Stress Management Strategies and Academic Performance of University Undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined stress management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State in Nigeria. Findings of the study showed that: undergraduates had transportation problem with the highest level of source of stress 59.1% high views; there was a positive significant relationship between relaxation management strategies and academic performance of undergraduates, (r=.905, p<0.05); there was a positive significant relationship between lifestyle management strategies and academic performance of undergraduates, (r=.239, p<0.05) and there was a positive significant relationship between meditation management strategies and academic performance of undergraduates, (r=.605, p<0.05). The study concluded that the use of appropriate stress management strategies have a positive effect on the academic performance of Undergraduates. It was recommended among others that relaxation centres within the universities should be upgraded and provided in adequacy for undergraduates to unwind after a stressful day's work in order to decrease their academic stress.

Keywords: Stress Management Strategies, Academic Performance, Source of Stress

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Introduction

Although, too much stress can have an adverse effect on the health and academic performance of undergraduates, an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability. Therefore, stress becomes an unavoidable part of life. Selye (1980) reported that, stress can take a toll on students' physical health, mental health, and academic success and even on every part of life unless a measure is designed to cope with it appropriately. University students experience stress connected to changes in lifestyle, increased workload, new tasks, interpersonal relationships and a lot of other things. Therefore, stress is handled differently by different people as it affects an individual's performance, either by increasing it which is known as eustress, or decreasing it which is referred to as distress (Selye 1980).

Stress could be seen as an emotional or psychological response resulting from internal or external factors. Stress is the demand made on an organism to adapt, to cope, or to adjust (Rathus, 2000). Some stress can be helpful and necessary to keep us alert and occupied. However, intense or prolonged stress can overtax our capacity to adjust, dampen our moods, impair our ability to experience pleasure, and harm the body (Repetti, 1993). Stress is an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that people experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being. Conversely, stress has numerous sources and overtime these stress sources have been viewed by many scholars in different dimensions. In the submission of Hong and Zhang (2011), stress sources refer to factors causing stress reactions, including sources involving biological, spiritual, social and environmental stress. Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2013) asserted that mental stress sources of college students mainly include study, social, life and economic factors, and career factors.

Academic stress among students have long gained the attention of researchers and it has been attributed to many stressors, such as numerous assignments, antagonism with other students, disappointment, failures and poor relationships with other students or lecturers, family or problems at home (Fairbrother and Warn, 2003). Even though stress kills brain cells, not all stress is destructive in nature. Appropriate amount of stress can actually trigger passion for work, tap latent abilities and even ignite inspirations. Stress in academic institutions has both positive and negative consequences on academic achievement if not well managed (Awino & Agolla, 2008).Academic achievement is the outcome of education and extent of curriculum or educational goal attainment by a teacher, student or institution based on relatively standardized experiences, such as a class test (Annie, Howard, & Mildred, 1996; Akinade, 2001). Studies

has identified various factors that could influence academic performance which include marital status, tertiary education, emotional support, part time employment, socio-economic status, parental background, learning environment, students' intelligence, personality and stress (Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse & Verschueren, 2011; Magnuson, 2007). Stress is capable of affecting and influencing students' academic performance (Hong and Zhang, 2011). Stress symptoms has been found to influence students' performance in schools, colleges and universities which has led to difficulties in concentration, lack of motivation and interest, poor attendance, and physical health such as headache and fatigability (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelly & Whalen, 2005).

Stress needs to be controlled in order to minimize its impact on the academic achievement of students and such mechanism can be referred to as management strategy. There are various strategies that can be adopted to control stress such that it can reduce its influence on the academic achievement of students. Stress symptoms and its associated consequences are managed within the realms of academics in coping with ever increasing pressure of improved performance. Individual's ability to mobilize and successfully or unsuccessfully deal with stress factors is termed 'coping' as a management strategy, (Rajesh, 2011). Stress management strategy which is the mechanism adopted to cope with all forms of stress symptoms and coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, reduce, tolerate or minimize stressful events (Rajesh, 2011). Several models have been designed in order to cope with stress at any instance of exposure to pressure. These models include problem-focused, emotion-focused, passive, active maintenance and avoidant models (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Each of these models can be adopted to cope with various forms of stress. Therefore, the focus of this study is to investigate the relationship between stress management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State. The stress management strategies adopted for this study were: Relaxation management strategies, Lifestyle management strategies, and Meditation management strategies.

