

# **EFFECTS OF STRESS ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTION (A CASE STUDY OF RAMAT POLYTECHNIC MAIDUGURI, BORNO STATE, NIGERIA)**

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Stress is most undermined syndrome in our society that is neglected since the element of mental health associated with it. Internationally there is a meaningful work and research conducted on the issue but there were no break through research available domestically. Mental health is actually the parameter for improved or enhanced performance in every society. There is a Greek philosophy;

“Mens sana in corpore sano” Thales Translation:  
“A sound mind in a sound body”

Having mentioned that, there was a need for identification of Stress and the key stressors that are affecting the academic performance. Several studies have shown the positive relationship between stress by health and social activities affecting the academic performance of students. The central focus of this study is to examine the effect of stress on academic performance amongst students of Ramat Polytechnic. The study sets to find out how this stress affects academic performance of these students. In addition, study also attempted to find out the common stress management amongst students. And from the findings, it was discovered that there is high incidence of stress amongst students of Ramat polytechnic. This is equally noticed on the part of the students to acknowledge that stress is part of their daily struggle on campus.

The effect of stress on students is negative. As a result many students are suffering from varieties of stress-linked disorders. However, there are stresses coping techniques, which students have been using.

The study has revealed that stress is both personal and social problem. Among the factors which contribute to stress on campus includes the issue of insurgency (insecurity) economic difficulties, strikes, carry over on so many courses and adverse weather conditions. The environmental conditions like exams pressure on students are not causes of stress but events which affect an individual adaptation. It is the reaction of an individual that determine the degree of predisposition.

Among the factors that’ triggered stress, insecurity and economic hardship appears to be the most potent factors that affects students. This is not in isolation with security and economic reality in Nigerian polytechnics; students are adversely affected by the insecurity and economic reality in

the country. Adjusting to economic hardship is not easy especially for students; this usually leads them to bad academic end. Because a student's economic demand has to do with survival and the basic necessity of life on campus. This disruption of academic activities and the attendance anxiety and the feeling of uncertainty create a negative impact on students overall wellbeing especially their academic performance. These include insecurity in state contributes in no small measure to the stress experienced by students. Therefore, students always see stress as something recurrently dashing their hope of graduating within a reasonable period of time.

The study shows that the students develop a nonchalant attitude towards their studies because of stress. Some give up the hope but students have always been coping with some of their life events and challenges that trigger stress. Stress coping techniques are having a positive outcome and to work toward it increase one's chance of getting desired results.

The study revealed that Nigerian polytechnic students are studying under a challenging and stressful atmosphere and yet they cope.

Without any doubt, education is the single most valuable investment you can make on child. Being in school alone can protect children from situations that could affect their mental health negatively. Most of the children as well as their families have showed signs of stress, anxiety and depression.

Health care professionals in the region noted a rise in the number of people requesting for counseling. In the case where parents are also undergoing stress, it tends to make matters even worse for the child. Healthy and positive relationships with family or caregivers are very important in regulating stress hormone production in children, hence promoting healthy development.

A startling increase in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among individuals living in the area exposed to the insurgency was reported by the Federal Neuropsychiatry hospital in Maiduguri. Exposure to violence has been linked with psychological difficulties in children ranging from insomnia and anxiety to PTSD.

Students that have also been separated from their families or witnessed the death of loved ones are at increased risk of developing the disorder. PTSD is an anxiety disorder that usually occurs after someone experiences one or more traumatic events.

Individuals who develop this condition display certain symptoms like frequent flashbacks of the traumatic event, avoidance of any trauma reminder, and hyper-arousal in the absence of any impending risk. The intensity varies, depending on the individual and the type of event. So also is the duration, which could last from several weeks to years.

Although in some parts of the country, camps and healthcare facilities are put in place for the individuals affected by the insurgency, thousands of youths orphaned or separated from their parents are reported to be facing ongoing trauma. Children and adolescents inflicted with trauma are more likely to show suicidal tendencies and some of them eventually end up committing the act.

Stress is not a useful term for scientists because it is such a highly subjective phenomenon that it defies definition. And if you can't define stress, how can you possibly measure it? The term "stress", as it is currently used was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as "the non-

specific response of the body to any demand for change". Selye had noted in numerous experiments that laboratory animals subjected to acute but different noxious physical and emotional stimuli (blaring light, deafening noise, extremes of heat or cold, perpetual frustration) all exhibited the same pathologic changes of stomach ulcerations, shrinkage of lymphoid tissue and enlargement of the adrenals. He later demonstrated that persistent stress could cause these animals to develop various diseases similar to those seen in humans, such as heart attacks, stroke, kidney disease and rheumatoid arthritis. At the time, it was believed that most diseases were caused by specific but different pathogens. Tuberculosis was due to the tubercle bacillus, anthrax by the anthrax bacillus, syphilis by a spirochete, etc. What Selye proposed was just the opposite, namely that many different insults could cause the same disease, not only in animals, but in humans as well.

