Academic Stress and Coping Strategies for Information Seeking among Undergraduate Students in Faculty Libraries of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

By

GRACE TAKAI &ABDULKARIM ALIYU BUBE

Abstract

This paper discussed academic stress and coping strategies for information seeking among undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The research questions used sought to find out the causes of academic stress of the students that come to the libraries, information seeking styles the students exhibit during stressful situation in the libraries and the coping strategies the undergraduate students use during information seeking in the libraries. Cross-sectional survey method was used. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The data collected for the study were presented and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage. The study found out that excessive workload is the cause of academic stress, the information seeking style used by the undergraduate students during stressful situation was by reading the textbook in the faculty's libraries and relaxation was the coping strategy used by the undergraduate students during stressful condition in the faculties libraries. It was concluded that academic stress has influence on information seeking among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria that come to the faculties libraries. The study recommended that the work load for undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, should be reduced in order to enable them perform well in their study, Apart from reading textbooks by undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria that come to the faculties libraries with academic stress, other information resources such as websites, databases among others should be used because, through these resources information that can help the students in understanding their field of studies are sought and the undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria should use other stress coping strategies such as seeking professional support, among others in order to reduce the stress face during the use of the library.

Introduction

Stress has become an important topic in academic circle as well as in the society. Just enough stress can retard from actualizing or overcoming a challenge and can have debilitating effects on good health, contributing to and agitating many problems including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, depression and sleep disorder (Ellis, 2008). The experience of stress in humans is universal, but there are also marked individual differences in how stress is experienced. For example, in the library context, students do come to the library with their academic stress such as examination phobia, financial problem, too much of

assignment among others. These stress are believed to have affect the library users concentration during information seeking. This is because for a library user to seek for the right information in order to solve his or her problem, that user needs a mind that is calm and free of worry for him or her to concentrate in his or her information seeking in the library. It is believed that part of the duties of librarians is to provide information, mentor, guide and cancel information seekers so as to get insight information to solve their problems and to make sure that their minds are calm and having little worries.

Stress occurs when individuals are confronted with situations that they perceive as overwhelming and cannot cope with. The experience of stress among undergraduate students is considered normal but "if stress is severe and prolonged, it can reduce academic performance; interfere with a student's ability to participate in and contribute to campus life; and increase the likelihood of substance abuse and other potentially damaging behaviors" (Richlin-Klonsky and Hoe, 2003). Many scholars in the field of behavioural science have carried out extensive research on stress and its outcomes and concluded that the topic

needed more attention (Baker 1994, Rees and Redfern, 2000; Ellision 2004).

Clearly, unresolved academic stress is a problem in Nigeria, and students are not exempted from many of the stressors that general populations face. The student of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria comes from diverse ethnic, religious and social background. These students possess certain degree of liberality and freedom to associate with one another politically, academically and socially. Which when not moderated lead into academic stress? Stress is one of the serious issues that affect university student's life negatively and also reflected in students' social, academic, and mental health.

Problem Statement

On a daily basis, people deal with stressful events in both their personal and work environments including University. Being a freshman can make it even more difficult to handle stress as an undergraduate. Clearly, unresolved stress is a problem in Nigeria, and students are not exempted from many of the stressors that the general population face inters playing with academic stress. An informal conversation with an official from the

academic office of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria revealed increasing number of students withdrawal and request for change of course from professional courses such as Pharmaceutical Sciences, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. According to the official, factors responsible for the problems have remain unresolved since the fact remains that students admitted in any of the courses merited the admission, but along the way they could not cope with the academic demand. What could be the problem have been reported by several authors, like Agolla and Ongori (2009) to include poor study and poor academic performance.

