



EFFICACY OF SELF-CONTROL THERAPY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG STUDENTS IN LAGOS STATE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: INTERVENTION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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Abstract

Confronting challenges such as awful traffic situations, erratic electricity supply, inadequate learning environments, dilapidated equipment and other excruciating academic challenges has become a daily occurrence among some students in tertiary institutions. These challenges can eventually lead to strained relationship, poor academic performance, stress and poverty. This study therefore, examined impact of self-control therapy on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions. The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design. The sample for this study consisted of 112 students drawn from two Lagos State tertiary institutions using Multistage sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a self-designed, 20-item questionnaire titled: “Stress Assessment Scale” (SAS). The instrument was validated by three experts in the field of psychometrics and its reliability coefficient obtained through the Cronbach Alpha reliability stood at 0.91. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The researchers conducted eight-week treatment sessions for participants in the experimental group and their pretest and posttest scores were obtained. Data obtained from the instrument was analyzed using percentages, mean, standard deviation and ANCOVA. The first hypothesis was rejected while the second was not rejected. Results showed that self-control therapy has significant effect in reducing academic stress among students and that this reduction is not gender-based. Therefore, there is need for authorities in tertiary institutions to establish functional counselling centres, employ more qualified counsellors. On their part, counsellors should always use self-control therapy in assisting student manage their academic stress via online or offline platforms.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Self-control Therapy, Students, Tertiary Institutions

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Introduction

Stress is a medical or a psychological phenomenon because of its potentials in mitigating against the health condition of a person and the stimulus that triggers the fight or flight response respectively. Most of the Students often face unbearable traffic situations, awful electricity supply, rushing to make their next class on time as well as other excruciating academic challenges and needs. As such Students can become disoriented, overwhelmed, paralyzed and unable to manage themselves when faced with too many duties and hectic schedules packed with studies. When these demands are too much on an individual, it could lead to strained relationship, withdrawal, denial and in most cases, stress.

Stress in physical science is external pressure or force applied to a structure, while strain denotes the resulting internal distortion of the object. But in behavioural science, especially psychology, stress is a physiological situation created by circumstances that place physical or psychological demands on an individual (Krohnea 2019). It connotes external forces that interrupt and impede on the body. stress is one of the most interesting and mysterious subjects that exists since the existence of man, it is not only limited to what happens to the body during a stressful situation, but also to what occurs in the psyche of an individual (Sincero, 2012). Stress is defined as the perception of discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfil these demands. Elizabeth (2020), defined stress as “any category of change that results in physical, emotional, or psychological strain”. Stress is the body’s reaction to anything that compels scrutiny or action. Mayo Clinic, (2022) stated that stress produces numerous physical and mental symptoms which vary according to each individual's situational factors. These can include a decline in physical health, such as headaches, chest pain, fatigue, and sleep problems as well as depression. Though not all stress are dangerous, it could be acute, severe and chronic depending on its seriousness.

Academic stress has been extensively researched and different stressors have been identified in Literature, also the effects of stress on academic achievement, physical and psychological wellbeing of students were identified too. Dhull and Kumari (2015) says academic stress is mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even the awareness of the possibility of such. They further hold that academic stress can arise due to educational expectations of parents, teachers, burden of homework and assignments, examination systems among others. Students may experience academic stress from both their own expectations to excel as well as the expectations of their parents and teachers. In line with the above assertion Mishra (2018) says every parent wants his or her child to perform well academically and if possible be the best among the peers. Sometimes these expectations do not put into consideration the capabilities of the child. Parents, thus burden their children with higher expectations which may lead to stress. In the same vain, Essel & Owusu (2017) opined that unrealistic parental expectation is a dominant stressor for students.

The educational system may also play roles that lead to increased stress levels. Some of the sources of stress in the educational system include overcrowded lecture halls, inadequate



resources and facilities, long hours and expectations of rote learning (Deb, Strodl and Sun 2015). Agolla and Ongori (as cited in Mishra, 2018) found that students reported experiencing high level of stress at university especially in preparation for examinations, competitions and mastering the syllabus within a short time. Batainesh, (2013) and Chemornas and Shapiro, (2013) asserts that other sources of academic stress include excessive workload unhealthy competition, time pressure, lack of finance and financial management, difficulties managing personal and academic life. Carver, (2011) reported that Students complain of feeling stressed academically when it comes to facing examinations, grade competition and having too much information to study, yet insufficient time to master the knowledge. Furthermore Mishra (2018) say Excessive workload and homework make students tense and this may lead to inability to give proper time to different study related activities.

