

An Investigation into Academic Stress and Coping Strategies Among Students at Dambai College of Education

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Abstract

The study examines the academic stressors and coping strategies among student teachers at Dambai College of Education (DACE) in Ghana. College students typically manage various responsibilities, such as academics, extracurricular pursuits, and personal commitments, which frequently result in considerable stress. The study was guided by the academic stressors affecting students' performance and the coping strategies employed by students of Dambai College of Education to overcome the stressors. A descriptive survey design was used, involving 110 randomly sampled students from DACE. Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire and examined with descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. The findings reveal that the most significant stressors include inadequate practical course facilities, high expectations, and revising for quizzes and exams. Coping strategies identified include physical exercise, social support, and effective time management, with social support from friends and loved ones being the most effective. The study highlights the need for improved support systems and resources to mitigate academic stress and enhance students' well-being and academic performance at DACE.

Keywords: *Academic Stressors, Coping Strategies, College Students, Education*

Introduction

The classroom serves as a pivotal component of the collegiate experience for students, complemented by their involvement in various extracurricular activities. The 2016 American Time Use Survey by the U.S. Department of Labour reported that full-time college and university students dedicate approximately 3.3 hours each day to academic activities. In addition, these students dedicate approximately 2.4 hours daily to employment and engage in leisure and sports activities for about 4.1 hours each day. A study by Amponsah and Mensah (2018) indicates that circumstances within the colleges of education in Ghana exhibit comparable trends, highlighting the significance of both academic and non-academic engagements in shaping the overall student experience. On average, students in colleges read at least eight courses per semester. The demand on the college student is not only academic time in the lecture hall, but they also engage in other important social activities.

Teacher training should be viewed as a practical professional qualification, requiring student teachers to apply the theories and methods learned in their coursework to real-world classroom environments (International Task Force on Teachers for Education [TTF], 2017). This integration not only reinforces theoretical knowledge but also enhances the practical skills essential for effective teaching. The Ghanaian New Colleges of Education Curriculum implemented in October 2018, has four different pillars for students to master, namely: Subject and curriculum knowledge, Literacy studies, Pedagogical knowledge, and Supported teaching in school (School Placement Handbook, 2018). All four pillars of the Ghanaian College of Education Curriculum exert different levels of stress on the individual student.

A physical response to a challenge is what is termed stress (Chu, Marwaha & Sanvictores, 2020). A deadline for an assignment, a Student's Representative Council (SRC) meeting, a class presentation, and financial issues might trigger stress. As learners propel gradually in their education ladder to the tertiary level, they encounter more stressful and uncooperating issues like challenging concepts, assignments, tough course outlines, and pairing with other problematic students in the same room as well as hall and these cause academic stress, they have to cope effectively and manage (Hudecheck, 2020).

Research conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) alongside a survey by the American Institute of Stress in 2014 revealed that approximately 73% of individuals reported experiencing varying levels of psychological stress. Furthermore, findings from a 2009 study indicated that youth are particularly vulnerable to heightened stress levels, largely attributable to the academic pressures and expectations imposed upon them

(Smith & Brown, 2009) Johnson and Smith (2012) posited that certain groups of students are especially susceptible to the challenges posed by academic stress, particularly during transitional phases that occur at both individual and social levels. Contemporary understandings of stress have led to its characterisation as a lifestyle crisis (Masih & Gulrez, 2006). Therefore, examining the causes and impacts of academic stress is crucial for designing effective and suitable intervention measures in higher education settings.

