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Demographic Dynamics as Underpinning of Non Academic Stress Level among University Students in Kenya

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Abstract
The study sought to find out the influence of gender, university type, year of study and age on non-academic stress levels among bachelor of education students in western Kenya. This study adopted a quantitative research method. It was based cognitive appraisal theory which proposes that a meditational process occurs between a stimulus (input) and response (output). A sample of 410 undergraduate students was selected from the schools of education of 6 universities. Non-Academic Stress Level (NASL) questionnaire was used to collect data which was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics used included percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviation. The inferential statistics used was two-way ANOVA at the 0.05 level of significance. The current study found that there was a significant variation of .011 on non-academic stress levels based on the year of study. The third year students had higher mean for the non-academic stress levels than the other years. There was also variation of .038at .05 level of significance on the levels of nonacademic stress based on university type. Students from private universities expressed higher level of non academic stress than those in the public universities. The findings of this study points out to the need to provide support to students on how to cope with nonacademic challenge s as they transit through their four years of study. There is also need to help student in private universities to cope with their nonacademic stress.

Keywords: Demographics, Non-academic stress level, university student, stressors, academic.

INTRODUCTION
University life exposes students to both academic and non academic experiences that are both exciting and some challenging. These require them to exercise control over their engagements and if they fail to do so, they are bound to be overwhelmed. Adams and Blair [1] found that one of the nonacademic factors students need to have control over is time management. In that particular study the participants identified 12 non-academic factors that they felt impacted on student performance and rated them using a Likert-type rating scale. Each factor was rated for perceived prevalence and perceived severity. The results showed that student time management was regarded as the most important nonacademic factor.

Coccia and Darling [2] maintain that many aspects of university life have the potential to cause stress including fulfilling academic requirements, life styles, poor time management, living conditions, social and administrative issues. Kumara and Jain [3] assert that when stress is perceived negatively or becomes excessive, it leads to anxiety before and during examinations. This reinforces the view that working towards exam makes students feel a lot of pressure. Besides academic requirements students also have other activities outside the academic environment which can potentially induce stress. These include social events, sports, theatrical endeavors, musical events, religious activities, entertainment activities and environmental organizations among other. Both the academic and non-academic activities may act as a source of pressure to the student. Kamarudin, Aris, and Ibrahim [4] render that too much stress can interfere with student's preparation, concentration, and performance but positive stress can be helpful to students by motivating them to peak performance.

Kumari and Jain, [5] point out the significant stressors for veterinary students included work and volunteer hours (outside of school), credit card debt, relationship concerns, self-care (i.e., eating, sleeping, and exercise habits) and perception of stress, anxiety, and depression levels. This is a patent indication that non academic environment can be stressful to college students.

Earlier studies also revealed that stressful experiences for students do not only emanate from their academic realm but also from the non-academic sphere. Pariat, Rynjah and Kharjana, [6] relate that non-academic stress factors experienced by university students in the exterior of the academic realm include family issues, financial problems, relationships with opposite sex and problems of accommodation. In most Kenyan universities there is a problem

concerning accommodation because residential halls are not adequate.

Misigo [7] confirms that based on first hand students' accounts, lack of accommodation, insecurity in residential areas, relational concerns and problems with roommates were some of the stressors in public universities in Western Kenya. The study further revealed that due to congestions in the hostels some students have to reside outside the university which posed challenges related to rental costs, commuting and insecurity. This corroborates the fact that outside the academic environment there are numerous factors that potentially cause stress to university students.

There are varied forms of stressors in the life of university students. Amusala, Odera, and Ndiku [8] relay that concerning causes of stress among university students, overall daily hassles were reported more often than major life events, with intrapersonal causes of stress being the most frequently reported sources. In addition, relations with faculty members and time pressures could also be sources of stress. Ang and Huan [9] relate that different groups of people are known to have different stressors.