Kio et al (2018) assert that academic stress has negative impacts on academic achievement, physical and psychological wellbeing of students. Symptoms of stress include loss of energy, increased blood pressure, depressed mood, difficulty in concentration, impatience and nervousness. Stressed students are more likely to be poorly motivated, less productive, less safe at work and vulnerable to social vices like drug abuse and violence. Winter and Yaffe (as cited in Mishra, 2018) opined that high levels of stress during students' first year of study can make them susceptible to many social and psychological problems leading to low grades. Ekpeyong et al (2013) suggested that individual variables that can influence one's response to stress include age, sex, physical ability, status, lifestyle, ethnicity among others. Some factors such as sex, age, year of study and course of study have been found to influence expressed level of stress among students. Jia and Loa (2018) reported that first year undergraduates expressed higher academic stress than other students. This may be as a result of their being new in the school environment which they have to adjust to. They may therefore experience some degree of loneliness, anxiety, depression and even disorientation in the attempt to establish new social relationships, and at the same time trying to cope with the increasing academic demands. However, Elias et al (2011) found that final year students expressed higher levels of stress than other students.

Another factor that has been found to influence expressed level of stress among students is the gender of the student. Reports on sex/gender differences in level of expressed academic stress have been equivocal. Researchers such as Ebrahim (2016); Dhull and Kumari, (2015); and Calvarcse,(2015) found females reporting higher levels of academic stress than males, while Mishra (2018) however reported higher academic stress among males. However, in another researches of Yikaelo et al, 2018; Gonmei, and Devendiran, 2017; Farhan and Khan, 2015; Prabu,2015; Khan et al, 2013, sex/gender was found to have no significant influence on expressed level of academic stress. On the influence of course of study on expressed level of academic stress, Deepa (2016) found that students from sciences experience more stress than students from the Humanities and Commerce. On the other hand, Reddy et al (2018) in their study with undergraduate students found that students in Commerce had the highest level of academic stress and while those in Humanities were the lowest. On the influence of age on academic stress of students, Khan et al (2016) found that younger students expressed higher



academic stress than older students. Academic stress can be a risk factor that influences the quality of life of university students and can lead to poor academic achievement, dropping out of School, which may eventually cause joblessness and poverty.

Poverty has serious consequences on stress level of an individual particularly students in tertiary institutions which has negative effect on their academic performance. Lund, Brooke-Sumner and Baingana (2018) said that poverty has been consistently associated with increased prevalence of depression and anxiety, as well as increased rates of suicidal behaviors and ideation. stress can trap an individual in poverty by preventing them from improving their economic outcomes. This vicious cycle of poverty and stress is particularly harmful for young people as deprivation experienced can be a strong predictive of later performance of an individual.

In view of the effects of stress, there is need to stem the tide of stress among students of tertiary institutions using counselling interventions such as self-control therapy. Nielsen (2020) defined self-control as the exertion of control over the self by the self – that is, an attempt to regulate or change how one thinks, feels, or behaves. Na-Gyeong and MI-Ae (2018) mentioned in their study that people utilizes self-control when they exert effort to override or inhibit their impulses. High self-control is positively associated with a plethora of desirable outcomes, including academic achievement, psychological adjustment (e.g., fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety, high self-esteem), and interpersonal relationships (e.g., family cohesion, secure attachment style). In contrast, low levels of self-control are often correlated with negative outcomes, including some health-compromising behaviours, such as binge eating, alcohol abuse, and drug use. Low self-control is also associated with sex-related cognitions and behaviour.

Tatjana and Henning (2020) assert that Self-control therapies are cognitive and behavioural skills used by individuals to maintain self-motivation and achieve personal goals. Initially the skills may be learned from a therapist, text, or self-help book. However, the individual is responsible for using these skills in real-life situations to produce the desired changes. Tatjana and Henning (2020) further stress that Self-control strategies are useful for a wide range of concerns, including medical (such as diabetes, chronic pain, asthma, arthritis, incontinence, or obesity), addictions (such as drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, gambling, or eating disorders), occupational (such as study habits, organizational skills, or job productivity), and psychological (such as stress, anxiety, depression, excessive anger, hyperactivity, or shyness). If symptoms are severe, self-control strategies may be used in conjunction with other therapies, but should not be the only form of treatment.