Selye's theories attracted considerable attention and stress soon became a popular buzzword that completely ignored Selye's original definition. Some people used stress to refer to an overbearing or bad boss or some other unpleasant situation they were subjected to. For many, stress was their reaction to this in the form of chest pain, heartburn, headache or palpitations. Others used stress to refer to what they perceived as the end result of these repeated responses, such as an ulcer or heart attack. Many scientists complained about this confusion and one physician concluded in a 1951 issue of the British Medical Journal that, "Stress in addition to being itself, was also the cause of itself, and the result of itself."

Unfortunately, Selye was not aware that stress had been used for centuries in physics to explain elasticity, the property of a material that allows it to resume its original size and shape after having been compressed or stretched by an external force. As expressed in Hooke's Law of 1658, the magnitude of an external force, or stress, produces a proportional amount of deformation, or strain, in a malleable metal. This created even more confusion when his research had to be translated into foreign languages. There was no suitable word or phrase that could convey what he meant, since he was really describing strain. In 1946, when he was asked to give an address at the prestigious Collège de France, the academicians responsible for maintaining the purity of the French language struggled with this problem for several days, and subsequently decided that a new word would have to be created. Apparently, the male chauvinists prevailed, and le stress was born, quickly followed by el stress, il stress, lo stress, der stress in other European languages, and similar neologisms in Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Arabic. Stress is one of the very few words you will see preserved in English in these and other languages that do not use the Roman alphabet.

Because it was apparent that most people viewed stress as some unpleasant threat, Selye subsequently had to create a new word, stressor, to distinguish stimulus from response. Stress was generally considered as being synonymous with distress and dictionaries defined it as "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension" or "a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." Thus, stress was put in a negative light and its positive effects ignored. However, stress can be helpful and good when it motivates people to accomplish more.

Any definition of stress should therefore also include good stress, or what Selye called eustress. For example, winning a race or election can be just as stressful as losing, or more so. A passionate kiss and contemplating what might follow is stressful, but hardly the same as having a root canal procedure.

Selye struggled unsuccessfully all his life to find a satisfactory definition of stress. In attempting to extrapolate his animal studies to humans so that people would understand what he meant, he redefined stress as “The rate of wear and tear on the body”. This is actually a pretty good description of biological aging so it is not surprising that increased stress can accelerate many aspects of the aging process. In his later years, when asked to define stress, he told reporters, “Everyone knows what stress is, but nobody really knows.”

As noted, stress is difficult to define because it is so different for each of us. A good example is afforded by observing passengers on a steep roller coaster ride. Some are hunched down in the back seats, eyes shut, jaws clenched and white knuckled with an iron grip on the retaining bar. They can't wait for the ride in the torture chamber to end so they can get back on solid ground and scamper away. But up front are the wide-eyed thrill seekers, yelling and relishing each steep plunge who race to get on the very next ride. And in between you may find a few with an air of nonchalance that borders on boredom. So, was the roller coaster ride stressful?

The roller coaster analogy is useful in explaining why the same stressor can differ so much for each of us. What distinguished the passengers in the back from those up front was the sense of control they had over the event. While neither group had any more or less control their perceptions and expectations were quite different. Many times we create our own stress because of faulty perceptions you can learn to correct. You can teach people to move from the back of the roller coaster to the front, and, as Eleanor Roosevelt noted, nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent. While everyone can't agree on a definition of stress, all of our experimental and clinical research confirms that the sense of having little or no control is always distressful – and that's what stress is all about.

Some co-morbid conditions like substance abuse, anxiety disorders, and major depression tend to develop in individuals with PTSD. Children and adolescents in such camps or facilities also face neglect. Neglect not in a form of the failure in meeting a child's physical needs, like shelter and food, but more of deprivation and lack of stimulation. This form of neglect often occurs when a child's cognitive, emotional and social needs are not fully met as a result of disruption or absence of parent or caregiver responsiveness, attention and protection.

Chronic neglect affects the stress response system in the body and can pose a greater threat to development than even abuse, resulting in cognitive impairments and health problems later in life. Significant attention must be given especially to the mental health state of the affected students.

Health services for assessment and identification of cognitive and behavioral problems should be routinely available and therapeutic intervention should be started as early as possible. This would not only be beneficial to the affected students and their families, but also to the society collectively.

