



SOURCES OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Academic stress poses a significant threat to polytechnic students in Oyo State, and the lack of effective coping strategies highlights the need for counselling interventions. This study therefore, examined the sources of academic stress and coping strategies among students. A descriptive survey design was employed, and a sample of 400 students was randomly selected across the institutions. A researcher-designed instrument, titled: "Sources of Academic Stress and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (SASCSQ)" was used to collect data from the respondents. Findings revealed that major stressors include an uncondusive learning environment, poor time management, and fear of failure, while coping strategies include seeking guidance and counselling, sharing concerns with friends, practicing meditation, getting sufficient sleep, and effective time management. No significant gender differences were found. It was recommended that students should actively engage in guidance and counselling services, and that polytechnic authorities provide a more conducive learning environment and offer training in time management and coping strategies to enhance students' wellbeing and academic performance. Polytechnic management and counsellors should also establish policies and programmes to reduce academic stress and ensure regular psychological and counselling assessment for students on campus.

Keywords: Academic stress, Coping strategies, Polytechnic students, Oyo State, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress arises when an individual faces a situation he or she perceives as overwhelming or difficult to manage. The term "stress" originates from the Latin word *strictus*, meaning "tight" or "narrow." Many students entering polytechnics in Nigeria experience adjustment challenges for the first time due to the unfamiliar environment. These challenges can lead to acute or chronic stress, influenced by various conditions, events, or circumstances. If not properly managed, stress can hinder their academic performance, participation in extracurricular activities, and overall mental and physical well-being.

Polytechnic students in Oyo State express concerns about the heavy burden of academic assignments, particularly when balancing academic responsibilities and extracurricular activities. These concerns, which include excessive workload, tight deadlines, and inadequate time for rest and personal needs, are often expressed through complaints to lecturers and academic advisers, discussions with peers, and reports during counselling sessions. Stress-induced behaviours often emerge midway through the semester, and students frequently report

symptoms of academic stress such as headaches, loss of appetite, feelings of inadequacy, and sleep disturbances (Dada et al., 2025). Prolonged academic stress can negatively affect students' academic performance and overall wellbeing (Power & Dalgleish, 2022). These challenges highlight the need for students to use polytechnic resources, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and administrative staff, to manage academic stress effectively.

Numerous factors contribute to academic stress, including challenges with time management, financial pressures, interactions with teachers, personal objectives, social commitments, adapting to campus life, lack of support systems, concerns about post-graduation employment prospects, self-imposed expectations, peer expectations, familial expectations, parental standards, inconvenient school schedules, high student-to-teacher ratios, and unsuitable classroom environments (Arsenio & Loria, 2024). Nkwuda, Chuka, Sampson, and Oginyi (2020) further add to these factors, mentioning issues like insufficient teacher-student interactions, rigid disciplinary measures, physical punishment, overwhelming workload, teaching approaches, pressure from parents, pressure to maintain high grades, lateness to do assignments, difficulty in public speaking, and inadequate financial resources.

Academic stress among polytechnic students varies between gender, influenced by societal expectations and personal circumstances (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2024). Female students often face high academic expectations, particularly in male-dominated fields, leading to increased pressure to excel. They also manage multiple responsibilities, such as family obligations and part-time jobs, which can exacerbate stress levels. In contrast, male students often deal with peer pressure to conform to social norms related to masculinity, impacting their academic performance (Adegboyega, 2020). Additionally, concerns about securing stable job prospects after graduation create anxiety for male students, while the competitive nature of their programmes adds further stress. Recognising these gender-specific sources of academic stress is essential for developing targeted support systems that promote a healthier academic environment for all students (Rahmayani, et al., 2024).

Academic stress is a significant concern that can negatively affect students' overall adjustment. It often manifests through physical, emotional, and behavioural symptoms such as frequent illnesses, anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, irritability, emotional distress, reduced academic performance, and experimentation with drugs or alcohol (Adegboyega, 2020). Students employ various coping strategies to manage these stressful situations, and those with more effective coping mechanisms typically experience lower levels of academic stress (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2024). Such strategies may include time management, seeking support from peers or counsellors, engaging in relaxation techniques like meditation, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Developing strong coping skills helps students regulate emotions, maintain focus, and promote overall wellbeing and academic success.

