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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC STRESS AND DEPRESSION AMONG STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA*

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between academic stress and depression among students of Federal universities in South-west, Nigeria. A descriptive survey of correlational type was employed for the study. A simple random sampling method was used to select 420 respondents from six Federal universities in Southwest, Nigeria, but 398 were properly retrieved and analyzed. Data collection was conducted using the "Academic Stress and Depression Questionnaire (ASDQ)." The findings revealed high levels of academic stress and depression among respondents in Federal universities in South-west, Nigeria. A notable relationship was found between academic stress and depression among respondents. Furthermore, variables such as gender, age, class level, and course of study significantly predict academic stress and depression among respondents. It is therefore recommended that students should utilize guidance and counselling services available at their universities when dealing with academic stress, as this can help in preventing depression and its related consequences.

Key words: *Academic stress, Depression, Students, Universities, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

Education requires long-term learning and rigorous training, which can be particularly demanding for undergraduate students. The transition from high school to university marks a critical stage in young adulthood, and many students may not be fully prepared to manage the psychological, emotional, and academic pressures of higher education. During this period, they are expected to acquire the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes necessary for lifelong career success. However, students often experience stress due to a heavy workload, intense competition, and

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the pressure to meet high parental expectations. These challenges limit their participation in extracurricular activities, as most of their time is devoted to academics, further heightening their stress levels.

Stress is an unavoidable part of everyday life, occurring when an individual faces situations that challenge or threaten their well-being. Stillion, McDowell, and May (2024) defined stress as the result of a dynamic interaction between an individual and his/her environment, where the person perceives the demands of the situation as overwhelming or beyond his or her control. It is both a situation and the tension it generates, arising when a person sees a gap between environmental demands and his ability to meet them, viewing the situation as harmful, threatening, or uncontrollable. Stress triggers physical and emotional reactions, particularly in students facing challenging events (Ibrahim & Zubair, 2023). This often leads to symptoms such as frequent illness, irritability, academic decline, experimentation with drugs or alcohol, and sleeplessness.

Academic stress arises from the pressure students' encounter within academic settings, where they are expected to meet various demands, often leading to anxiety and negatively impacting their studies. Nasir and Mufith (2010) described academic stress as a negative experience resulting from the numerous expectations placed on students, primarily due to the challenges of university life. The stress experienced by students typically originates from four sources: physical demands, task demands, role demands, and interpersonal demands. Stress can have both positive and negative effects. Eustress, the positive type of stress, is not only helpful but can also be enjoyable and essential (Wang & Salami, 2022; Baumel, 2024, p. 23). However, distress, the negative form of stress, can be detrimental if not properly managed. The high levels of academic stress students experience are often due to two main reasons: their limited exposure to difficult situations, as these challenges are relatively new, and their lack of coping skills to handle demanding circumstances. Without effective coping mechanisms, students may face negative mental health consequences, including self-harm.

Academic stress is prevalent among university students, with its severity shaped by factors such as gender, age, academic level, and course of study. When students encounter intense academic stress, they often feel overwhelmed, regardless of these factors**.** According to Omoniyi and Igbokwe (2022), 54.6% of engineering students reported high academic stress, compared to 20.6% in education and 32% in social sciences and humanities. Contributing factors include excessive assignments, heavy workloads, peer competition, fear of failure, strained relationships with teachers or peers, poor time management, financial issues, and high expectations from parents (Mba, 2021, p. 23). These academic pressures, combined with mental health struggles, can increase students' risk of depression. Depression is a common mental health disorder characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness in response to life's challenges. It is a mood disorder that is known as major depressive disorder or clinical depression. Oladele and Oladele (2016) note that individuals with depression may experience changes in sleep patterns and appetite, a loss of interest in academic pursuits, fluctuations in

energy, difficulty in decision-making, and at times, thoughts of death that could lead to suicidal behaviours. Additionally, depression can alter a person's perspective, making them more pessimistic, critical of themselves, and more likely to attribute blame for negative occurrences to themselves (Popoola & Ogundipe, 2022).

