

Psychological Stress, Academic Adjustment and Emotional Adjustment among Undergraduate Students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between psychological stress, academic adjustment and emotional adjustment among Undergraduate Students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study was six thousand, six hundred and thirty five (6,635) male and female undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. The sample of the study was 351 respondents drawn from 300 level students of the university. Data was collected using psychological stress inventory (PSI), academic adjustment inventory (AAI), and emotional adjustment inventory (EAI). The collected data were analysed using frequencies, mean, standard deviation, Pearson product moment correlation and t-test. All tests were done at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed, among others, that positive relationships exist between psychological stress and academic adjustment ($r=0.889$, $p=.000$); and between psychological stress and emotional adjustment ($r=.506$, $p=.001$). It is recommended that the management of Nasarawa State University, Keffi should establish functional psychological testing and counselling centres in all the faculties for re-addressing students with psychological stress problem in order to foster positive adjustment.

Keywords: psychological, stress, academic, emotional, adjustment

Introduction

Adjustment refers to an individual's general adaptation to his environment and the demands of life, such as the way he relates to other people (that is interpersonal behaviour), handles his responsibility, deals with stress and meets his own needs and life satisfaction. The society is dynamic and change is the only constant thing, so the individual's ability to review his attitude and behaviour is an essential ingredient of adjustment. Adjustment is associated with what is called living system, which is like system of organs. Groups of individuals and social systems such as social organization are regarded as open system. In the process of adjustment, forces are balanced naturally within the system with forces originally from the environment. In this regard, adjustment is seen as a state of equilibrium, a form of balance in the person's own internal system. The equilibrium concept is related to the idea of tension reduction, and leads to the definition of adjustment as a process rather than a satisfaction of needs; thereby reducing tension particularly when usual ways of meeting the need are blocked (Elliot, 2005).

Emotional adjustment on the other hand can be described as the behavioural processes by which human beings maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacle of environments. A sequence of adjustment begins when a need is felt and ends when it is satisfied. Hungry individuals, for instance, are stimulated by their physiological state to seek food. Therefore, they reduce the stimulating condition that impelled them to activity, and thereby adjust to this particular need.

Psychological stress, according to Hashin (2003), refers to academic pressure the school poses to students. Academic related stress have included fear of failing the course work, finding motivation to study, time pressure and concern about academic ability. Tyrrell (1992) defines psychological stress as struggle to meet academic standards, time management worries and concerns over grades. Olphin (1997) opined that these sources of psychological stress may exist throughout the span of the college students' academic careers if prevention efforts are not developed to assist student deal with psychological stress. According to Altback (2007), psychological stress is students' perception of school as exerting great influence over their lives, making them feel that they live in a state of substantial powerlessness. Psychological stress could also be in form of difficulty of achieving social intimacy due to excessive studies. If for this reason, students lack time and opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships, such students are said to be experiencing psychological stress (Chen, 2006).

Psychological stress, according to Falk (1995), is the students' reaction to school challenges; for some, tertiary institution is stressful because it is an abrupt change from secondary school. For others, separation from home is a source of stress. The psychological stress faced by most students is attributed to poor study habits, such as poor time management, studying for exams (Baldwin, Wilkinson, & Barkley, 2000), and coursework (Robotham, 2008), which may eventually lead to poor academic performance. In order to overcome the pressure from psychological stress, the students have to employ suitable coping strategies like in any other stressful situation (Smith & Renk, 2007). There are various coping strategies used by students when experiencing psychological stress. Some resort to avoidant coping; alcohol/drug abuse, denial and behavioural disengagement; while others cope actively through acceptance, planning, and positive reframing and taking the necessary steps to overcome the psychological stress (Sreeramareddy et al., 2007).

Academic adjustment refers to the feat which students achieve within the academic context. It may be useful to think of academic adjustment as an adjustment to how things are normally done. Students who achieve academically are those whose ability and actual level of performance are consistent with their intellectual capacity. Students who achieves higher, exhibit characteristics of positive academic adjustment in areas such as attitude toward school, attitude toward teachers and classes, motivation and self-regulation, self-perception, and goal values. Current research has approached distinguishing academic achievers from underachievers by investigating five academic adjustment factors including student perceptions, attitudes, motivation and self-regulation and goal valuation

(Mathews & McBee, 2007; McCoach & Siegle, 2003), reasoning that underachievers exhibit characteristics on a negative continuum of those adjustment factors (Reis & McCoach, 2000). Students thrive in settings where they have opportunities to communicate with students who are at the same intellectual level. Academic achievement is more likely to occur when students are provided accelerated experiences which are challenging and rigorous, and when students are given opportunities to interact with intellectual peers as well as their chronological age peers (Colangelo, et al., 2004; Rogers, 2007). Research in students' education has long advocated for enriched and differentiated curriculum needed to provide academic rigours and as a means for students to interact with their intellectual peers. When students achievers are exposed to accelerated experiences such as subject-based and grade-based classroom opportunities that increase challenge, depth and complexity (Rogers, 2004) and when they are allowed to interact with intellectual peers, students are more likely to fulfill their intellectual and academic potential (Rogers, 2007; VanTassel-Baska, 2007). Conversely, students who are not given acceleration opportunities may get discouraged with their current class placement and disengage with the regular curriculum and may experience periods of depression (Reis & Renzulli, 2004).

