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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL-RELATED STRESS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN GENERAL USE OF ENGLISH AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the relationships between school-related stress and academic achievement of students in selected faculties in public universities in Anambra State. One research questions guided the study, and one null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population for this study consisted of 20,005 second year (200level) undergraduates. The sample of the study consisted of 2,549 undergraduates drawn through multi-stage sampling procedure. The instruments used for the study was School Related Stress Questionnaire (SRSQ) with a reliability coefficient alpha of 0.82. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used for data analysis. The result revealed a high negative significant relationship between the undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement in General Use of English. The study concluded, among others that public university undergraduates' level of school-relates stress is a high negative significant correlate of their academic achievement in General Use of English. It was recommended, among others that university administrators in conjunction with the Nigerian Universities Commission should plan and structure the undergraduate academic curricular in such a way that it will not be so cumbersome on students to avoid unnecessary stress.

Keywords: Relationship; School-Related Stress; Academic Achievement

Introduction
Education is a vital tool for individual and societal development, and academic achievement serves as a key indicator of educational success. However, the academic environment, particularly in public universities, often exposes undergraduates to a wide range of stressors that may negatively affect their performance. In public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria, undergraduates face a myriad of challenges, including limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, tight academic schedules, financial constraints, and high expectations from family and society. These factors can lead to heightened stress levels, which may

interfere with students' concentration, motivation, and overall academic performance. While some stress can serve as a motivator, excessive or poorly managed stress may hinder academic achievement and contribute to negative outcomes among students.

Academic achievement refers to the extent to which a student has attained his/her educational goals, as evidenced by grades, test scores, and overall performance in school. It is influenced by multiple factors, including stress levels, motivation, and coping strategies (Aafreen, Priya and Gayathri, 2018). It is the measurable performance outcomes of students in their educational endeavors, which can include grade point averages, standardized test scores, and subject-specific competencies. This concept is shaped by cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors, such as stressors within the school environment and support systems (Derakhshan, 2021). In the context of this study, academic achievement is defined as the measurable outcome of a student's academic performance, typically assessed through grades, test scores, or other standardized evaluations, reflecting the extent to which learning objectives and curriculum goals have been met. This definition emphasizes the objective assessment of learning outcomes in formal educational settings. Academic achievement is the attainment of knowledge and skills demonstrated through tests, assignment, and projects aligned with curriculum standards.

Academic achievement is typically evaluated through performance in classroom activities, assignments, presentations, continuous assessments, standardized tests, and examinations (Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015). These performance metrics reflect students' progress toward their educational goals and serve as critical indicators of their academic development.

Undergraduate students often face immense pressure to meet the demands of their academic pursuits. From rigorous examinations to complex assignments, these challenges frequently lead to heightened levels of stress, which can manifest as burnout, anxiety, and ultimately, diminished academic performance (Aafreen, Priya, and Gayathri,2018; Alharbi and Smith, 2018). The interplay between academic stressors and their consequences highlights the critical need for strategies that mitigate their adverse effects while promoting resilience among students. A significant contributor to academic stress is the difficulty students' face in managing their time effectively. Striving to balance academics, extracurricular activities, and personal responsibilities often results in procrastination and inadequate preparation for examinations (Azila-Gbettor, Atatsi, Danku and Soglo, 2015; Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015). More so, poor time management not only intensifies stress but also compromises students' ability to meet deadlines and maintain academic consistency, perpetuating a cycle of underperformance and mounting pressure.

Financial difficulties further compound the stress experienced by many undergraduate students. The need to juggle part-time work alongside academic responsibilities can dilute focus and engagement, leaving students overstretched and unable to perform at their best (Allam, 2021; Brobbey, 2021). Financial strain not only hampers their ability to prioritize studies but also exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and helplessness. Motivation also plays a pivotal role in academic success; however, many students experience disengagement from their coursework. When students lack a meaningful connection to the learning material, their academic performance suffers, often leading to a heightened sense of futility that increases their stress level. Research emphasizes the importance of creating academic environments that foster motivation and active engagement to counteract these effects (Bryne, 2016).

Similarly, mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression seem widespread among university students and have profound implications for their academic success. These conditions disrupt students' ability to concentrate, retain information, and meet deadlines, further intensifying the pressure they face (Bale and Epperson, 2015; Brobbey, 2021). Without adequate support, mental health struggles can spiral, creating barriers to both personal well-being and academic achievement. In the face of mounting stress, many students adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms, including avoidance and substance use. These strategies, though temporarily relieving, ultimately exacerbate academic struggles by failing to address the root causes of stress (Heffer and Willoughby, 2017; Musa, 2018). Encouraging the development of healthier coping mechanisms is essential for fostering resilience and sustained academic success.