Ndu and Eze (2022) reported an increase incidence of depression among students in Nigeria. Jayanthi, Thirunavukarasu, and Rajkumar (2015) found that students facing academic stress are more prone to depression compared to those who access guidance and counselling services. Rahul and Vikas (2018) established a significant relationship between levels of academic stress and student depression. Ola and Akanbi (2023) reported that over 75% of students in Lagos State experienced depression, primarily linked to low self-esteem, chronic stress, and academic anxiety. Furthermore, Oku, Owoaje, Oku and Ikpeme (2015) indicated that 65% of medical students at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, had poor mental health, with 45% to 83% of them suffering from depression and at a high risk for suicidal thoughts. Additionally, studies by Omoniyi and Igbokwe (2022) and Popoola and Ogundipe (2022) emphasised a notable relationship between academic stress and depression among students in India.

Numerous studies, including those by Ohayon (2014) and Ajidahun (2022), showed that students experiencing academic stress were more vulnerable to increased level of depression. Furthermore, Olaseni (2018) and Udo and Eze (2023) identified a significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal depressive symptoms. Similarly, Singh and Pathak (2017) observed that rising academic stress correlates with increased depression levels. This relationship may vary across different age groups and religious backgrounds. Moreover, Chung and Young (2012) pointed out that factors such as living conditions and academic standing significantly impact academic stress and depression among students in both the United States and South Korea. Nasrin, Mohsen, Rez, and Shabnam (2010) explored the interplay between academic stress, depression, and mental health among 265 students at Tehran University, finding that academic stress was the strongest predictor of depression, with age, gender, and field of study also showing significant correlations with both academic stress and depression. In addition, Rahul, and Vikas (2018) noted that student depression significantly influences academic stress levels.

Empirical research on academic stress among students in Nigeria has highlighted several influencing factors, including gender, age, class level, and course of study (Sheetal & Srivastava, 2020). Studies examining gender differences in academic stress show mixed results; some suggest that female students experience higher stress levels than their male counterparts, often due to societal expectations, traditional gender roles, and differing coping mechanisms. Age also significantly affects stress levels, with younger students, especially those in their first and second years, reporting greater stress due to the challenges of transitioning from secondary school to university (Oji *et al*., 2021). Also, class level and academic discipline are important predictors of academic stress. Students in their third and fourth years often face heightened stress due to demanding coursework, research projects, and the pressures of graduation and job searching. Furthermore, the field of study plays a

crucial role, as students in medical, engineering, and social sciences report higher stress levels compared to those in education and humanities. This difference is largely attributed to the intensive nature of the curricula and the high expectations associated with professional courses like medicine, engineering, and social sciences (Stillion, McDowell & May, 2024, p. 170).

Empirical studies examining depression among Nigerian students have identified various contributing factors, including gender, age, class level, and academic discipline (Oladele & Oladele, 2016). Research indicates a high prevalence of depression in this demographic, with no significant gender differences in depression rates; however, female students typically report higher anxiety levels than their male peers. This difference may be linked to a range of social, biological, and psychological influences. Age also plays a role, as younger students tend to experience slightly higher rates of moderate to severe depression, likely due to the challenges involved in transitioning to university life (Ajayi, 2020). Additionally, class level and field of study impact depression rates, with students in higher academic tiers facing greater stress from demanding coursework and the pressures associated with impending graduation, leading to an increase in depression cases (Arslan, *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, those in rigorous programmes such as medicine, social sciences, and engineering report higher levels of depression compared to students in humanities and education, which can be attributed to the intense nature of their curricula and heightened expectations.

Despite numerous studies mentioned in this work and to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there have been no studies specifically addressing the relationship between academic stress and depression among students at Federal universities in South-west Nigeria. This study sought to fill this gap in the literature by examining the relationship between academic stress and depression among students in Federal universities in South-west Nigeria.

2. Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study was to investigate relationship between academic stress and depression among students of Federal Universities in South-west Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

a. determine the levels of academic stress and depression among students of Federal universities in South-west, Nigeria.

b. determine to what extent do gender, age, class level, and course of study significantly predict academic stress among students of Federal universities in South-west Nigeria.

c. determine to what extent do gender, age, class level, and course of study significantly predict depression among students of Federal universities in South-west Nigeria.