Ukeh, Hassan, and Dauda (2023) suggested that managing academic stress may require employing various techniques, with students who adopt better coping strategies experiencing low anxiety levels and risk of academic frustration and stress. Dada, Babatunde, and Adeleye (2025) proposed relaxation techniques, exercise, maintaining good health, and effective time management as methods for managing academic stress. Power and Dalgleish (2022) identified the five most commonly utilised coping strategies among students, including internet browsing, sleeping and resting, watching TV shows or movies, instant messaging, and seeking counselling. Notably, 70% of Nigerian students surveyed expressed the belief that having a counselling center on campus would be beneficial (Nkwuda, et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a need for counselling programmes staffed by trained professional counsellors to assist students in managing academic stress effectively.

Afonne et al. (2023) proposed several strategies for coping with academic stress, including relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, challenging irrational thoughts,

assertiveness training, effective time management, maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in regular exercise, participating in recreational activities, and altering daily routines to manage stressful situations experienced in school. Nkwuda, et al. (2020) advocated for the guidance and counselling services to mitigate academic stress and tension, which adversely impact students' abilities. Effective techniques such as biofeedback, yoga, life skills training, mindfulness meditation, and psychotherapy have been shown to effectively reduce academic stress among students. Mauthner (2024) identified various methods students employ to mitigate academic stress, including efficient time management, seeking social support, adopting positive reappraisal techniques, and refraining from drug use or substance abuse.

Coping with academic stress varies significantly between male and female students due to differences in socialisation and expectations. Female students often rely on social support and engage in emotion-focused strategies, such as journaling and collaborative learning, which foster community and help them process their feelings (Arsenio & Loria, 2024). Many also turn to mindfulness practices like meditation and yoga to manage anxiety effectively (Ezelote, et al., 2024). In contrast, male students tend to adopt problem-solving approaches, focusing on identifying challenges and finding practical solutions. They often engage in physical activities, using exercise as an outlet for stress, while some may resort to distraction or avoidance strategies that can lead to procrastination (Power & Dalgleish, 2024).

Numerous research studies had been carried out on the nature of academic stress in Nigeria. For instance, Ifeagwazi, et al. (2013) examined role of stress reactivity, age and gender on neuroticism among students; Lamidi (2016) worked on prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety and academic stress among undergraduates in Oduduwa University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria; Adegboyega (2020) investigated sources of academic stress among undergraduates at University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. Despite the efforts of earlier researchers on academic stress; to the best of the researchers' knowledge, none of the previous researchers had worked on the sources of academic stress and coping strategies among polytechnic students in Oyo State. Therefore, the study contributed and filled the gap left by the previous researchers, and examined the sources of academic stress and coping strategies among polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of the study were to:

1. examine the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State
2. examine the strategies polytechnic students employ to cope with academic stress in Oyo State.

The following research questions were raised and answered in this study:

- (1) What are the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State?
- (2) What strategies do polytechnic students employ to cope with academic stress in Oyo State?

2.2. HYPOTHESES

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

- (1) There is no significant difference in the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender.
- (2) There is no significant difference in the strategies for coping with academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender.

3. METHOD

The researchers chose a descriptive survey design as the most suitable method for collecting and analysing data on the sources of academic stress and coping strategies among polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study focused on all polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria, as its population. Researchers used a multi-stage sampling procedure to select a representative sample. The student population figures obtained was as follows: Polytechnic of Ibadan, 19,603; Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, 7,000; and School of Surveying, Oyo, 10,307, totaling 36,910 students across the selected institutions. Following the recommendation of the Research Advisor (2006), a sample size of 381 respondents was suggested for a population of this magnitude. To account for potential attrition, an additional 5% of the sample size was added, resulting in a total of 400 respondents. In the first stage, one institution was purposively selected from each senatorial district. The School of Surveying was selected from the Oyo Central Senatorial District, Oke-Ogun Polytechnic from the Oyo North Senatorial District, and the Polytechnic of Ibadan from the Oyo South Senatorial District. In the second stage, a proportional sampling technique was employed to select students from each institution participating in the study.

Table 1: Proportional sample of Students in the Targeted Schools in Oyo State

S/N	Institution	Targeted Population	Sample
1	Polytechnic of Ibadan	19, 603	212
2	Oke-Ogun Polytechnic	7, 000	76
3	School of Surveying, Oyo	10, 307	112
	Total	36, 910	400

In the third stage, a simple random sampling technique (through dip-hat method) was used to select 400 students. Simple random sampling ensures that each individual or unit in the population has an equal opportunity to be chosen for inclusion in the desired sample.

