

IMPACT OF STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES ON EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment and academic performance among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State, with implications for counsellors and educational psychologists. The objectives were to assess the effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment and academic performance and to explore counselling and educational psychology implications. A quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test control group design was used. The study involved 220 second-year university students purposively selected from two institutions, with one serving as the experimental group (n = 115) and the other as the control group (n = 105). The experimental group participated in an 8-week intervention involving mindfulness, time management, and relaxation techniques. Data were collected using the Emotional Adjustment Scale (EAS), Academic Performance Test (APT), and a structured Stress Management Techniques Intervention Manual. ANCOVA results revealed significant effects of the stress management techniques on emotional adjustment ($F(1, 217) = 225.88, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .510$) and academic performance ($F(1, 217) = 288.44, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .571$). The study concluded that stress management techniques significantly improve students' emotional stability and academic outcomes. The study recommends integrating stress management and emotional intelligence training into student support services and strengthening counselling capacity.

Keywords: Stress Management Techniques, Emotional Adjustment, Academic Performance

Introduction

In today's dynamic higher education environment, students in tertiary institutions frequently encounter intense academic, social, and emotional pressures that contribute to elevated stress levels. When poorly managed, stress can significantly hinder students' emotional adjustment and academic success (Oluyinka & Adebayo, 2021). Emotional adjustment, the capacity to maintain psychological balance and cope with life's demands, is essential for students' well-being and their ability to actively engage in learning (Olayemi et al., 2022). In Kaduna State, Nigeria, factors such as heavy academic workloads, limited institutional resources, financial hardship, and concerns about future employment exacerbate these stressors, underscoring the need for effective stress management strategies.

Stress management techniques encompass cognitive, behavioural, and physiological strategies used to minimize or cope with stress and its adverse effects (Aminu & Ibrahim, 2021). These techniques include mindfulness practices, relaxation training, cognitive restructuring, time management, and regular physical activity. Recent studies indicate that students who actively engage in stress management practices demonstrate enhanced emotional regulation, improved problem-solving skills, and higher academic achievement (Okonkwo et al., 2023). Therefore, fostering the adoption of stress management strategies among tertiary students is critical to supporting their emotional stability, academic growth, and overall personal development.

Emotional adjustment involves an individual's capacity to respond adaptively to internal and external stressors and maintain emotional balance (Santrock, 2016). Students with poor emotional adjustment are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, and burnout, which negatively influence academic success. Conversely, emotional adjustment has been found to mediate the relationship between stress and academic performance (Yusoff, 2011). Furthermore, academic performance, defined as students' achievement in educational settings as measured by GPA, test scores, or coursework, is intricately linked to students' emotional well-being and stress management capacities (Credé & Kuncel, 2008). In Nigerian tertiary institutions, increasing cases of academic failure, dropouts, and mental health issues among students underscore the need for structured interventions in stress management and emotional regulation.

Several empirical research underscores the detrimental effects of poor stress regulation on students' emotional well-being and academic performance in tertiary institutions. Emotional instability manifested through anxiety, mood fluctuations, and depression has been consistently linked to students' inability to manage academic stress effectively. For example, Babalola et al. (2023) examined the predictive role of self-regulation in the psychological well-being of undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria. Their findings revealed that students with low self-regulatory capacities experienced higher emotional distress and diminished academic engagement, underscoring the importance of stress management skills for emotional adjustment and academic functioning.

In a similar vein, Bolu-Steve and Fadipe (2024) explored the relationship between academic stress and depression among university students. Their study identified a significant positive correlation between heightened academic stress and increased depressive symptoms. This suggests that inadequate stress regulation compromises emotional stability, which in turn hinders students' concentration, academic motivation, and performance. Adding to this body of evidence, Ononye et al. (2022) investigated the role of academic resilience and emotional intelligence in predicting academic performance. Their results showed that emotional regulation an integral component of stress management served as a mediating factor in achieving academic success. Students with higher emotional intelligence were more adept at navigating academic demands, maintaining emotional equilibrium, and attaining better results. Supporting these findings, Adegboye and Adegboye (2021), in a study conducted in Colleges of Agriculture in Plateau State, found that emotional instability significantly predicted poor academic outcomes. Their research affirmed that when students fail to regulate emotional responses triggered by academic stress, it often leads to reduced productivity and lower achievement. Beyond these individual studies, broader research emphasizes the value of specific stress management techniques in boosting students' academic and emotional resilience. Yusuf and Balogun (2020), for instance, investigated the impact of structured mindfulness practices among undergraduates in Southwest Nigeria. Their findings revealed that students who engaged in mindfulness exercises experienced reduced anxiety, enhanced concentration, and an improved academic self-concept, ultimately leading to better academic performance.

