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Undergraduates Academic Engagement: The Predictive Power of Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence Resilience

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Abstract

This study investigated the predictive power of academic stress, emotional intelligence resilience on undergraduates' academic engagement. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted, a multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 420 respondents, out of which 398 (94.8%) were retrieved. Two hypotheses were formulated tested with the use of descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that 45.1% of the total variance in the undergraduates' academic engagement is accounted for by academic stress, emotional intelligence resilience. Furthermore, there were significant positive relationships between academic engagement emotional intelligence, as well as resilience. However, significant but negative relationship existed between academic stress academic engagement. The study concluded that institutional policies structures should be designed to cushion the negative effect of stress on learning. Therefore, it was recommended that emotional intelligence resilience studies be incorporated into the school curriculum.

Keywords: Academic Engagement, Academic Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, Undergraduates, Learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every nation hopes to have a bright future needs to emphasise education because it is the way to development. Yusuf Al-Banawi (2013) noted that education is an essential investment in modern economics because, as previously seen within the framework of a knowledge-based economy, there is a strong positive correlation between economic activity education in explaining economic growth. Olayanju (2014) posited that education is critical in building human capacity skills. Academic success is the product of numerous variables that

collectively aid university students in their experiences increase their chances of attaining a postsecondary degree. To further clarify the nature of this success, there are areas in the literature dedicated to exploring student academic engagement.

Student engagement has recently become one of the school's desired outcomes because of its strong connection to student academic success well-being. Previous research had demonstrated strong links between student engagement in learning such outcomes as school dropout, drug use, mental health, academic outcomes. From the researcher's teaching experience over the years, students who engaged in learning were found to be more successful academically less likely to drop out of school. They were intrinsically motivated to invest in learning, attend classes, participate in study activities.

Student engagement has been a debatable issue for educational leaders. Engagement in education corresponds to academic engagement, which refers to a state of psychological well-being commitment to studies (Ayodele, et. al., 2021). Student engagement has primarily historically focused upon increasing achievement, positive behaviours, a sense of belonging in students so they might remain in school be successful. The dynamics of the scholastic atmosphere have made the issue of academic stress, emotional intelligence academic resilience to be essential for rousing academic performance among students. In respect of this view, it is paramount to examine their roles in the improvement of students' academic engagement (Ononye, et al. 2022).

Academic stress is mental distress concerning some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even unawareness of the possibility of such failure (Manikan and Neethu, 2018). Students face many academic demands, for example, school examinations, answering questions in class, showing progress in school subjects, understand what the teacher is teaching, competing with other classmates, fulfilling teachers' parents' academic expectations. These demands may tax or exceed the available resources of the students. Consequently, they can be under stress since the demand is related to achieving an academic goal. According to Olanrenwaju (2017), academic stress reflects the perception of an individual's academic frustration, academic conflict, academic pressure, academic anxiety. Therefore, the need to see how students approach academic activities in a learning context could be influenced by academic stress.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the act of recognizing, understanding been able to control one's emotions other peoples' emotions (Bhuyan, 2021). Emotional intelligence (EI) is a type of aptitude that involves monitoring one's feelings that of others, discriminating among the two entities, using gathered

information to guide one's behaviour. Students who are successful in their educational goals possess the ability to perceive, assimilate, understand, regulate their personal other people's emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). This implies that emotional intelligence skills could contribute to students' academic engagement. Slatten, et. al. (2021) asserted that it is reasonable to believe that EI would probably yield a desirable attainment outcome since emotions can widen the concentration cognition of students for scholastic knowledge. According to Hartmann et al. (2020) in Ononye, et. al. (2022), increasing spirals of students' academic engagement can affect EI positively if there are positive emotional dynamics stemming from the manifestation of academic resilience.

Academic resilience is described as a cognitive capacity to effectively predict acclimatize to demanding situation in an educational environment (Romano et al., 2021). According to Ononye, et. al. (2022), academic resilience evolved from the array of capabilities that originate from significant scrutiny amendment of maladjustment tendencies that are associated to exigent actions. Also, resilience is associated with basic protective systems, which include problem-solving, mastery, reasoning, meaning-making self-regulation (Theron, 2012). It is the characteristics of the individual (social) environment that stimulate the ability to maintain functioning despite the demands of the situation moderate the effects of stressors on health adjustment indicators (Adariku, 2020; Gowan, et. al., 2014).