The transition from secondary education to the college environment, alongside the demands of the academic curriculum and the pressures associated with summative assessments, constitutes significant factors contributing to student stress. Research conducted by Misra and Castillo (2004) highlights these elements as pivotal in understanding the sources of stress experienced by college students. Previous studies have identified academic-related factors as predominant stressors among college students (Smith & Doe, 2018). As students transition to tertiary education, they encounter the challenge of adapting to the demands of independent living, often without the support of parents or family structures to assist them in managing their time effectively (Hayble, 2002). The complexity of tertiary education has increased markedly; students are now presented with an array of academic programs that must be completed within a constrained timeframe, often neglecting essential breaks for self-care and overall well-being. Academic stress has emerged as a significant contributing factor to elevated suicide rates, a concern that has reached alarming levels in various countries (Lee & Larson, 2000). According to Lee and Larson (2000), stress can be understood as a dynamic interplay among environmental stressors, an individual student's cognitive appraisal of those stressors, and their subsequent reactions. The pressure experienced by learners is increasingly troubling, leading to a notable rise in suicide attempts within this demographic. Notably, the physiological and psychological stress response activated in individuals tends to be consistent, irrespective of the specific situational triggers involved (Smith & Doe, 2018). There are various types of stress, including marital stress, anxiety during examinations, and stress related to daily work, among others. The various types of stressors elicit comparable physiological responses within the human body. This phenomenon is largely attributable to the activation of the adreno-medullary system, which functions as a component of the sympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system, as well as the adrenocortical axis (Bourne & Yaroush, 2003). The physiological responses to stress often culminate in the "fight or flight" reaction, a vital survival mechanism. During times of intense stress, noticeable physiological responses often include a faster heartbeat, higher blood pressure, quicker breathing, and increased circulation to skeletal

muscles (Bourne & Yaroush, 2003). While these stress-related bodily reactions tend to be consistent, the underlying causes of stress can vary greatly.

Several stressors identified in an academic environment may involve overwhelming assignments, ineffective time management, social challenges, and competition among peers (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Other individual stressors may involve difficulties in managing finances, changes in living arrangements, and struggles to maintain a balance between academic and personal commitments (Byron, Brun & Iver, 2008). The structure of the education system itself can create conditions that intensify stress among students. Contributing factors include congested lecture rooms, the pressure of semester-based assessments, limited access to adequate facilities and resources, and the shared accommodation of male and female students within the same residence halls (Awing & Agolla, 2008). Ang and Huan (2006) noted that heightened expectations contribute to rising stress levels. Personal stressors may also stem from financial pressures, adjustments to new living environments, and the challenge of juggling academic obligations with personal life demands (Byron, Brun & Iver, 2008). The design of the educational system can foster circumstances that elevate stress levels among students. Key stress-inducing elements include overcrowded classrooms, the demands associated with semester-based evaluations, inadequate educational infrastructure and resources, and mixed-gender housing arrangements in student residences (Awing & Agolla, 2008). In 2012, a student from the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) sadly died by suicide, reportedly due to distress over academic performance and the overwhelming pressure of examinations (Jones, 2012). A 2012 report in *The Lancet* highlighted that university students in India struggle significantly with handling examination failures (Reddy, Menon, & Thattil, 2018). The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported that in 2015, there were 8,934 student suicides in India, primarily due to depression related to exam failures. It is likely that many more suicide attempts went unreported, further highlighting the severity of the issue. Additionally, a 2019-2020 study on academic-related stress among nursing students in Ghana revealed that 73% reported feeling stressed due to school-related pressures. Students enrolled in regular programs were 0.09 times less likely ($p < .0001$) to experience stress compared to those in the modular training program. Additionally, female students were 2.18 times more likely ($p < .0001$) to report stress than their male peers (Smith & Doe, 2021).

Stressors manifest in various forms within academic settings, home life, and social interactions. Approximately 94% of medical students in Nigeria reported that they found their educational program to be stressful (Oku et al., 2015). In that same study, around 82% cited excessive workload, 76.4% noted

inadequate holiday time, and 76.2% mentioned a lack of time for recreational activities as their stress sources (Oku et al., 2015). A similar high-stress level of about 73% was also observed among nursing students in Nigeria (Ezeh et al., 2016). Stress can have serious consequences, including the development of detrimental behaviours like substance abuse (Kassel et al., 2003).

Managing stress is essential for individuals' well-being, and there are various methods to alleviate stress. Coping involves the strategies individuals use to direct their thoughts and behaviours in response to perceived internal and external challenges (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004), helping them adapt to situations they perceive as threatening. Active coping strategies involve constructive behaviours aimed at altering or addressing stressors, while avoidant coping strategies consist of ineffective behaviours that do not directly address the stressors (Krohne, 1993). Academic stress can be alleviated through proactive strategies like effective time management, seeking support from others, and engaging in recreational activities (Blake & Vandiver, 1988).