Academic stress exerts a profound influence on students' performance, serving both as a motivator and a barrier. While moderate stress, or eustress, can enhance motivation and productivity, excessive distress impairs cognitive functions and diminishes academic outcomes (Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015; Prabu, 2015). Chronic stress disrupts learning processes by limiting students' ability to absorb and retain information, redirecting their focus from long-term goals to short-term relief (Giota and Gustafsson, 2017; Marie, 2021). Stress also takes a toll on physical and mental health, further hindering students' ability to meet academic expectations (Klinger, 2015; Reschly, Huebner, Appleton and Antaramian, 2018). Practically, the lack of robust support systems for handling stress among university students exacerbates these effects, highlighting inequities in coping resources. Students with access to supportive environments are better equipped to manage stress, while those without such resources face heightened academic challenges (De la Fuente and Gonzalez-Gomez, 2017; Raj and Tripathi, 2021). A critical consequence of persistent academic stress is the cycle of underperformance it engenders. Repeated failures due to stress reinforce negative perceptions of self-efficacy, creating a feedback loop of declining achievement and escalating stress (Dangwal, Dhoudiyal and Joshi, 2021; Hauwa, Shehu and Dayo, 2024).

By addressing the root causes of stress and fostering effective stress management strategies, educators and institutions can create pathways for improved academic outcomes and overall well-being.

In recent times, public universities in Nigeria are seemingly facing unique challenges in managing student stress. These institutions often contend with large class sizes, limited resources, and a high demand for access to education. These stressors can lead to emotional, physical, or psychological strains, potentially affecting students' ability to achieve their academic goals (Yogie, Suryadi and Soefijanto, 2021).

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to challenges or demands that exceed an individual's ability to cope effectively. It often arises from academic pressures, personal expectations, or environmental factors that impact mental and emotional well-being (Aafreen, Priya and Gayathri, 2018). Stress can also be defined as an emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. In an academic context, it includes factors such as heavy workload, time management issues, and performance anxiety, all of which can significantly influence a student's cognitive and emotional state (Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015). However, in the context of this study, school-related stress refers to the psychological and emotional strain experienced by university students as a result of academic pressure, interpersonal challenges within the school environment, and the balancing of various school-related tasks and responsibilities. It encompasses stressors such as heavy workloads, fear of failure, high expectations from lecturers and parents, peer competition, and lack of adequate resources or support.

School-related stress occurs when there is a discrepancy between environmental demands, known as stressors, and an individual's ability to fulfil those demands. The effects of school-related stress can manifest in unpleasant emotional and physiological changes, often resulting in mental and physical health issues among students. Shekhawat and Sodha (2018) noted that university students experience different types of school-related stress, ranging from physical and psychological to academic and psycho-spiritual. Physical stress arises from factors such as intense workloads, illness, or substance abuse, while psychological stress includes emotional disturbances like fear, frustration, and anxiety. Academic stress, on the other hand, stems from pressures like examinations, competition for grades, and tight academic schedules. Additionally, psycho-spiritual stress may emerge when students experience a lack of purpose or values related to their academic pursuits. School-related stress are the unavoidable experiences undergraduates are likely to encounter in the university which may either motivate them to work harder and achieve high academically or may negatively affect their academic achievement.

These stressors, inherent in the academic environment, are found in various aspects of students' lives, including their homes, schools, and social interactions. The degree to which stress affects students varies,

influencing their academic performance differently. For instance, Sheeba and Khan (2015) observed that students often experience the greatest stress from studying for examinations, managing large volumes of material in limited time, and competing for academic excellence. Sedlak (2024) noted that extreme stress can lead to physical and psychological impairments, further affecting students' academic and personal lives.

Students adopt various coping strategies to manage stress, such as effective time management, building supportive social networks, reassessing challenges positively, and engaging in leisure activities. However, Bryne (2016) highlighted that the intense pressure to excel academically and the limited time to prepare create a stressful academic atmosphere. This pressure not only impacts students' academic performance but also strains their social relationships and overall well-being, thereby influencing their ability to achieve personal and academic goals.

Common signs of stress include changes in mood, difficulty sleeping, dizziness, anxiety, fatigue, muscle tension, headaches, and various physical ailments. These symptoms reflect the body's response to stressors, which can arise from academic, financial, or personal challenges. Scholars in behavioural sciences note that stress often stems from changes or unexpected events, such as failure in academics, financial difficulties, health problems, or the loss of a loved one. For university undergraduates, specific stressors may include the struggle to attend lectures, complete assignments, manage time effectively, prepare for examinations, and cope with demanding timetables. These stressors can impact not only an individual's lifestyle but also their physical and mental health, depending on how they perceive and manage the situation.