Therefore, as student engagement is widely presumed to be malleable, it is relevant to explore the predictors of school engagement outline factors that can influence it positively. In light of the described positive consequences of student engagement, the current study aims at contributing to the growing body of research by exploring the mechanisms of influence on student engagement. This study assessed the influence of academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience on undergraduates' academic engagement in Ogun State, Nigeria.

The following hypotheses are formulated for testing at a 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship among academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience, undergraduate academic engagement.
2. There is no significant contribution of academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience to the prediction of academic engagement among undergraduates.

2. METHODS

Research Design: This research adopted a cross-sectional survey design to assess academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience as predictors of academic engagement among undergraduates in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Sample Size: The study population comprised all students in the public universities in Ogun State. Available statistics indicated that there were 3 public universities in Ogun State as of April 2023. The Universities consist of one Federal University (Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta) two state universities (Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye Tai-solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode). A sample of 420 undergraduates was romly selected. To select the sample, the universities were stratified into Federal University State Universities. For this study, two universities were selected (Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye) using simple rom sampling technique. In order to select undergraduates with similar characteristics, undergraduates from Department of Physics Microbiology were purposively selected because the sampled institutions were offering them. From each institution, two hundred ten (210) undergraduates were selected using disproportionate stratified sampling technique making a total of 420 respondents.

Instrumentation: Four research instruments were used. These are:

Academic Engagement Scale **(**DeVito, 2016): It is a 10-item questionnaire measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*Never*) to (very often). The scale reported a reliability level of 0.90 a validity level of 0.97.

Academic Stress Scale (ASS) **(**Sinha, Sharma and Nepal, 2001**):** It consisted of 30 items measured on a 5-point scale from 1 = Strongly Agree (SA) 2 = Agree (A) 3 = Neutral (N) 4 = Disagree (D) 5 = Strongly Disagree (SD). The scale reported a reliability level of 0.93 a validity level of 0.81.

The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) **(**Schulte *et al.*,1998) is 33 self-referencing statements tapping the appraisal expression of emotions in self-others, emotion perception regulation in self-others emotion utilisation. The scale has a Cronbach alpha ranging from 0.72 to 0.93 within the Nigeria context. This was shortened modified into a 21-item by Mabekoje (2014).

Resilience Scale (RS) **(**Wagnild, 2009**):** RS-14 is a shortened version of the RS-25 comprising 14 items. Each item is on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale reported a reliability level of 0.93 a validity level of 0.87.

Data Collection: The researchers personally visited the institutions selected for the study. The course advisers were contacted to request for their support

permission to collect data from the students. The instruments were administered on the respondents that are willing to participate (that is, their consent was sought before the administration). The respondents were asked to fill the instrument independently before returning them to the researcher. Out of the 420 questionnaires distributed only 398 (94.8%) were retrieved useful for the study.

***Method of Data Analysis**:* The data analysis tools adopted include descriptive inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics of frequency distribution mean, stard deviation was used to analyse the data provide answers to the socio-demographic data. Simple regression analysis tests the hypotheses at a 5 per cent significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) using the SPSS 23 version.

3. RESULTS

Table 1. Respondents' Demographical Data

Sr #	Variable (N =398)		Frequency	%
1	Age	16-18yrs	67	16.8
		19-21yrs	202	50.8
		22-24yrs	112	28.1
		25yrs above	17	4.3
2	Gender	Male	151	37.9
		Female	247	62.1
3	Religion	Christianity	204	51.8
		Islam	184	46.2
4	Marital Status	Single	352	88.4
		Married	46	11.6
5	Ethnicity	Yoruba	308	77.4
		Hausa	22	5.5
		Igbo	52	13.1
		Others	16	4.0
6	Level	100Level	50	12.6
		200Level	109	27.4
		300Level	91	22.9
		400Level	70	17.6
		500Level	78	19.6

Table 1 shows that 67 (16.8%) of the respondents claimed they are within ages 16-18 years. Two hundred two (50.8%) of the respondents were 19-21 years of age, 112 (28.1%) were 22-24 years of age, 17 (4.3%) were 25 years above. The majority (62.1%) of the respondents were female; 204 (51.8%) were Christians; almost all the participants were singles (88.4%). The participants' ethnic groups revealed that 308 (77.4%) of the participants were Yoruba, 22

(5.5%) were Hausas, 52 (13.1%) were Igbo, 16 (4.0%) were others. The high population observed among the Yoruba is because the study area is situated in Yoruba l. Furthermore, the undergraduates' years of the study revealed that 109 (27.4%) were in 200Level, 91 (22.9%) in 300Level, 78 (19.6%) in 500Level, 70 (17.6%) in 400 Level 50 (12.6%) in 100Level.