Duckworth et al (2018) hold that the goal of self-control strategies is to reduce behavioural deficiencies or behavioural excesses. Behavioural deficiencies occur when an individual does not engage in a positive, desirable behaviour frequently enough. The result is a missed future benefit. For example, a student who rarely studies may not graduate. Behavioural excesses occur when an individual engages in negative, undesirable behaviour too often. This results in a negative future consequence. For example, a person who smokes may develop lung cancer. In the case of behavioural deficiencies, one may fail to engage in a desirable



behaviour because it does not provide immediate gratification. With behavioural excesses, there is usually some type of immediate gratification and no immediate negative consequence. Self-control strategies help individuals to become aware of their own patterns of behaviour and to alter those patterns (usually by creating artificial rewards or punishments) so that the behaviour will be more or less likely to occur.

Stress can influence one's level of self-control. Mishra (2018) found out that in college student populations, stress from examinations resulted in less self-control, when compared to students that had no academic examination stress. This held true for both a laboratory task and self-reported daily behaviours. On the contrary, self-control also influences how an individual reacts to stress. This will be the focus when examining the effect of self-control on stress for the current study. Individuals with high self-control have better ability to cope with stressful events, which is evidenced by Galla and Wood (2015). It was found that high school students with higher self-control were better able to be mindful and think before reacting. This effect was also found for children with siblings who have cancer, who experience a type of stress called "role overload". It was also discovered that participants with higher self-control were less anxious and had fewer psychosomatic symptoms (Hamama et al, 2008). Even when experiencing the same amount of stress, individuals with higher self-control exhibited less symptoms than those with lower self-control, affirming that individuals with higher self-control are better able to cope with stressful situations.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the debilitating effects of stress on academic progress and mental health of tertiary institution students, there exists little or no behavioural intervention in this direction. It is worthy to note that most of the available documentations on alleviating stress were done among foreign students. There is therefore the need for the use of effective psychological treatment such as self-control therapy to alleviate the resultant effect of this psychological challenge among Nigerian students. This study therefore is a response to the challenges of depression, poor academic performance, suicide and attrition among students of Lagos State tertiary institutions.

To aid this research, the study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Questions

1. Does Self-Control therapy have any effect on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions?
2. How does gender affect management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions?

Hypotheses



The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significant

1. There is no significant effect of Self-Control therapy on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions.
2. There is no significant effect of gender on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions.

Methodology

This study adopted a pretest posttest quasi-experimental research design with 2x2 factorial matrix. The sample for this study consisted of 112 students, drawn from two out of six Lagos State tertiary institutions. Multistage sampling technique was used in selecting the sample used for the study. The first stage involved the use of simple random technique to select two out of the six Lagos State tertiary institutions. The selected tertiary institutions are: Lagos State University of Science and Technology- LASUSTECH, Ikorodu and Lagos State University of Education- LASUED, Naforija, Epe. The second stage involved the use of balloting to select a department/school from each of the two selected tertiary institutions. They are Department of Mechanical Engineering from LASUSTECH and School of Arts and Social Science from LASUED Epe.

The third stage involved administration of the instrument designed by the researchers and named **Stress Assessment Scale (SAS)** on all year 2 students in each of the two selected departments to obtain their stress level. After analyzing the data, anyone who scores above 40 marks out of the total obtainable marks of 80 from the questionnaire was adjudged to have high stress level and was selected for the training. The total number of participants selected for the training were 120, comprising of 65 students from LASUSTECH and 55 students from LASUED. However, due to absenteeism and attrition at the training sessions, those that completed the training were 112 and they eventually formed the sample.

The research instrument named “Stress Assessment Scale” (SAS) used for this study was a self- constructed instrument. It was designed by the researchers to evaluate and gauge the level of stress among young people. It consisted of two sections, namely Sections A & B. Section A contains demographic data of the respondents such as name of institution, course, level, sex, age group, family type, while Section B consist of 20 items that measures stress levels based on four central constructs of stress assessment. The items were measured on a four-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 = Not true of me at all, 2 = Some what true of me, 3 = Quite true of me and 4 = Very true of me. The minimum score in SAS was 20 while the maximum score was 80.

The instrument was presented to three experts in psychometrics for scrutiny and necessary corrections to ascertain face, construct and content validity; necessary correction were effected to produce final version of the instruments. The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient through pilot study in order to determine the internal consistency of the instruments. The instrument was administered on 45 students randomly selected from the University of Lagos. A reliability index of 0.91 was



obtained for the instrument. This was an indication that the instruments is very reliable and suitable for the study.