In the same breadth Yikealo, Yemane and Karvinen [10] found that environmental stressors such as weather, noise, crowding, traffic, unsafe and substandard housing and crime were causes of stress among college student. Yet-mee, Cai-Lian and Teck-Heana [11] pointed out that the cause of stress among college students in Malaysia was not restricted to their studies alone but it could have been caused by health, financial, academic and romantic relationships. The study also found that stress among college students resulted from family and academic related problems and other factors such as societal activities, job demands or romantic relationships.

Rafidah, Aziza, Chong, Noraini, Norzaid, and Salwani [12] concur that, university students might experience high stress due to academic commitments, financial pressures and lack of time management skills.

Stress among university students may begin way before they encounter serious academic challenges. For instance among university students in Jordan, students face pressure when they exit high school. They face the difficult challenge of leaving home, separating from their parents, and beginning the process of finding their own identity as adults and their place in the world. These can cause students sadness and tension, [13].

Distant from the social cultural expectations, some emotional experiences can exert pressure on students. Busari [14] articulates that some other non-academic stressors are universally painful and emotive to most of the people such as the death of a loved one. However these major life event stressors are relatively rare but most of the stressors encountered by university students are those that occur on a daily basis, the daily hassles [15].

A study by Busari [14] identified the difference in the perceptions of academic stress and reaction to stressors based on gender among first year university students in Nigeria. The results of the research showed that male and female respondents differed significantly in their perceptions of frustrations, financials, conflicts and self- expectations stressors but did not significantly differ in their perceptions of pressures and changes related stressors. Perceived stress was reported in some research, to vary among different socio-demographic groups [16]; [17]). For example, it was found that females, younger students, those without a previous higher education qualification, and those not satisfied with their decision to study dentistry were significantly more likely to report perceived higher level of stress when compared to their counterparts[18]; [16].

Men and women report different reactions to stress, both physically and mentally. Men and women attempt to manage stress in very different ways and also perceive their ability to do so and the things that stand in their way in markedly dissimilar ways. The fore stated view is sustained by Ermasova, Ermasova and Rekhter [19] who found out that, male students were more likely to use exercise and smoking to alleviate stress than female students. Kumar and Bhukar [20] state that female students are more vulnerable to stress that comes and are inflicted more with environmental stress than the male counterparts.

This was attributed to the fact that girls were expected to watch more social standards and restraints in Indian society more than the boys. There is limited research on non academic stress among university students in Kenya. Although this was the case in their study girls were reported to have better coping strategies than boys. Seemingly stress cannot be avoided at any stage of life. The reviewed literature hints that there are different sources of stress as much as there are different ways of responding and coping mechanisms. It is therefore imperative to understand the causes of stress among university students so as to be able to equip them with effective coping strategies. This study was therefore intended to examine how the demographic dynamics influence the levels of nonacademic stress among university students in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

This study sought to determine the level of non-academic stress level among university students in Kenya. It was also set to examine how demographic

dynamics such as gender, the year of study, age and the type of university underpins on non-academic stress level among university students.

Research Methodology

This study adopted quantitative research design which enabled the researcher to gather quantifiable data. It allowed the use of statistical methods and helped increased the accuracy of the study.

Study Area

This study involved both public and private chartered universities in western part of Kenya. According to Geology.com [21], the country borders the Indian Ocean and Somali to the east, southern Ethiopia and South Sudan to the North, Uganda to the West and Tanzania to the South**.** The area was easily accessible and allowed the use of purposive sampling in selecting the universities involved in the study. This region was considered appropriate because little has been done on non-academic stress despite the presence of reports of signs of stress among students.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The target population of this study included all undergraduate university students in both public and private universities in. According to Ministry of Education strategic plan for the period 2017-2022, there are 74 universities in Kenya. There are 37 public universities and an equivalent number of private universities. The undergraduate students were drawn from the first to fourth years of study of 2017/ 2018 academic year. While the universities were purposively selected based on their presence in the region, the research population was obtained through stratified sampling.

