling, enlightenment programmes such as workshops, seminars and symposia.

Key Words: Academic, Stress, Coping, Students

Introduction

Stress is a common phenomenon in the society because it is part of everyday living. Most definitions agreed that stress can be positive when it motivates one to get things done and is negative when it threatens the health of an individual. Adeoye (2010) defined stress as a state of severe physiological and psychological tension. Ajagbe (2012) looked at stress as an unpleasant state of emotional and psychological condition that people experience in situation they perceived as

dangerous or threatening to life and their wellbeing. Akinboye, Akinboye & Adeyemo (2002) defined stress as response to any undesirable, mental, emotional, social or environmental demands. Stress is the interference that disturbs a person's mental or physical well-being.

The incidence of stress among students is alarming due to academic challenges or events that go with the academic demands of students (Ashaolu, 2001). When stress is seen as being negative, students can begin to experience physical and psychological impairment (Murphy & Archer, 1996). Lee and Graham (2001) noted that the high school students listed some of the stress they encounter in the school setting as; unannounced test, deadlines for the submission of homework, academic and achievement expectation.

Adeoye (2010) said that school related stressors include inadequate instructional materials, poor classroom environment, etc. Students are subjected to different types of stressors such as pressure to succeed in their academics, fear of the future, socio economic changes and financial pressure (Minahan, Rappaport and Edelson, 2013). The researcher noted that transitional process of students leaving home for school can lead to academic stress. This is because they are leaving the comfort zone of their homes to the school environment where there is no much support system from parents and siblings. Ogunye (2007) noted that the fear of the future is the major source of stress among the University students. Teen health (2011) listed some signs of academic stress and which include; anxiety, panic attack, feeling of being consistently under pressure as a result of not meeting up the dead line of submission of assignment, irritability and moodiness. Mayo clinic (2001) explained that stress can lead to pain, over reaction, anger, and psychological breakdown. Ajagbe (2012) revealed that as a result of academic stress, students experience health and emotional breakdown during examination periods. Doe (2011) observed that doing quality work and submitting it on time is a challenge that often leads to stress among students. Poor study habits and ineffective time management skill makes students to experience high stress.

Academic stress is defined as the harmful physical and emotional response which occurs when the requirement of the academic environment do not match the capabilities, resources of the students. Stressor can come from multiple sources like the normal routine class work, lecturers, academic demands, environmental challenges on the campus and some interpersonal challenges. The result of this is that the students end up not being motivated (Braaten, 2000). Bellani and Funlani (1996) noted that lack of resources, increased work load, reduction in academic accomplishment can cause academic stress. Stress is unavoidable and as such, everyone has to deal with stress.

Gbolade (2012) defined coping as an adaptive or constructive way of reducing stress. Omolehin (2007) defined coping as an inbuilt ability and capability of an individual which are either in born or developed by personal effort through

cooperation with other forces. The researchers further said that choice of coping strategy depends on the appraisal made of a situation in which a person finds themselves. Carver (1999) distinguished between problem and emotional focused coping styles. Problem focused coping style aims at doing something to alter the source of stress while the emotional emphasized managing the emotional distress that is associated with the problem. Bellani and Fulani (1996) have shown that men and women respond to stressors with different stress reaction and coping strategies. Asonibare (1986) expressed that students cope by being assertive. This helps an individual to ask for what they want, refuse what they do not want, express negative feedback and also accept negative feedback. Bancroft (2001) noted that students have various ways of coping with academic stress. Ajagbe (2012) explained that students cope with academic stress by taking time off to rest, engaging in exercise and eating good meal. Babar et al, 2004. Arthur, (1998) Rijavec and Bradar (1997) suggested that the coping strategy adopted by an individual depends on a number of factors such as age, gender, type of environment and so on. Earlier studies showed that girls are more likely to use social support (Siu and Watkins, 2007), while male students cope with stress by engaging in sports (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2003).

Statement of Problem

People's ability to cope with stress differ. Stress management refers to all the means used to objectively or subjectively respond to a stressful situation perceived by the individual (Baciu, 2007). Stress becomes a problem when it leads to the detriment of one's health. Rajassekar (2013) highlighted some stress factors that are common among the University students and this include; environmental, monetary, physical and psychological stressors. The researcher emphasized that all these can lead to high health risk. Gbolade (2012) discovered that when students are stressed, they tend to cope by eating junk foods. This also could lead to obesity. Ginsberg (2006) found that academic stress is a predictor of sleep disorder. When people find it difficult to cope with stress, the behaviour of such individual may change and there may be physical symptoms such as; pain, anxiety and emotional frustration (Herbert & Wetmore, 2002). Ogunye (2007) found that academic stress can lead to the development of unhealthy habits. Although, the effects of academic stress cannot be grouped under the Diagnostic Manual for Psychiatric Disorder (DSMiv-R), the indicators of psychological distress that go with sources of stress among students are closely linked with the development of psychiatric disorder such as anxiety (Minahan, Rappaport and Edelsohn, 2013).