The researchers designed the data collection instrument, titled: "Sources of Academic Stress and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (SASCSQ)", based on insights gathered from the literature review. To validate the instrument, face and content validity were established by five lecturers from the Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies, University of Ibadan. Reliability testing involved a test-retest method, where the instrument was administered twice to a group of students at Kwara State Polytechnic, Department of Civil Engineering Technology, with a two-week interval between administrations. The correlation of the two sets of scores, analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83.

The questionnaire thus comprised three sections: Section A focused on demographic information, Section B addressed sources of academic stress, and Section C delved into coping strategies. Sections B and C were structured using a four-point Likert scale format, including options for "Strongly Agree =4points, Agree =3points, Disagree =2points, and Strongly Disagree =1point". The benchmark for the instrument was established by summing the response points and dividing by 4, resulting in a mean score of 2.5 (i.e., $4+3+2+1=10/4=2.5$). Mean scores of 2.5 and above were considered as sources of academic stress and effective coping strategies, while mean scores below 2.50 were not or less considered.

Following ethical guidelines, two researchers, with the support of two trained research assistants briefed on the study's objectives, personally distributed the questionnaires to respondents. The study's purpose was clearly explained, and participants' consent was obtained beforehand. Individuals who chose not to participate were excluded and did not receive the questionnaire. Additionally, confidentiality was assured before participants completed the questionnaires.

4. RESULTS

In Oyo State, 400 questionnaire forms were distributed for the study, but only 389 were properly filled, recovered, and analysed. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were analysed using inferential statistics (Independent t-test) at a significance level of 0.05.

Research Question 1: What are the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State?

Table 2 presented the mean scores and rank order of sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria. The table revealed that all items were identified as sources of academic stress among these students, as all mean scores exceeded the mid-point value of 2.50. Specifically, items with mean values of 3.89, 3.87, and 3.77 were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, respectively, indicating that an uncondusive learning environment, lack of time management, and fear of failure were the major stressors.

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order of Sources of Academic Stress among Polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria

N	As a student, I experience academic stress due to:	Mean	Rank
7	Uncondusive learning environment	3.89	1st
13	Lack of time management	3.87	2nd
4	Fear of failure	3.77	3rd
2	Abuse of substances	3.74	4th
6	Delays in releasing examination timetables	3.72	5th
8	Inadequate study facilities i.e. computers, books, chairs, electricity	3.72	5th
15	No parental support	3.72	5th
5	Financial problems	3.70	8th
11	Pressure to maintain high grades	3.68	9th
9	Insufficient sleep	3.64	10th
12	Competition with fellow students	3.62	11th
1	Overcrowded lecture halls	2.59	12th
14	Low motivation	2.57	13th
10	Lack of transportation	2.53	14th
3	Lateness to do assignments	2.50	15th

Researcher's Fieldwork, 2025

Research Question 2: What strategies do polytechnic students employ to cope with academic stress in Oyo State?

Table 3 presented the mean scores and rank order of coping strategies employed by polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria. All items listed were identified as coping strategies employed by these students, as their mean scores exceeded the mid-point value of 2.50. Specifically, items with mean values of 3.86, 3.81, and 3.73 were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, respectively, indicating that seeking guidance counselling services, engaging in meditation, and ensuring sufficient sleep were the most common coping mechanisms.

Table 3: Mean and Rank Order of Coping Strategies of Polytechnic students in Oyo State, Nigeria

N	As a student, I cope with academic stress by:	Mean	Rank
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10	Seeking guidance and counselling services	3.86	1st
3	Engaging in meditation	3.81	2nd
4	Getting a sufficient sleep	3.73	3rd
7	Keeping a sense of humour	3.71	4th
12	Approaching the lecturer for further explanation	3.69	5th
8	Engaging in group discussion	3.69	5th
13	Taking good diet	3.67	7th
5	Having a positive view of one's future	3.65	8th
6	Avoiding illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco	3.65	8th
9	Playing online games	3.61	10th
11	Setting realistic goals	3.59	11th
1	Attending regular classes	3.56	12th
14	Sharing feelings with trusted friends	3.53	13th
15	Creating good time management for reading	2.59	14th
2	Avoiding unnecessary arguments	2.55	15th

Researcher's Fieldwork, 2025

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing Sources of Academic Stress among Polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	182	36.90	5.64	387	0.34	1.96	0.12
Female	207	37.10	5.54				

* Not significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 4 showed the calculated t-value of 0.34 and critical t-value of 1.96. It was revealed that the calculated t-value was less than the critical t-value; hence, the hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, no significant difference was revealed in the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the strategies for coping with academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test showing the Strategies for Coping with Academic Stress among Polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	182	32.80	7.13	387	1.16	1.96	0.36
Female	207	31.92	7.78				

