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Academic Stress as Correlate of Aggressive Behaviours Among In-School Adolescents in Anambra State

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized correlational research design to investigate academic stress as correlate of aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents in Anambra state. Five research questions guided the study, and five null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population of the study consisted of all the 12,172 Senior Secondary (SS2) students in the 263 public secondary schools in Anambra state. The sample for the study consisted of 750 SS2 students drawn from the population of the study using simple random sampling technique. Two sets of questionnaire were used to collect data for the study. The two sets of questionnaire are titled "Academic Stress Questionnaire" (ASQ) and "Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire" (BPAQ). The instruments for data collection were validated by three experts, two in the Department of Educational Foundations and one in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education but an expert in Educational Psychology all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach's alpha method and the alpha coefficient was 0.80 for ASQ and 0.78 for BPAQ. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation for answering the research questions while P-value of Correlation Coefficient was used for testing the hypotheses. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that academic stress positively correlated with aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. The researchers recommended among others that teachers should evolve pedagogical skills that will enable in-school adolescents to manage their frustration and by extension reduce their proclivity to aggressive behaviours.

Keywords: Academic stress, aggressive behaviours and in-school adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of life in the development of an individual between childhood and adulthood. The adolescence stage constitutes a phase of curiosity, risk taking and defiance. As opined by Okeke and Joe-Akunne (2020), most students in senior secondary schools are in their adolescent stage. They further asserted that this is a period when the adolescents are filled with life and energy, many are yet to develop proper self-identity, many draw their identity from peer group perceived “tough guys” criterion and more often exert their physical energy in aggressive behaviours. Giving credence to this assertion is Tadele (2019) who noted that recently, manifestation of aggressive behaviours is one of the major challenges associated with adolescents in secondary schools. Tadele further decried the pervading incidence of aggressive behaviours among secondary school students is startling.

Psychologically, aggression is a term which refers to a range of behaviours that can result in both physical and psychological harm to oneself, others and objects in the environment. This type of behaviour centers on harming another person either physically or mentally. Aggression can take varied forms including physical, verbal, mental and emotional. Physical aggression are aggressive behaviours that physically harms oneself or others such as beating, hitting, biting, kicking and using weapons. Mental aggression entail aggressive behaviours experienced with the intent of harming someone mentally such as causing anxiety, stress and depression. Emotional aggression refers to aggressive behaviours that harms someone emotionally and causes them to struggle with expressing themselves while verbal aggression connotes aggressive behaviours that is spoken by one person to make another person feel less confident such as mocking, name-calling and yelling (Kendra (2020); Lauren (2020); Tadele (2019)). However, the researchers’ observation is that physical aggression is more common with secondary school students than the other forms of aggression. Supporting the above statement is Fauzi, Zulkefli and Baharom (2023) that physical aggression is a common type of aggression observed among adolescents which is apparent and outward confrontational acts manifested physically such as fighting.

Some authors have tried suggesting possible reasons for manifestation of aggressive behaviours among adolescents. Berkshire Healthcare National Health Scheme Foundation Trust (2024) posited such reasons to include health conditions. For example, children and adolescents with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and sensory processing difficulties has the tendency of displaying aggressive behaviours when they feel out of control, over stimulated/anxious or when they are finding the sensory environment difficult. Other reasons include feeling anxious and unsafe, experiencing peer relationship difficulties, difficulty in expressing their desire/wish, trying to get their own way and academic challenges.

Academic challenges are inevitable at all levels of schooling. School education is a very important part in an individual’s life and is also a turning point in their academic life. At this stage, the academic performance of a student plays a crucial role in deciding the next stage of their education, which in turn shapes their career. An excess of academic stress during this

stage can result in adverse effects that are far-reaching and prolonged. In today's highly competitive world, students face various academic problems including exam stress, disinterest in attending classes and the inability to understand a subject. Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even the fear of the possibility of academic failure. Academic stressors show themselves in many aspects in the students' environment: at school, home, in their peer relations and even in their neighbourhood.

Excessive levels of academic stress can result in an increased prevalence of psychological and physical problems like depression, anxiety, nervousness and stress related disorders, which in turn can affect their academic results. It is also a reflection of an individual's academic frustration, academic conflict, academic anxiety and academic pressure. Personal experience and observation of the researchers reveal students' greatest academic stressors to include tests, grades, homework, academic and achievement expectations and parental pressure. School related stresses include inadequate instructional methods, teacher-student relationships, heavy academic workload, poor physical classroom environments, inability to balance one's leisure time with school, and disorganization surrounding academic assignments and schedules. Additional sources consist of a struggle to meet academic standards, worries about time management and concerns over grades and scores. Students are thus, seen to be affected by the negative causes of academic stress.

