STRESS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies the effects of stress on the academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Four research questions were posed as a guide for the study while a descriptive survey design was adopted. The population consist of 29,976 students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka out of which a sample of 300 was used. A questionnaire of 19 items designed with a four-scale response options was used as Instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts and a reliability co-efficient of 0.82 was obtained indicating a high reliability index. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents on a direct contact for to aid easy retrieval and arithmetic mean was used for data analysis. The findings of the study indicated that there are factors that poses stress on students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, because students experience stress as a result of; the distance from the school to hostel, examination time table that are not spaced out for students to have time to prepare well, high school fees, long lecture periods and Poor eating habit. It was also revealed that Stress affects academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, because; students who are free from stress are likely to perform well academically, stress leads to poor performance, students that are faced with financial problem tend to perform poor academically and emotional stress affects academic performance. The following recommendations were made by the researchers; those in education sectors should do their best to remove or control those stressors. Government and school administrators should organize seminars and workshops where students will be educated on how to control those stressors.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a powerful neuro-chemicals and hormones that prepare one for action to fight or flee if one does not take action, the stress responses can lead to health problems (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen 2005). Researchers (Vermunt and Steensman, 2005; Topper, 2007; Watson, 2002; Malach-Pines and Keinan, 2007) have defined stress as the perception of discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill these demands. Porter, (1990) also defines stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them. Stress occurs when an individual is confronted by a situation that they perceive as overwhelming and cannot cope up with. Academic stress among students have long been researched on, and researchers have identified stressors as too many assignments, competition with other students, failures, lack of pocket money (Fairbrother and Warn, 2003), poor relationships with other students or lecturers, family or problems at home.

Institutional (university) level stressors are overcrowded lecture halls, (Ongori, 2007; Misra and Castillo, (2004), semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work. When these events take place, an individual becomes disorganized, disoriented and therefore less able to cope up, thus resulting in stress related health problems. The pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful. (Masih and Gulrez, 2006; Kumar and Jejurkar,, 2005; Misra and McKean, 2000). This is likely to affect the social relations both within the University and outside (Fairbrother and Warn, 2004) since there is conflict with the social aspect of individual life. This is not the only effect the social relations within or outside the University, but this goes to affect the individual person's life in terms of commitment to achieving the goals. Knowing the causes of students' stress will make the University administrator know how to monitor and control the stress factors that are responsible for the students' stress.

Scholars (Richlin-Klonsky and Hoe,, 2003; Smith et al., 2000; Safree and Dzulkifli, 2010; Ongori, 2007; Topper, 2007; Misra and Castillo, 2004; Agolla, 2008) for instance identified the symptoms and the causes of stress in work environments as sitting for a long period of time, poor work performance, poor interpersonal relationship, inadequate or lack of resources ,inadequate time to perform particular assignments, poor working conditions, overcrowded work stations, excessive paperwork, and many others. Whereas these factors have been found to be responsible for stress, it is worth noting that in order to minimize the stress among students; the University administrators must develop appropriate strategies that will enable them to detect in advance the symptoms and causes of the stress.

Watson, (2002) further states that there is a series of physiological reactions that occurs in response to environmental demands or any noxious stimulus. Some familiar

reactions to demands made on the body include increased heart rate, respiratory rate, blood glucose level. Wilks (2008) also states that prolonged and severe stress may be psychologically damaging in that it may hinder a person's ability to engage in effective behavior. Learning and memory can be affected by stress. Although an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability (Gonzalez & Ladero 2007), too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems (Murphy, M. C. & Archer, 1996), reduce students' self-esteem (Trueman & Hartley, 1996; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004) and may affect students' academic achievement.

Further, if a student is challenged with inadequate stress management skills, limited resilience, lack of social support, or poor mental health; overall health can be compromised (Hussain et al., 2008). Therefore, an important aspect to supporting students during university education is to understand the stressors they face and addressing the ways in which stress can be managed.

The findings of this study, after it has well been disseminated will create an awareness on what stress is, its causes and its effects on Academic performance of students and help the university community in planning and conducting necessary programmes for the students, so that stress-related factors could be reduced and better academic performance could be achieved.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

University students have many obstacles to overcome in order to achieve optimal academic performance. A number of researches have been done looking at the correlation of many stress factors that university students experience and the effects of stress on their learning outcome. Researches were also conducted to assess the relationship between stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students and it is found that stress affects students' academic achievement (Roberti et al.,2006; Rawson, Bloomer, & Kendall, 1999). Students complained of feeling stressed academically when it comes to facing exams and grade competition and having too much information to study yet insufficient time to master the knowledge (Carveth, Gesse & Moss, 1996).