Sharma [22] explains that this method involves the division of a population into smaller groups known as strata. In stratified random sampling, the strata are formed based on members' shared attributes or a characteristic for example in this study gender was considered as strata. The advantage of using the method is that it is highly representative of the population. It also makes it possible to make inferences. The dataset had a similar number of both genders. Regarding the type of university, majority of the respondents were from public universities. The data for the year of the study was well distributed with majority of the respondents (33.2%) being third years while the first and fourth years were the least representing 21.5%.

Instruments

A questionnaire was the main instrument used to obtain data. This was the preferred method of collecting data because it would lead to quantified data. It also allowed the researcher to carry out statistical analysis thus qualifying the study to fit a quantitative research method. Quantification enabled the results of the study to be easily compared and contrasted with those of other researchers. The first section had 4 items used to collect demographic information on gender, type of university, year of study, and age. The second section that determined non-academic stress level had 14 items, but two, based on a likert scale.

Scoring of the Instruments

The first section of the questionnaire provided bio data on gender, type of university, the year of study, and age. These were used to describe and organize the characteristics of the population. It allowed observation of non academic stress level. Data on Stress levels was obtained through Non-academic Stress Level (NASL) questionnaire. It had 14 items on a likert scale and 2 items not based on the likert scale. The respondents stated the extent of stress level. Scoring of responses were as follows; not stressful (NS =1), slightly stressful (SS=2), moderately stressful (MS=3), highly stressful (HS=4) and extremely stressful (ES=5). The maximum score on non-academic stress level scale was 70 and minimum was 14. Scores from 49-70 were considered as high level of stress, 37-48 as moderate or comfort zone and 36 and below as low level of stress. In excel spread sheet high stress level was coded as 3, moderate stress level remained as MS and was coded as 2 and low stress level was coded as 1. The mean on the non-academic stress level scale was indicated as the non-academic stress level index (NASLI).

Limitation

Self-reported questionnaires were used to collect data which did not guarantee the objectivity of the information given. On the same note it was also not possible to guarantee exhaustive responses since the questionnaire was mainly based on close ended items. The responses may not have accurately reflected the very true feelings of the respondents since the items gave the respondents limited options. This may have hindered effective responses. This was dealt with by using the likert scale to get as varied responses as possible

This research used a sample as opposed to the whole population and the generalization of results could only be made to the research population. It was also not possible to obtain the most desirable sample because of restriction of resources and time. Non-academic stress is a problem across all groups of university students but this study chose to use those pursuing Bachelor of Education.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics used included frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. These descriptive statistics simplified the data for a better understanding and enabled the researchers to describe

the variables. Two-way ANOVA (inferential statistics) was used to determine the differences on the levels of stress according to gender, year of study, type of university and age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Non-Academic Stress and Gender

The intention of this study was to find whether male and female students differed in their perception of non-academic stress. Stress levels were categorised as low, moderate and high. Table 1 below shows the non-academic stress levels, presented as low, moderate and high based on gender. The figures are presented in terms of frequency, percentage and mean.

Table 1: Gender and non-academic stress level Cross tabulation

Gender	Low stress	Moderate stress	High stress	Total	NASLI
Female	33(16.1%)	84 (41%)	88(42.9%)	205	2.3
Male	36(17.6%)	79(38.5%)	90(43.9%)	205	2.3
Total	69(16.8%)	163(39.8%)	178(43.4%)	410	2.3

Table 1 above shows that male and female respondents did not differ greatly in their expression of non-academic stress levels. With NASLI on a 3-point scale, both male and female students had moderate non-academic stress of 2.3. Male students however had a higher percentage of those with high stress. Female respondents had a higher percentage with moderate to high stress levels and a smaller percentage with low stress level. On low stress level the female respondents had a lower number of respondents as compared with the male respondents. This is an indication that female students were slightly less stressed than the male respondents on non-academic stress than the male respondents however the difference is minimal. This can be attributed to exposure to similar experiences in the non academic environment by both genders.

