

**EVALUATION ON THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL STRESS ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ZARIA-NIGERIA**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

*Stress has always been an issue among undergraduate students and past research finds emotional stress to be significantly correlated to academic achievement. The study examined the evaluation on the impact of emotional stress on undergraduate students' academic achievement in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria. The design adopted for the study was correlational type of survey design. However, 164 students, both male and female were purposively selected for the study using simple random sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection. They are; Undergraduate Students' Emotional Stress Questionnaire (USESQ) and Undergraduates' Academic Performance Scores (USAPS). The research instruments were duly validated by experts and have reliability coefficient index power of 0.67 and 0.74 respectively determined using Cronbach Alpha method. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used in the test of the null hypothesis postulated by the study. The study found that significant inverse relationship exists between emotional stress and undergraduate students' academic achievement in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria. The study recommends the need to identify the most prevalent academic pressures among undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria with view to effectively managed it and aid in the promotion of academic work and the elicitation of high academic achievement from undergraduate students.*

**Keyword: Academic achievement, Emotion, Evaluation, Stress and Undergraduates**

**Introduction**

People the world over at one point or another experience one form of stress or the other irrespective of their race, color and ethnicity, professional or academic background. Stress came in several forms and affected people of all ages and walks of life. This implies that stress is a part of life. Stress is the outcome of a failure to adjust to change, specifically an inability to respond appropriately to actual or imagined emotional or physical commination to the organism. Stress is specific and unique to each person, so what one person finds relaxing may be unpleasant to another (Keil, 2004; Okorie, 2016). It is seen as a stimulation that disrupts an organism's biological and psychological balance (Udoh & Ajala, 2005; Okorie, 2016). Studies conducted have indicated that chronic and continued exposure to stressful condition leads to emotional, physical and mental disturbance of the students (Silver & Glicker, 1990; Melaku, Mossie & Negash, 2015). Persistent stress leads to low self-esteem of students, difficulty in handling different situation, sleep disorder, decreased attention and abnormal appetite which eventually effects the academic achievement and personal growth of students (Shapiro, Shapiro & Schwartz, 2000). Stress can also lead to improved performance and one of the reasons for this could be students approach to coping with stress (Davenport & Lane, 2006) and the other could be the environmental context (Post & Weddington, 1997).

Excessive stress, according to Balarabe (2008) and Okorie (2016), is detrimental to academic performance and can lead to dropout. According to Wilcox (1992), higher levels of stress lead to lower grade point averages (GPA), which leads to an increase in psychological and somatic symptoms. The findings are also in line with those of Magol (2008), who found that when people are stressed, their concentration suffers. In addition, Sergerstrom and Miller (2004) discovered that academic stress and time pressure have a significant impact on students' cognitive functioning. Furthermore, Ndu (1990) discovered that overcrowded classrooms correlate with pupils' poor academic performance. He claimed that even an overcrowded dormitory with five to six students in a room designed for two might be stressful. Because of the noise, such students cannot obtain enough sleep. Noise, according to Ross, Neibling, and Heckert (1999), is a stressor that arises from an overcrowded environment. According to Keil (2004), some colleges' research materials are insufficient, and evaluating the internet has been a major challenge. As a result, pupils are constantly nervous and uptight, which hurts their academic performance (Lazarus and Folkman, 2007). Similarly, Lovallo (2005) stated that poor academic accomplishment is caused by a variety of psychological issues that prevent pupils from succeeding. Academic stress has a negative impact on tertiary students' mental and physical health, as well as a variety of academic issues. Given that many long-term health-related behaviors and patterns, both

positive and negative, are set during adolescence and early adulthood, good stress-management skills have the potential to benefit young people for the rest of their lives (Sawyer et al., 2012).

Academic achievement is defined as accomplishment that occurs as a result of exposure to a specific learning experience (Halpern, 2000). Achievement can be used in a variety of ways. The achievement aids the school in making judgments concerning a student's class placement, admittance into a program, or promotion to a higher grade level. According to Cohen and Swerdik (2010), students' achievement can assist determine the quality of instruction in a given class, school, district, or state. Achievement scores are too limited and unstable to be used as the sole source of information for any major decision about student placement or promotion, according to the American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. When making significant judgments regarding children, achievement scores should always be used in conjunction with other sources of information about student accomplishment (National Research Council, 2001).

The World Health Organisation (1996) survey highlights that top-performing girls report that the fear of making mistakes often disrupts their test performance (OECD, 2015). Students in the bottom quarter of academic performance report feeling far more stressed compared to those in the top quarter of academic performance. As many as 63% of students in the bottom quarter of science performance report feeling anxious about tests no matter how well prepared they are, while 46% of students in the top quarter report feeling anxious (OECD, 2015). This demonstrates that higher perceived stress levels are associated with poorer academic performance. Stressful life experiences as well as acute or chronic stress usually lead to depression which can interrupt the normative progression of developmental mile stones in students, both at home and in school. As such, stressful experiences and emotional difficulties are likely to undermine a variety of school-related competencies, including academic motivation and school engagement, goal orientation, scholastic performance and school conduct (Balarabe, 2003).