## **WHAT IS STRESS OR WHAT DOES STRESS MEANS?**

Stress is the known specific reaction to the demand made on it. It is an unpleasant human experience resulting from environmental situation requiring adjustment and adaptation, Selyer (1956). According to Imam (1996), stress can be described as the generalized known specific reaction of the body to many demands made on it when any chance distracts, the homeostasis of equilibrium, the body reacts internally by defensive mechanism and fight back so as to protect

itself when a person experienced stress his nervous system stimulates the organs in such a way as to prepare for sudden intensive expenditures of the energy at the expense of long-term body maintenance functions. The specific reactions that constituted this response in compose increase rate of heartbeat blood pressure, muscle tension and respiration and decrease digestive and sexual processes. Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. When you sense danger—whether it's real or imagined—the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction or the "stress response."

The stress response is the body's way of protecting you. When working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life—giving you extra strength to defend yourself, for example, or spurring you to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident.

Stress can also help you rise to meet challenges. It's what keeps you on your toes during a presentation at work, sharpens your concentration when you're attempting the game-winning free throw, or drives you to study for an exam when you'd rather be watching TV. But beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships, and your quality of life.

## **CAUSES OF STRESS**

The situations and pressures that cause stress are known as stressors. We usually think of stressors as being negative, such as an exhausting work schedule or a rocky relationship. However, anything that puts high demands on you can be stressful. This includes positive events such as getting married, buying a house, going to college, or receiving a promotion.

Of course, not all stress is caused by external factors. Stress can also be internal or self-generated, when you worry excessively about something that may or may not happen, or have irrational, pessimistic thoughts about life.

Finally, what causes stress depends, at least in part, on your perception of it. Something that's stressful to you may not faze someone else; they may even enjoy it. While some of us are terrified of getting up in front of people to perform or speak, for example, others live for the spotlight. Where one person thrives under pressure and performs best in the face of a tight deadline, another will shut down when work demands escalate. And while you may enjoy helping care for your elderly parents, your siblings may find the demands of caretaking overwhelming stressful.

Common external causes of stress include:

- Major life changes
- Work or school
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial problems
- Being too busy
- Children and family
- Common internal causes of stress include:
- Pessimism
- Inability to accept uncertainty
- Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility

- Negative self-talk
- Unrealistic expectations / perfectionism
- All-or-nothing attitude

## **HOW DOES STRESS LEAD TO POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE?**

Stress can lead to poor academic performance especially stress related to financial constraints in undergraduates or students among other things include financial hardship at the polytechnic (parents unable to pay) accumulated debt that cannot be paid soon difficultly in borrowing money from people, inability to buy basic needs (textbooks, handouts), insufficient funds to have three square meals. The stress emanating from consequent manipulation can lead to poor academic performance by not passing most of their exams.

## **WHAT FREQUENCY DOES STRESS LEAD TO POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE?**

The level at which stress leads to poor academic performance is when a student finds himself/herself in an academic environment, where exam malpractice, stealing, fighting, membership of secret society (cultism), rape, sex, alcoholism, drug abuse, immorality, rioting, violence are the order of the day and also of the clinical psychological system like poor appetite, sleeplessness, lack of concentration, poor memory, aches and pains, internal heart beats (palpitations), bad dreams, feeding sometimes identified in clued depression, fear and anxiety. The frequency and intensity of these disorders tends to increase as examinations approaches. You will find many students rushing to the medical centers all because of the increase in stress. Therefore, all these frequency has the ability of making a students attain a poor academic height.

## **WHAT USE WILL FINDINGS BE?**

This findings will enable us to know how students live in their academic institutions which are subject to stress producing forces like academic pressure, financial constraints, insurgency, incessant strikes, menace of secret cults, unavailability of textbooks and journals in the libraries, lack of accommodation, inadequate toilet facilities which has negative effect on academic solving the problems.

## **HOW CAN STRESS BE ADEQUATELY MANAGED?**

Severe stress and its adverse consequences can be managed if the students are aware that when his/her performance in academic and other task begins to decline or he/she develops any symptoms, it is a signal for the students to consider more adaptive mechanism. Like the relaxation technique and assertive training helps students deal with sleeplessness.

As we age, our immune systems are less efficient, and adding stress to that can lead to disease progression or the onset of disease," says Dr. Ann Webster, a health psychologist at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital. But there are stresses we have to accept, so we must change our reactions to them," explains Dr. Webster. She offers the following ways to reduce or manage stress:

- **Relaxation techniques.** These are activities that trigger the relaxation response, a physiological change that can help lower your blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, oxygen consumption,

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and stress hormones. You can achieve this with activities such as meditation, guided imagery, yoga, and deep breathing exercises.

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).** CBT is based on the idea that changing unhealthy thinking can change your emotions. A CBT therapist will help you identify negative thinking and learn to automatically replace it with healthy or positive thoughts.
- **Goal setting.** "When people set goals for themselves, they have a positive sense of commitment, feel they're in control, and are optimistic," says Dr. Webster. She recommends setting goals in your career, relationships, creativity, play, and health.