Martins (2014) established that social support is the most significant predictor of academic performance of college students. Therefore, social and academic adjustment was found to enhance the relationship between affective adjustment and academic achievement. Osas-Edoh and Iyamu (2012) study revealed that academic adjustment influences academic achievement of student. According to Richman (2006), parent education is one of the strongest predictor of cognitive performance and academic attainment of students among others. In his article about relationship between emotional adjustment and socio development, he found mothers' education to be a stronger predictor of intellectual attainment of student. He further stated that lower psychological stress correlates to high education attainment.

Yengimolki and Malekitabar (2015) explored the relationship between self- concept and emotional adjustment with academic achievement of student. The research shows that significant difference exists between arts students and science students. There is also a significant difference in the overall adjustment between these two groups (arts and science) but there is no significant difference between their self-concept.

Statement of the problem

The university is a social institution where learning takes place. However, the transition of individual students from different secondary school environments to the tertiary institution may come with a lot of anxiety, stress and difficulties. Many students in universities are faced with adjustment problem in terms of academic motivation and expectation from teachers, personal academic communication or interaction with new colleagues. In their pursuance of knowledge, they are faced with a new dimension or method of teaching, new academic institution, security challenges and many others that can create excessive pressure which may in turn have effect on students' academic

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adjustment as well as emotional anxiety. This researcher engaged in an interaction with undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria and observed that there seems to be high level of psychological stress, poor academic adjustment and poor emotional adjustment among students of the university. As a result, there are so much complaint of too much academic demands and expectation from students, limited time allocation, problems, worries about future, career, financial problems, issues of school fees, poor school environment, poor time management and many more.

The interaction with the students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, at different levels of the university indicates that they have peculiar psychological problem and task that can create condition for stress which may affect students' academic adjustment. The problem lies in the fact that when students continually experience excessive stress, they are likely to have poor academic adjustment. The objective of educational system of such universities will be jeopardized and this will affect the manpower production of the nation particularly in the teaching sub-sector and thereby causing unemployment problem as currently being witnessed today; which is also tied to many problems such as security problem etc. It is on the basis of this that the researcher deems it fit to investigate relationship among psychological stress, academic adjustment and emotional adjustment among undergraduates students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria, with a view to proffering solution to the problem, in order to minimize stress, and improve good emotional and academic adjustment among students of the university.

Objectives of the study

- i. To determine the relationship between psychological stress and academic adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
- ii. To determine the relationship between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduates student of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
- iii. To find out whether differences exist between School of Arts and School of Sciences in the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between psychological stress and academic adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between School of Arts and School of Sciences in the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Methodology

This research employed correlational design. According to Mitchell and Jolley (2007), when researchers want to find out the relationship between two or more variables, then correlational design should be used. The population of this study was made up of 300

level students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Their number stands at six thousand, six hundred and thirty five (6,635) male and female undergraduate students. Sample size of three hundred and fifty- one (351) male and female undergraduate students was drawn.

Three instruments were used for data collection. The instruments were emotional adjustment inventory, psychological stress inventory and academic adjustment inventory. The instruments were rated on five points scale ranging from Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Not Sure (NS), Disagreed (D), Strongly Disagreed (SD) which represent students' feelings. Emotional adjustment inventory was adopted from Bell (1994). It comprises of two sections, section A is on Bio data while section B deals with Emotional Adjustment items; it consists of 15 items, which are designed to measure emotional adjustment of the student. Scoring guide for emotional adjustment includes: <29- low adjustment, 30-59-averagely adjusted, 60-100 highly adjusted. Psychological stress inventory was adopted from Balarabe (2018). The scale consists of 20 items that measure the characteristics of academic Stress. The Scale is on 4-point Likert scale ranging from 3 (Very True), 2 (True), 1 (Untrue) and 0 (Very Untrue).Therefore, the highest scores of Academic Stress among respondents will be (60 3x20 Items),while the lowest possible Academic Stress scores of the respondents will be (0x20 items). Academic adjustment inventory was adopted from Elias (2010). It consists of 14 items, which is designed to measure adjustment of students in their academics. The Scale is on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Agree), 3 (Undecided), 2 (Disagree) and 1 (Strongly disagree). Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2 while t-test was used to test hypotheses 3. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between psychological stress and academic adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics on the relationship between psychological stress and academic adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	r	df	Sig (p)
Psychological stress	350	2.95	.45	0.889	348	0.000
Academic Adjustment	350	66.69	10.03			