* Not significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 5 indicated the calculated t-value of 1.16 and critical t-value of 1.96. It was revealed that the calculated t-value was less than the critical t-value; hence, the hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, no significant difference was showed in the strategies for coping with academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed that polytechnic students experience academic stress due to an uncondusive learning environment, poor time management, and fear of failure. This aligns with Dada et al. (2025), who reported that limited resources, lack of social support, and poor planning increase student stress. However, Deshpande and Chari (2014) found that students with strong resilience may not experience high stress despite similar demands, suggesting individual traits can buffer stress. The reason for this finding might be that the pressure to achieve high grades and meet expectations from parents and peers overwhelms students who lack coping skills. The implications are that polytechnic counsellors should provide stress management programmes, while management should improve learning conditions and offer resources, peer support, and time-management training to help students handle academic demands effectively.

The findings indicated that polytechnic students adopt various strategies to cope with academic stress, such as seeking counselling, sharing feelings with friends, good time management, meditation, sufficient sleep, and avoiding unnecessary arguments. This is supported by Francis-Edoziuno et al. (2023), who found that problem-focused coping and social support help students manage academic stress effectively. Ezelote et al. (2024) also reported that planning and time management are linked with lower stress levels among undergraduates. However, some studies, such as Lamidi (2016) and Ukeh et al. (2023), found that not all coping strategies reduce stress, showing that avoidance or maladaptive strategies can worsen stress outcomes. The reason for this finding might be that students who set realistic goals, attend classes regularly, maintain a healthy lifestyle, and seek social support are better able to regulate their stress and avoid psychological distress. These findings imply that counsellors in polytechnics should design inclusive programmes that teach effective coping strategies and provide regular guidance on stress management. They also suggest that polytechnic management should create supportive learning environments to help students apply these strategies successfully.

The finding showed no significant difference in the sources of academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender, suggesting that male and female students face similar academic pressures. This supports Afonne (2023), though Thawabieh and Qaisy (2024) noted that female students may experience higher stress due to social and academic expectations. The reason for this study might be that both genders face similar workloads, performance pressures, and environmental challenges. The implication is that polytechnic management, educators, and student support services should implement stress-reduction programmes and strategies that address common stressors, promote time management, and provide resources to support all students' well-being.

Findings revealed no significant difference in coping strategies for academic stress among polytechnic students in Oyo State based on gender, suggesting that both male and female students use similar methods to manage stress. This aligns with Mauthner (2024), though Arsenio and Loria (2024) found that female students sometimes use wishful thinking and problem-focused disengagement more than males. Hence, the reason for this study might be that both genders face similar academic demands and pressures. The implication is that polytechnic management, educators, and the Student Affairs Unit should provide stress-management programmes, guidance on effective coping techniques, and opportunities for peer support that benefit all students equally.

The study concluded that polytechnic students in Oyo State experience academic stress due to factors such as an unsupportive learning environment, poor time management, fear of failure, low motivation, transportation challenges, and procrastination. To manage and reduce this stress, students use strategies like seeking guidance and counselling, confiding in friends,

practicing meditation, ensuring adequate sleep, avoiding conflicts, and organising their time effectively. The findings also showed that gender did not significantly affect either the sources of academic stress or the coping strategies, suggesting that interventions should target all students and focus on improving the learning environment, promoting time management, and providing accessible counselling services.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Polytechnics in Oyo State should create a conducive learning environment with well-equipped classrooms and supportive spaces to reduce academic stress and enhance student success.
2. Students experiencing academic stress should seek guidance and counselling services, as these can help them manage stress, overcome fear of failure, prevent substance abuse, improve time management, apply stress-reduction techniques, maintain healthy sleep habits, and ensure regular class attendance.
3. Students should develop an effective time management to balance between study time and social activities which academically constitute so much stress for them.
4. Students should be provided with adequate support services by the Polytechnic management, such as counselling, time management workshops, peer support groups, and wellness programmes, to make school activities less stressful and help them cope with academic stress.
5. Polytechnic management and counsellors should establish policies and programmes for the reduction of academic stress and ensure regular psychological and counselling assessment for students on campus.
6. Students should have access to a comprehensive stress management programme that provides support to all individuals in school, regardless of gender, to address common sources of academic stress.
7. Polytechnic institutions in Oyo State should foster a culture of inclusivity, support, and resilience, ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, develop effective coping strategies to manage stress and achieve academic success.

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