

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN COPING STRATEGIES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ZARIA METROPOLIS

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Abstract

This study examined gender difference in coping strategies and academic achievement among secondary school students in Zaria metropolis Kaduna state, Nigeria. Two objectives were formulated for the study. A survey research design was used with a population of the study comprising of all SS 3 students from senior secondary schools in Zaria metropolis totaling 9,249 out of which a sample of 250 were drawn based on the recommendation of Research Advisors (.2006). A multistage sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the sample of the study. Instrument used for data collection was self-developed Coping Strategies Inventory while Mathematics and English MOCK Examination results for 2022/2023 academic session was the measure of Academic Achievement. An inferential statistic of t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 levels of Significance. Findings revealed that no significant difference exists between coping strategies of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria metropolis, $t = .885$, and $p = .379$. The study also found that no significant difference in academic achievement of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria metropolis, $t = -.122$ and $p = .903$. It was recommended that Psychologists and counsellors should educate students on the different coping strategies irrespective of gender. Learning should be made interesting and engaging to both male and female students to give room for a healthy competition which would enhance a greater academic achievement for both gender.

Keywords: Gender Difference, Coping Strategies, Academic Achievement

Introduction

It is the aspiration of parents that their children excel in all spheres of endeavour and most importantly academic pursuit. In daily academic life and rapid diversification of human activities, students are exposed to a wide range of potentially stressful academic and non-academic situations that could affect their achievements and psychological wellbeing. Stress can be associated with significant harm to the student's academic performance, reduced ability to pay attention, less dedication to studies, and lack of proper adjustments in school. And if not checked and the right coping strategies put in place, can degenerate into unhealthy and negative conditions. The quest for academic achievement poses enormous challenges, Stress and pressure on students' teachers, school management and in general the education system itself. Stress is defined as internal and external events that individuals appraise as important to their well-being and as taxing or exceeding their resources, (Melanie et al., 2013) Among

the factors that could cause stress among secondary school students could be adjustment and adaptation to a new context, insufficient time to do their academic tasks, inappropriate teaching and learning style, increasing and unhealthy competition among students, social and academic anxiety, biological and physiological changes in adolescents, lack of proper parental guide, not understanding the psychological state and personality type of their adolescent children, high expectation or parental pressure, and lack of proper counseling and guidance at the secondary school level. Therefore, the use of proper coping strategies becomes necessary to check these problems and proffer solutions to them for a sound scholastic achievement.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person. From a transactional point of view, coping is defined as a process, basically as constituting individual differences in appraisals and ways of dealing with stressful demands and the emotions they generate. It can also be viewed as a fundamental human adaptive process that involves the regulation of multiple subsystems like emotion and attention that are activated by stress and that also shows regular age-graded developments in how such regulation is accomplished (Melanie et al., 2013).

Coping is outlined as a stage-wise process that functions as consistent assessment and re-assessment of an individual's environment or situation. Specific factors can influence an individual's ability to cope are labeled "coping resources", which we might refer to as protective factors. These protective factors include social support, social skills, problem-solving skills, positive beliefs, health and energy. On the flip, "constraints against coping resources" which we could also be labeled as risk factors include the influence of cultural values and norms around emotions and behaviors, environmental constraints such as material resources, and level of threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In response to these constraints, coping strategies should be predicted & exercised to overcome challenges, and students need to adopt the right coping strategies that work for them. Chowdhury (2020) maintained that Coping mechanisms vary from person to person and from time to time. No two individuals are likely to use the same strategies to get over a situation. Even the same individual can use two or more completely different coping strategies to adapt to similar stressors at different points in life. Coping strategies or mechanisms include any conscious or unconscious decision which causes relief or consolation in stressful situations. It is also the strategies used to manage a negative or stressful event or academic failure (Annakay & Diane, 2021).

According to Melanie et al. (2013), one of the most commonly known broad categorizations of coping is the differentiation of strategies that are primarily problem-focused from those that are more emotion- focused. Problem-focused coping is usually defined to include strategies enacted in an attempt to modify or directly confront the stressful event, such as problem solving and direct action. Emotion-focused coping is usually defined to include responses that serve the purpose of managing emotional reactions to stress, such as social withdrawal, distraction, and emotional venting.

However, Jacqueline and Stephanie (2022) maintained that the goal of emotion-focused coping is to help an individual stay hopeful and optimistic in the face of negative events. In contrast, problem-focused coping strategies are directed towards problem solving, rather than emotional avoidance. Problem-focused coping is considered an active coping style where an individual engages in specific activities to negate the problem or negative event. Oftentimes, problem-focused coping is used when an individual feels some sense of control over the outcome. A number of Studies that examine the association of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping categories with psychopathology have considered a wide range of outcomes, most frequently depression, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal ideation, self-esteem, and positive well-being. A small number of studies have assessed additional outcomes, such as stress reduction, physiological reactions, or physical health (Roberts et al., 2013).