Non-Academic Stress Level and Type of University

This research also enquired on how non-academic stress level was influenced by the type of university. The types of universities were public and private. The question was on whether non-academic stress level can be determined by the type of university. There were 108 students from private university and 302 from public. The levels of stress as per university are shown in table 2 below

Table 2: University and non-academic stress level Cross tabulation

University	Low stress	Moderate stress	High stress	Total	NASLI
Private	12 (11.1%)	41 (38%)	55 (50.9)%	108 (26.3%)	2.4
Public	58 (19.2%)	121 (40.1%)	123 (40.7%)	302 (73.7%)	2.2
Total	70 (17.1%)	162 (39.5%)	178 (43.4%)	410	2.3

The NASLI indicate that bachelor of education students in both private and public had moderate non-academic stress levels. There were a larger percentage of students with high non-academic stress level in comparison with those with moderate and low stress. Students in private universities reported higher non-academic stress level than those in public universities with 50.9 percent of respondents with high non-academic stress level as compared to 40.7 percent of those from public universities. This means that students from private universities suffer more from non-academic stress than those from public universities. This can be attributed to challenges relating to accommodation and financial needs.

Year of Study and Non-Academic Stress Level

This research sought to understand the level of stress based on the year of study. Bachelor of Education degree in Kenya takes four years. The years of study therefore range from the first to the fourth year. The findings are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Year of study and non-academic stress level Cross tabulation

Year	Low stress	Moderate stress	High stress	Total	NASLI
Year 1	30 (30%)	35 (35%)	35 (35%)	100 (24.4%)	2.1
Year 2	16 (16.5%)	39 (40.2%)	42 (43.3%)	97 (23.6%)	2.3
Year 3	13 (12.3%)	34 (32.1%)	59 (55.6%)	106 (25.9%)	2.4
Year 4	11 (10.3%)	54 (50.5%)	42 (39.2%)	107 (26.1%)	2.3
Total	70 (17.1%)	162 (39.5%)	178 (43.4%)	410	2.3

The description in table 3 above indicates that regardless of the year of study the bachelor of education students had moderate non-academic stress levels. However the third year students exhibited higher level of nonacademic stress than the other years with NASLI of 2.4. The table above shows that 55.6 percent of third year students had high level of non-academic stress. The students in that year of study were affected more by non-academic issues than the other years.

This higher level of nonacademic stress among third year students can be attributed to challenges emerging from relational problems as well as financial needs. The second year students were also more affected than the first and fourth year students with 43.3 percent having high non-academic stress. This could be the time when students are beginning to come to terms with realities of university life and may prove challenging. The fourth year had 50.5 percent of those with moderate stress level and was the highest in that level. They also had a lowest number with low stress level. This can be attributed to the fact that in the fourth year students are more mature and are able to manage their nonacademic stress more easily than in the previous years. The first year students were more comfortable with nonacademic stress than those of the other years since they had the lowest with an equal percentage (35%) of moderate and high stress. They also had the highest (30%) with low stress. In the first year student students in university are given more guidance and more attention and fair treatment by parents and university staff. Largely there was a higher percentage (43.3%) of respondents with high stress. This finding reveals that on average bachelor of education students experienced high non-academic stress level. This means that the non-academic environment present a lot of challenges to the students.

Age and Non-Academic Stress Level

Age was another demographic variable and an attempt was made to find out its influence on non-academic stress level. The age brackets were 20 and below, 21-25, 26-30 and above 30. The findings of non-academic stress levels based on age are presented on the table 4 below.

Table 4: Age and non-academic stress level Cross tabulation

Age	Low stress	Moderate stress	High stress	Total	NASLI
20 and below	21 (23.3%)	30 (33.3%)	39 (43.3%)	90 (22%)	2.2
21-25	40 (14.8%)	116 (42.8%)	115 (42.4%)	271(66.1%)	2.3
26-30	6 (14.6%)	15 (36.6%)	20 (48.8%)	41(10%)	2.3
Above 30	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	8 (1.9%)	2.3
Total	70 (17.1%)	162 (39.5%)	178 (43.4%)	410	2.3

Table 4 above shows that regardless of age, university education students had moderate non-academic stress levels. Most of the respondents were within the age bracket of 21-25. The students within this bracket expressed moderate non-academic stress level. Most students in the age bracket of 30 and above had the highest level of nonacademic stress. This is because they are trying to balance between academics and other social responsibilities such as family duties and engaging in extra sources of income activities and even some have established romantic relationships. This was followed by those within the age bracket of 26-30 with 48.8 percent. This suggests that those who are older had higher levels of non-academic stress than the younger groups. Most of the younger ages are still highly dependent on their parents and therefore may resolve their challenges more easily. The overall percentage show that those with high level were 43.3%, moderate 39.7 and low 17%. This indicates that respondents rated higher on non-academic stress levels than low and moderate stress.