Stress is increased by participation in risky behaviors that are common amongst university students (Williamson, Birmaher, Ryan, & Dahl, 2005). For example, it has been found that university students have high rates of alcohol use, binge drinking, unprotected sex, and drug experimentation (Sulaiman, Hassan, Sapian & Abdullah, 2009). University students also report unhealthy sleep habits, being physical inactive, disordered eating, and poor eating habits (American College Health Association, 2009, Ontario University and College Health Association (OUCHA), 2009).

Majority of the investigation has taken place in the United States of America (USA) and the emphasis was placed more on the students in the medical field. The researchers have found out that there is not much research conducted in our local universities particularly in Nnamdi Azikiwe university itself pertaining to this issue. The need to embark on this study is thus justified. Therefore, it is timely to conduct a research to examine the effects of Stress on the Academic performance of undergraduate in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose or objective of this study is to examine the effects of stress on the academic performance of undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The Specific objective includes;

1. To identify the factors that posed stress on students.
2. To analyze ways in which stress from social factor affects the academic performance of students.
3. To analyze ways in which stress from health factor affects the academic performance of students.
4. To examine the effect of stress on the academic performance of students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the factors that posed stress on students?
2. What are the ways in which stress from social factor affects the academic performance of students?
3. What are the ways in which stress from health factor affects the academic performance of students?
4. What are the effects of stress on the academic performance of students?

METHOD

The descriptive survey research design was adopted in the conduct of the study which was conducted in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprises of all 29,976 students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka of which 300 students were selected using simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a 19-itemed questionnaire which was subjected to face and content validation by three experts, with the response categories of; Strongly Agree (SA)-4, Agree (A)-3, Disagree (D)-2 and Strongly Disagree (SD)-1. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained from the Pearson's product moment statistics. The researchers personally distributed the Questionnaire to the respondents of which out of the 300 copies, 270 were retrieved and used for the study. This yielded 90 percent return rate. Data collected were analyzed using the arithmetic mean. The interpretation reveals that any item with a mean of 2.50 and above is regarded as Agreed while an item with mean rating below 2.50 is regarded as Disagreed.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the factors that posed stress on students?

Table 1: mean response of students on the factors that poses stress

S/N	I experience stress as a result of	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	The distance from the school to hostel.	219	41	7	3	3.76	Agreed
2.	Examination time table that are not spaced out for students to have time to prepare well.	172	58	26	14	3.44	Agreed
3.	High school fees	212	36	18	4	3.69	Agreed
4.	Long lecture periods	233	28	7	2	3.82	Agreed
5.	Poor eating habit	257	10	3	0	3.94	Agreed
	Grand Mean = 3.37						

Table 1 shows that all the items have mean score above 2.50, this show that they are factors that poses stress on students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. With a grand mean of 3.37, the students agreed that the identified Items are the factors that poses stress on them.

Research Question 2: What are the ways in which stress from social factor affects the academic performance of students?

Table 2: mean response on stress from social factor that affects the academic performance of students

S/N	Stress from social factors that affects the academic performance of students through	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Being too regular in a social event.	212	36	18	4	3.69	Agreed
2.	The living Environment.	195	47	22	6	3.60	Agreed
3.	Attending Parties	233	28	7	2	3.82	Agreed

4.	Environment where learning takes place affects academic performance.	154	46	48	22	3.22	Agreed
	Grand Maen = 3.58						

Table 2 shows that all the items are accepted since they scored mean above 2.50. This implies that stress from social factors influence academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question 3: What are the ways in which stress from health factor affects the Academic performance of students?

Table 3: means response on stress from health factors that affects students' academic performance.

S/N	The following stress from health factors affects the academic performance of students	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Students with health issues perform poorly in school.	233	28	6	3	3.82	Agreed
2.	Poor eating habit affects academic performance.	172	58	26	14	3.44	Agreed
3.	Students exposed to drug or smoking is likely to perform poorly.	223	17	21	9	3.68	Agreed
4.	Excessive use of alcohol leads to poor performance.	212	36	15	7	3.68	Agreed
5.	Students who are healthy are likely to perform well.	198	59	10	3	3.67	Agreed
6.	Mentally sound students will do well academically.	233	28	6	3	3.82	Agreed
	Grand Mean = 3.69						

Table 3 reveals that all the items were agreed upon since they recorded mean scores above 2.50. By implication, stress from health factors affects academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question 4: What are the effects of stress on the academic performance of students?