Sarah et al. (2007) in some studies on Cross situational coping with peer and family stressors in adolescents categorized coping as general styles of approach (sometimes also called active or engagement coping) and avoidance (sometimes also referred to as disengagement coping). Approach coping, is seen as the cognitive or behavioral efforts to manage a stressor. These are usually measured as problem solving, cognitive reappraisal, information or support seeking, and taking concrete action. Avoidance coping includes both cognitive and behavioral responses that serve the function of avoiding the distressing event or circumstances. Most often this is measured as distraction from the stressor, ignoring the situation, denial or minimization, withdrawal, escape, and/or wishful thinking.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in their coping model maintains that a successful coping mechanism depend on the emotional functions related to the problem. Eight functions form the bases for active coping and lies at the core of our behavior while experiencing stress. Such functions that most of us use for active coping include:

1. Self-Control – where we try to control our emotions in response to stress.
2. Confrontation – where we face the pressure and retaliate to change the situation and bring it back to our favour.
3. Social support – where we talk to others and look for social connections to help us survive a difficult time.
4. Emotional distancing – where we stay indifferent to what is going on around and prevent the distress from controlling our actions.
5. Escape and avoidance – where we deny the existence of stress as a coping response.
6. Radical acceptance – where one resorts to unconditional self-acceptance for adapting to adversity.
7. Positive reappraisal – where we seek to find the answer in the struggle and grow from it.
8. Strategic problem-solving – where we implement specific solution-focused strategies to get through the tough time and redirect our actions accordingly.

Surender (2021) defined academic achievement is an attained ability or degree of competence in school task, usually measured by standardized tests and expressed in grades or units based on norms derived from a wide sampling of students' performance. The most significant psychological factors for students' academic achievements is their self-viability, motivation,

stress and test nervousness for the subject they study. Academic achievement should be considered to be a multifaceted construct that comprises different domains of learning (Ricarda et al., 2020).

Sultana et al. (2017) maintained that good academic achievement is essential for fruitful requirement in life because it gives children opportunities for higher education, better occupational career and productive life. In contrast low academic achievement causes stress, hopelessness, depression, delinquency and substance abuse. low or moderate levels of stress can interfere with task performance and cognitive reactions of stress result in the inability to concentrate. Excessive stress hampers students' performance at all levels of education leading to physical, psychological, sociological imbalance. Academic Causes of Stress in students could be, work that is too hard, work that is too easy, learning style mismatch, homework problems, test anxiety, social causes of school anxiety, parental pressure, student teacher mismatch, friends, lack of family time, time schedule and time management, excessive workload, competition, poor diet, socio-economic status (Surrender, 2021). Therefore, the need for an appropriate coping strategies become evident for students' adjustment both in school and larger society

In a study conducted by Julia et al. (2006), gender is a key determinant in academic success, with females attaining at a significantly higher level than males. The differences between males and females were in terms of engagement in coping strategies and academic attainment. Specifically, males exhibited greater ability to detach themselves from the emotions of a situation. They were more inclined to demonstrate emotional inhibition or 'bottling up' of emotions and reported higher self-esteem. Such findings are consistent with findings of (Richardson & Woodley 2003), who found that significant differences were seen in females achieving higher learning outcomes than males because they were more persistent and committed than males. Graves et al. (2021) found that gender differences were evident in both coping dimensions and individual coping strategies used. Females were found to utilize the emotion-focused coping dimension and endorsed the use of four coping strategies more often than males. These included self-distraction, emotional support, instrumental support, and venting. On the flip, Ajai and Imoko (2015) found no significant difference in male and female achievements in Mathematics. Students taught algebra using PBL did not significantly differ in achievement and retention scores, thereby revealing that male and female students are capable of competing and collaborating in mathematics. In addition, this finding showed that performance is a function of orientation, not gender.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher observed a persistent decline in academic performance of secondary school students' year in year out. Although, some of these students spend time and energy studying Many of them pay attention to other unnecessary distractions such as social media usage which may affect their concentration to learn in school and in turn affect their results. Consequently, they end up being frustrated as their goal is not realized. Academic demands expose students to numerous stressful experiences that could affect their achievement and psychological wellbeing if not managed effectively. Stress has potential harm to the students'

academic achievement because it reduced ability to pay attention, less dedication to studies and lack of proper adjustment in school. And if not checked, and the right coping strategies put in place to manage it, can degenerate into poor academic achievement, unhealthy academic experiences, drug abuse, school dropout and other social vices. In the long run, this may lead to inability of students to earn requisite credits in their final examination, thereby affecting successful transition into tertiary institution. It is against this background that the researchers seek to investigate gender difference in coping strategies and academic achievement among secondary school students in Zaria metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided with the following objectives:

1. To determine the difference between coping strategies of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis.
2. To determine the difference between academic achievement of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in coping strategies of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis.
2. There is no significant difference in academic achievement of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey design. Population of the study comprised of all SS 3 students of 2022/2023 academic year in senior secondary schools in Zaria Metropolis which stands at 9,249. A sample of the study compresses of 240 based on the recommendation of Research Advisors (2006). A multistage cluster sampling technique was used to select four schools which were used. These schools include GSS Kufena, GSS Alhudahuda, GGSS Gyllesu and GGSS Fada. A self-develop Inventory was employed to collect data on coping strategies of the students. Mathematics and English Mock Examination 2022/2023 results collected from ERC; Zaria were used as measures of academic achievement. The coping strategies Inventory had 20 items each on a four-point Likert scale ranging from very true, true, untrue and very untrue. Instruments were validated by experts from the Departments of Educational Psychology and Counselling Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, and reliability was established using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient with reliability of 0.790 for coping strategies. Instruments were administered by the researchers and data collected were analyzed using independent t-test with SPSS version 26.

Results

- H01: There is no significant difference in coping strategies of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria metropolis.

Table 1: An independent t-test Analysis comparing mean scores of Male and Female SS 3 Students on Coping Strategies

Variables	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P
Male	125	56.69	18.34	-.885	77	.379
Female	125	59.50	8.06			

Table 1 showed that the mean scores of coping strategies of Male and Female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis is not significantly different with $t = -.885$ and $p = .379$ which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in coping strategies of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria metropolis is hereby retained.

H02: There is no significant difference in academic achievement of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis.

Table 2: t-test Analysis Comparing mean score of Male and Female on Academic Achievement.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	T	df	p
Male	125	13.18	3.78	-.122	78	.903
Female	125	13.30	5.24			

Table 2 revealed that there is no significant difference in academic achievement of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis $t = -.122$ and $p = .903$ which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in academic achievement of male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis is hereby retained.

Discussion of Findings

The study examines the gender differences in coping strategies and academic achievement among secondary school students in Zaria Metropolis. No significant difference was found between coping strategies among male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis. This finding suggests that both male and female secondary school students in Zaria metropolis handle stress using the problem focus approach, active and engagement strategies as oppose to other approaches. These findings are on the flip not in agreement with Graves et al. (2021) who investigated into Gender differences in perceived stress and coping among college students. Their findings suggest that gender differences were evident in both coping dimensions and individual coping strategies with females found to utilize the emotion-focused coping dimension and endorsed the use of other coping strategies like self-distraction, emotional support, instrumental support, and venting more often than males. The disparities may be informed as a result of instruments used, geographical location, cultural background and the that population and sample of this study were secondary school students while the former were university students.

Findings of the study also reveal no significant difference in academic achievements among male and female SS 3 students in Zaria Metropolis. This stands to be in agreement with the

findings of Ajai and Imoko (2015) who found no significant difference in male and female achievements in Mathematics. On the flip, this finding of the study is not in agreement with that of Julia et al. (2006), who found that gender is a key determinant in academic success, with females attaining at a significantly higher level than males. Male students exhibited greater ability to detach themselves from the emotions of a situation. They were more inclined to demonstrate emotional inhibition or ‘bottling up’ of emotions and reported higher self-esteem. The finding is equally not in line with the findings of Richardson and Woodley (2003), who found that significant differences were seen in Females achieving higher learning outcomes than males because they were more persistent and committed than males.

Conclusions

It was concluded that no significant difference in academic performance and coping strategies found among male and female students of SS three students in Zaria metropolis. Impliedly, this indicates there isn’t any difference in the manner or strategies of coping with stress and academic performance among male and female students. However, a healthy gender competition is needed for better academic achievements in schools. In most researches on gender differences in academic performance, females were seen to have shown significant better achievements than male students. In the aspect of coping, males were mostly seen to have demonstrated emotional inhibition or ‘bottling up’ of emotions and reported higher self-esteem as opposed to female students who apply the emotion focused strategy. In the whole, further researches may bring to limelight why there isn’t significant difference found in gender on academic and coping strategies among male and female students in Zaria metropolis.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on findings of the study:

1. Psychologists and counsellors should as a matter of importance, educate students on the various coping strategies they can adopt in case of stress. In-depth explanation should be made to give room for students to understand what strategies suit them irrespective of gender.
2. A healthy gender-based competition should be encouraged among students because as it brings about better academic achievement.
3. Parents should spend quality time with their children and have emotional attachment with them. Create an enabling atmosphere where children feel free to voice out their problems, fears, and achievements. They should also understand their children emotional and psychological state, personality type and guide them accordingly.

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