Research Questions

(1) What is the level of academic stress among students of Federal Universities in South-west Nigeria?

(2) What is the level of depression among students of Federal Universities in South-west Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

(1) There is no significant relationship between academic stress and depression among students of Federal Universities in South-west Nigeria.

(2) Gender, age, class level, and course of study will not significantly predict academic stress among students of Federal universities in South-west Nigeria.

(3) Gender, age, class level, and course of study will not significantly predict depression among students of Federal universities in South-west Nigeria.

3. Methodology

Research Design

According to Adeyemi (2023), a research design serves as a thorough framework or strategy that researchers create to address their research questions or objectives, guiding all phases from data collection to analysis and interpretation. In this study, a correlational research design was adopted to examine the relationship between academic stress and depression among students at Federal universities in South-west Nigeria.

Population, sample and sampling procedure

The study's population included 215,927 students from federal universities in Southwest Nigeria, as reported by the National Universities Commission (2023). The population size was increased by the addition of new universities and affiliations with colleges of education. To ensure a representative sample, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Following the guidelines by Research Advisor (2006), a sample size of 383 respondents was considered adequate for this population size. An additional 10% was included to offset potential non-responses, resulting in a final sample of 420 respondents.

In the first stage, a purposive sampling method was used to choose one university from each state in Southwest Nigeria, based on their respective student populations. The selected universities for this study were the University of Ibadan in Oyo State, the University of Lagos in Lagos State, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in Osun State, the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA) in Ondo State, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) in Ogun State, and the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) in Ekiti State.

In the second stage, a proportional sampling method was used to select a representative sample of 420 students from the universities previously mentioned in Nigeria. The breakdown of respondents was as follows: the University of Lagos contributed 161 respondents, Obafemi Awolowo University had 62 respondents, the Federal University of Technology, Akure included 40 respondents, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta had 43 respondents, the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti had 20 respondents, and the University of Ibadan accounted for 94 respondents.

Table 1. Proportional Percentage of Students in the Targeted Institutions in Southwest Nigeria

S/N	State	Institution	Target Population	Sample
1	Lagos	UNILAG	57,000	161
2	Oyo	Unibadan	33,420	94
3	Osun	OAU	21,954	62
4	Ondo	FUTA	14,026	40
5	Ekiti	FUOYE	7,425	20
6	Ogun	FUNAAB	15,095	43
TOTAL			**148,920**	**420**

Source: National Universities Commission, 2023

In the third stage, a simple random sampling method, known as the "dip hat" technique, was used for sample selection. This approach guarantees that every sample has an equal probability of being selected, thereby providing an unbiased representation of the total population. In total, 420 students were selected for the study.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were adapted by the researchers, who modified all the items. The questionnaire was based on the Students' Academic Stress Scale, initially developed by Sun, Dunne, Hou, X, and Xu in 2011, along with the Beck Depression Scale developed by Aaron Beck in 1961. As a result, the instrument was titled the "Academic Stress and Depression Questionnaire (ASDQ)." It comprised three sections: Section A collected demographic data from the respondents, while Section B contained twenty items aimed at measuring the level of academic stress among students. Section C included twenty items focused on assessing the level of depression among students. Both Sections B and C utilised a four-point Likert scale format with response options of Strongly Agree = 4points, Agree = 3points, Disagree = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree = 1 point.

Psychometric Properties of the instrument

Validity: To assess the instrument's validity, the researchers gave it to two experts from the Department of Psychology, one lecturer from the Department of Sociology, and two lecturers from the Department of Social Work at the University of Ibadan for content validity. The insights and suggestions provided by these experts were incorporated to modify specific items in the instrument.

Reliability: To determine the reliability of the instrument, the researchers utilized the test-retest method with a sample of 15 students from the Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics at the Federal University of Health Sciences, Osun State. This involved administering the questionnaire on two occasions, separated by a two-week interval. The scores obtained from both sessions were then analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlation coefficient for the Academic Stress Scale was found to be 0.82, while the Depression Scale yielded a coefficient of 0.87, both significant at the 0.05 alpha level.