Generally, stress in academic settings, especially among university undergraduates often stems from pressure to excel academically, meet parental expectations, manage social relationships, and compete for scholarships. These stressors are particularly evident among university undergraduate students, who face heightened academic and social demands. Excessive stress has consistently been shown to have detrimental effects on academic performance, manifesting in decreased motivation, reduced concentration, and lower achievement levels. Beyond academic outcomes, chronic stress may have severe consequences on undergraduate students' mental and physical health. Persistent exposure to high level of stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders, which further exacerbate academic difficulties. This interplay between stress and academic achievement highlights the critical need for targeted interventions that address the root causes of stress while supporting students' overall well-being. Okafor, Nwobi and Udogu (2024) observed that most undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Anambra State perform very poor in their courses, hence, the number of carryovers in public universities continue to increase.

While some studies have explored the relationship between school-related stress

and academic achievement, certain gaps in the literature persist, particularly concerning public university undergraduates in Anambra State, Nigeria. Most existing research on this topic focuses on developed countries, where academic environments, resources, and socio-cultural settings differ significantly from those in Nigeria. These differences may influence how university undergraduates perceive and respond to stress, as well as the strategies they adopt to cope with it. Consequently, there is limited understanding of the unique challenges and stressors faced by students in public universities in developing regions like Anambra State. Also, while research has identified that female students generally experience higher levels of stress compared to their male counterparts (Bale and Epperson, 2015; Inchley et al., 2020), there is limited investigation into the underlying factors driving these differences in the Nigerian situation. Addressing these gaps in literature and knowledge is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between school-related stress and academic achievement among undergraduates in selected faculties in public universities in Anambra State. This research aims to bridge these gaps by investigating the relationship between school-related stress and academic achievement of students in selected faculties in public universities in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

University is a social institution where learning takes place. Therefore, university education is created to provide a platform for acquiring specialized knowledge, developing critical thinking skills, and building a strong profession network. Basically, every university undergraduate is expected to successfully navigate through the rigorous paths of university education with high academic achievements. However, observations and semester academic records from respective departments have shown that while some undergraduates achieve high academically, the academic achievement of others is fluctuating and constantly declining. This is evident as the researcher's interaction with some of the undergraduates, lecturers and examination officers showed that some public university undergraduates in Anambra state perform very poor in their semester examinations while some perform high especially in the General Use of English Language course.

In addition, measures such as organizing town-hall meetings and orientation programmes, provision of student work-aid and counselling intervention services have also been introduced in the universities to quench the problem of poor academic achievement among undergraduates. However, the problem appears unabated as the number of carryovers recorded by undergraduates continue to increase. This could likely result in loss of confidence in undergraduates upon graduation. This is a worrisome situation because graduates from public universities are gradually losing their reputation and place in the world of work.

Public opinion has blamed poor academic achievement of undergraduates on the falling standard of education, teaching methodology adopted by lecturers and lack of fund from the government to provide quality teaching-learning materials, lack of financial support,

for some the stress of locating their venue for lecture, while for other is the change of environment. Although, number of factors may be attributed to the poor academic achievement among university undergraduates in Anambra state, but the current researcher believes that the most pertinent one may be school-related stress. This is because many university undergraduates may become overwhelmed with stress as they struggle to grabble with the complexities that come with university education. It is based on the above problem that the researcher intends to empirically examine the relationship between school-related stress and academic achievement of students in selected faculties in public universities in Anambra State.

Research Question

The following one research question was be answered:

1. What is the relationship between school-related stress and academic achievement in General Use of English among public university undergraduates in Anambra State?

Hypothesis

The following one null hypothesis was tested at 0.5 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between school-related stress and academic achievement in General Use of English among public university undergraduates in Anambra State.

Research Method

The study adopts correlational survey research design. This study was conducted in two public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria: Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. These institutions were among the leading universities in southeastern Nigeria, offering a wide range of academic programs and serving as significant centers of higher learning and research. Both universities had multiple campuses spread across different locations in Anambra State, each serving specific academic and administrative functions.

The population of the study comprises all 20,005 year two undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Chukwuemeka Odumegu Ojukwu University. The undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, are a total population of 11,039 undergraduates. On the other hand, the students from Chukwuemeka Odumegu Ojukwu are total of 8,966, as per the data gathered from the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) department on September 29, 2024. The sample for the study consists of 2,549 (1,154 males and 1,395 females) undergraduates drawn through the multi-stage sampling procedure. The sample represented 12.7 percent of the total population. The following instruments was used for data collection: **School Related Stress Questionnaire:** School Related Stress Questionnaire (SRSQ) was developed by the researcher. SRSQ is a self-report psychometric scale which was developed to measure school-related stress of public university undergraduates. The