Often times some students find themselves overwhelmed by multitude of responsibilities, inadvertently embracing unnecessary stress. The word stress originally derived from a Latin word called "Stringere" which connotes pain, hardship and affliction. At certain points in the school, the demands of academic life can sometimes create distress for students. Academic stress is the intense feeling of pressure and anxiety related to academic engagement. Anoushka (2018) giving credence to the above assertion opined that the competitive nature of the world today has opened avenue for students encountering multifaceted academic problems including inability to understand contents, lack of interest in attending classes and examination stress. Anoushka (2018) further observed that academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failures. Dickson, Joshua and Mavis (2020) explained academic stress as all kinds of factors that trigger tension often referred to as stressors which could be interpersonal, intrapersonal, social, health related as well as environmentally related that hinders academic growth. Bibi, Javed, Khuda and Khurram (2020) noted that academic stress entail combined effect of academic-related requirements that goes beyond the individuals accessible adaptive resources. There are five components in academic stress namely: Pressure (from study), Frustration (from workload), Anxiety (worry about grades), self expectation and despondency.

Academic pressure is the tension, discomfort, and other emotions caused by the pressure from school, family, and society in the learning process (Vallejo, 2023). Academic pressure has some of its causative factors to include parental pressure, poor organization and time management. Academic pressure can be helpful in encouraging good performance but excessive academic pressure can be detrimental to a student's health and overall wellbeing.

Academic frustration is one of the components of academic stress which can negatively impact students' interest and enthusiasm in their academic activities, causing them to feel isolated due to perceived failures, thus decreasing their personal achievement motivation. Academic frustration is defined as a negative psychological emotion experienced by students when they are unable to deal with frustration in their learning process (Ballman, Helmer, Berg-Beckhoff, Guldager, Jervelund, Busse, Pischke, Negash, Wendt and Stock (2022). Although academic frustration is a negative emotional experience, some authors including Mather, Bergstrom, Blom and Swedberg (2015); Li, Yu, Gao, Tang, Liao and Zhang (2019) opined that it may sometimes lead to positive outcomes. For example, negative emotional experiences can have an amplification function whereby individuals become more motivated to address their own problems with purpose, which is conducive to targeted problem solving.

Academic anxieties is the feelings of worry, tension, or dread that are associated with academic settings or tasks which could be examinations, assignments, subjects, social pressures related to schoolwork (parents, peers), or merely feeling uneasy about studying or working in groups in class. It is common for all learners to feel some degree of nervousness about academic requirements or assignments. In fact, a low degree of anxiousness can actually be helpful in motivation to meet academic goals. This is called "Facilitative Anxiety". However, when these feelings of anxiety become so intense that they become detrimental to academic success, learners should engage in coping strategies to manage their academic anxiety (Indiana Academy, (2022).

Self-expectation are often rooted in a person's value, beliefs and desires. The concept of self-expectation in education simply refers to an individual's belief about his/her abilities, potential and likelihood of success in academic endeavors. It includes both the student's perceived ability and their expectation of success based on their experiences and perceptions. Educationists recognize that self-expectation significantly impact a student's motivation, effort and ultimately their academic outcomes.

Despondency implies a state of low spirits, characterized by a loss of hope and courage, particularly within the learning environment. Despondency can manifest as dejection, discouragement, and a lack of motivation, often arising from perceived failures or challenges in academic pursuits. It is characterized by feelings of hopelessness, sadness and a loss of motivation to learn or engage in schoolwork. Students experiencing despondency often exhibit lack of interest in learning, a reluctance to participate in class as well as decline in effort and engagement with their studies as a result of academic stress.

Academic stress manifest in different aspects in the students' environment, at school, family, peer relations as well as in their neighbourhood. Academic stress could result in prevalence of psychological and physical problems like depression, anxiety, nervousness and stress related issues which in turn can affect academic results (Anoushka, 2018). The researchers' experiences during their secondary school education and observation of close associates reveal that stress has become part of students' academic life due to various internal and external expectations placed on them. Also the greatest academic stressors

among most secondary school students' include tests, scores, homework and academic achievement expectation.