The library as a learning and research environment is there to assist students overcome the issue of poor study and poor academic performance but it suffers neglect by undergraduate students who are supposed to explore and utilize the facilities subscribed and housed for their use. Could it be that the types of resources in the library do not meet the needs of the students or could it be as a result of stress? The library users need a calm mind without worry at all for them to concentrate in their information seeking. But unfortunately, observation coupled with informal interview with some of the students revealed that students in some Faculties in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria come to their faculties and departmental libraries with some kinds of stress. Could it be that the stress was related to worries over excessive workload, examination phobia, and financial problems, among other? Could it be that those stresses lead to the consequences such as withdrawal from the programmes? This condition as reported by Pfeiffer (2012) can interfere with a student's preparation, concentration, and academic performance. This prompted the researcher to find out the causes of academic stress, what are the appropriate strategies to overcome the stress during information seeking among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the causes of academic stress to the undergraduate students using faculties libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

2. What information seeking styles do undergraduate students exhibit during stressful situation in the faculties libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

3. What coping strategies do undergraduate students use during information seeking in the faculties libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria?

4.

Literature Review

The causes of academic stress can be internal or external.

➢ Internal stressors:

Internal stressors are self – generated. Most of the source of stress is rooted in the person's mind which makes it difficult to manage and would entail more work to get rid of. Oftentimes, people suffering from internal stress subconsciously put themselves in stressful situations or feel stressed out about things that are not stressful to begin with. Some of them include negative self esteem, inability to accept uncertainty. Unrealistic expectations, perceived need to excel at all cost, lack of control or autonomy, perfectionism, lack of assertiveness, pessimism & many others.

➢ External stressors:

These are factors which are located outside the body that cause stress. Everybody is exposed to these factors but they react differently to them. While some tolerate these stressors well, some tend to break down on exposure to these stressors. Some external stressors are heavy academic workload, time pressures and demands.

In a study by Conner, *et al* (2009), more than 70 percent of students were reported to often or always feel stressed by their schoolwork, and 56 percent were reported to often or always worry about such things as grades, tests, and college acceptance. Analyses of students' responses to the open-ended question, "Right now in your life, what causes you the most stress?" confirm that academics and schoolwork are major stressors for these youth. Other high frequency answers included the college admissions process, large projects and assignments, and standardized tests. Students highlighted these school-related factors as causing more stress than other life stressors, such as social issues or family life. Answers such as "family pressure," "divorce," and "parent/sibling illness" did not fall into the top 10 most frequent answers at any school. Students' responses demonstrated that many feel that schoolwork dominates their day. On average, students in their study reported spending 3.07 hours on homework each night. This does not include time spent online on social activities, such as chatting with friends, or browsing the Internet.

In practice, however, doing quality work and turning it on time is a challenge that can easily lead to stress, especially when unforeseen events occur. Lecturers expect work to be completed on time. Students may underestimate the amount of time it takes to complete reading and writing assignments, to print out copies of their work, or to travel to school. Missing deadlines, regardless of the reason, is stressful, especially because missing work leads to falling behind. Even well-prepared students will experience stress, especially if they spend a lot of time on assignments but do not receive the grade they expected. While many students will experience school-related stress, it is the ability to cope with the stress that matters. Some consequences of stress are mild, such as occasionally losing a few hours of sleep or skipping a meal while trying to meet a deadline. Serious negative consequences can also occur, however. Stress lowers immunity. It can cause insomnia, especially when sleep is interrupted, inconsistent, or too short. Some students try to relieve stress with drinking alcohol or taking drugs (Singh, 2011). Too much stress can interfere with a student's preparation, concentration, and performance (Pfeiffer, 2012). Fisher (1994) stated that one of the main causes to academic stress is test anxiety. Most graduate and undergraduate students seem to be more emotionally vulnerable due to examinations. Increased anxiety from tests has a debilitating effect on their performance. When information generated by worrying about the test reduces the capacity available for performing the task, the result is that performance breaks down and the result becomes self-confirming (Fisher, 1994). After completing an examination, there is a period of depression when students reflect on their performance and compare it to how their colleagues did. Poor confidence and a perception of poor performance can be an important reason for depression that occurs after examination and no further changes are possible. More emphasis is needed on understanding the impact of examinations on students, on identifying vulnerable individuals, and on the appropriateness of the current examination process. Course overload can also cause students a great deal of stress. Having too many courses in a given semester, that are difficult to do well in, is partly due to rushing through to achieve a goal. Many students will take extra courses so they can graduate early. This can cause students to suffer

psychologically, physically, socially, and educationally.

