

**ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF
EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

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BENIN CITY**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

We hereby certify that this project research was carried out by Osasumwen Faani **OBASUYI** with the Matriculation Number **EDU2102421** in the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to Almighty God my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this programme and on His wings only have I soared. God has indeed been faithful to me.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors contributing to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The study focused on four major stress indicators which include academic workload, course demands, challenges in adaptation, and pressure to achieve high academic performance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 140 randomly selected first-year students using a structured questionnaire with verified reliability. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that academic workload had a significant positive relationship with academic stress ($r = 0.319, p < 0.01$), indicating that heavy coursework, numerous assignments, and difficulty keeping up with academic tasks contribute to students' stress. Course demands also showed a significant positive relationship with academic stress ($r = 0.366, p < 0.01$), suggesting that high expectations, complex course content, and frequent assessments heighten students' anxiety. Adaptation challenges were found to significantly increase stress levels ($r = 0.482, p < 0.01$), especially in relation to adjusting to new learning styles, large classes, and academic independence. The strongest contributor to academic stress was the pressure to achieve high academic performance ($r = 0.737, p < 0.01$), driven by fear of failure, family expectations, and the desire to maintain a high CGPA. The study concludes that academic stress among first-year students is multidimensional, arising from both academic requirements and personal expectations. It highlights the need for improved academic guidance, supportive learning environments, and strengthened counselling services

to help students adjust effectively to university life. The study recommends a review of academic workload, improved teaching strategies, structured mentorship programmes, and increased psychological support to enhance students' wellbeing and academic success.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The transition from secondary school to university represents a significant milestone in the lives of many young adults. This period is often accompanied by a myriad of challenges, including adapting to new academic environments, increased academic workload, and the pressure to perform well in a more competitive and less structured academic setting. For first-year students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin, these challenges can manifest as academic stress, which, if not properly managed, may adversely affect their academic performance and overall psychological well-being.

Academic stress refers to the psychological strain and emotional discomfort resulting from academic demands that surpass an individual's ability to cope or adapt effectively. It encompasses feelings of anxiety, frustration, and pressure related to academic tasks such as attending lectures, completing assignments, preparing for examinations, and meeting institutional expectations. According to Aihie and Ohanaka (2019), academic stress is widely experienced among undergraduates in Nigerian universities, with contributing factors including time constraints, workload pressure, course difficulty, and unrealistic academic expectations.

One prominent variable influencing academic stress is academic workload, which refers to the volume of academic tasks, such as continuous assessments, multiple lecture hours, and numerous assignments, that students are expected to handle within limited timeframes. Heavy workloads have been linked to mental fatigue, decreased motivation, and

academic burnout among undergraduates (Adeyemo & Ogunyemi, 2020). Closely related to this is course demand, which includes the complexity of course content, frequency of examinations, and expectations of academic excellence. High course demands, especially when coupled with inadequate preparation or support, can intensify stress and reduce students' capacity to maintain academic engagement.

Another important factor is the challenge of adapting to the university's academic environment, especially for first-year students. The shift from the highly regulated system of secondary education to a more autonomous and self-directed university structure often results in a sense of disorientation and confusion. Adegboyega (2019) explains that new university students commonly struggle with academic independence, classroom dynamics, and the unfamiliar expectations of lecturers, all of which can trigger considerable stress.

Perhaps most pervasively, the pressure to achieve high academic performance is another significant contributor to academic stress (Hudd *et al.*, 2000; Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). In a society where academic achievement is often equated with future success, students may feel compelled to meet high expectations from parents, lecturers, and peers. Fasoro *et al.* (2019) observed that the intense internal and external expectations placed on students to attain top grades often result in chronic stress, self-doubt, and even unhealthy coping strategies such as substance use or academic dishonesty.

The implications of academic stress are far-reaching. Prolonged exposure to stress can lead to emotional disturbances such as anxiety and depression, and physical health issues like insomnia and fatigue. Moreover, numerous studies have linked academic stress to poor academic performance and disengagement. For example, Oduwaiye *et al.* (2017) found a

strong negative correlation between students' stress levels and academic outcomes among university students in Kwara State, Nigeria.

In the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin, where students are being trained to become future educators and role models, managing academic stress is especially vital. An education student burdened by stress may not only perform poorly but may also carry forward negative coping mechanisms into the teaching profession. Thus, understanding the scope and specific sources of academic stress among first-year students in this faculty is a critical step toward promoting healthier academic experiences and outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The transition from secondary school to university marks a critical period of adjustment for many students, particularly those in their first year. In the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin, this transition often exposes students to numerous academic demands, which may exceed their coping capacity and result in academic stress. Academic stress, characterized by feelings of anxiety, tension, and mental pressure due to academic tasks, is becoming increasingly common among first-year students.

