

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC STRESS AND ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OWERRI WEST L.G.A
IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between academic stress and academic performance of Secondary school students in Owerri West Imo state, Nigeria. Two objectives, two research questions and two hypotheses served as a guide to this study. The Descriptive survey research design and correlational research design were adopted for the study. The population of the study covered a total number of 1,895 students in 12 public secondary schools (mixed) in Owerri West. The sample size of this study covered a total number of 300 students drawn from 3 out of 12 public secondary schools using Systematic random sampling technique. Students' achievement scores and a validated four-point Likerts scale questionnaire entitled: Academic Stress of secondary students' questionnaire (ASSQ) were the instruments employed for data collection. The questionnaire after validation indicated a reliability index of 0.73 which is fairly adequate for the study. The findings showed that, the mean academic performance scores of secondary school students in Owerri West Imo State is average including English language and Mathematics; the study equally reviewed that among secondary school students in Owerri West Imo state, there was significant positive relationship between academic stress and academic performance. Based on the findings, the study recommended the need for school administrators in Imo state to provide the prerequisite academic environment to boost students' academic performance particularly in English language and Mathematics; the study also recommended the need for schools to establish functional career units to orientate and sensitize students on the coping strategies for Stress in order to enhance their academic performance.

Keywords: Relationship, Students, Academic Stress and Academic Performance

Introduction

By generalization life is full of challenges and struggles. Everybody in this world faces one kind of challenge or the other in pursuing his / her goals in life. These challenges, limitations and struggles cut across all facets of life; that is struggle to survive, struggle to get better life, struggle to learn, struggle to find relationship, struggle to maintain relationship, as well as struggle to achieve self-independence and self-actualization. Some of these challenges and limitations are equally applicable to students; since in the process of their academic pursuit they tend to go through all sort of daily tension, depression and strain in order for them to achieve their anticipated academic goals. Some of these daily tension, depression and strain could range

from varied pressures and anxieties including transition from one environment to the other, extracurricular activities, social challenges faced in school, mental health issues, examination anxiety, combining school activities with home activities, bullying by school mates amongst others which could all be detrimental to their mental well-being and academic achievement. Adolescent stage in human development is a very demanding and tasking stage for the young adult, since it is a stage of transition from childhood to adulthood which comes with diverse challenges to the adolescent twain with biological and psychological changes which comes with severe academic pressure for students to excel in academic activities, and also adjust to their social environment, which end up posing obvious challenges to them such as emotional changes, mental health related problems, behavioural changes, social challenges, aggressive behaviours, conflict of interest between the adolescent and the society amongst others which influences the adolescents behaviour and mental well-being (Apeh, Elaigwu Isaac 2023).

Academic stress among students is a phenomenon that has been given close attention by researchers due to its consequences on students' academic performance. Many scholars in the field of behavioural science have carried out extensive and well-detailed research on stress and its outcomes and concluded that the topic needed more attention (Agolla, 2009). Stress in general could majorly be chronic which may have adverse effect on how students perform academically. While chronic stress could have perilous effect on the totality of students including their academic performance and mental well-being, chronic stress has been associated with negative outcome even among students (Tamlin .S, Conner,2010). Acute stress for example is a common phenomenon for every individual including students, in the course of their daily school activities since it is based on the demands upon them, and also the internal and external pressures encountered by them in their day to day activities. Of all forms of academic stress, acute academic stress is the most widely experienced one, since it is typically caused by the daily demands and pressures encountered by each student (Sincero, 2012). Technically, stress can be viewed as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors (Basil Bernstein, 2008). It is an unavoidable consequence of life and can be referred to as any external event or any internal drive that threatens to upset the organism's equilibrium. When persons feel that they cannot cope with the number of abilities and skills in environmental requirements, is experiencing stress (Berjot & Gillet, 2011). Stress and its manifestations such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, have always been seen as common problems among people in different professions and occupations and at different levels of development. On the part of teachers, Stress may likely arise when it comes to teaching, assessment, and evaluation, especially when dealing with overcrowded classrooms, or when lacking appropriate teaching materials to use that will enhance proper learning of the concepts being taught. Academic pressure is a significant source of Stress for much school students (Hashim, 2003) As such, teachers in this situation may be stressed from time to time, especially if the remuneration is not adequate enough to take good care of them, and this drastically affects the quality of their teaching and the learning as well. On the part of students, Stress could be regarded as an academic phenomenon or psychological distress encountered daily by students during the course of striving to meet up with the demands of their daily school activities. In the course of their daily school activities there are numerous pressure and expected hindrances associated with academic demands which are equally stressors that influences the mental well-being of students such as getting good grades, transition from one environment to