Based on the problems the students is facing in deciding to join any group, the' students should be guided by the demands of his/her academic programme. The same applied to the kind of friends he/she makes. These friends should be those that help the students achieve the goals of successiding in obtaining their certificates through honest acquisition of knowledge.

### **WHY WOULD THE CONCERNED AUTHORITIES NOT PROVIDE THE NECESSARY CONDITION FOR HIGH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE?**

The concerned authorities should provide necessary conditions for high academic performance by providing facilities for helping the students solve their personal problems such facilities should includes medical centres, psychology clinics, counselling units of students affairs department, spiritual leaders on campus to help students in distress. Each student should be assigned to an academic adviser whom the students would be consulting for help and academic guidance. The hall wardens should also help students deal with interpersonal and other hostel problems.

### **WHAT ROLE DO CONCERNED AUTHORITIES PLAY IN REDUCING STRESS IN THE INSTITUTION IN GENERAL?**

The appropriate or concerned authorities that are responsible for the provision of the basic amenities which might reduce stress are supposed to provide adequate amenities and favourable policies in order to increase the rate of academic performance among Ramat polytechnic students which will motivate students to study effectively and will reduce or will help in reducing poor academic performance. The concerned authorities will have to improve or provide adequate educational or learning and recreational facilities, medical centres, and accommodation by building more hostels or hall of residence, academic guidance by an academic adviser etc. if many among the mentioned basic amenities are improved or provided it will reduce stress in the institution in general.

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The effect of stress on students is negative. As a result many students are suffering from varieties of stress-linked disorders. However, there are stresses coping techniques, which students have been using.

## **GENERAL IMPLICATION**

In the process of conducting this research, some problems were encountered. Time constraints has affected the research work, this is due to lack of enough time for the researcher to carryout the work.

For lack of sufficient fund, the researcher could not cover a larger sample. There is also the problem of lack of cooperation from the respondents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study has revealed that stress is both personal and social problem. Among the factors which contribute to stress on campus includes economic difficulties, strikes, carry over on so many courses and adverse weather conditions. The environmental conditions like exams pressure on students are not causes of stress but events which affect an individual an adaptation. It is the reaction of an individual that determine the degree of predisposition.

Among the factors that' triggered stress, economic hardship appears to be the most potent factor that affects students. This is not in isolation with economic reality in Nigerian polytechnics students are adversely affected by the economic reality in the country. Adjusting to economic hardship is not easy especially for students; this usually leads them to bad academic end. Because student's economic demand has to do with survival and the basic necessity of life on campus. This disruption of academic activities and the attendance anxiety and the feeling of uncertainty crate a negative impact on students overall wellbeing especially their academic performance. These include strike action by academic and non academic staff of the Nigerian polytechnics contributes in no small measure to the stress experienced by students. Therefore, students always see strike as something recurrently dashing their hope of graduating within a reasonable period of time.

The study shows that the students develop a nonchalant attitude towards their studies because of stress. Some give up the hope but students have always being coping with some of their life events and challenges that trigger stress. Stress coping techniques are having a positive outcome and to work toward it increase one's chance of getting desire results.

The study revealed that Nigerian polytechnic students are studying under a challenging and stressful atmosphere and yet they cope.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are put forward.

1. The Federal and State government should set up a special committee to look into conditions of the Nigerian polytechnic students with a view to proposing measures that will alleviate students suffering; some of the measures include meeting academic staff union of polytechnic (ASUP) demands for reequipping the institutions.



2. National association of Nigerian students (NANS) should resist the move by polytechnic to increase tuition fees. Already some, students are financially over-stretched. If the move to introduce tuition fees is allowed, many students may not be able to cope and because of that will aggravate, stress them and lead to poor academic performance.
3. There is the need for an improved lecturer-students relationship on campus. Such a cordial atmosphere is paramount to enhance learning. Students should respect lecturer, lecturers should respect themselves as parents. Because as parents, they cannot frustrate their own children. Therefore no good lecturer can frustrate his/her own students on no good ground.
4. Polytechnics are over-populated; there is a need for government to expand the facilities. A situation where a facility is meant for five people and twelve people happen to accommodate it, it is a big challenge to people and then it will lead them to or in doing badly academically. This problem needs urgent attention in the light of population increase in the Nigeria polytechnics especially when it comes to hostel facilities (accommodation).
5. Students should bear in mind that there is no gain without pain. Just as a farmer tails hard and when the harvest is ready he/she smiles so students should realize that they should work hard in order to the desired result.
6. National Board for Technical Education should explore the viability of providing necessary facilities in polytechnics that will motivate students to study effectively. This will help in reducing the span of many carry over.
7. The issue of security should be addressed properly; especially the case of suicide bombing which has become very rampant these days.

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