First-year students are typically faced with a combination of challenges, including increased academic workload, difficult course demands, unfamiliar academic environments, stressful registration processes, and immense pressure to excel. These stressors not only disrupt their academic focus but also affect their emotional and psychological well-being. Observations within the Faculty of Education suggest that many first-year students struggle to adapt to the university system, leading to frustration, poor academic performance, and in some cases, withdrawal from school activities.

Despite growing awareness of the effects of academic stress on university students, there is still limited empirical research specifically examining the experiences of first-year students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin. The lack of targeted data makes it difficult to design effective interventions that address the unique needs of this group. Moreover, existing institutional support structures may not adequately address the specific factors contributing to academic stress among first-year education students.

This study is therefore necessary to investigate the nature and sources of academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education. By identifying key stressors such as academic workload, course difficulty, adaptation challenges, administrative delays, and performance pressure, the study aims to provide evidence that can guide the development of support systems that promote academic success and psychological resilience among these students.

Research Questions

The following research questions are used to guide the study:

1. To what extent does academic workload contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education?
2. To what extent do course demands contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education?
3. Are first-year students in the Faculty of Education stressed by the challenges of adapting to the university's academic environment?
4. Does the pressure to achieve high academic performance contribute significantly to the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study:

1. Academic workload does not significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.
2. Course demands do not significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.
3. Challenges in adapting to the university's academic environment do not significantly influence academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.
4. The pressure to achieve high academic performance does not significantly contribute to the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Examine the extent to which academic workload contributes to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.
- Investigate how course demands contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.
- Determine the influence of challenges in adapting to the university's academic environment on academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

- Investigate the effect of pressure to achieve high academic performance on the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research will provide valuable insights into the major sources of academic stress experienced by first-year students, highlighting specific areas such as academic workload, adaptation challenges, registration procedures, and the pressure for academic excellence. This understanding can help educational administrators, counsellors and policymakers design targeted interventions to reduce academic stress and create a more supportive learning environment.

The study will be beneficial to university management, counsellors and student support services. The identification of key stressors will enable the development of effective support programs, such as time management workshops, counselling services, and streamlined registration processes aimed at minimizing stress among students.

Lecturers and academic staff will benefit from the study's findings by gaining awareness of the stress factors affecting first-year students. This awareness can encourage more flexible and student-centered teaching approaches that alleviate unnecessary academic pressure.

The study's findings will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Educational Guidance and Counselling by providing empirical data on the specific stressors affecting first-year students in Nigerian universities, particularly within the Faculty of

Education. This can serve as a reference for future research and for implementing stress-management strategies in other faculties and institutions.

Finally, the study will also serve as a resource for students themselves, helping them recognize common academic stressors and develop coping strategies to manage their academic responsibilities more effectively.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on examining the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin. It investigates the impact of stressors such as academic workload, adaptation to the academic environment, registration procedures, and pressure for academic performance. The study is limited to first-year students in the Faculty of Education and does not extend to other faculties.

Definition of Terms

1. **First-Year Students:** these are individuals who have recently transitioned from secondary education into university and are enrolled in their first academic year in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin.
2. **Academic Stress:** The mental and emotional strain experienced by students due to the demands and pressures of academic work, such as assignments, exams, and performance expectations.
3. **Academic Workload:** The total amount of coursework, assignments, lectures, and study required in a given semester, which can contribute to the stress students experience.

4. **Academic Performance:** The level of success or achievement in academic tasks, usually measured through grades or exam results, which can create pressure and contribute to stress.
5. **Academic Environment:** The physical and social setting in which students engage in learning activities, including classrooms, libraries, faculty support services, and peer interactions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, literature is reviewed under the following subheadings;

- Theoretical Framework
- Concept of Academic Stress
- Academic Workload and Academic Stress
- Course Demands and Academic Stress
- Adaptation to Academic Environment and Academic Stress
- Pressure to Achieve High Academic Performance and Academic Stress
- Summary of Reviewed Literature

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the Person–Environment Fit Theory, which offers a suitable lens for understanding the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The theory, originally developed by French, Caplan, and Harrison (1982), posits that stress arises when there is a misfit or lack of alignment between an individual and their environment. In particular, the theory identifies two core dimensions of fit: the demands–abilities fit and the needs–supplies fit. The demands–abilities fit refers to the extent to which an individual’s personal resources (such as knowledge, skills, and stamina) align with the demands placed upon them by their environment. The needs–supplies fit, on the other hand, addresses how well the environment provides the resources, support, and conditions necessary to meet an individual's psychological and functional needs.