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics was carried to gain a deeper understanding on the determination of non-academic stress level by gender, type of university, year of study and age. Two- way ANOVA was used and presentation of results are as shown in table 5 and 6 below.

Table 5: ANOVA for non-academic stress level based on gender and the type of University

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3.389[a]	3	1.130	2.122	.097
Intercept	1628.083	1	1628.083	3057.891	.000
Gender	.053	1	.053	.099	.754
Varsity	2.308	1	2.308	4.334	.038
Gender * varsity	.687	1	.687	1.290	.257
Error	216.163	406	.532		
Total	2320.000	410			
Corrected Total	219.551	409			

a. R Squared = .015 (Adjusted R Squared = .008)

The findings presented in table 5 above indicate that there was no significant variance in non-academic stress level based on gender since the p =.754 was greater than alpha value of .05. The findings indicate that there was significant difference in non-academic stress level based on the type of university since p = .038 was less than alpha rate of .05. This means that the respondents from private universities had significantly higher levels of nonacademic stress than those in public universities. This can be attributed to differences in learning as well as residing environments. Failure to get adequate attention from university staff could also be a contributing factor.

Table 6: ANOVA for non-academic stress level based on the year of study and age

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	10.754[a]	13	.827	1.569	.091
Intercept	278.191	1	278.191	527.612	.000
YEAR	5.903	3	1.968	3.732	.011
AGE	1.154	3	.385	.730	.535
YEAR * AGE	1.514	7	.216	.410	.896
Error	208.797	396	.527		
Total	2320.000	410			
Corrected Total	219.551	409			

a. R Squared = .049 (Adjusted R Squared = .018)

The findings in table 6 above indicates that there was significant variance in non-academic stress level based on the year of study with p = .011 less than the alpha value of 0.05. Student at different years of studies experienced significantly different levels of non academic stress. On the contrary the age did not have any significant influence on the stress level since the p value of .538 was greater than alpha rate of .05.

DISCUSSION

Non-academic stressors are the factors that do not directly relate with academic environment but the effect can extend to academic matters. Some students for example fail to achieve their degrees because of unseen factors in the non-academic environment. Non-academic stress is presumed to discourage academic success thus heightening the academic stress. Amusala, Odera, & Ndiku [8] corroborate that for college students intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors have the potential to cause stress. This view is in agreement with the assertion by Yet-mee, Cai-Lian and Teck [11] that the causes of stress among university students are multi-factorial. They recognised that the causes of stress among Malaysian university students could be attributed to their health status, financial and romantic relationships. Although their study focused on the same variable with the current study the locations of study differed. This could have given rise to situational differences. However the non academic stressors examined are the same.

The findings of this study indicate that on average undergraduate students in Kenya reported moderate to high levels of non-academic stress level. Most of the reviewed studies have indicated that generally females tend to have higher stress level than males but on the contrary this study found that there was no statistically significant difference in non-academic stress level among male and female students. The finding of this study is also inconsistent with the study of Achor, Crum and Salovey [23] who found that females perceived more stress in interpersonal domain than males. In their study the domains relating to non-academic stress included parental expectations, sleeping difficulties and worrying about the future. The contradiction could be attributed to the methods used and the study populations involved. The reason as to why no-academic stress level did not differ among male and female students can be attributed to the fact that students are exposed to same challenges in the non-academic environment. Some of the common challenges as related by Misigo [7] include lack of accommodation, insecurity in residential areas and relationship problems.