Healthy stress management strategies are necessary in order to enhance academic performance of Undergraduates which could be curtailed or elevated by numerous factors, one of which is stress. This could be seen in the study of Jimoh (2009) which investigated the relationship between stress management skills and academic achievement of undergraduate students in two Nigerian Universities. Sami, Redhwan, Mustafa, Krishna (2011), conducted their study on the sources of stress and coping strategies among University students in Malaysia. Omosidi, Tijjani

& Sheu (2016) however, conducted a study on stress and coping strategies among senior secondary school teachers in Ilorin West Local Government Areas in Kwara State. Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2013) examined stress management as it relates to the academic performance of Business education students in Edo state.

In Nigerian Universities, students receive lectures for several hours, coupled with tests, practical, examinations, project and other school requirements which may exceed their abilities. If time is not managed correctly to ensure that all of these tasks are completed, many students can experience stress. Stress can usually be related to everyday experiences, worries and challenges in school, at home, in the community and within the peer group interactions. Although stress could be viewed as a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of daily living, it has both positive and negative effects. Different authors have provided varied definitions of stress which reveal their different biases and experiences, (Anyaduba, 2001). Stress is defined by Akinade (2007) as any stimulus that either raises your excitement or anxiety level beyond what you regard as your usual or personal compatibilities. Anyaduba (2001) on the other hand defined stress as the adaptive response to external pressure or tension or other situation by an individual that results in physical, psychological and/or behavioural disorders or deviation. Stress is a situation when people tend to focus on the negative feelings and emotions it produces (Redhwan, Sami, Karim, Chan and Zaleha, 2009). It is believed that stress crops up when an individual perceives a situation to be a source of stress. This could also mean that certain situations are not really what they seem but what an individual perceives them to be. Blonna (2005) defined stress as a holistic transaction between the individual and a stressor that results in the body's mobilization of a stress response. Stress is also defined as a combination of a stressor and stress reactivity. According to Greenberge and Baroon (2000) stress is personal, physiological and emotional reactions against stimulus. Hussien and Hussien (2006) defined stress as the situation by which the individual suffers from physical and psychological hypertension resulting from factors that cannot be handled and exceeds human ability to cope with. However, it is worthy of note that these previous studies were conducted at different times, contains different variables, and were not conducted in Universities in Kwara State. This study bridges the time gap, scope gap and the difference in variables between this study and previous studies. Also due to various stress faced by Undergraduates in Universities in Kwara State, this study provides information that would be useful to them and students in other Universities in Nigeria on how to recognize and manage stress effectively.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Stress Management Strategies and Academic Performance of Undergraduates in Universities in Kwara State. Specifically the objectives of this study include:

1. To examine the major sources of stress among Undergraduates in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria;
2. To examine the stress management strategies being adopted by Undergraduates in Universities in Kwara State, Nigeria;
3. To examine the level of academic performance of Undergraduates in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria;
4. To examine the relationship between relaxation management strategies and academic performance of Undergraduates in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria;
5. To examine the relationship between lifestyle management strategies and academic performance of Undergraduates in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria; and
6. To examine the relationship between meditation management strategies and academic performance of Undergraduates in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria. **Research Questions**

This study provided answers to the following research questions;

1. What are the sources of stress among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. What are the stress management strategies being adopted by university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria?
3. What is the level of academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between stress management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Operational Hypotheses

Ho$_1$: There is no significant relationship between relaxation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between lifestyle management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between meditation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Methods