In the university context, particularly for first-year students, the transition from secondary to tertiary education presents significant environmental shifts. These students often encounter high academic workloads, increased course demands, unfamiliar academic procedures, and pressure to meet performance expectations, all of which can become sources of stress if they feel underprepared or unsupported. The Person–Environment Fit Theory is particularly appropriate here, as it emphasises the interactive nature of individual capacities and environmental demands in the development of stress (Mucherah, Owino, & McCoy, 2016).

In this study, academic workload, course demands, adaptation challenges, and performance pressure are examined as key contributors to academic stress among first-year students. A heavy workload, involving numerous assignments, lectures, and assessments, can exceed students' time and skills, creating a poor demands–abilities fit (Chow *et al.*, 2018). Complex course requirements, frequent assessments, and high expectations may surpass students' academic readiness, increasing anxiety and lowering self-efficacy (Geng *et al.*, 2020). Difficulties in adapting to new teaching styles, larger classes, and reduced supervision can cause uncertainty and helplessness (Enose, 2017). Finally, pressure to achieve high performance from self, family, or scholarship requirements can create unrealistic standards, leading to emotional strain (Chao, 2016).

In summary, the Person–Environment Fit Theory provides a comprehensive and practical framework for understanding how various stressors affect first-year students in the Faculty of Education. By focusing on the degree of alignment between individual characteristics and environmental demands or supports, the theory accounts for the variability

in how students respond to academic pressures. It helps to explain why some students cope effectively with workload and university expectations, while others experience significant distress. More importantly, it underscores the dual responsibility of both the students and the institution in achieving a healthy academic fit. Institutions that actively support students through orientation, accessible counselling services, flexible registration processes, and academic support structures can help mitigate stress by improving the overall fit between the learner and the learning environment.

Thus, this study adopts the Person–Environment Fit Theory as its guiding theoretical lens, as it appropriately explains the relationship between academic workload, course demands, institutional procedures, adaptation challenges, and academic performance expectations variables central to the study of academic stress among first-year undergraduates.

Concept of Academic Stress

Academic stress is one of the most pervasive and pressing challenges confronting students in institutions of higher learning today. It refers to the psychological and physiological responses that students experience in response to academic demands that exceed their adaptive capacities. These demands can include examinations, tight deadlines, excessive coursework, pressure to succeed, and adjustment to new learning environments. When students perceive that these academic requirements exceed their coping abilities, they may experience stress, anxiety, frustration, and emotional exhaustion (Misra & McKean, 2000; Agolla & Ongori, 2009).

Stress in the academic context is not inherently negative. Mild to moderate levels of stress can sometimes motivate students to perform better, stay alert, and manage their time

effectively. However, chronic or excessive academic stress has been associated with negative outcomes such as burnout, poor academic performance, mental health issues, and disengagement from learning (Owusu *et al.*, 2015). This makes it particularly concerning for first-year students who are undergoing a critical transitional period marked by increased responsibilities and unfamiliar academic expectations.

For many first-year students, the transition from secondary school to university is abrupt and jarring. The academic environment of tertiary institutions is typically more demanding and autonomous, requiring students to independently manage their schedules, meet academic deadlines, and grasp complex theoretical content. In most Nigerian universities, including the University of Benin, the sheer volume of academic tasks, large class sizes, and limited access to individualized support can further exacerbate stress (Eze, 2019). Students often struggle with managing their time, adjusting to lecture formats, comprehending technical content, and meeting the expectations of different lecturers all of which can lead to a build-up of stress.

Research has consistently shown that academic stress is linked to both internal and external factors. Internal stressors include fear of failure, low self-esteem, perfectionism, and lack of preparation. External stressors, on the other hand, comprise heavy academic workloads, long lecture hours, frequent assessments, peer competition, administrative bottlenecks, and socio-economic challenges (Yikealo, Yemane & Karvinen, 2018). In a study conducted by Womble (2003), it was found that over 70% of undergraduate students reported moderate to severe levels of academic stress, citing course load and time management as the most significant contributors.

Furthermore, academic stress is not just limited to cognitive strain; it often manifests physically and emotionally. Symptoms may include headaches, insomnia, irritability, poor concentration, and even depression (Oduwaiye *et al.*, 2017). These symptoms, when unaddressed, may impact a student's overall well-being, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. First-year students, who are still acclimating to the university system, are particularly vulnerable to these outcomes.