Procedure for Scoring

The scale used in this study consisted of a total of 80 items, with each section on academic stress and depression had 20 items (20 items × 4 points = 80). The minimum possible score for Sections B and C was 20 (20 items × 1 point = 20). Scores varied from a maximum of 80 to a minimum of 20, resulting in a range of 60 points. The midpoint of this range was calculated as 30 (60 divided by 2). To determine the cutoff point, the midpoint was subtracted from the highest possible score, resulting in a cutoff score of 50 (80 minus 30). Therefore, percentages were used to determine the levels of academic stress and depression among students at Federal Universities in Southwest Nigeria. Scores above 50% indicated high levels of academic stress and depression, while scores below 50% indicated low levels among students.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was subjected to statistical analysis, using percentages to assess the levels of academic stress and depression among students at federal universities in South-west Nigeria. Hypothesis one was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, while hypotheses two and three were tested using Multiple Regression Analysis. All statistical analyses were tested at a significance level of 0.05.

Results

Out of the 420 questionnaires distributed to participants, 396 were successfully retrieved and used for data analysis. The following section shows the results obtained from the respondents, including frequency and percentage distributions.

Research Question 1: What is the level of academic stress among students of federal universities in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of the Level of Academic Stress of the Respondents

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	154	38.9
High	242	61.1
Total	**396**	**100.0**

Table 2 revealed that 154 respondents (38.9%) reported low level of academic stress, whereas 242 respondents (61.1%) indicated high level of academic stress. This finding implied that most students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria were experiencing academic stress.

Research Question 2: What is the level of depression among students of federal universities in Southwest Nigeria?

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of the Level of Depression of the Respondents

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	120	30.3
High	276	69.7
Total	**396**	**100.0**

Table 3 showed that 120 respondents (30.3%) reported low level of depression, while 276 respondents (69.7%) indicated high level of depression. This implied that most students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria were experiencing high level of depression.

Hypotheses Testing

Three null hypotheses were established and examined in this study. These hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression Analysis statistical techniques, with a significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and depression among students of federal universities in Southwest, Nigeria

Table 4. Pearson 'r' Showing Relationship between Respondents' Academic Stress and Depression

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. r-value	p. value
Academic Stress	396	65.40	7.69	394	.512*	.000
Depression	396	68.58	8.78			

*Significant, p<0.05

Table 4 indicated that the calculated r-value was .512, accompanied by a p-value of .000, which was below the 0.05 significance level. Since the p-value of 0.000 was less than the alpha level of 0.05, this showed that was a significant relationship between academic stress and depression among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria. Thus, this implied that academic stress was a significant factor that increases the level of depression among students at Federal universities in Southwest, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: Gender, age, class level, and course of study will not significantly predict academic stress among students of federal universities in Southwest Nigeria

Table 5a. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.770[a]	.710	.709	9.618

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Class level, and Course of study

Table 5b. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	8750.37	4	2187.59	37.69*	.000[b]
Residual	22693.58	391	58.04		
Total	31443.95	395			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Stress
b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Class level, and Course of study

Table 5c. Regression Coefficient showing Gender, Age, Class level, and Course of study of the Respondents

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	32.78	9.25		3.54	.000
Gender	2.88	.869	.177	3.31	.001
Age	1.12	.560	.312	2.01	.027
Class level	4.12	.798	.128	5.16	.005
Course of Study	6.34	.716	.228	8.85	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Stress

Table 5a presented a Multiple R of .770, an R square of .710, and an Adjusted R square of .709. The adjusted R square value of .709 translates to 70.9%, which indicated the degree of association among the measured variables. This finding implied that the independent variables (gender, age, class level, and course of study), when analyzed collectively, predict the extent of their influence on the dependent variable.