The study is a descriptive design of correlational type, and the research design adopted is descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey was adopted because it concerns with gathering of information on peoples' opinion (Sambo, 2008).The population of this study consists of all university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. The researcher adopted multistage sampling techniques for the study. Using purposive sampling technique, the researcher chose one Federal University, one State University, and one Private University in Kwara State, Nigeria and they are University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Al-Hikmah University. Using convenience sampling technique, all students in the Faculty of Education of the various universities were chosen to serve as the target population. The population of Undergraduates in the Faculty of Education of the three purposively selected Universities are as follows: University of Ilorin-34,383; Kwara State University-7,432; and Al-Hikmah University-5,748.While for the target population, University of Ilorin- 1478, Kwara State University- 114, and Al-Hikmah University-56. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size determination was then used to select 306, 92, and 52 undergraduates from University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, and Al-Hikmah University respectively, to give a sample size 450.

The questionnaire titled "Stress Management Strategies Questionnaire" (SMSQ) was used to collect relevant data on students' stress management strategies. The Questionnaire was patterned after a four point Likert-scale type rating scale where N=Never, R=Rarely, S=Sometimes, and A= Always, with the highest score for any item being four (4) and the lowest being one (1) thus: Always (4 points), Sometimes (3 points), Rarely (2 points), and Never (1 point). However for easy analysis, responses were grouped into two categories; Always and Sometimes were categorized as High views, while rarely and never fall under Low views. The researcher collected the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) scores of 300level students of Faculties of Education in each of the three Universities for the 2014/2015 session. All data regarding CGPA was used for research purposes only.

The Questionnaire designed was therefore validated through face and content validities by the four lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and two experts in the Department

of Counseling. The reliability of the instrument was determined through Split half reliability method. The value obtained was 0.86 as the reliability coefficient. The three research questions raised were analysed through percentage while the main and three operational hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics (PPMCS) at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the sources of stress among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 1: The sources of stress among university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Sources of stress	High Freq	High %	Low Freq	Low %	Total Freq	Total %
Academic workload	248	55.1	202	44.9	450	100
Family problems	183	40.7	267	59.3	450	100
Financial pressure	178	39.6	272	60.4	450	100
Social factors	159	35.3	291	64.7	450	100
Transportation problems	266	59.1	184	40.9	450	100

Table 1 indicates that Transportation problem with 266 (59.1%) respondents had high views, while 184 (40.9%) respondents had low views. This shows that transportation problem have the maximum high views. The table also revealed that social factors have the least high views with 159 (35.3%) respondents, and low views of 291 (64.7%) respondents. Academic workload had 248 (55.1%) respondents with high views, while low views had 202 (44.9%) respondents. Family problems was found to be a stress factor for 183 (40.7%) respondents who have high views, while 267 (59.3%) respondents had low views. Financial pressure was also found to be a stress factor with high views of 178 (39.6%) respondents, and low views of 272 (60.4%) respondents.

Research Question 2: What are the stress management strategies being adopted by university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 2: The stress management strategies being adopted by university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

SMS	High Freq	High %	Low Freq	Low %	Total Freq	Total %
RMS	217	48.2	233	51.8	450	100
LMS	242	53.8	208	46.2	450	100
MMS	103	22.9	347	77.1	450	100

Key: SMS: Stress Management Strategies RMS- Relaxation Management Strategies; LMS- Lifestyle Management Strategies and MMS- Meditation Management Strategies

Table 2 indicates that Lifestyle Management Strategies (LMS) has the highest high views of 242 (53.8%) respondents, and low views of 208 (46.2%) respondents. It also revealed that Relaxation Management Strategies (RMS) has 217 (48.2%) respondents for high views and 233 (51.8%) respondents for low views. Meditation Management Strategies (MMS) has the least high views of 103 (22.9%) respondents, and low views of 347 (77.1%) respondents.