Coping strategies are the behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that students use to adjust to the changes that occur in their life. Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. Two general coping strategies have been distinguished: problem-solving strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events. Research indicates that people use both types of strategies to combat most stressful events (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). An additional distinction that is often made in the coping literature is between active and avoidant coping strategies. Active coping strategies are either behavioral or psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressor itself or how one thinks about it, whereas avoidant coping strategies lead people into activities (such as alcohol use) or mental states (such as

withdrawal) that keep them from directly addressing stressful events. (Holahan and Moos, 1987). Higgins and Endler (1995) grouped coping strategies into three main classes: task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented. The task-oriented strategy is problem-focused. It involves taking direct action to alter the situation itself to reduce the amount of stress it evokes. In the emotion-oriented strategy, efforts are directed at altering emotional responses to stressors. It also includes attempts to reframe the problem in such a way that it no longer evokes a negative emotional response and elicits less stress (Mattlin, 1990). Finally, avoidance – oriented coping includes strategies such as avoiding the situation, denying its existence, or losing hope (Lazarus andFolkman, 1984).

Research has shown that students do not have specific coping strategies they adopt a general response to enable them to cope with specific academic situation. A survey on Psychological Morbidity Sources of Stress and Coping Strategies among Undergraduate Medical Students of Nepal reported that, the coping strategies used by the students were positive reframing, planning, acceptance, active coping, self-distraction and emotional support (

Streeramareddy, *et al.* 2007). In another study by Kausar, (2010) on perceive stress, academic workload and use of coping strategies by university students , found out that active practical coping strategies were used the most followed by avoidance focus coping, religious coping and distracting coping by the student.

Information seeking means different things in different contexts. In the simplest terms, information seeking involves the search, retrieval, recognition, and application of meaningful content. This search may be explicit or implicit, the retrieval may be the result of specific strategies or serendipity, the resulting information may be embraced or rejected, the entire experience may be carried through to a logical conclusion or aborted in midstream, and there may be a million other potential results (Kingrey, 2002).

Information seeking is communication, and communication is more than the exchange of substantive data, it is a relationship in which participants share their ideas about themselves, their cohorts, and others outside of the relationship.

Case (2002) stated that information seeking takes place when a person has knowledge stored in long term memory that precipitates an interest in related information as well as the motivation to acquire it. It can also take place when a person recognizes a gap in their knowledge that may motivate that person to acquire new information. Ingwersen and Jarvelin (2005) stated that information seeking is a form of human behaviour that involves seeking for information by means of the active examination of information sources or information retrieval systems to satisfy the need, or to solve a problem. Information seeking is the process or activity of attempting to obtain information in both human and technological contexts. Information seeking has been viewed as a cognitive exercise, as a social and cultural exchange, as discrete strategies applied when confronting uncertainty, and as a basic condition of humanity in which all individuals exist.

Methodology

Cross-sectional survey research method was adopted. The population of this study comprised of undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. The total number of these students in the twelve

faculties of the university was thirty-three thousand three hundred and forty-two (33,342) as obtained from Management Information System (MIS) Unit of the University (2015). The researcher used 35% of the 12 Faculties arriving at four Faculties as established by Kalmanas cited in Ibrahim (2013) who said that if the population of the study is large 35% to 42% of the population can be used. The four Faculties were selected using simple random sampling technique. In choosing the subjects of the study, the researcher used 5% of the respondents from the four selected Faculties arriving at three hundred and twenty one subjects (321). The 5% was used because Mohammed (2015) established that, if the population of the study is large, 5% of that population can be used. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection.