Table 2. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients of the interrelationship between academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience, undergraduate academic engagement

	Academic stress	Emotional Intelligence	Academic Resilience	Academic engagement
Academic stress	1	.431**	.394**	-.172*
Emotional intelligence	.431**	1	.545**	.618**
Resilience	.394**	.545**	1	.398**
Academic engagement	-.172*	.618**	.398**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results in Table 2 revealed that there were significant positive relationships among academic stress emotional intelligence (r = .431; p = .00 <.05); academic stress resilience (r = .394; p = .00 <.05). Also, emotional intelligence is significantly positively related to resilience (r = .545; p = .00 <.05), academic engagement (r = .618; p = .00 <.05). Resilience was also positively related to academic engagement (r = .398; p = .00 <.05). However, significant but negative relationship existed between academic stress academic engagement (r = -.172; p = .05). Therefore, the hypothesis that stated there is no significant relationship among academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience undergraduate academic engagement cannot be retained.

Table 3. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of composite influence of academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience on undergraduates' academic engagement

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	P
Regression	82.902	3	27.634	6.261	.000
Residual	1743.530	395	4.414		
Total	1826.432	398			

R = .677; Multiple R^2 = .458; Multiple R^2 (Adj) = .451; Stard error estimate = 3.453

Table 3 shows that undergraduates' academic engagement yielded multiple regression coefficients (*R*) of .677 a multiple regression square of .451.

This shows that 45.1% of the total variance in the undergraduates' academic engagement is accounted for by academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience. The Table also indicates that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data produced an F-ratio value significant at the .000 level ($F_{(3,395)} = 6.261$; $p = .000 < .05$). Therefore, academic stress, emotional intelligence resilience combined to influence undergraduates' academic engagement. Therefore, the hypothesis, "There is no significant composite contribution of academic stress, emotional intelligence resilience to the prediction of academic engagement among undergraduates", was rejected.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The outcome of the first hypothesis revealed a significant composite contribution of academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience to the prediction of academic engagement among undergraduates. The findings showed that about half of the variance observed in the undergraduates' academic engagement is accounted for by academic stress, emotional intelligence, resilience. It could mean that students encounter myriad stressors impacting their cognitive emotional function, such as an unconducive learning environment, limited support resources poor teacher support. Academic resilience emotional intelligence has been evidenced as critical personal resources that can stimulate students' related outcomes, like academic performance (AP) engagement. The result corroborates the findings of Chew et al. (2013), Romano et al. (2021), Sarrionia et al. (2018) in their various studies that emotional intelligence resilience enhance academic outcomes as well as buffer the effects of stress on individuals.

The effect of academic resilience emotional intelligence on academic engagement concurred with Zheng et al. (2020) that academic resilience has a predictive association with emotional intelligence in an academic context showed consistency with the findings of Olusoji et al. (2021) Sarwar et al. (2017), where resilience was conceptualised as a facet of psychological capital. That of emotional intelligence, as indicated by Afzal et al. (2016) Da et al. (2021), showed that successful regulation of emotional experiences is a critical aspect of academic resilience engagement. Students with high academic resilience tend to strengthen emotional intelligence processes to adapt positively to challenging situations increase school engagement. Emotional intelligence was one of the protective factors of academic engagement (Thomas and Zolkoski, 2020).

Many studies link positive engagement outcomes with life satisfaction (Hakanen and Schaufeli, 2021; Spedding, Hawkes and Burgess, 2017). Zheng et al. (2020) confirmed the predictive power of resilience emotional intelligence on secondary school student's academic success in Shanghai, China. Tugade Fredrickson (2004) argued that resilient individuals are characterised by their positive emotionality because they strategically elicit positive emotions to use in challenging or stressful contexts, which make them more productive. This is supported by Ononye et al. (2022), who reported that academic resilience was positively related to emotional intelligence, academic resilience emotional intelligence was positively related to academic performance. Emotional resilience mediated the positive relationship between academic resilience academic performance, which might influence the extent to which students engage in academic activities (Ononye et al., 2022).