Research Question 3: What is the level of academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Level of academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria for the 2014/2015 session

University	First class	Second class upper	Second class lower	Third class	Pass	Total
Unilorin	5 (71.4%)	241 (93%)	725 (90.8%)	503 (89.5%)	4 (21%)	1478 (89.9%)
KWASU	0	2 (.8%)	46 (5.8%)	50 (8.9%)	14 (73.7%)	112 (6.8%)
Al-Hikmah	2 (28.6%)	16 (6.2%)	27 (3.4%)	9 (1.6%)	1 (5.3%)	55 (3.3%)
Total	7	259	798	562	19	1645
Percentage	.4	15.7	48.5	34.2	1.2	100

Table 3 shows the distribution of Undergraduates' level of academic performance in Universities in Kwara State, Nigeria for the session 2014/2015. The table revealed that only 7 Undergraduates representing .4% had a first class, while 259 and 798 Undergraduates with percentages of 15.7 and 48.4 had second class upper and second class lower respectively. 562 and 19 Undergraduates with percentages of 34.2 and 1.2 had third class and pass respectively. Table 5 also revealed that 48.5% of Undergraduates had second class lower which is the highest while only .4% had first class which is the lowest. This computation was however made on the 1645 students who had CGPAs of between .50 and 5.0. The researcher excluded the remaining

3 students because they had less than .50 in their CGPA and are either placed on probation or advised to withdraw.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using Pearson product moment correlation statistics at 0.05 alpha significance level.

Main Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between stress management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Stress management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. r-value	Crit. r-value	Decision
Stress Management Strategies	450	2.24	.38				
				448	.911	.088	Ho Rejected
Academic Performance	450	2.79	.42				

Table 4 indicates that the calculated r-value of .911 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance and for 448 degree of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that, a positive significant relationship exist between stress management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. This means that, the use of appropriate stress management strategies university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria has a positive effect on their academic performance.

Operational Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between relaxation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State.

Table 5: Relaxation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal.r-value	Crit.r-value	Decision
Relaxation Management Strategies	450	2.43	.39				
				448	.905	.088	Ho1 Rejected

| Academic Performance | 450 | 2.79 | .42 |

Table 5 shows that the calculated r-value of .905 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance and for 448 degree of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result revealed that, a significant relationship exists between relaxation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. This implies that, undergraduates' use of relaxation management strategies in Universities in Kwara State has an impact on their academic performance.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between lifestyle management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State.

Table 6:Lifestyle management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal.r-value	Crit.r-value	Decision
Lifestyle Management Strategies	450	2.55	.32				
				448	.239	.088	Ho2 Rejected
Academic Performance	450	2.79	.42				

Table 6 depicts that the calculated r-value of .239 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance and for 448 degree of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result shows that, a significant relationship exists between lifestyle management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria. This implies that, undergraduates' use of lifestyle management strategies in Universities in Kwara State has an impact on their academic performance.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between meditation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State.

Table 7: Meditation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal.r-value	Crit.r-value	Decision

Meditation Management Strategies	450	1.75	.56				
				448	.605	.088	Ho3 Rejected
Academic Performance	450	2.79	.42				

From Table 7, it can be seen that the calculated r-value of .605 is greater than the critical r-value of .088 at .05 level of significance and for 448 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between meditation management strategies and academic performance of undergraduates in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria is rejected. This means that, a significant relationship exist between meditation management strategies and academic performance of university undergraduates in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Discussion

The result corroborates with the findings of Jimoh (2009) which states that there is a strong relationship between stress management skills and undergraduates' academic achievement. Studies shown that stress is capable of affecting/influencing students' academic performance (Hong & Zhang, 2011). Stress has negative effect on the mastery of the academic curriculum. The experience of stress, particularly chronic stress, takes a significant toll on the well-being of undergraduates in terms of emotional and physical discomforts as well as functional ability. All these discomforts are capable of influencing or affecting the overall academic performance of university students. Williamson, Birmaher, Ryan, and Dahl (2005), reported that stressful life events are significantly elevated in anxious and depressed youths, thus could lead to low performance in academic achievement. A study by MdAris and Mariam (2010) also indicated the same results. They found that depression, anxiety, and stress negatively correlate with academic achievement. The higher the depression, anxiety, and stress, the lower the academic achievement among students.