In relation to stress level based on the type of university this study found that there was a significant difference in non-academic stress levels between undergraduates in private and public university with f = 4.334,P = 0.038, x = 0.05. A higher percentage of students from private universities experienced high stress level in comparison to those in public universities. This could be attributed to the fact that students in private universities are self-sponsored and those in public universities are government sponsored. Those in private universities could also be struggling financially and with issues of accommodation since most private universities in Kenya tend to have fewer hostels than public universities. However there has been no research to compare with the findings of this study in order to be in a perfect position to determine where the differences stem from.

This study also established that the year of study predicted stress level among university students. The

third year students were more susceptible to non-academic stress than those in the other years. Though it was expected that fourth years would have had a higher stress level, the third year students' level of non-academic stress was higher. There is a possibility that the fourth year students could have adopted better coping mechanisms than the third years. This suggests that as the students advanced in their academic ladder, non-academic stress increase. This gains the support of a United Kingdom (UK) research conducted by Andrews and Wilding (2004)[24] who found that among UK students who had no psychological symptoms at the entry course, 9% became clinically depressed.

It also recorded that 20% became clinically anxious by the mid-point of their degrees. The study found that financial stress and relationship difficulties were the main predictors of their depression and anxiety. The tendency of higher stress level among third year students in the current study can also be attributed to the same factor as in the fore mentioned study. However the socio-economic status of university students in the UK and Kenya is not the same as that of the Kenyan students. Despite the difference in the methods of research the findings of the UK study above concur with the current study.

This study sought to bring to light the response of students per item on non-academic stress scale which hadb14 item. Stressors that led to high stress levels were; lack of attention by university staff and conflict with parents. The remaining 12 stressors caused moderate stress level. These findings were in agreement with a study in the UK by Mclyntyre (2018)[25] which indicated that financial, academic and social related stressors were the most common that students underwent. The study found that relationship stressors such as family, romantic, peer and faculty relationships were commonly reported as stress among university students.

These findings are also in agreement with an earlier study by Thawabieh and Qaisy [13] which designated stress to social circumstances among university students in Jordan. However there was a difference in the current study and the two previous studies. This is due to the fact that the samples of the study were drawn from different populations and the areas of study also differ. This is important because different settings present different challenges.

The study by Thawabieh and Qaisy [13] focused on stress related factors relating to transition from high school to the university whereas this current study focused on students who were already in pursuance of their university education.

A further analysis was made to gain insight into the items that were considered most stressful by the respondents. Lack of attention by university staff, insecurity in campus and lack of money were found to be the highest causes of non academic stress. This closely relates with the findings of Busari [14] on a study among university students in Nigeria. The Nigerian study found significant difference between the male and female respondents on financial-related stressors. This corresponds with an earlier western Kenyan study which focused on non-academic stressors such accommodation, security in residential halls, relational problems and problems with roommates.

The study found that these factors were the highest causes of stress among students of universities in western Kenya, (Misigo, 2015)[7]. The current study is in agreement with the latter study since it shares the accessible population. Correspondingly it also assessed both academic and non-academic stressors. The study gives a good comparison with this study thus bringing to light the fact that non-academic stressors has an impact on the students in universities of western Kenya. This is important since it leads to a better understanding of the non-academic factors affecting students in the area of study and propose recommendation for further action. This implies that the universities can give more attention to non-academic challenges facing students to allow them succeed socially and academically.

Non-academic stress levels among Kenyan university students were moderate although some groups of students experienced higher non academic stress level than others. However there is a variation of expression of stress across the four demographic variables. Gender and age did not determine the level of non-academic stress. The year of study and the type of university had statistically significant influence on non-academic stress level.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study it was concluded that the type of university and the year of study had significant role in determining the level of non academic stress. Age and gender had no impact on the level of non academic stress.

RECOMMENDATION

The departments of counselling need to re-define their activities to allow them to be more in touch with the needs of students. Counselling centres and services can be made more accessible to university students. More counselling centres can be established closer to residential areas and be made to operate for longer hours than the usual working hours. The counselling centres can incorporate the use of peer counsellors.

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