In Table 5b, the ANOVA results showed an F-value of 37.69 and a p-value of .000, which was less than the 0.05 significance level; thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that gender, age, class level, and course of study significantly predict academic stress among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 5c presented the contributions of different variables (gender, age, class level, and course of study) to academic stress. Gender had a Beta weight (β) of .177, $t = 3.31$, $p<0.05$; age had a Beta weight (β) of .312, $t = 2.01$, $p<0.05$; class level had a Beta weight (β) of .128, $t = 5.16$, $p<0.05$; and course of study had a Beta weight (β) of .228, $t = 8.85$, $p<0.05$. These findings indicated that gender, age, class level, and course of study significantly predict academic stress among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria. Among these factors, age was identified as having the most significant impact on predicting academic stress, followed by course of study, gender, and class level.

Hypothesis Three: Gender, age, class level and course of study will not significantly predict depression among students of federal universities in Southwest, Nigeria

Table 6a. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.778[a]	.720	.719	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Class level and Course of Study

Table 6b. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	7089.075	4	1772.268	22.92*	
Residual	30298.652	391	77.292		
Total	37387.727	395			

a. Dependent Variable: Depression
b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Class level and Course of Study

Table 6c. Regression Coefficient showing Gender, Age, Class level, Course of Study of the Respondents

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	67.58	2.70		25.01	
Gender	.390	1.00	.121	.388	.018
Age	.484	.647	.341	.747	.045
Class level	.710	.922	.242	.770	.042
Course of Study	.908	.828	.393	1.097	.023

a. Dependent Variable: Depression

Table 6a presented a Multiple R of .778 and an adjusted R square of .719, equivalent to 71.9%, indicating the degree of association among the measured variables. This finding indicated that the independent variables (gender, age, class level, and course of study) collectively show a significant relationship with depression.

In Table 6b, the ANOVA results revealed an F-value of 22.92 and a p-value of .003, which was lower than the 0.05 significance level. Because the calculated p-value was less than the significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that gender, age, class level, and course of study were significant predictors of depression among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 6c showed the contributions of various variables (gender, age, class level, and course of study) to depression. Gender had a Beta weight (β) of .121, t = .388, p>0.05; age had a Beta weight (β) of .341, t = .747, p>0.05; class level had a Beta weight (β) of .242, t = .770, p>0.05; and course of study had a Beta weight (β) of .393, t =1.097, p>0.05. These findings implied that gender, age, class level, and course of study significantly predict depression among students at federal

universities in Southwest Nigeria. Among these variables, course of study had the most significant contribution to predicting depression, followed by age, class level, and gender.

4. Discussion

The findings revealed that a significant number of students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria experience high level of academic stress. This stress may arise from the pressure to achieve excellent grades, fulfill the expectations of parents or teachers, or maintain a high GPA (Grade Point Average), which can result in stress and anxiety. Furthermore, the apprehension about not meeting academic objectives or failing courses can negatively impact their mental and physical health, as well as their overall well-being. This observation is consistent with the research by Cole, Nonterah, Utsey, Hook, Hubbard, Opare-Henaku, and Fischer (2022), which found that numerous students in India encountered failures and frustrations due to academic stress in educational settings.

The findings revealed that many students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria experience high level of depression. This can be linked to academic pressures, such as heavy workloads, high expectations, the drive to achieve good grades, increasing tuition fees, living costs, and worries about financial stability. Students who feel overwhelmed by academic demands - like lectures, numerous assignments, examination stress, and frustrations from academic setbacks - are especially vulnerable to depression. This aligns with Barikani's (2009) research, which noted heightened depression levels among students due to living away from home and adapting to new academic programmes.

The findings revealed a significant relationship between academic stress and depression among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria. This relationship may be associated with the fear of failure, which can lead to academic stress and subsequently foster depression. Additionally, unrealistic expectations and perfectionism can result in both academic stress and depression in students. Those who strive for perfection in their academic pursuits are often at a greater risk of experiencing depression. This aligns with the work of Arul *et al.* (2015), who highlighted that students facing high levels of academic stress are more prone to depression. Fares *et al.* (2016) indicated that high levels of academic stress negatively impacted students' emotional burnout, further contributing to depression.