Data collection procedure involved obtaining letter of introduction from the Head of department, Educational Foundations and Counselling Psychology of the Lagos State University to the Heads of the department of the two selected Lagos State tertiary institutions. Thereafter, approval was obtained from their respective Head of Departments (HODs) of these departments to use some selected students from their departments. With the support of research assistants, the Stress Assessment Scale (SAS) was administered on all year 2 students in the selected departments in order to obtain their pretest scores. After analyzing the Stress Assessment Scale (SAS), anyone who scored above 40 in the scale which serves as the baseline was adjudged to be of high stress level and was selected for the training. The sample was divided into 2 groups: experimental group (LASUSTECH) with self-control therapy while the control group (LASUED) was on the waiting list. The training session for the experimental group lasted eight weeks. The initial score obtained from the SAS was used as pretest score while after the training, SAS was also administered on all selected students in the two departments to obtain their post test scores. Data obtained from pretest and post test scores were analysed using descriptive statistics of percentages, mean and standard deviation as well as inferential statistics of ANCOVA.

Result

Research Question 1. Does Self-Control therapy have any effect on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions?

Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics of effects of treatment on Management of students' academic stress

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Control Therapy	58	64.40	9.95
Control Group	54	83.17	11.31
Total	112	73.45	14.17

From Table 1, participants' posttest mean and standard deviation in the self-control therapy group are 64.40 and 9.95 respectively while participants' posttest mean and standard deviation in the control group are 83.17 and 11.31 respectively. This shows that posttest mean score of participants in the self-control therapy group which is 64.40 is lower than that of their counterparts in the control group which is 83.17. Hence, the treatment (self-control therapy) had effect on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions.



Research Question 2. How does gender affect management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions?

Table 2 : Descriptive Statistics of effects of gender on Management of students' academic stress

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	66	73.85	14.65
Female	46	72.87	13.58
Total	112	73.45	14.17

Table 2 shows that the posttest mean and standard deviation of male participants are 73.85 and 14.65 respectively while the posttest mean and standard deviation of female participants are 72.87 and 13.58 respectively. This shows that posttest mean score of both male and female participants are very close. Therefore, gender had no effect on the management of academic stress among participants.

Hypothesis 1. There is no significant effect of treatments (Self-Control therapy) on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions.

Table 3: ANCOVA of effect of treatment (self-control therapy) on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	17643.220 ^a	2	8821.610	207.659	.000	.792
Intercept	150.652	1	150.652	3.546	.062	.032
Pretest	7790.920	1	7790.920	183.397	.000	.627
Group	12876.399	1	12876.399	303.108	.000	.736
Error	4630.459	109	42.481			
Total	626444.000	112				
Corrected Total	22273.679	111				

a. R Squared = .792 (Adjusted R Squared = .788)

Table 3 shows that the effect of treatment ((self-control therapy), $F_{(1, 109)} = 303.11$ $p = 0.000$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.736$, was significant at 0.05. Since the p-value of the F-ratio which is 0.000, is less than 0.05, then the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was a significant effect of treatment on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions. Also, the value of partial eta squared (η_p^2) which is 0.736 indicates that treatment – self-control therapy accounted for 73.6 % of the variance on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions. Figure 1 shows where the effects lie.

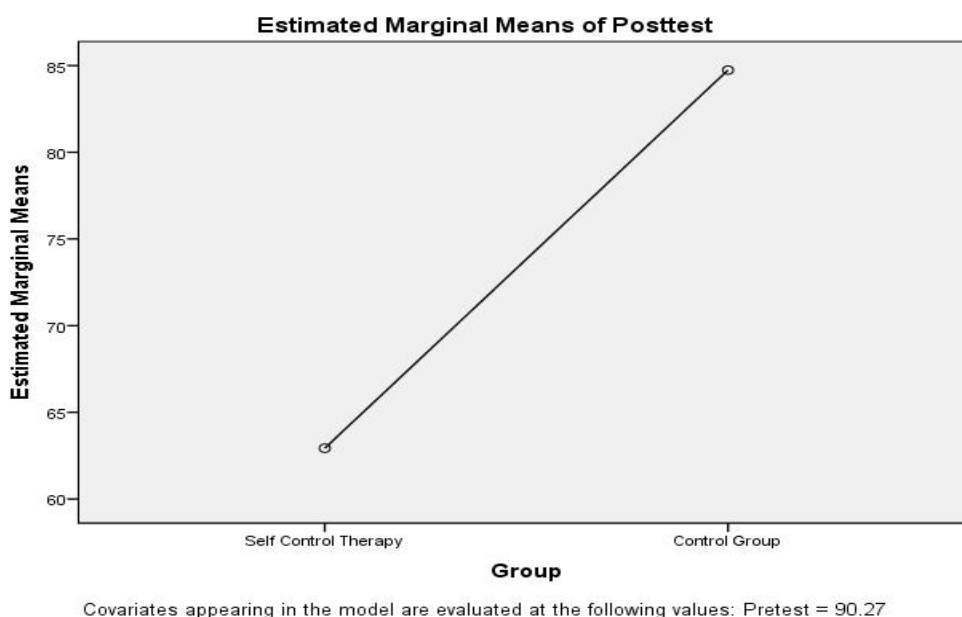


Figure 1: Effect of self-control therapy on the management of students' academic stress

Figure 1 shows that the posttest mean score of participants in the self-control therapy group which is 64.40 is lower than that of participants in the control group which is 83.17. Hence, the treatment (self-control therapy) had significant effect on the management of academic stress among participants.