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

The computed result from table 1 revealed the relationship between psychological stress and academic adjustment among undergraduate students using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The result revealed that significant positive relationship exists between psychological stress and academic adjustment. This is because the calculated

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significant (p) value of 0.000 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlation index (r) value of 0.889 at 348 df. This shows that psychological stress significantly affects academic adjustment; this implies also that the higher the level of psychological stress, the lower the academic adjustment. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between psychological stress and academic adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa state University, Keffi is hereby rejected.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics on the relationship between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa state University, Keffi

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	R	df	Sig (P)
Psychological Stress	350	66.69	10.03	0.506	348	0.001
Emotional Adjustment	350	18.79	2.07			

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

The computed result from table 2 revealed the relationship between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The result revealed that significant relationship exists between psychological stress and emotional adjustment of undergraduate students. This is because the calculated significant (p) value of 0.001 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlation index (r) value of 0.506. This implies that the higher the level of psychological stress, the lower the level of emotional adjustments, and vice versa. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi is hereby rejected.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between School of Arts and School of Sciences in the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Table 3: t-test statistics on difference between School of Arts and School of Sciences in the emotional adjustment of undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Std .err	Df	t-calc.	t-cri	Sig (p)
Schools of Arts	162	69.55	12.52	.98093	348	5.144	1.96	0.000
Schools of Sciences	188	64.21	6.27	.45704				

Calculated $p < 0.05$, calculated $t > 1.96$ at df 348

Results from table 3, using independent t-test statistics, revealed that significant difference exists between School of Arts and School of Sciences in their mean emotional adjustment. Reason being that the calculated p-value of 0.000 is lower than 0.05 level of significance while the calculated t-value of 5.144 is higher than the 1.96 critical value at 348 df. The calculated mean emotional adjustments are 69.55 and 64.21 for Arts and Science students respectively, with a mean difference of 5.33 between School of Arts and School of Sciences. This implies that arts students had higher level of emotional adjustment than their science student counterparts. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between school of arts and school of sciences students in their mean emotional adjustment is hereby rejected.

Discussion of the findings

The paper aimed at investigating the relationship between psychological stress, academic adjustment and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

The findings of this research indicated that significant relationship exists between psychological stress and academic adjustment of undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University. The findings agree with that of Martins (2014) who established that social support is the most significant predictor of academic performance of college students with $p =$ value of 0.000. Therefore, social and academic adjustment was found to enhance the relationship between affective adjustment and academic achievement. The study also agreed with that of Osas-Edoh and Iyamu (2012) whose findings showed that academic adjustment influences academic achievement of students with $p = 0.053$.

The finding also revealed that significant relationship exists between psychological stress and emotional adjustment among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. These findings agree with other researchers. According to Richman (2006), parent education is one of the strongest predictor of cognitive performance and academic attainment of students among others. In his article about relationship between emotional adjustment and socio development, he found mothers' education to be a stronger predictor of intellectual attainment of students. He further stated that lower psychological stress correlates to high education attainment.

The finding further revealed that significant difference exists between school of arts and school of sciences in their emotional adjustment. Reason being the fact that the calculated (p) value of 0.000 is lower than the 0.05 level of significance while the calculated t-value of 5.144 is higher than the 1.96 critical t-value at df 349. Their calculated mean social adjustment was 64.55 for Arts student and 64.21 for the Science students, with a mean difference of 5.33 between the two of them. This implies that Arts students had higher level of emotional adjustment than their Science counterparts. The findings correspond with the findings of Yengimolki and Malekitabar (2015) who aimed at exploring the relationship between self- concept and emotional adjustment with academic achievement of students. The research shows that significant difference exists between Arts students and Science students. There is also a significant difference in the overall adjustment between these two groups (Arts and Science) but there is no significant difference between their self-concept.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that students with low psychological stress can easily perform better in their academic adjustment than those with high psychological stress. More so, students with high psychological stress can easily have emotional adjustment problem, than those with low psychological stress. The calculated mean score of emotional adjustments indicated that Arts students are emotionally well adjusted than their Science counterparts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are given on the basis of findings of this research:

1. Managements of undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, should establish functional psychological testing and counselling centres to aid in assisting students with problem of psychological stress for proper academic adjustment.
2. Teachers and administrators should pay more attention to college students with emotional problem and refer them to school psychological testing and counselling centres.
3. School authorities should put more emphasis on science students or set aside a social programme week for the science students; this will encourage science students to participate in social activities thereby increasing their level of emotional adjustment.

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