Findings

Table 1 Causes of Academic Stress to the Undergraduate Students Using Faculties Libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Causes of Academic Stress	Faculties								Total	
	Agric.		Env. Des.		Law		Med.			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Excessive workload	14	4.7	78	26.0	42	14.0	60	19.9	194	64.5
Inadequate time for the submission of assignment	2	0.7	3	1.0	13	4.3	9	3.0	27	9.0
Too much assignment within a semester/course	15	5.0	30	10.0	15	5.0	16	5.3	76	25.2
Studying for exam	12	4.0	20	6.6	28	9.3	19	6.3	79	26.2
Financial problem	11	3.7	24	8.0	37	12.3	32	10.6	104	34.6
Peer group pressure	2	0.7	25	8.3	7	2.3	11	3.7	45	15.0

Table 1 presented the causes of academic stress of students that come to the faculty's library. From the table, it was discovered that majority of the respondents 194 (64.5%) agreed that excessive workload are the causes of academic stress. This is in line with the finding of Robotham (2008) and Pfeiffer (2012) who reported that academic stress could be attributed to too much of course work. The implication of this finding

is that excessive workload may eventually lead to poor academic performance because the student may likely not concentrate and their grade may drop. Which could lead to the consequences such as withdrawal from the programme or delay in graduation? However, only 45 (15.0%) of the respondents agreed that peer group pressure is the cause of academic stress.

Table 4.2: Information Seeking for Undergraduate Students Use during Stressful Situation in the Faculties Libraries in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Information Seeking Styles	Faculties								Total	
	Agric.		Env. Des.		Law		Med.			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
By reading the textbook in the library	14	4.7	56	18.6	35	11.6	62	20.6	167	55.5
By snapping the information from the textbook in the library	0	0.0	2	0.7	0	0.0	5	1.7	7	2.3
By asking the librarian through verbal interaction	2	0.7	10	3.3	0	0.0	4	1.3	16	5.3
By browsing the information from the internet	7	2.3	11	3.7	9	3.0	10	3.3	37	12.3

Table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents' information seeking style for their academic work during stressful situation is by reading the textbook in the library represented by 167 (55.5%) response scores for the four Faculties. While 7(2.3%) seek for information by snapping the information from the textbook in the library. However, there is need for the students to involve themselves in verbal interaction with the librarians to ease their stressful level because the librarians can help them get the rightful information that they need at that particular time.

Table 3: Coping Strategies Used by Undergraduate Students Using Faculties Libraries

Coping Strategies	Faculties								Total	
	Agric.		Env. Des.		Law		Med.			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Self-reliance	0	0.0	7	2.3	11	3.7	9	3.0	27	9.0
Seeking professional support	3	1.0	5	1.7	9	3.0	0	0.0	17	5.6
Relax during the period of stress	4	1.3	63	20.9	15	5.0	41	13.6	123	40.9
Self-distraction	2	0.7	24	7.9	0	0.0	8	2.7	34	11.3

Table 3 showed that majority of the respondents for the four faculties 123 (40.9%) relax during the period when they are stressful. This is in line with the findings of Tafreshi and Hagani (2007) on their research on experienced stressors and coping strategies among Iranian nursing students, majority of the students used relaxing strategy to cope with stress. While the least is 17 (5.6%) seek professional support as coping strategies. The implication of this finding is that if students relax during period of stress, it will be of help to them because it will make them to concentrate well in their academic work.

Conclusion

From the analysis and summary of the findings of this study, it was concluded that academic stress has influence on information seeking among undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria that come to the faculties libraries. Excessive workload was found to be the cause of academic stress among the students. The information seeking style the students used was through reading the textbook. The coping strategy used by the students was to relax during the period of stress. Despite the academic stress, undergraduate students still seek for information for their academic work.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The work load for undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, should be reduced in order to enable them perform well in their study.

2. Apart from reading textbooks by undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria that come to the faculties libraries with academic stress, other information resources such as websites, databases among others should be used because, through these resources information that can help the students in understanding their field of studies are sought.

3. The undergraduate students in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria should use other stress coping strategies such as seeking professional support, among others in order to reduce the stress face during the use of the library.

References

Agolla, J. E. and Ongori, H. (2009). An Assessment of Academic Stress among Undergraduate Students: The Case of University of Botswana. *Educational Research and Review,* 4(2), 63-70.

Baker, L.M (1994). The Information Needs and Information – Seeking Pattern of Women Coping with and Adjusting to Multiple Sclerosis. Retrieved from http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitized theses.Accessed on 16/09/2015.

Case, D.O (2002). *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs and Behavior*. San Diego, CA: Academic press.