Pisaniello (2010) worked on emotional labour, emotional work and occupational strain among nurses. Stevenson and Harper (2006) looked at workplace stress and the student learning experience while Ajagbe (2012) carried out a study on the sources of academic stress and coping strategy among in-school

adolescents. To the best of the researchers' knowledge not much work has been done on the academic stress and coping strategies of the students in University of Ilorin.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the sources of academic stress and coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin. The study intended to find out the influence of variables such as gender, age and religion on academic stress and coping strategies of the students in University of Ilorin.

Research Questions

1. What is the major academic stress of students in University of Ilorin?
2. What is the coping strategy employed by the students in University of Ilorin?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the academic stress of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of gender.
3. There is no significant difference in the academic stress of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of age.
4. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of age.
5. There is no significant difference in the academic stress of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of level.
6. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of level.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey method. The design allows the researcher to collect data and describe it in a systematic manner (Adana, 1996). The target population of the study consisted of all students in University of Ilorin. The researchers purposively selected four faculties that have high student population and they are Faculties of Education, Arts, Life Science and Physical Science. The respondents were then stratified into gender, age and levels. Simple random sampling technique was used to select eighty respondents from each of the stratum. As such, a total number of three hundred and twenty respondents participated in this study.

Instrumentation

A researcher developed questionnaire tagged "Academic Stress and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (ASCSQ)" was used to gather information from the respondents. It has three sections: A, B and C. The instrument comprised of fifteen items. Section A contained the demographic data of the respondents. Section B comprised of information on the sources of academic stress while section C has items on the coping strategies. Respondents are expected to choose the response which applies to them on a Four-Point Likert-type of: "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), "Disagree" (D) and "Strongly Disagree" (SD). The validity of the instrument was established by giving copies of the questionnaire to three (3) experts in the related field. The final draft was done in line with the suggestions of these experts who adjudged the instrument valid. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument test re-test method was adopted. The test was administered to the same group of respondents who were not part of the study at an interval of four weeks. The two set of scores obtained were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation co-efficient and a co-efficient of 0.74 was obtained. The instrument was therefore considered reliable and suitable for the purpose for which it was designed.

Result

Table 1: Demographic distribution of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	158	49.4
Female	162	50.6
Total	320	100.0
Age		
Below 17 years	72	22.5
18-21 years	120	37.5
22years and above	128	40.0
Total	320	100.0
Level		
100	69	21.6
200	70	21.9
300	55	17.2
400	106	33.1
Post graduate	20	6.3
Total	320	100.0

Table 1 shows that 158 (49.4%) are males and 162 (50.6%) of the respondents are females. 72 (22.5%) of these students are below 17 years, 120 (37.5%) are between 18-21years while 128 (40.0%) of them are 22 years and above.

Table 2: Mean, Ranking of Respondents Expression on Academic Stress of Students in University of Ilorin

Item no	As a student I experience academic stress because of :	Mean	Rank
2	the various assignments that must be completed	3.37	1 st
8	lack of accommodation on the campus	3.28	2 nd
11	meeting a dead lines	3.14	2 nd
5	large amount of course content to master	3.07	4 th
6	lack of infrastructure	3.06	5 th
7	lack of good laboratory	3.02	6 th
10	the thought about unfinished assignment	3.01	7 th
9	over crowded classroom	2.97	8 th
4	lack of financial assistance	2.93	9 th
1	clumsy time table	2.94	10 th
3	the difficulty in having time for leisure activities	2.88	11 th
14	lack of self-confidence to ask questions from lecturers in the class	2.80	12 th
13	the inability to have access to learning materials	2.79	13 th
15	Lack of good study habit	2.76	14 th
12	the difficult discomfort I experience in the class room	2.69	15 th

Table 2 shows that item 2 ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.37 and it states that "as a student I experience academic stress because of 'the various assignments that must be completed'". Item 12 was ranked last with the mean score of 2.69 and it states that as a student I experience academic stress because of the difficult discomfort I experience in the class room.

Table 3: Mean, Ranking of Respondents Expression on Coping Strategies of Students in University of Ilorin

Item no	I cope with stress by	Mean	Rank
3	preparing ahead for classes	3.49	1 st
2	making friends with those that can help me	3.24	2 nd
4	discussing with a counsellor	3.16	3 nd

13	Reducing the number of hours I spend to read at night	3.15	4 th
11	praying	3.14	5 th
5	Getting enough sleep	2.93	6 th
1	changing my environment for sometimes	2.86	7 th
6	watching films	2.83	8 th
13	developing good relationship with my classmates	2.75	9 th
8	giving myself a break from academic activities	2.72	10 th
11	involving in religious activities	2.67	11 th
7	engaging in relaxation technique	2.41	12 th
15	seeking for financial assistance from friends	2.38	13 th
10	attending parties	2.31	14 th
12	Crying	2.24	15 th

Table 3 also shows that item 3 ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.49 and it states that as a student I cope with stress by 'preparing ahead for classes'. Item 12 was ranked last with the mean score of 2.24 and it states that as a student I cope with stress by crying.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses One:

There is no significant difference in the academic stress of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of gender.