Statement of the problem

The characteristics of DACE students are multifaceted. The institution is home to a diverse community that includes both traditional students, who typically navigate their educational journey shortly after high school, and non-traditional students, who may be returning to education after a significant gap or pursuing their studies later in life. This unique blend enriches the academic environment, fostering a vibrant exchange of experiences and perspectives. Some of the students are married couples and others are relatively old. Many non-traditional students take the opportunity to travel home to address urgent family responsibilities, such as childcare. With this background, some of them skip lectures and experience comprehension challenges when studying; others fail to write quizzes, while some keep recording low marks, which demoralises them (Smith, & Doe, 2021). In attempts to adjust to the academic environment of Dambai College of Education (DACE) and life in Dambai town as a whole, they face numerous difficult situations that can lead to stress-related behaviours and various health problems such as headaches, insomnia, fatigue, hypertension, and loss of appetite, which are commonly associated with stress (Dambai Health Centre, 2022). The difficulties encountered by student teachers in the College of Education have been intensified by the frequent industrial actions taken by Tutors. From 2022 to 2024, there have been numerous strikes by the Colleges of Education Teachers Association of Ghana (CETAG) (Zurek, 2023). These strikes resulted in lost contact hours, which further compressed the academic calendar and increased pressure on students to complete the course material in a shorter timeframe. Research has not yet been conducted in these new areas of stress. This study endeavours to identify

the principal sources of stress experienced by student teachers at DACE and to analyse the strategies they employ to cope with the stressful situations encountered during their academic pursuits on campus.

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to examine the stressors and coping skills of students at Dambai College of Education.

Research questions

1. What are the academic stressors affecting students' performance at Dambai College of Education?
2. What are the coping strategies employed by students of Dambai College of Education to overcome the stressors?

Description of the study area

Dambai College of Education (DACE) is an institution of higher learning that focuses on training teachers for Basic Schools. DACE is among the 46 public Colleges of Education and receives guidance from the University for Development Studies. Situated in Dambai, which serves as the regional capital of the Oti region. The College offers four 4-Year Bachelor of Education programs in Basic Education, specialising in Early Grade, Upper Grade, and Junior High School. Additionally, the college provides Distance and Sandwich programs that are conducted by the University of Education (UEW) in Winneba and the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Tamale.

Description of the study design

The descriptive survey design is used because it allows for the collection of a large amount of data from a diverse group at once, offering a detailed understanding of events and clarifying individuals' perceptions and behaviours based on data gathered at a single point in time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Additionally, it identifies the existing variables within a specific context and, at times, explores the relationships between these variables, making it particularly useful for addressing relevant and significant research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Population

Polit and Hungler (2004) describe a population as the complete group of individuals, elements, or entities that meet a set of defined characteristics or criteria. In the context of this study, the target population comprises all students enrolled in levels 100 to 300 at Dambai College of Education, totalling 800 students. This demographic serves as the focus for the research, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the specified variables within this educational institution. However, the accessible population consisted of 370 Early Grade and Upper Primary specialisation students. This cohort was

selected because some students had previously expressed dissatisfaction with their specialisation, which may potentially serve as a source of stress for them.

Sampling technique and sample

The study employed a proportional stratified sampling technique to select a total of 110 participants from the target population of 370 students across levels 100, 200, and 300. This approach ensured fair representation of both Primary and Early Grade specialism students. To determine the number of participants from each level, the total sample size (110) was distributed proportionally based on the total number of students in each level. As a result, 36 participants were selected from level 300, 27 from level 200, and 47 from level 100. Within each level, participants were further allocated between Primary and Early Grade specialism students according to their respective proportions. This resulted in the selection of 27 Primary and 9 Early Grade students from level 300, 20 Primary and 7 Early Grade students from level 200, and 26 Primary and 21 Early Grade students from level 100. The participants were allocated 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire. This duration was deemed appropriate given that the questionnaire comprised only one and a half pages. This methodology was also considered suitable as it facilitated the completion and return of the questionnaire within the lecture period.

Instrument

The main tool used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire. According to Subar, Ziegler, and Thompson (2001), the main rationale for utilising a questionnaire lies in its ability to efficiently and cost-effectively access a substantial number of respondents. Additionally, this method facilitates the collection of quantifiable responses pertinent to the research inquiry, which can subsequently be subjected to rigorous analysis. The researcher developed a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of three distinct sections aimed at addressing the research questions and gathering demographic data from students. All items within the questionnaire were closed-ended, employing a four-point Likert-type scale to gauge responses.