Hypothesis 2. There is no significant effect of gender on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions.

Table 4: ANCOVA of effect of gender on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4790.939 ^a	2	2395.470	14.935	.000	.215
Intercept	58.221	1	58.221	.363	.548	.003
Pretest	4764.963	1	4764.963	29.708	.000	.214
Gender	24.118	1	24.118	.150	.699	.001
Error	17482.739	109	160.392			
Total	626444.000	112				
Corrected Total	22273.679	111				

a. R Squared = .215 (Adjusted R Squared = .201)

Table 3 shows that the effect of gender, $F_{(1, 109)} = 0.15$, $p = 0.699$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$, was not significant at 0.05. Since the p-value of the F-ratio which is 0.699, is greater than 0.05, then the null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that there was no significant effect of gender on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions. Also, the value of partial eta squared (η_p^2) which is 0.001 indicates that gender



accounted for a mere 0.1 % of the variance on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions.

Discussion

This study examined impact of self-control therapy on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions. Findings from the study revealed that the treatment (self-control therapy) had effect on the management of academic stress among participants and that these effects are not gender based. This is in agreement with the position of Tatjana and Henning (2020) who stated that self-control therapy is cognitive and behavioural skill used by individuals to maintain self-motivation and achieve personal goals. Individual is responsible for using these skills in real-life situations to produce the desired changes. It is useful for a wide range of concerns, including medical, addictions (such as drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, gambling, or eating disorders), occupational (such as study habits, organizational skills, or job productivity), and psychological (such as stress, anxiety, depression, excessive anger, hyperactivity, or shyness).

The first hypothesis which stated that there is no significant effect of treatment (self-control therapy) on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions was rejected. In other words, there was a significant effect of self-control therapy as a counselling intervention on the management of academic stress among students. This finding agreed with the position of Galla and Wood (2015) who stated that individuals with high self-control have better ability to cope with stressful events and were better able to be mindful and think before reacting. It was also discovered that participants with higher self-control were less anxious and had fewer psychosomatic symptoms (Hamama et al,2008). In addition, Duckworth et al, (2018) averred that the goal of self-control strategies is to reduce behavioural excesses. These excesses occur when an individual engages in negative, undesirable behaviour too often. In a nutshell, self-control as a therapy help individuals to become aware of their own patterns of behaviour and to alter those patterns so that the behaviour will be more or less likely to occur.

The second hypothesis which stated that there is no significant effect of gender on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions was not rejected. That is, there was no significant effect of gender on the management of academic stress among students. This finding is at variance with the position of Yikaelo et al (2018) who stated that sex/gender was found to have no significant influence on expressed level of academic stress among students. However, gender has been found to influence expressed level of stress among students. Ebrahim (2016) supported this by saying that females reporting higher levels of academic stress than males, while Mishra (2018) however reported higher academic stress among males in another study. Taken together, findings from this study revealed that management of academic stress among students in tertiary intuitions does always depend on their gender.



Conclusion

This study systematically and empirically examined the effect of treatment (self-control therapy) on the management of academic stress among students in Lagos State tertiary institutions. Generally, self-control was discovered to be a very potent therapy in reducing academic stress among students. When students of any groups are exposed to this therapy, their academic stress level will reduce drastically and their academic performance will be greatly enhanced. With this therapy, students would also be fully assisted and their morale will be boosted to pursue their academic successfully and enhanced poverty alleviation.

Recommendations

Findings from this study therefore, present the following as some recommendations to all stakeholders in the management of academic stress among students in tertiary institutions:

1. There is an urgent need for all institutions of higher learning to establish functional counselling centers and to equip them with modern facility.
2. Tertiary institutions should employ more trained and qualified counsellors.
3. Counsellors in various school should be given opportunity for training and re training
4. These counsellors are expected to make use of self-control therapy in managing stress among students using either online or offline platforms.
5. In conjunction with others, Counsellors can organize lectures, workshops seminars and research on the management of stress among students



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