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of Respondents on Academic Stress of Students in University of Ilorin on the Basis of Gender

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio
Male	158	44.15	4.427	318		
Female	162	45.27	5.053		2.11*	1.96

The result on table 4 reveals that the calculated t- value is greater than the critical t- value, therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two:

There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of gender.

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values of Respondents on Coping Strategies of Students in University of Ilorin on the Basis of Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value
Male	158	42.58	5.200	318	0.95	1.96
Female	162	42.01	5.479			

The calculated t-value of 0.95 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, as such, hypothesis two which states that there is no significant difference in the influence in the coping strategy of students in university of Ilorin on the basis of gender was not rejected.

Hypotheses Three:

There is no significant difference in the academic stress of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of age.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Academic Stress of Students in University of Ilorin on the Basis of Age.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio
Between groups	.426	2	.213	.009	3.00
Within groups	7286.262	317	22.985		
Total	7286.688	319			

The result on Table 6 reveals that the calculated F-ratio of .009 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00. Therefore, hypothesis three was not rejected.

Hypotheses Four:

There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of age.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Coping Strategies of Students in University of Ilorin on the Basis of Age.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio
Between groups	10.543	2	5.271	.184	3.00
Within groups	9093.007	317	28.685		
Total	9103.550	319			

The result on Table 6 reveals that the calculated F-ratio of .009 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00. Therefore, hypothesis four was not rejected.

Hypotheses Five:

There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of students in University of Ilorin on the basis of educational level.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Coping Strategies of Students in University of Ilorin on the Basis of Educational level.

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-ratio
Between groups	473.783	4	118.446		
Within groups	6812.904	315	21.628	5.476*	3.00
Total	7286.688	319			

The Cal F-ratio of 5.476 is more than the Crit F- ratio of 3.00 as such the hypothesis is rejected

Discussion

The students experience academic stress as a result of the various assignments that must be completed. In line with this, Fairboth and Warn (2003) identified poor relationship with classmates and too many assignments as the major source of academic stress among the students. Also, Minahan, Rappaport and Edelson (2013) noted that students experience different forms of stress in the pursuit of their academics which often lead to anxiety. Mayo clinic (2001) explained that everyone encounters stress, excessive or unresolved stress can increase the chances of developing chronic anxiety. Most of these students cope by preparing ahead of the class. Felsten and Wilcox (1992) emphasized on time management and future preparation as a way of coping with stress. It is believed that a lot can be achieved when students organize themselves and plan ahead.

Result of the study indicated that male and female respondents experience academic stress in different ways; however they also employ the same coping strategies. The general belief in literature is that women cope with stress condition better than their male counterpart (Porter and Stone, 2005). Chakraborty (2005) explained that people undergo a lot of physiological changes which can make male and female to respond to stress in different ways. Murphy and Archer (1996) noted that when stress becomes excessive, students cope by adopting time management skills, accepting social support and engaging in leisure pursuits. Ashaolu (2001)

revealed that students normally adopt different coping strategies styles to deal with academic stress.

Age did not determine the way students experience academic stress. Irrespective of their age respondents also employed the same coping strategies. Abouserie (1994) stated that students often experience academic stress especially when preparing for examinations. Gisele, (2002) noted that academic stress can lead to impaired judgment about oneself, loss of self-esteem and lack of concentration. Frydenberg (2003) emphasized that age and educational qualification notwithstanding, students often develop academic, financial, health related problems and self-imposed challenges in the pursuit of their studies which, may predispose stress.

Conclusion, Counselling Implication and Recommendation

It is often real that students are saddled with the responsibility of carrying out various assignments that usually form part of their grading. The need to meet up with deadlines exerts some degrees of stress on some students who may find it difficult to fulfill. Thus, this study established that students of University of Ilorin are no exemption. However, female students experience academic stress than their male counterparts, probably because the fact that the former are fragile in nature. Nevertheless, both male and female are not different in their coping strategy. Furthermore, respondents were not different in their academic stress and coping strategy based on age. By implication, it is apparent that the institution has not been putting academic stress into consideration. Also, there appears there has not been adequate counselling programme that would help the students to avoid falling into victims of academic stress. Therefore, the need to constantly relate with students to know how well they are able to cope with academic assignments and facilities. It is recommended that counselors should organize seminars to inculcate in students skills required to cope with academic stress. Also, counselors should train the students to adopt study habits adequate to prevent academic stress. The school authority should endeavor to provide adequate learning environment and student friendly academic activities that will prevent stress on students.

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