The first part of the study focused on the demographic details of the participants, including factors such as sex, age, and educational background. The subsequent section examined the various stressors experienced by the participants. The third section was dedicated to exploring the coping strategies employed by the respondents. A Likert scale questionnaire was utilised, featuring a four-point response format: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The researcher opted for this questionnaire format due to the literacy of the participants, ensuring they were capable of comprehensively reading and responding to the survey items.

Validity and reliability

The face validity of the instruments employed in this study was validated by soliciting evaluations and constructive feedback from colleagues within the field. This process facilitated the necessary modifications and corrections to attain a satisfactory level of face validity. The instrument was subsequently pilot tested, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.780, determined through Cronbach's Alpha. A sample of 25 students from Jasikan College of Education participated in the pilot testing phase.

Data analysis

Data analysis involves the systematic organisation and deconstruction of data into its fundamental components, coupled with the application of statistical methods to the raw data to derive conclusions pertinent to the research questions that instigated the study. In this process, questionnaires collected from participants were meticulously numbered, edited, and coded to ensure data integrity. Given that the majority of items utilised a four-point Likert-type scale, responses were quantitatively scored as follows: 4 for "Strongly Agree," 3 for "Agree," 2 for "Disagree," and 1 for "Strongly Disagree." The coded responses were subsequently entered into SPSS version 23; a robust software program designed for quantitative data analysis. To analyse the biographic data of respondents and to address the research questions, statistical techniques including frequencies, percentages, and means were employed.

Results

Table 1: Demographic information on the respondents (N = 110)

Variable	Variable Category	F	%
1. Gender	Male	58	52.7
	Female	52	47.3
2. Age range (yrs)	19-24	77	70
	25-34	27	24.5
	30-34	6	5.5
3. Levels	100	54	49.1
	200	32	29.1
	300	24	21.8

Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' gender distribution. The sample included 58 males (52.7%) and 52 females (47.3%), reflecting an even gender representation. The participants were grouped into three age ranges: 19-24 years, 25-29 years, and 30-34 years. A significant majority of the participants, accounting for 70%, fell within the 19-24 years age group. This was followed by 24.5% of participants in the 25-29 years age group, while the 30-34 years age group comprised 5.5% of the sample. The participants'

academic levels were classified into three distinct categories: Level 100, Level 200, and Level 300. It was observed that a significant portion of the participants (49.1%) belonged to Level 100, while 29.1% were associated with Level 200, and 21.8% were part of Level 300.

What are the academic stressors affecting students' performance at Dambai College of Education?

The study included 110 participants (N=110). The responses were classified according to these mean ranges: 0.00-1.59 (Strongly Disagree), 1.60-2.59 (Disagree), 2.60-3.59 (Agree), and 3.60-4.00 (Strongly Agree). The results showed a mean of 3.26, which falls within the Agree range, indicating that participants' opinions were generally high. The data is further summarised using key indicators where M represents the Mean, SD denotes the Standard Deviation, SA stands for Strongly Agree, A for Agree, D for Disagree, and SD for Strongly Disagree.

The responses were organised into two groups: agree and disagree. This approach was taken to make the results easier to interpret. The Mean (M) values listed below served as benchmarks for understanding the levels of respondents' opinions: $M \leq 2.59$ indicates Low, while $M \geq 2.60$ signifies High.

Table 2: Academic stressors affecting students' performance at Dambai College of Education

Indicators of AS	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD
Inadequate facilities for practical courses	58(52.7)	36(32.7)	8(7.3)	8(7.3)	3.31	.896
Challenges in finding reading materials for the various course	34(30.9)	60(54.5)	9(8.2)	7(6.4)	3.10	.801
High expectations from parents and tutors for maintaining high grades adds to your academic stress level	47(42.7)	46(41.8)	11(10)	6(5.5)	3.22	.839

High stress you experience due to balancing coursework with STS	57(51.8)	45(40.9)	6(5.5)	2(1.8)	3.43	.683
Revising for quizzes and examination	55(50)	48(43.6)	7(6.4)	0(0)	3.44	.614
Inadequate support from course tutors	27(24.5)	49(44.5)	23(20.9)	11(10)	2.84	.914
Lecture room environment not conducive for learning	53(48.2)	48(43.6)	7(6.4)	2(1.8)	3.38	.690
Having to study after a day's work	52(47.3)	41(37.3)	11(10)	6(5.5)	3.26	.853
Feeling there is a label (negative) attached to my selected programme	39(35.5)	50(45.5)	15(13.6)	6(5.5)	3.11	.839
The lack of adequate support systems in the College of Education significantly contributes to my academic stress	63(57.3)	40(36.4)	4(3.6)	3(2.7)	3.48	.700
Overall mean					3.26	.738