Stress has become a health concern in the world today and seems to affect people of every age bracket. It is the discrepancy between the demands placed by the environment and a person's coping ability. Academic stress according to Aihie and Ohanaka (2019) is the unpleasant situation that occurs due to the many demands made on the students or learners in the form of examinations, maintaining healthy and academic lives, competing with peers, meeting the academic expectations of teachers and parents as well as their own academic expectations. These stressors in the learning environment spring up as the in-school adolescents try to balance their busy academic lives with fending for themselves while further trying to find time for family and friends. When these demands exceed the resources available for the student to cope effectively, stress occurs. It is noteworthy that stress at some level can be a motivating factor for the in-school adolescents to achieve more but it becomes worrisome once it exceeds the learner's ability and breeds indulgence in aggressive behaviours (Oden, 2021). There is need to seek redress for this social problem from the psychological construct of academic stress. The researchers adopted a psychological approach to addressing the social vice of aggressive behaviours. Therefore, the study intends to investigate academic stress as correlate of aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents in Anambra state.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between pressure and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state?
2. What is the relationship between frustration and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state?
3. What is the relationship between anxieties and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state?
4. What is the relationship between self-expectation and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state?
5. What is the relationship between despondency and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between pressure and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state.
2. There is no significant relationship between frustration and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state.
3. There is no significant relationship between anxieties and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state.
4. There is no significant relationship between self-expectation and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state.
5. There is no significant relationship between despondency and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra state.

METHODS

The correlation survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consisted of all the 12,172 Senior Secondary (SS2) students in the 263 public secondary schools in Anambra state. The sample for the study consisted of 750 SS2 students drawn from the population of the study using simple random sampling technique. Two sets of questionnaire were used to collect data for the study. The two sets of questionnaire are titled “Academic Stress Questionnaire” (ASQ) and “Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire” (BPAQ). The instruments for data collection were validated by three experts, two in the Department of Educational Foundations and one in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education but an expert in Educational Psychology all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instruments were established using Cronbach’s alpha method and the alpha coefficient was 0.80 for ASQ and 0.78 for BPAQ.

The instruments were administered by the researchers with the assistance of five teachers at selected secondary schools the researchers were to work with. The teachers were guided/briefed on the demands, details and intents of the research work which guided them to direct the students properly. Two weeks were mapped out for the administration of the questionnaires. The researchers, with the collaborative efforts of the research assistants, used direct delivery approach in order to retrieve a greater portion of the distributed questionnaires. Out of 750 copies of questionnaire that were distributed, 680 were recovered; signaling 90.7% recovery which was used for the analysis.

Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation for answering the research questions while P-value of Correlation Coefficient was used for testing the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1: Pearson r on Relationship between Pressure and Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents

Source of Variation		r	p-value	Remark
N				
Pressure	680	0.812	0.02	Very High Positive and Significant Relationship
Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents				

Data in Table 1 show that there is a very high positive relationship between pressure and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r , which is 0.812. More so, there is a significant relationship existing between pressure and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents. The calculated r (0.812) has p -value <0.05 . The null hypothesis one was therefore rejected.

Table 2: Pearson r on Relationship between Frustration and Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents

Source of Variation N		r	p-value	Remark
Frustration	680	0.739	0.00	High Positive and Significant Relationship
Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents				

Data in Table 2 show that there is a high positive relationship between frustration and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r , which is 0.739. Again, there is a significant relationship existing between frustration and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents. The calculated r (0.739) has p -value <0.05 . The null hypothesis two was therefore rejected. .

Table 3: Pearson r on Relationship between Anxieties and Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents

Source of Variation N		r	p-value	Remark
Anxieties	680	0.785	0.04	High Positive and Significant Relationship
Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents				

Data in Table 3 show that there is a high positive relationship between anxieties and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r , which is 0.785. More so, there is a significant relationship existing between anxieties and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents. The calculated r (0.785) has p -value <0.05 . The null hypothesis three was therefore rejected.

Table 4: Pearson r on Relationship between Self-Expectation and Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Self-Expectation	680	-	0.21	Moderate Negative and Non-Significant Relationship
Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents		0.571		

Data in Table 4 show that there is a moderate negative relationship existing between self-expectation and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r , which is -0.571 . Again, there is a non-significant relationship existing between self-expectation and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents. The calculated r (-0.571) has p -value greater than 0.05 . The null hypothesis four was therefore not rejected.