Likewise, Ibrahim and Musa (2023) explored the combined influence of time management and emotional regulation on the academic success of students in Northern Nigerian universities. The study concluded that students who effectively managed their schedules and emotional responses to academic pressures showed superior emotional control and performed better academically than their counterparts who lacked such skills. Importantly, emotional regulation acted as a buffer against burnout and psychological breakdown, particularly during examination periods.

Institutional-level studies further corroborate these findings. Aikens et al. (2014), through a pre-post experimental design involving 147 college students, demonstrated that mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) significantly decreased perceived stress while enhancing psychological resilience and academic focus. Regehr, Glancy, and Pitts (2013), in a meta-analysis of 24 studies, affirmed that interventions like cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), relaxation training, and mindfulness

significantly reduced psychological distress and boosted academic outcomes. These studies offer strong evidence for the broad applicability and effectiveness of structured stress-reduction techniques in tertiary education.

Similarly, Mahmoud et al. (2012), in a cross-sectional study of 508 American college students, found that poor coping strategies correlated with increased depression, anxiety, and academic disengagement. Their research highlights the urgent need for structured interventions to support students' emotional balance and academic integration. Shamsuddin et al. (2013) conducted a large-scale study involving over 1,500 Malaysian university students and found that high stress often due to academic overload and poor time management was significantly associated with lower academic performance and inadequate emotional adjustment. These findings mirror conditions in developing nations like Nigeria, where students frequently operate in highly competitive and resource-constrained educational environments.

In a comparative study, Misra, and Castillo (2004) analysed coping strategies among American and international students in United State of American universities and found that effective time management and adaptive stress coping techniques were strongly associated with reduced stress and improved emotional well-being. The authors emphasized the critical nature of equipping students, especially those from diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds, with essential stress management skills. Achor and Agboola (2019) demonstrated through a quasi-experimental study that cognitive restructuring interventions significantly improved emotional adjustment and academic performance among university students. This underscores the efficacy of cognitive-based approaches in helping students navigate the psychological demands of higher education.

Complementing these findings, Yusuf and Adigun (2010) evaluated the impact of stress management counselling in Nigerian tertiary institutions and reported that students who received such intervention showed reduced anxiety levels and improved academic results. The authors advocated for the institutionalization of regular counseling programs as a strategy to support students' psychological and academic development.

This study is guided by Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2010) and the Theory of Emotional Intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). These theories explain the mechanisms through which stress impacts students' emotional stability and academic performance, and how stress management techniques can mitigate these effects.

Cognitive Load Theory posits that working memory has limited capacity and can be overwhelmed by stress-induced distractions, referred to as extraneous load. When students experience high stress, their ability to process and retain academic content is impaired. Stress management techniques such as time management, relaxation, and mindfulness reduce extraneous cognitive load, thus improving focus and learning outcomes (Sweller, 2010).

Emotional Intelligence Theory emphasizes the ability to recognize, manage, and use emotions effectively. Students with high emotional intelligence are better at coping with academic and personal challenges. Stress management strategies support emotional intelligence development by enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995).

Counsellors and educational psychologists play a vital role in implementing and promoting these techniques through psychoeducation, workshops, and individualized guidance. However, there remains a research gap regarding how such interventions directly influence emotional adjustment and academic outcomes among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly in Kaduna State.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the impact of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment and academic performance among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State. The findings will offer critical implications for counsellors and educational psychologists, who are key stakeholders in fostering student mental health, academic achievement, and overall institutional effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Students in tertiary institutions across Kaduna State are increasingly exposed to high levels of academic, social, and emotional stress, which negatively impacts their emotional adjustment and academic

performance. Faced with academic pressure, financial constraints, poor time management, and social expectations, many students experience chronic stress that significantly affects their emotional well-being and academic performance. The inability to cope with these stressors often leads to anxiety, depression, academic burnout, and in some cases, withdrawal from school. Despite the increasing awareness of these issues, many students still lack access to effective stress management techniques or the psychological support necessary for emotional adjustment.