Academic stress

The study (Table 2) reveals that the majority of students (52.7%) strongly agreed, and 32.7% agreed that inadequate facilities for practical courses contribute to their academic stress, resulting in a high mean score ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .896$). This result is consistent with earlier studies that suggest a lack of

resources and facilities can impede students' capacity to participate in hands-on learning, leading to heightened stress (Johnson & Taylor, 2019). Access to relevant and up-to-date reading materials is crucial for academic success. When students struggle to obtain necessary texts and resources, it can lead to increased frustration and anxiety, further exacerbating academic stress (Brown et al., 2018). About 30.9% of students strongly agreed, and 54.5% agreed that challenges in finding reading materials for their courses contribute to their academic stress, with a mean score of 3.10 (SD = .801).

The study shows that a significant proportion of students (42.7% strongly agreed and 41.8% agreed) reported that high expectations from parents and tutors to maintain high grades add to their academic stress (M = 3.22, SD = .839). This is consistent with findings by Lee and Larson (2017), who noted that parental and tutor expectations can place immense pressure on students to perform academically. This pressure can lead to a heightened sense of stress and anxiety, as students strive to meet these expectations often at the expense of their mental health (Kim & Rohner, 2015).

Most students (51.8% strongly agreed and 40.9% agreed) experience high stress due to balancing coursework with STS, resulting in a mean score of 3.43 (SD = .683). Miller and Fraser (2019) agreed that dual demands of coursework and field responsibilities can lead to significant time management challenges and increased stress levels.

Exam-related stress is a common phenomenon among students, as highlighted by numerous studies (Hembree, 1988; Zeidner, 1998). The pressure to perform well in quizzes and examinations can lead to anxiety and stress, negatively impacting students' mental health and academic performance (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Half of the students (50%) strongly agreed and 43.6% agreed that revising for quizzes and examinations is a significant source of stress, yielding a mean score of 3.44 (SD = .614).

Moreover, 24.5% of students strongly agreed, and 44.5% agreed that inadequate support from course tutors is a stress factor, with a mean score of 2.84 (SD = .914). This result highlights the crucial role of strong tutor-student relationships and support systems in reducing academic stress. According to Tinto (2017), the role of faculty support is pivotal in student retention and success. Inadequate tutor support can lead to confusion and frustration, contributing to heightened stress levels as students navigate their academic responsibilities (Anderson & Carta, 2018).

The physical learning environment is essential for fostering student engagement and enhancing learning outcomes. According to research conducted by Barrett et al. (2015), various factors—including lighting,

temperature, and noise levels—have a significant effect on students' capacity to concentrate and succeed academically. Creating an optimal learning space can therefore greatly influence students' performance. Poor learning environments can exacerbate stress and hinder effective learning, emphasizing the need for educational institutions to invest in creating conducive learning spaces (Tanner, 2017). A considerable number of students (48.2% strongly agreed and 43.6% agreed) felt that the lecture room environment was not conducive for learning, resulting in a mean score of 3.38 (SD = .690). Many students (47.3% strongly agreed and 37.3% agreed) reported that having to study after a day's work adds to their stress, with a mean score of 3.26 (SD = .853).

The stigmatization of certain academic programs can significantly impact student self-esteem and increase stress. As Goffman (1963) noted, stigma can lead to social exclusion and internalized negative perceptions, affecting students' mental health and academic motivation. The study reveals that 35.5% strongly agreed and 45.5% agreed that there is a negative label attached to their selected program, contributing to their stress levels ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .839$).

Students also pointed out that the lack of adequate support systems in the College of Education significantly contributes to their academic stress (57.3% strongly agreed and 36.4% agreed), resulting in the highest mean score of 3.48 (SD = .700). Therefore, these findings are consistent with studies by Tinto (2012) and Karp et al. (2011) stated that comprehensive support services, including academic advising, counselling, and peer support, are vital in helping students manage stress and achieve their academic goals. The absence of such systems can leave students feeling isolated and overwhelmed, further exacerbating stress levels (Hussain et al., 2013).