Conner, J., Pope, D., and Galloway, M. (2009).Success with Less Stress. *Health and Learning*, 67(4), 54-58.

Ellis, M. (2008). How Stress Affects Academic Performance. Retrieved on from http://www.healthnews.com/en/news/how-stress-affects-academic-performances/. Accessed on 4/6/2016.

Ellison, K. W. (2004). Stress and the Police Officer, 2nd Ed., Charles C. Thomas Publishers, Springfield, IL, 71-86.

Fisher, S. (1994). *Stress in academic life.* New York: Open University Press.

Folkman, S. and Lazarus, R.S. (1980). An Analysis of Coping in a Middle-aged Community Sample.*Journal of Health and Social Behaviour,* 21: 219-239.

Higgins, J. E. and Endler, N. (1995).Coping, Life Stress, Psychological and Somatic Distress.
European Journal of Personality, 9: 253-270.

Holahan,C.J. and Moss,.R.H. (1987). Risk Resistance and Psychological Distress: A
Longitudinal Analysis with Adult and Children.*Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 91: 3-*
13.

Ibrahim, U. (2013). Techniques for Writing and Presentation of Thesis/Dissertation: A Companion Guide for Postgraduate Students in Nigerian University System. Zaria:Ahmadu Bello University Press.

Ingwersen,P. and Jarvelin,.K. (2005). The Turn: Integration of Information Seeking and

Retrieval in Context. Dordrecht, Netherland: Springer. Retrieved from http://www.webology.org/2006/3n3/bookreview/html. Accessed on 3/5/2016.

Kausar, R. (2010). Perceived Stress, Academic Workload and Use of Coping Strategies by
University Students.*Journal of Behavioural Science, vol.20. Retrieved* from
http://www.psycdweeb.weebly.com/uploads/3/5/2/0/3520924/perceive-stress-and-college-
workload. Accessed on 1/5/2016.

Kingrey, K. P. (2002). Concepts of Information Seeking and their Presence in the Practical
Library Literature.*Library Philosophy and Practice,* vol.4, No 2. Retrieved from
http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/-mboln/kingrey.html. Accessed on 1/11/2015.

Lazarus,.R.S. andFolkman,.S (1984). *Stress Appraisal and Coping.* New York: Springer.

Mattlin, J.A. (1990). Situational Determinants of Coping and Coping Effectiveness. *Journal of Health & Social Behaviour, 3(1)*: 103-122.

Mohammed, H. (2015). Application of Knowledge Management Tools to Library Operations and Services in Northern States of Nigeria University Libraries. A

Research Proposal (Ph.D.), Department of Library and Information Science Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Pfeiffer, D. (2012). Academic and Environmental Stress among Undergraduate College Students: A Literature Review. Retrieved from

http://www.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2001/2001/pfeifferd.pdf. Accessed on 5/9/2015.

Rees, C. J. andRedfern, D. (2000). Recognising the Perceived Causes of Stress – A Training and

Development Perspective.*Ind.andCommer.Train.* 32(4): 120-127.

Richlin-Klonsky, J. and Hoe, R. (2003).Sources and Levels of Stress among UCLA Students. Student Affairs Briefing, 2. Retrieved from http://www.research.easybib.com/......search?....%22UCLA. Accessed on 2/5/2016.

Robotham, D. (2008). Stress among Higher Education Students: Towards a Research Agenda. *Higher Education, 56*, 735-746.

Singh, B.P (2011). Study and Analysis of Academic Stress of B.Ed students. *International Journal of Educational Planning &Administration.1(*2):119 – 127.

Sreeramareddy, C. J, Shankar, P.R, Binu,V.S., Mukhopadhyay, C., Ray, B. andMeneze,R.G. (2007). Psychological Morbidity Sources of Stress and Coping Strategies among

Undergraduate Medical Students of Nepal. Retrieve fromhttp://www.biomedcentral.com. Accessed on 28th/08/2015.

Tafreshi, M. and Hagani, H. (2007). Experienced Stressors and Coping Strategies among Iranian

Nursing Students.Retrieved from htt://www.biomedcentral.com. Accessed on 10/5/2015.