Evidence from literature (Afolabi et al., 2021; Okafor & Chukwu, 2022) indicates that poor stress regulation is linked to emotional instability and declining academic outcomes. Similarly, studies have shown that students who adopt effective stress management strategies such as mindfulness, time management, and emotional regulation tend to perform better academically and demonstrate greater emotional resilience (Yusuf & Balogun, 2020; Ibrahim & Musa, 2023). However, many tertiary institutions in Kaduna State still operate with limited mental health support systems and poorly structured guidance services.

More concerning is the limited role of school counselors and educational psychologists in addressing stress-related challenges due to lack of training, underutilization, or systemic neglect. Without appropriate intervention, these issues may continue to affect not only students' academic achievement but also their psychological development and future productivity.

Therefore, the problem this study seeks to address is the persistent negative impact of unmanaged stress on emotional adjustment and academic performance among tertiary students in Kaduna State. The study aims to investigate whether the application of structured stress management techniques can significantly improve emotional well-being and academic outcomes, and to identify implications for more effective involvement of counselors and educational psychologists in managing student stress.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study was

1. To determine the effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State.
2. To examine the effect of stress management techniques on academic performance of students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

H_{0 1}: There is no significant effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State.

H_{0 2}: There is no significant effect of stress management techniques on academic performance of students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State.

Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test control group approach. This design is appropriate as it allows for the assessment of the impact of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment and academic performance before and after the intervention. The quasi-experimental approach will help compare the outcomes between the experimental group (students who receive stress management interventions) and the control group (students who do not receive the intervention).

The target population consists of 200 level university students in Kaduna State. The study focused on students across various disciplines who are experiencing academic stress and exam anxiety. Purposive sampling was used to select two universities and two faculties based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Faculties of education was purposively selected from the two universities. Two intact classes (Academic Disciplines/Department) were used from the two universities and faculties. One university and Faculty was used as experimental group and the second university and Faculty was used as the Control group. A sample of 220 students were used for the study because of the availability of students (Experimental group n = 115, Control Group n= 105),

Table 1: Sampled Schools

SN	University	Group	Faculty/ School	Discipline/Depart ment	Level	Total
1	Federal University of Education, Zaria	Experimen tal	Education	Educational Administration and Planning	200	115
2	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	Control	Education	Guidance and Counseling	200	105
Total						220

Three instruments were used for the study, Emotional Adjustment Scale (EAS) adapted from the Emotional Adjustment Inventory (EAI) (Kaur, 2015). It was used to assess the emotional well-being of students before and after the intervention. It included questions related to emotional regulation, anxiety, depression, and overall mental health. Academic Performance Test (APT), A test to measure performance in their discipline before and after treatment and Stress Management Techniques Intervention Manual. A manual containing structured interventions such as mindfulness, time management strategies, and relaxation techniques was used in the experimental group.

The intervention was delivered for 8 weeks in weekly sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The control group did not receive the intervention but continue with regular stress management strategy. Baseline academic stress and emotional adjustment levels was measured before the intervention during the pre-test. Then followed by the Implementation of Stress Management Techniques as contain in Stress Management Techniques Intervention Manual for the experimental group. After eight weeks, a posttest administered to both groups to determine changes in stress, anxiety, and academic performance. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to analyse the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State.

Table 2: ANCOVA Result on effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Corrected Model	9064.480 ^a	2	4532.240	115.508	.000	.516	
Intercept	9963.162	1	9963.162	253.920	.000	.539	
Group	8862.840	1	8862.840	225.877	.000	.510	
Pre-test	327.797	1	327.797	8.354	.004	.037	
Error	8514.516	217	39.237				
Total	302771.000	220					
Corrected Total	17578.995	219					

a. R Squared = .516 (Adjusted R Squared = .511)

Table 2 results indicated a significant effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment among tertiary students in Kaduna State, $F(1, 217) = 225.88$, $p < .000$. The large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .510$) shows that 51% of the variance in emotional adjustment was due to the intervention. The covariate (pre-test emotional adjustment) was also significant, $F(1, 217) = 8.35$, $p = .004$, suggesting baseline levels influenced outcomes. Since the p value $.000 < 0.05$ alpha level of significant, therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating the stress management techniques was effective in improving emotional adjustment.