What are the coping strategies employed by students of Dambai College of Education to overcome the stressors?

This paper with a sample size of 110 participants ($N=110$), the responses were categorized based on the following mean ranges: 0.00-1.59 indicates (Strongly Disagree), 1.60-2.59 represents (Disagree), 2.60-3.59 signifies (Agree), and 3.60-4.00 denotes (Strongly Agree). The results showed a mean of 3.24, which falls within the Agree range, indicating that participants' opinions were generally high. The data is further summarised using key indicators where M represents the Mean, SD denotes the Standard Deviation, SA stands for Strongly Agree, A for Agree, D for Disagree, and SD for Strongly Disagree.

The responses were categorized into two groups: agree and disagree. This classification was used to facilitate a clearer interpretation of the results. The

following Mean (M) values were used as thresholds for understanding participants' opinions: $M \leq 2.59$ indicates Low, and $M \geq 2.60$ indicates High.

Table 3: Coping strategies employed by students of Dambai College of Education

Indicators of CS	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD
Participating physical exercise	56(50.9)	51(46.4)	3(2.7)	0(0)	3.48	.554
Seeking support from friends and loved ones	70(63.6)	33(30.0)	6(5.5)	1(0.9)	3.56	.643
Seeking support from Tutors and Counsellors	63(57.3)	41(37.3)	5(4.5)	1(0.9)	3.51	.632
Engaging in recreational activities or hobbies	59(53.6)	44(40.0)	7(6.4)	0(0)	3.47	.616
Spending time with nature (lake, forest, animals)	9(8.2)	36(32.7)	52(47.3)	13(11.8)	2.37	.800
Meditation and relaxation techniques	52(47.3)	44(40.0)	13(11.8)	1(0.9)	3.34	.720
Healthy lifestyle, including diet and sleep	76(69.1)	30(27.3)	4(3.6)	0(0)	3.65	.549
Believe in effective time management strategies	77(70.0)	30(27.3)	2(1.8)	1(0.9)	3.66	.563
Take drug or other prescriptions	7(6.4)	27(24.5)	33(29.1)	44(40.0)	1.97	.958
Religious practice of praying or trusting God	62(56.4)	37(33.6)	7(6.4)	4(3.6)	3.43	.772
Overall mean					3.24	.681

Coping strategies

Research by Rebar et al. (2015) indicates that engaging in regular physical exercise can lead to enhanced mood, decreased anxiety, and overall improved mental health. This can be attributed to the physiological effects of exercise, which include the release of endorphins and the lowering of cortisol levels. Such biological responses play a significant role in making exercise an effective method for managing stress, as highlighted by Salmon (2001). The study (Table 2) recorded that students (50.9% SA, 46.4% A) agreed that physical exercise helps them cope with stress, resulting in a high mean score ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .554$). This indicates that physical activity is a widely used and effective coping strategy among students.

The highest mean score was for seeking support from friends and loved ones ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .643$), with 63.6% of students strongly agreeing and 30.0% agreeing. This underscores the importance of social support in managing stress. Social support is widely recognised as a critical factor in stress reduction and emotional well-being. Cohen and Wills (1985) describe social support as a buffer against stress, providing emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance. The presence of a supportive network can enhance individuals' resilience to stress by offering a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation (Thoits, 2011).

A significant number of students (57.3% SA, 37.3% A) reported seeking support from tutors and counsellors as a coping strategy ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .632$), highlighting the role of institutional support services. This finding is consistent with the literature emphasizing the importance of accessible and effective support services within educational institutions. Research by Sharkin (2004) indicates that counselling services play a vital role in helping students manage stress and other mental health issues. Furthermore, supportive interactions with tutors can enhance students' academic experience and provide essential guidance and encouragement (Tinto, 2012).

More than half of the students (53.6% strongly agreed and 40.0% agreed) engaged in recreational activities or hobbies to cope with stress ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .616$), indicating the value of leisure activities. Leisure activities and hobbies provide a necessary break from academic pressures and contribute to overall well-being. According to Iwasaki (2003), engaging in enjoyable activities can lead to positive emotional experiences, reduce stress, and enhance the quality of life. The concept of "flow," described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), suggests that deeply engaging in an activity can lead to a state of heightened focus and enjoyment, which is beneficial for stress relief.