instrument contains 29 items. The instrument is on a four-point scales of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree(A), Disagree(D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with assigned weight of 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. **Academic Achievement Scores:** The academic achievement scores of the sampled departments of both Universities were collected from the General Studies (GS) Units of the universities for session 2023/2024. This helped the researcher to get the students' examination scores in general use of English language. In order to determine the validity of the instruments, copies of the instruments were given to three experts to validate; two experts were from the Department of Guidance and Counselling while one expert was from measurement and evaluation unit, all in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The experts were given the title, purposes of the study, research questions and hypotheses as well as copy of the questionnaire. Corrections and modifications were made to ascertain the appropriateness and content coverage with reference to the research objective. The corrections were effected by the researchers. The reliability of the instrument was established through measures of internal consistency whereby the researchers conducted a pilot study using 30 undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who were not part of the research population. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained for the SRSQ instrument was 0.82. The researchers therefore concluded that the instrument is reliable to be used for study. The administration of the questionnaires structured for data collection was done through direct delivery approach. By this method copies of the questionnaires were distributed personally to the respondents by the researchers with the help of five research assistants. The data to be collected for this study were scored following the scoring instructions of the instruments. All the data collected for this study were organised in tables and analysed. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyse the data.

Presentation of Results

Research Question: What is the relationship between university undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement in General Use of English?

Table 1: Pearson r on university undergraduates' school-related stress and their achievement in general use of English

Source of Variation	N	Stress r	Achievement r	Remark
Stress	2536	0.00	-0.68	High negative relationship
Achievement	2536	-0.68	0.00	

Table 1 indicated that there is high negative relationship of -0.68 between the university undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement in General Use of English.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between public university undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement in General Use of English.

Table 2: Significant of Pearson r on the undergraduates' school-related stress and their achievement in General Use of English using probability table of r

N	Cal. R	Df	P-value	Cal.p-value	Remark
2536	-0.68	2535	0.05	0.00	S

S = Significant

Table 2 showed that at 0.05 level of significance and 2535df, the calculated r-0.68 has p-value 0.00 which is less than the critical p-value 0.05. Therefore, the first null hypothesis is rejected. This signifies that there is significant relationship between public university undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement in General Use of English.

The finding of the study revealed a high negative significant relationship between the university undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement in General Use. This finding indicated that the level of school-related stress experienced by university undergraduates highly influenced the grade they obtain in their semester examinations in the negative direction. It equally means that as the undergraduates' school-related stress scores increases, their academic achievement scores decrease, (i.e., the higher the stress level, the lower the academic achievement), vice versa. This finding agreed with the report of previous researchers (Elliot and Hill, 2017; Kotter, Wagner, Bruheim and Voltmer, 2017; Aafreen et al, 2018; Alharbi and Smith, 2018; Benneth, 2018; Usman, 2018) which concluded that school-related stress significantly correlated negatively with their academic achievement. This finding of the study also supports the findings of Shinto (2018) and Muema, Muola and Muriungi (2020) who reported that the relationship between students' school-related stress and their academic achievement in Use of English were significantly high in the negative direction.

The possible reason for the high significant correlation observed between the undergraduates' school-related stress and their academic achievement may be because of the intense pressure faced by the students in other to grabble with the complexities of university education. From complex academic tasks within a limited timeframe to rigorous assessment exercises, these academic challenges may lead to heightened levels of stress, which can manifest as boredom, burnout, anxiety, and finally result to poor academic achievement. Financial difficulties further compound the stress experienced by many university undergraduates. Financial strain not only hampers students' ability to prioritize studies but also exacerbates feelings of inadequacy, helplessness and lack of motivation to studies which could lead to diminished levels of academic achievement.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study summarized above, the researchers concluded that majority of the public university undergraduates in Anambra state have high school-related stress. It was also

concluded that most of the undergraduates in Anambra state have good academic achievement in General Use of English. The study further concluded that school-related stress is a high negative significant correlate of university undergraduates' achievement in General Use of English. Finally, the study concluded that school-related stress is a high negative significant correlate of academic achievement in General Use of English among male and female public university undergraduates in Anambra state.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since many of the university undergraduates are experiencing high school-related stress which could be the reason for their poor academic achievement, university counsellors should design effective stress management intervention strategies to help undergraduates adequately cope with stressors in the universities.
2. University administrators in conjunction with the Nigerian Universities Commission should plan and structure the undergraduate academic curricular in such a way that it will not be so cumbersome on students to avoid unnecessary stress.
3. 'All work and no play make Jack a dull boy'. Therefore, the Students Union Government in conjunction with the university managements should establish recreational and social activities to make campus life easy and less stressful to university undergraduates.
4. The university undergraduates should focus on healthy lifestyles choices, effective time management and stress-reducing techniques such engaging in regular physical activities, social support, mindfulness meditation, and taken regular breaks for relaxation. They should also seek professional help their academic advisers and the university counselling services when the need arises.
5. Parents and caregivers should show adequate interest and support to their children's academic endeavour. They should also encourage their children in any way possible to carry out academic tasks without much stress. This could encourage the children's level of academic achievement.

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