H₀₂: There is no significant effect of stress management techniques on academic performance of students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State.

Table 3: ANCOVA Result on effect of stress management techniques on academic performance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	12497.981 ^a	2	6248.991	154.958	.000	.588
Intercept	8969.483	1	8969.483	222.419	.000	.506
Group	11631.898	1	11631.898	288.440	.000	.571
Pre-test	1052.509	1	1052.509	26.099	.000	.107
Error	8750.946	217	40.327			
Total	314052.000	220				
Corrected Total	21248.927	219				

a. R Squared = .588 (Adjusted R Squared = .584)

Table 3 result revealed a significant effect of stress management techniques on academic performance among tertiary students in Kaduna State, $F(1, 217) = 288.44$, $p < .000$. The large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .571$) indicates that 57.1% of the variance in academic performance was attributable to the intervention. The covariate (pre-test performance) was also significant, $F(1, 217) = 26.10$, $p < .000$, meaning prior performance influenced posttest outcomes. Since the p value $.000 < 0.05$ alpha level of significant, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating the stress management techniques was effective in improving academic performance of students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State

Discussion of Findings

The present study investigated the impact of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment and academic performance among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State. The results of the study confirmed the significant positive influence of the intervention on both emotional and academic outcomes.

For H_{01} , the result indicated a significant effect of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment, $F(1, 217) = 225.88$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .510$), explaining 51% of the variance. This suggests that the intervention substantially improved students' ability to manage emotions, reduce stress responses, and maintain psychological balance. This finding aligns with multiple empirical studies. Yusuf and Balogun (2020) and Ibrahim and Musa (2023) provided further support, demonstrating that structured stress reduction strategies like mindfulness and time management enhance emotional regulation and academic efficiency. Babalola et al. (2023) and Bolu-Steve and Fadipe (2024) established that students with poor self-regulation and stress coping mechanisms are more prone to emotional distress and lower academic engagement.

Similarly, for H_{02} , stress management techniques had a statistically significant effect on academic performance, $F(1, 217) = 288.44$, $p < .001$, with a larger effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .571$), showing that 57.1% of the variance in academic achievement was due to the intervention. The finding aligned with the study of Ononye, et al. (2022) who confirmed the mediating role of emotional intelligence and resilience in promoting academic success. Likewise, Adegboye and Adegboye (2021) found that emotional instability due to unmanaged stress negatively impacts academic outcomes. Institutional and international studies by Aikens et al. (2014), Regehr et al. (2013), and Mahmoud et al. (2012) also corroborated the findings, affirming the value of cognitive-behavioural and mindfulness-based interventions in improving students' psychological resilience and academic outcomes.

Moreover, theoretical frameworks like Cognitive Load Theory and Emotional Intelligence Theory provide foundational support for the observed outcomes. Stress can overload cognitive capacity, reduce concentration, and impair learning, while stress management techniques help reduce such load and improve cognitive functioning (Sweller, 2010). Emotional Intelligence Theory (Salovey & Mayer,

1990; Goleman, 1995) reinforces the importance of emotional regulation and resilience in managing academic and personal pressures effectively.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of stress management techniques on emotional adjustment and academic performance among students in tertiary institutions in Kaduna State. The findings revealed that stress management techniques significantly improved both emotional stability and academic performance. These findings are consistent with existing literature and theoretical perspectives that highlight the detrimental effects of unmanaged stress and the benefits of emotional regulation and cognitive management strategies. By confirming the effectiveness of these techniques, the study provides strong evidence for rejecting the null hypotheses and affirms that incorporating stress management interventions can lead to significant improvements in students' emotional and academic functioning.

Recommendations

1. Tertiary Institutions should integrate mindfulness, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and relaxation techniques into student support services to improve emotional well-being and academic performance.
2. Guidance Units should equip counselling units with trained personnel to provide timely psychological support and identify students in distress for prompt intervention.
3. Lecturers should promote emotional intelligence, set realistic academic expectations, and create supportive learning environments to reduce academic pressure.
4. Students and Parents should Encourage students to engage in mindfulness practices eand peer support programs, while parents should provide emotional support and monitor their children' s academic and psychological well-being.

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