the other, extracurricular activities, examination anxiety, bullying by school mates, completing homework amongst others which in most cases result to distress and uneasiness in students which in turn could be detrimental to students' academic performance. The pressure to perform well in the examination or test and time allocation makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006). Academic problems have been reported to be the most common source of Stress for students (Khan, M.A 2013). Many studies have signposted that stressors most frequently reported by adolescents are school related, such as studying For test, getting good grades, completing homework, and time management. Some of these studies also Reported that high level of students' related stress reduces the mental well-being of the students (APA, 2009; Conner, et al, 2010; Lohman & Jarvis, 2009; Mostafaei, 2012). In order to do something positive concerning academic stress among students it is vital to identify personality traits that predict academic Stress.

Academic Stress

Academic stress is a feeling of distress that students experience due to the learning process. Espinosa (2020) refers academic stress as the negative mental, emotional and physical reactions experienced by students due to the pressure and demands associated with their education. This can be caused by many factors such as pressure to perform, examination pressure, competition, teacher expectations, parental pressure, lack of time management etc. Academic stress can have a significant impact on students' well-being and academic performance, leading to decreased motivation, difficulty in concentration, and physical and emotional problems. It's important for students to develop effective coping mechanisms and seek support when needed to manage academic stress and maintain their mental health. Albert Bandura (2017) developed the concept of "self-efficacy and highlighted its role in academic stress, suggesting that students with low academic self-efficacy are more likely to experience stress. Richard Lazarus 2015 went further to opine that the understanding of stress as a cognitive process, emphasizing the importance of how individuals perceive and appraise stressors. The only task students were expected to undertake was to study and studying was never perceived as stressful. What proved to be stressful was the expectations parents had for their children, which in turn grew into larger burdens that these children could not carry anymore. Lee & Larson 2000 explain this academic stress as an interaction between environmental stressors, students' appraisal and reactions for the same. It has now become a grave reality that is termed as a "career stopper". It therefore becomes a significant cause of concern as it is symptomatic of rising mental health concerns (Nadamuri & Ch, 2011).

Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to a student's ability to complete academic tasks, measured by objective criteria like final course grades and grade point average, essentially reflecting their achievement across different academic subjects and representing the outcome of their learning process within an educational setting; it can also include factors like attendance and engagement in learning activities. Khan et al, 2013 defines academic performance as "students' capacity to carry out academic tasks, measured by their achievement across subjects using objective measures like final grades". Torres & Rodriguez (2016) "the level of knowledge demonstrated in a subject area compared to the norm, usually measured by GPA". The researcher recognized that

a good learning quality is created in a continuous process to enhance the knowledge and understanding. By the increase of knowledge, understanding, attitude and students' competencies, can accelerate academic performance. Students' performance is determined by the willingness to change, adaptability, complex decision-making, and learning from mistakes, the change of controlled belief and choices (Feldman. 2016).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed at uncovering the relationship between academic stress and academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West Imo state, Nigeria, specifically focusing on:

1. Identifying the primary sources of academic stress experienced by secondary school students
2. Examining the impact of academic stress on various aspects of academic performance.
3. Exploring the potential coping mechanism and strategies employed by students to manage academic stress and their effectiveness in mitigating its negative effects.

Purpose of the Study

Relationship between academic stress and academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West L.G.A Imo state.

Specifically, it is set to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the mean scores of academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo State.
2. To determine the relationship of academic stress on performance of secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the mean scores of academic performance senior secondary students in Owerri West, Imo State?
2. What is the relationship between academic stress and academic performance of senior secondary Students' in Owerri West, Imo State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study:

H₀₁. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of the extent academic stress affects students' cognitive abilities.

H₀₂. There is no significant relationship between the extents academic stress affects academic performance of Secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo State.

Methods

This study examined academic stress and academic performance among secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo State. To meet up the expectation of the study, correlational research design was adopted to establish relationship between academic stress and academic

performance. This design according to Osaze (2008) does not allow the researcher to manipulate the variables but rather to compare the effect which independent variable (academic stress) has on dependent variable (academic performance). The population of this study covered a total number of 1,895 students from twelve public secondary schools of Owerri West, Imo State. The sample size of this study comprised a total number of 300 students drawn from 3 out of 12 public secondary schools in Owerri West, Imo State, and using purposive and systematic sampling technique. Purposive technique is non-probabilistic sampling technique in which researcher freely selects an object or subject to form a sample of the study as a result of occurrence of phenomena that suit the Study. In this regard, the phenomena or variable of interest is the occurrences of mixed gender. Therefore, all schools happened to be co-educational so three were purposefully selected as a sample school. Similarly, SS II students were purposefully selected as a sample school. Hence, Academic Stress Scale was used to collect data under the study. The researcher presents facts and data with reference to the research questions raised to guide the study.