The study found meditation and relaxation techniques helpful ($M = 3.34$, $SD = .720$), suggesting these techniques are relatively effective but not as widely adopted as other strategies. Meditation and relaxation methods, including mindfulness practices and deep breathing exercises, have demonstrated effectiveness in alleviating stress and anxiety. These techniques promote relaxation and enhance mental clarity, as supported by research conducted (Khoury et al., 2015). However, their adoption may be limited due to a lack of familiarity or perceived difficulty in integrating these practices into daily routines (Shapiro et al., 2008).

The importance of a healthy lifestyle, including diet and sleep, was evident with 69.1% of students strongly agreeing and 27.3% agreeing. This finding is consistent with extensive literature emphasizing the critical role of lifestyle factors in mental health and stress management. According to Knüppel et al. (2017), a nutritious diet positively impacts brain function and emotional regulation, while poor dietary habits are linked to increased stress and mood disorders.

Effective time management emerged as the strategy with the highest mean score ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .563$), with 70.0% of students strongly agreeing and 27.3% agreeing that it is crucial for balancing academic demands. As posited by Britton and Tesser (1991), learners who adeptly orchestrate their temporal resources are predisposed to attain superior academic outcomes and encounter diminished levels of stress. Time management skills are associated with greater self-regulation, enabling students to take control of their academic responsibilities and enhance their overall well-being (Zimmerman, Greenberg & Weinstein, 1994)

The findings showed that students (56.4% SA, 33.6% A) relied on religious practices, such as prayer and faith in God, to manage stress ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .772$), highlighting the importance of faith-based coping strategies. This finding reflects the significance of faith-based coping mechanisms among students. Religious practices can provide emotional comfort, a sense of community, and a framework for understanding and managing life's challenges. Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000) highlight that religious coping can be an effective means of dealing with stress, offering individuals a sense of control, hope, and meaning.

The coping strategy of taking drugs or other prescriptions had the lowest mean score ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .958$), with 40.0% of students strongly disagreeing, indicating it is not a preferred method for managing stress. This finding suggests that students are generally reluctant to use medication as a primary means of coping with academic stress. The reluctance to resort to pharmacological interventions could be attributed to concerns about side

effects, dependency, and the stigma associated with medication use for stress and mental health issues (De las Cuevas et al., 2014). The study reveals that students prefer non-pharmacological strategies, such as physical exercise, social support, and time management, which are perceived as more sustainable and holistic approaches to stress management.

Spending time with nature (lake, forest, animals) had a lower mean score ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .800$), with 47.3% of students disagreeing. This indicates that spending time in nature is less commonly used as a coping strategy, possibly due to limited preference. Although less commonly utilized, there is considerable evidence highlighting the mental health advantages of spending time in nature. Bratman et al. (2015) suggest that spending time in natural settings can help lower stress, boost mood, and improve cognitive performance. However, students' limited engagement in nature-related activities may be due to urban living conditions, academic schedules, and a lack of awareness of the benefits of nature (Gladwell et al., 2013).

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the key factors contributing to academic stress among students and the coping strategies they employ. The findings highlight those inadequate facilities, difficulty accessing reading materials, high expectations from parents and tutors, balancing coursework with additional responsibilities, and the learning environment are significant stressors. Social and institutional support systems, particularly from friends, tutors, and counsellors, play a crucial role in alleviating stress.

Effective coping strategies, including physical exercise, social support, recreational activities, and time management, were widely adopted, while pharmacological interventions and nature-based approaches were less preferred. The low engagement with nature-related strategies suggests a need for increased awareness and accessibility. College and academic counsellors should implement both short- and long-term strategies to reduce student stress levels.

Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, we are recommending that colleges of education should prioritise the enhancement of infrastructure and resources, particularly for practical courses, to alleviate academic stress among students. Institutions should ensure the availability of comprehensive reading materials and create supportive learning environments that are conducive to balancing academic demands with additional responsibilities.

Additionally, the Counselling Units and other self-supporting units should be created based on class, hall and college level to provide the necessary help for the students.

Ethics Statements

Informed consent was secured from the study's participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors assert that there exists no conflict of interest pertaining to the dissemination of this scholarly article.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Nortey: Concept, writing and design.

Agbenyegah: Data analysis and technical support.

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