Table 5: Pearson r on Relationship between Despondency and Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Despondency	680	0.506	0.01	Moderate Positive and Significant Relationship
Aggressive Behaviours of In-School Adolescents				

Data in Table 5 show that there is a moderate positive relationship existing between despondency and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r , which is 0.506 . In addition, there is a significant relationship existing between despondency and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents. The calculated r (0.506) has p -value <0.05 . The null hypothesis five was therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Relationship between pressure and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State

The finding of the study revealed that a very high positive and significant relationship existed between pressure and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This is indicative of the fact that the more academically pressured in-school adolescents are, the greater the tendency for them to exhibit aggressive behaviours. This is to the extent that academic pressure has a way of making in-school adolescents lose concentration and when concentration is lost, the natural tendency is for one to exhibit aggressive behaviours especially when left unchecked. Much as there is paucity of research works on academic pressure and aggressive behaviours among in-school adolescents, Aihie and Ohanaka (2019) asserted that though reaction to stress may differ from one student to the other, in-school adolescents suffering from academic stress display several common symptoms such as loss of energy, increased blood pressure, depressed mood, difficulty in concentrating on tasks, impatience and nervousness. It stands to reason that academically pressured in-school adolescents lend themselves to impatience which could ultimately culminate in aggressive behaviours. In similar vein, Kio, Omeonu and Agbede (2015) pointed out that academically stressed in-school adolescents may equally show symptoms of being poorly motivated, are less productive, less safe at work and are vulnerable to social vices like drug abuse and violence.

Relationship between frustration and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State

The finding of the study revealed that a high positive and significant relationship existed between frustration and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This shows that the more frustrated an in-school adolescent is, the greater the tendency for them to engage in aggressive behaviours. This is because a frustrated in-school adolescent will be disposed to depression which could result in aggression behaviour. In line with findings of the present study, Bennet and Holloway (2014) stressed that adolescents exhibit risky behaviours such as increase in consumption of drugs and alcohol, unprotected sex as a result of academic stress. Put differently, frustration borne out of academic stress could make in-school adolescents prone to aggressive behaviours. In similar vein, Reddy *et al.* (2018) observed that academic stress has further been blamed for the five-fold increase in suicide attempts among students.

Relationship between anxieties and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State

The finding of the study revealed that a high positive and significant relationship existed between anxieties and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This shows that the more anxious an in-school adolescent is, the higher the tendency for aggressive behaviours. In other words, in-school adolescents that are given to anxiety is bound to exude negative attitudes towards their studies or even co-students which could predispose them to aggressive behaviours. Similarly, excessive academic stress not only causes negative cognitive attitudes toward academics (Savarese *et al.*, 2019); behaviorally,

leads to bad habits such as academic procrastination (Niazov, Hen, and Ferrari, 2022), emotionally inducing depression (Jiang, Ren, Jiang and Wang, 2021), reduced mental health (Aloia and McTigue, 2019), and even suicidal tendencies (Okechukwu *et al.*, 2022).

Relationship between self-expectation and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State

The finding of the study showed that a moderately negative and non-significant relationship existed between self-expectation and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. This indicates the higher the self-expectation of in-school adolescents, the lesser the tendency for aggressive behaviours. This goes to show that in-school adolescents who have high self-expectation possess the lower tendency for examination misconduct which could make them less vulnerable to aggressive behaviours. In tandem with the present study, Ouyang, Ouyang and Xu (2023) found that adolescents' self-educational expectations is a protective factor against adolescent problem behaviors, and enhancing this factor can decrease the likelihood of adolescent engagement in problem behaviors.

Relationship between despondency and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State

The finding of the study depicted that a moderately positive and significant relationship existed between despondency and aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State. Put differently, the more despondent in-school adolescents are, the greater the tendency for them to get involved in aggressive behaviours. Thus, despondency brings about examination malpractice tendency and the logical consequence could be aggressive behaviours. The finding of the present study is in agreement with Walburg (2014) who noted that after feeling academic stress, adolescents may react negatively to this stress if they assess it as a threat. The afore-mentioned could make them susceptible to aggressive behaviours. Isiguzo and Okolie (2024) academic stress had a significant impact on mental health of first year undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Sokoto Metropolis respectively. This to say that more academically stressed in-school adolescents are, the higher the tendency to be despondent which could impact that their mental health. In further agreement with the present study, Tharaldsen, Tvedt, Caravita and Bru (2022) found that a strong link existed between academic stress and emotional problems.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that academic stress positively correlated with

aggressive behaviours of in-school adolescents in Anambra State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of the study, several recommendations were made which include:

1. Guidance counsellors should organize counselling sessions for in-school adolescents on the need to manage pressure so as to reduce their tendency to aggressive behaviours.
2. Teachers should evolve pedagogical skills that will enable in-school adolescents manage their frustration and by extension reduce their proclivity to aggressive behaviours.
3. Guidance counsellors should organize counselling sessions for in-school adolescents on the need to handle anxieties so as to reduce their tendency to aggressive behaviours.
4. In-school adolescents should see the need to eschew despondency so as to reduce their inclination to aggressive behaviours.

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