Research Question 1: *What Are the Mean scores of Academic Performance of Secondary Students in Owerri West, Imo State?*

Table 1: Academic Performance of Male and Female Students in Mathematics and English Language in Owerri West, Imo State.

Subjects	Gender	N	Mean	SD
English Language	Male	180	6.72	2.59
	Female	120	10.00	3.16
Mathematics	Male	180	3.53	1.88
	Female	120	9.50	3.08

Table 1 above shows the descriptive summary of the mean scores and standard deviations of students' Performance in English Language and Mathematics. For English Language, Male students had a mean Score of 6.72 and standard deviation of 2.59 while female students had a mean score of 10.00 and standard deviation of 3.16. For Mathematics, Male students indicated a mean score of 3.53 and standard Deviation of 1.88 while female students indicated a mean score of 9.50 and standard deviation of 3.08. Although the comprehensive score of the total performance seems to be average, still, this indicates that majority of the male students performed better than female students in English language and Mathematics.

Table 2: Relationship between academic stress and academic performance of secondary School students in Owerri West, Imo State

Variables	N	Mean	S D	R	P	Decision
Academic stress	300	47.65	19.76	.468**	.000	Reject Ho ₁
Academic Performance	300	30.63	17.03			

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

From Table 2 above, Academic stress indicated a mean of 47.65 and a standard deviation of 19.76 while Academic performance indicated a mean of 30.63 and a standard deviation of 17.03. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient statistic was ($r = .468$, $N = 365$, and $P = .000$). Since the p-value (.000) is less than the alpha value (.05), the null hypothesis is hereby rejected and the alternate hypothesis adopted. Hence it is concluded that, there is significant positive relationship between academic stress and academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo state. Therefore, based on the analysis presented above, it shows that, there is significant positive relationship between academic stress and academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo State.

Discussions of Findings

Finding from this study revealed that, although the comprehensive score of the total performance of Secondary school students in Owerri West Imo state seems to be average, still, this signposts that majority of the female students performed better than male students in English language and Mathematics in secondary schools in Owerri West, Imo state. This result is in line with a study conducted, using cross sectional surveys by Fortin et al (2011), who found that girls' high school GPA has moved from "B" to "A", whereas boy's GPA remain static at "B". They noted that girl's post-secondary expectation for achievement was the most significant contributing factor for this trend. Buttressing this, a study conducted by Aguolu (2013) shows that learning materials relevant to one's subject of interest (Books, Journals etc.) may be available in the library but a student may not be able to lay hands on them thus resulting to poor academic performance. The finding from the study equally revealed that, there is a significant positive relationship between academic stress and academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West Imo state. This is evident in the correlation statistic and the p-value ($r = .468$, $p = .000$) obtained between the academic stress and academic performance of the students. This finding simply means that students' academic performance is significantly positively influenced by the level of academic stress they found themselves. Thus, this finding is in agreement with previous findings like that of Aafreen, Priya, and Gayathri (2018), Khan, Altaf, and Kausar (2013), and Oketch-Oboth, and Okunya (2018), which stated that stress or academic stress is consistently linked to students' performance. Although an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability, but excessive level of stress can cause physical and mental health problems. Also, the findings of Struthers, Perry and Menec (2000), who examined the relationship between stress, students' academic performance and coping style.

Recommendation

From the findings, the researcher recommends the following:

- There is a need for school administrators to create and encourage a conducive educational environment that will reduce academic Stress among students and improve their academic performance.
- There is a need for schools to establish a functional career service unit to orient students on coping strategies of Stress to improve their academic performance.
- Further study should be conducted on academic stress and academic performance of male senior secondary school students in Imo state.

Summary

The findings from this study led to the general conclusion that, the total performance of secondary School students in Owerri West, Imo state is average. The study equally concluded that significant positive relationship exists between academic stress and academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo state. Therefore, this study discovered that academic stress is inversely related to academic performance of secondary school students in Owerri West, Imo state. This narrative reviews that academic-related stress is a major concern for secondary school students. The ongoing stress relating to education has demonstrated negative impact on students' learning capacity, academic performance, education and employment attainment, sleep quality and quantity, physical health, mental health and substance use outcomes. Increasing students' stress-management skills and abilities is an important target for change.

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