The findings revealed that gender, age, class level, and course of study were significant predictors of academic stress among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria. Males and females encounter different societal pressures, with females often experiencing higher stress levels due to the need to balance academic and social expectations. Younger students, particularly those making the transition from high school, struggle to adjust to university demands, while older students face additional responsibilities such as work and family, which contribute to increased stress. As students advance to higher class levels, they are faced with a heavier academic workload and greater pressure to succeed, resulting in increased stress levels. Competitive programmes create an atmosphere of intense peer rivalry, further

intensifying stress. These results are consistent with Sheetal and Srivastava (2020), who emphasized a significant relationship between gender and academic stress among students. Additionally, Oji, Ondieki, and Ouko (2021) found noteworthy links between age, class level, and academic stress among students at County University. Moreover, Stillion, McDowell, and May (2024) reported a significant association between course of study and academic stress among students in India.

The findings indicated that gender, age, class level, and course of study were significant predictors of depression among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria. Gender influences depression through various social pressures, coping mechanisms, and biological factors. Younger students, especially those transitioning from high school, are particularly vulnerable to depression, while older students face heightened risks due to added responsibilities and life stresses. The probability of experiencing depression also differs by class level; lower-level students often deal with adjustment difficulties, while upper-level students face increased academic pressure. Demanding courses, such as those in medicine, sciences, or engineering, are often associated with higher rates of depression due to the considerable academic workload. Oladele and Oladele (2016) identified a significant relationship between gender, age, and depression among students with learning disabilities in Oyo State. Ajayi (2020) noted a significant link between class level and depression among university students in Nigeria, and Arslan, Ayranci, Unsal, and Arslantas (2020) also found a significant association between course of study and depression among university students.

5. Counselling Implications

Counselling implications aimed at reducing high levels of academic stress and depression among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria should focus on the early identification and intervention of at-risk students. It is essential to develop comprehensive mental health programmes that include stress management workshops, mindfulness training, and resilience-building activities. Additionally, providing resources for stress management, such as guides and online tools, can empower students to effectively cope with their stress. Training faculty members to recognize signs of stress and depression, as well as to refer students to appropriate counseling services, is crucial. Ensuring that counseling services are easily accessible and well-promoted will encourage students to utilize these resources. Furthermore, implementing regular mental health check-ins and offering ongoing support for students identified as experiencing high levels of stress or depression can help monitor their progress and provide continuous assistance.

The findings indicated that age, gender, class level, and course of study are significant predictors of academic stress and depression among students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria. Counselling services should create age-specific programmes to help younger students adjust to university life, while also providing support for older students in balancing their academic and personal responsibilities. Gender-specific interventions are necessary to tackle the unique societal pressures that male and female students face. New students might benefit from orientation

programmes and continuous support, while upper-level students need strategies to manage academic pressures effectively. It is vital to consider the impact of living conditions on mental health, as on-campus students may require stress-relief activities, and off-campus students may need assistance with commuting issues and resource access. Specialized counselling for students in rigorous programmes can help manage their unique stressors. Additionally, forming peer support groups can help reduce stress related to competition. In summary, a holistic and proactive counselling approach that is accessible to all students is essential for alleviating academic stress and depression.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's findings indicated that students at federal universities in Southwest Nigeria face high levels of academic stress and depression. It was established that there was a significant relationship between academic stress and depression among these students. Furthermore, factors such as gender, age, class level, and course of study were identified as having significant associations with both academic stress and depression among students in this region.

Sequel to the findings and discussions from the study; the following recommendations were made:

1. Students should engage in stress reduction programmes coordinated by the school management, incorporating counselling, workshops, and mindfulness training to effectively cope with academic stress.
2. Students struggling with depression should be supported with psychological support, therapy, and counselling services, including mental health counselling, provided by professionals at the school.
3. Students should take advantage of guidance and counselling services when dealing with academic stress, as this can aid in preventing depression and its related effects in federal universities in Southwest Nigeria.
4. Students should prioritize self-care, stress reduction, and a healthy lifestyle, considering their gender, age, class level, and course of study, to effectively manage academic stress and succeed in university.
5. Students should receive support from guidance counsellors to manage depression and enhance mental well-being through coping strategies and counselling, tailored to their age, gender, class level, course of study, and unique characteristics.

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