The main task that faces the student In Nigerian higher education institutions is an intellectual one but the students' academic achievement is influenced and affected with a unique set of stressors that may be overwhelming, thus, altering the ability to cope with the situation. A study by Shalshidar, Rao and Hedge (2009) shows that a large number of young people are moving through universities into adult life with fears of whether they will be able to find a job after graduating and even finding a suitable life partner. It has been widely recognized that learning is not an isolated process but is profoundly embedded in the complex biological, psychological and social aspect of an individual's functioning. Therefore, the academic success of students depends largely on how conducive and safe the learning environment is. Productive interaction depends on how well balanced a student is both cognitively and psychologically. When a student is mentally well organized and balanced, the Issue of good relationship, abstract thinking that demonstrated creative potentials, which leads to quality interaction can be guaranteed. Technical and scientific breakthrough cannot occur in an individual's life or society in a situation of inadequate mental health. It is in a state of sound mental fitness that people or society talk of meaningful contribution that guarantees functional development. Stress and how students are able to cope with it may affect their academic achievement. The academic-related stress experienced by tertiary students impacts their mental and physical health and leads to a range of academic problems. Good stress-management skills have the potential to benefit young people in an ongoing manner throughout their lives, given that many long-term health-related behaviours and patterns, both positive and negative, are established during adolescence and early adulthood (Sawyer et al., 2012). It is on this note that this study evaluates the impact of emotional stress on undergraduate students' academic achievement in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of emotional stress on undergraduate students' academic achievement in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria. Specifically, the study is aimed at finding out:

1. The relationship between emotional stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students' academic achievement in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria;

### **Research Question**

- i. What is the relationship between emotional stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students' academic achievement in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria?

### Null Hypothesis

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between emotional stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria;

### Methodology

The population of this study comprised of all undergraduate students of Federal College of Education, Zaria who are affiliated to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The design adopted for the study was correlational type of survey design. However, 164 students, both male and female were purposively selected for the study using simple random sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection. They are; Undergraduate Students' Emotional Stress Questionnaire (USESQ) and Undergraduates' Academic Performance Scores (USAPS). The research instruments were duly validated by experts and have reliability coefficient index power of 0.67 and 0.74 respectively determined using Cronbach Alpha method. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used in the test of the null hypothesis postulated by the study.

### Results

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between emotional stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria;

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) statistic on the relationship between Emotional Stress and Academic Achievement of Undergraduate Students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria**

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	R	p
Stress	164	193.67	7.567	-0.91**	0.00
Academic Achievement	164	3.87	.589		

\*\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic in Table 1 indicated that inverse relationship exists between emotional stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria. This is due to the fact that the calculated significant (p) value of 0.000 is lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlation index r level of -0.91 at df of 162. In addition, their mean stood at 193.67 and 3.87 for emotional stress and achievement respectively. Thus, the null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

### Discussion

The study found that significant relationship exists between emotional stress and academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria with ( $r = -0.91, p=0.00$ ). This indicates that the academic achievement of undergraduates is inversely affected by their emotional stress experiences. These findings corroborate that of Balarabe (2008) and Okorie (2016) who found that excessive emotional stress is harmful to academic performance and may lead to dropping out. Wilcox (1992) found that higher levels of emotional stress reduce grade point averages (GPA) which led to increase in psychological and somatic symptomology. The finding is also in consonance with that of Magol (2008), which shows that concentration is usually lessened under stress. The current finding also corroborates that of Buhari, Abdullahi and Salihu (2021) which indicated that significant inverse relationship exists between stress and achievement of pre-service teachers in Social Studies, at Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria.

This finding is in line with Sergerstrom and Miller (2004) who found that academic workload and time pressure in no small measure kill cognitive functioning in students. This finding is supported by the study of Ndu (1990) who also found that overcrowded classrooms contribute to poor academic performance of students. Even an overcrowded dormitory, with five to six students in a room built for two can be stressful, he maintained. Such students cannot have enough sleep because of noise. Ross, Neibling and Heckert (1999) asserted that noise is a stressor that emanate from over-crowded environment. The finding of the present study is also in accordance with the study of Keil (2004) who found that research materials are inadequate in some universities, and assessing the internet has posed a

big problem. As a result, students are always anxious and tensed up which undermine academic attainment (Lazarus and Folkman, 2007). The present study supports Lovallo (2005) in whose contribution, remarked that poor academic achievement is not due to inability but rather due to some other psychological problems that block the students.

### Conclusion

Emotional stress has always been an issue among undergraduate students and past research finds stress to be significantly correlated to academic achievement. This study concludes that there emotional stress adversely affects the academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria. This implied that the higher the stress, the lower the academic achievement of undergraduate students in Federal College of Education, Zaria-Nigeria.

### Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, it is recommended that:

- i. Counseling services should be put in place and improved services such as social support groups made up of lecturers, administrators and students be made available. This will enable students to feel comfortable and free enough to express their feelings;
- ii. Workshops, seminars and conferences on techniques in managing stress and time management for all students will go a long way to equip students with ways of coping with stress;

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