Table 4: mean response on the effect of stress on the academic performance of students.

S/N	The following are the effects of stress on the academic performance of students	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Students who are free from stress are likely to perform well academically.	209	50	8	3	3.72	Accept
2.	Stress leads to poor performance.	223	17	21	9	3.68	Accept
3.	Students that are faced with financial problem tend to perform poor academically.	219	41	7	3	3.76	Accept
4.	Emotional stress affects academic performance.	200	47	13	10	3.36	Accept
	Grand Mean = 3.63						

Table 4 reveals that all the items are accepted since they scored mean above 2.50. This implies that stress affects academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the data analysis, the following findings were made

1. There factors that poses stress on students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, because students experience stress as a result of; the distance from the school to hostel, examination time table that are not spaced out for students to have time to prepare well, high school fees, long lecture periods and Poor eating habit.
2. Stress from social factors influence academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka because; being too regular in a social event, the living Environment, Parties, and the environment where learning takes places affects students' academic performance.
3. Stress from health factors affects the academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka because; students with health issues perform poorly in school, poor eating habit affects academic performance, students exposed to drug or smoking is likely to perform poorly, excessive use of alcohol leads to poor performance, students who are healthy are likely to perform well and mentally sound students will do well academically.
4. Stress affects academic performance of students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka because; students who are free from stress are likely to perform well academically, stress leads to poor performance, students that are faced with

financial problem tend to perform poor academically and emotional stress affects academic performance.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

For research question 1, results gathered from analysis indicated that the respondents agreed on the items that students experience stress as a result of; the distance from the school to hostel, examination time table that are not spaced out for students to have time to prepare well, high school fees, long lecture periods and Poor eating habit. This clearly shows that they are factors that poses stress on students. This is in line with the finding of Agolla & Ongori (2009) academic workload, inadequate resources, low motivation, and poor performance in academic, continuous poor performance in academic, overcrowded lecture halls, and uncertainty of getting job after graduating from the university lead to stress among students. It also affirms the report of Bataineh (2013) which showed that academic overloads, course awkward, inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams awkward, low motivation, and high family expectations were drive moderately stress among students.

In respect to research question 2, results gathered from the analysis indicated that being too regular in a social event, the living Environment, Parties, and the environment where learning takes places affects students' academic performance. This clearly affirms that stress from social factors influence academic performance of students. The finding of the second research questions affirms the report of Dwyer & Cummings (2001) that there was a significant correlation between social stress factors such as; excessive clubbing, peer pressure, fraternity parties, etc and students' academic performance.

For research question 3, results gathered from the analysis indicated that the respondents agreed on the items that students with health issues perform poorly in school, poor eating habit affects academic performance, students exposed to drug or smoking is likely to perform poorly, excessive use of alcohol leads to poor performance, students who are healthy are likely to perform well and mentally sound students will do well academically. This clearly affirms that stress from health factors affects the academic performance of students. This supports the findings of Li & Lin (2003) that psychological well-being of college students affects their academic performance.

In respect to research question 4, results gathered from the analysis indicated that the respondents agreed on the items that; students who are free from stress are likely to perform well academically, stress leads to poor performance, students that are faced with financial problem tend to perform poor academically and emotional stress affects academic performance. This affirms that stress affects academic performance of

students. This is in line with the finding of Mussarat, Altaf & Hafsa (2013) which showed that there is a significant effect of academic stress on student's performance.

CONCLUSION

From the results obtained in the research, the following conclusion could be drawn that Nnamdi Azikiwe University students are under stress and that stress affects academic performance of students. It could also be drawn that stress from both social and health factors influence academic performance of students.

This implication is that a student who spends his time in parties, club, and lives in areas that does not encourage education or other social activities without regard to his studies will perform poorer than someone who is focused with his studies. Also, when someone has health challenges like blind, cripple or other forms of sickness, it will limit the performance of that person.

Therefore, if Nnamdi Azikiwe University students will perform better and higher, the stressors need to be removed or controlled so that, the students could be channeled to the pathway of greater achievement.

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