ASAP-UCDHS (2010) reported that relaxation management strategies such as having a workout, helps to activate the body's natural response. ASAP-UCDHS (2010) added that this relaxation response is a powerful antidote to stress, so when these activities are practiced regularly, it leads to a reduction in everyday stress levels and a boost in productivity. For undergraduates, it keeps them fit, always energized, ready for challenges, and brings about good grades. Lawrence et al (2010) are of the opinion that routine relaxation techniques heightens performance of individuals. The relaxation management strategies mostly used by the

undergraduates under this study includes taking a warm bath at night before sleeping, listening to music, and watching comedy movies. These are but simple ways of relieving stress as well as getting refreshed and entertained.

Harvey and David (2013) opined that a healthy lifestyle is an essential companion to any stress-reduction program because it enhances general health as well as performance.

To further buttress this, undergraduates in this study used more of the lifestyle management strategies. These items are attending to important issues or tasks first, setting achievable goals, and engaging in positive self-talk. These techniques go a long way to prevent stress in the lives of undergraduates, because they try to put round pegs into round holes. This means that if undergraduates are able to carry out these activities correctly and concurrently, they tend to lower the actions of stress-aggravating hormones such as adrenaline and replace them with that of feel-good hormones like dopamine. Wallenstein, (2003) further explained that stress has enabled human to survive, and their lifestyle would further increase their awareness and improve performance.

ASAP-UCDHS (2010) noted that meditation directs the human mind to cultivate the habit of mindfulness which is an effective tool in reducing stress and improving academic dealings of students and subsequently their academic performance. In other words, undergraduate' use of meditation management strategies in universities in Kwara State, Nigeria has a positive impact on their academic performance. The meditation management strategies used more by the undergraduates in this study. These are engaging in deep muscle relaxation, engaging in mind training, dancing freely to a soothing rhythm of music. These techniques also give undergraduates the ability to control the actions of stress on them. So the trick is trying to maximize the positive stress and minimizing the negative stress. Ramesh, (2012) explained that the quality of life before and after undergoing sahoja yoga meditation differs a lot. Anxiety and blood pressure is controlled which results in improvement of overall wellness of people, academic performance inclusive.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The outcome of the study revealed that stress management strategies had positive significant relationship with academic performance of university undergraduates in universities in Kwara state, Nigerian. The implication of this is that, with continues application of stress management strategies, there is likely the tendency that academic performance of university undergraduates

would continue to improve. Based on the major findings and all that have been discussed in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Genuine efforts should be made by concerned authorities to provide more vehicles to transport Undergraduates in and out of the university and at a subsidized rate, so that stress can be reduced to the bearest minimum.

2. Undergraduates should be educated more on the positive impact of both relaxation and meditation management strategies on their academic performance. This could be done through the distribution of leaflets or pamphlets containing such information.

3. In order to maintain a good academic performance, undergraduates should be tutored on stress management. This could form part of job specification of not only the university counselors, but also that of deans of faculties, heads of departments, course lecturers, and most importantly level advisers.

4. Relaxation centres should be upgraded and provided in adequacy for undergraduates to unwind after a stressful day's work in order to decrease their academic stress. Relaxation centres where they can listen to soothing music, watch comedy movies, have a workout, and if possible get a massage done, all for free or at a subsidized rate.

5. The university management should organize talks or shows on stress management for the students. These programs should be organized continuously, not only during orientation weeks. Such programs would educate students well on how a good lifestyle can help to reduce the level of stress and improve their academic performance.

6. The school authority can also provide the students with meditation centres which could be an integral part of the sports unit. This is essential because meditation contributes to good health which indirectly results in producing good academic performers.

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