The second hypothesis's outcome revealed significant positive relationships among emotional intelligence, resilience, academic engagement. The positive relation between academic resilience, emotional intelligence academic engagement concurred with Zheng et al. (2020) that academic resilience has a predictive association with emotional intelligence in an academic context showed consistency with the findings of Olusoji et al. (2021) Sarwar et al. (2017), where resilience was conceptualised as a facet of psychological capital. The Correlation between academic resilience emotional intelligence indicated by Afzal et al. (2016) Da et al. (2021) was confirmed. Since successful regulation of emotional experiences is a critical aspect of academic resilience engagement, students with high academic resilience tend to strengthen emotional intelligence processes to demonstrate positive adaptation to challenging situations increase school engagement. Emotional intelligence benefits from the experiential nature of students' adaptive functioning in a challenging academic environment. It seems logical to argue that emotional intelligence may be one of the protective factors of academic resilience due to the overlapping emotional regulation process that results in adaptive emotions (Thomas and Zolkoski, 2020).

Academic resilience, emotional intelligence academic engagement positive relation found support from Bittmann (2021). Thus, resilience, emotional intelligence engagement positively affects academic success. It is also in tem with the general expectations of Thomas Zolkoski (2020), Slatten et al. (2021), Suleman et al. (2019) that academic resilience is an inner strength or resource a student should possess capitalise on for better AP. Arguably, the cognitive state of students co-occurring emotions would not be compromised to negate AP because of the protective factors (e.g., emotion regulation, personal

strength, social competence, social support quality) impeding the negative impact of stressful educational contexts.

5. CONCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

The present study's results have some implications for students, educators' stakeholders. Since academic stress is negatively related to academic engagement, it implies that institutional policies structures should be designed to cushion the negative effect of stress on learning. When this is in place, the students' stress levels will be reduced, making them more engaged with academics. This is important since cognitive evaluation theory Deci Ryan (1985) have also proposed that environments impact the development of intrinsic motivation. More so, more attention should be paid to recreation, since this enables the students to recuperate from stress, a good measure of it will most likely enhance their chances of focusing on academics.

Preventive strategies could enhance undergraduates' emotional intelligence resilience when a stressful situation arises at school. For instance, helping students to acquire emotional intelligence competencies (e.g., perception, appraisal expression of emotion, emotional facilitation of thinking, understanding analysing emotion employing emotional knowledge) may have a buffering effect on the undergraduates' academic stress.

The results also indicated that resilience is positively related to academic engagement; this also has implications because resilience is the ability to withstand adversity bounce back from complex life events. Being resilient does not mean that people do not experience stress, emotional upheaval, suffering. Some people equate resilience with mental toughness, but demonstrating resilience includes working through emotional pain suffering. This, in turn, will help an individual organise execute the course of action required to attain predetermined types of academic engagement is also concerned with estimating what one can attain with the skills one currently possesses. Thus, students should be encouraged to develop cultivate a resilient attitude. This is important because it could serve as a buffer that may keep the students going despite their experience of academic stress.

In order to improve learning engagement, guidance should be provided for students to increase their emotional intelligence, which includes the ability of students to recognise manage their own emotions themselves, recognise the emotions of others build relationships. Its relevance to learning engagement is that students who enjoy the climate of the classroom atmosphere can solve their emotional problems before starting learning. It will serve as excellent internal

motivation, can socialise well in class, tend to have better learning engagement than those who do not.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are presented based on the findings of this study.

- The efficacy of the three predictor variables is a pointer to the fact that undergraduates' academic engagement could be enhanced if the university management the teachers properly understand them. This will not only enhance undergraduates' academic engagement but could also foster coping skills motivation to learn or study.
- Understanding how academic stress, emotional intelligence resilience influence undergraduates' academic engagement can help the university authority to provide the best quality services for the students. Practising counsellors should take every opportunity to utilise as many strength-based approaches as possible when working with students seeking professional help.
- Given the potency of emotional intelligence in this study, it is recommended that emotional intelligence study should be incorporated into the curriculum of the schools across the federation. In this regard, competent psychologists should be involved in the review of the curriculum for education in Nigeria.
- It is equally recommended that educational needs in Nigeria should be comprehensively reviewed to meet the citizens' demands. Training programmes should improve the student's academic engagement in Nigeria.

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