Another critical dimension of academic stress is its cumulative nature. Unlike single stressful events, academic stress tends to build over time due to ongoing exposure to academic demands without adequate relief. For instance, during peak academic periods such as examination seasons or continuous assessment deadlines, students may face compounded stressors that intensify psychological pressure and reduce academic functioning (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012).

The perception of academic stress also varies from student to student. While some view it as a challenge that fosters growth, others perceive it as a threat to their self-worth and academic aspirations. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Cognitive Appraisal Theory, it is this perception rather than the objective presence of stressors that determines whether or not a student becomes stressed. Thus, academic stress is a subjective experience that is shaped by individual differences in resilience, coping strategies, and personal background.

In the Nigerian context, additional stressors often intersect with academic demands to create unique challenges for students. These include financial difficulties, lack of infrastructure (e.g., overcrowded classrooms and inadequate library facilities), strikes, and

unstable academic calendars. These systemic issues compound the stress already experienced by students due to academic workload, often leaving them feeling helpless and frustrated (Afolabi, 2020).

Academic stress is a multi-faceted phenomenon that results from the complex interplay between personal, institutional, and environmental factors. For first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, this stress is intensified by their need to transition into a new academic environment, handle increased academic demands, and meet both personal and societal expectations. Understanding the nature and sources of academic stress is therefore essential to developing effective coping mechanisms and institutional support systems that promote student success and mental health.

Sources of Academic Stress

Academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin is often intensified by various stress-inducing factors related to the demand for high academic performance. As students transition from secondary to tertiary education, they face multiple challenges that strain their psychological and emotional well-being. These stressors stem not only from the complexity of university-level coursework but also from the high stakes attached to academic outcomes within the Nigerian educational context.

One major contributor to academic stress is the weight of family expectations. Many first-year students report experiencing significant pressure to excel because their families have invested heavily both financially and emotionally in their education. This sense of responsibility to “make it” academically can create chronic anxiety, especially when students

encounter unfamiliar subjects, large class sizes, or limited personal attention from lecturers. The fear of failure or disappointing loved ones can lead to persistent stress, insomnia, and diminished academic engagement (Oduwaiye *et al.*, 2017).

Another common stressor is peer comparison, which is exacerbated by constant social interaction within academic settings and on digital platforms. First-year students often measure their success by observing the perceived performance of their classmates. When students feel that they are not performing as well as their peers, it can trigger negative emotions such as inferiority, self-doubt, and discouragement. This emotional response to perceived underachievement fosters a competitive environment that heightens academic stress and undermines collaborative learning (Owusu *et al.*, 2015).

Institutional expectations also serve as a critical source of stress. The Faculty of Education at the University of Benin, like many academic institutions, sets high standards for progression, including strict minimum GPA requirements, attendance policies, and qualification benchmarks for participation in professional training programs like teaching practice. These academic demands, combined with limited institutional support systems, often create a stressful environment for first-year students who are still adapting to university life. The urgency to meet deadlines, prepare for assessments, and maintain academic eligibility can cause students to experience mental exhaustion, physical fatigue, and emotional burnout (Yikealo, Yemane, & Karvinen, 2018).

Overall, the convergence of familial, social, and institutional expectations places a heavy psychological burden on first-year students. These stressors often interact with each other, compounding the emotional toll and potentially impacting academic performance,

mental health, and social adjustment. Addressing these sources of academic stress requires a multi-layered approach, including improved academic orientation programs, mental health services, and supportive learning environments.

Academic Workload and Academic Stress

Academic workload refers to the volume, complexity, and intensity of academic tasks assigned to students within a specific timeframe. These tasks may include attending lectures, completing assignments, engaging in group work, reading academic materials, preparing for tests, and participating in practical or laboratory sessions. When the quantity or difficulty of these tasks exceeds a student's capacity to manage them effectively, it often results in academic stress, particularly among first-year university students who are newly transitioning from structured secondary school environments to more autonomous and demanding tertiary institutions (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012).

The academic demands placed on first-year students are significantly different from what they were previously accustomed to in secondary school. In universities, students are expected to navigate multiple courses, each with its own deadlines, readings, assignments, and examinations. Additionally, the fast-paced delivery of lectures, the expectation to be self-directed learners, and the need to keep up with a high volume of academic content in a relatively short period all contribute to a heightened sense of pressure (Misra & Castillo, 2004). This increased academic workload often leads to sleep deprivation, fatigue, poor eating habits, and high anxiety levels among students, which are all indicators of academic stress.

Empirical studies consistently show that heavy academic workload is a major predictor of stress. Womble (2003) found that undergraduates who reported academic overload and limited leisure time also reported the highest stress levels. Misra and Castillo (2004) observed that large volumes of coursework, short deadlines, and the expectation for self-directed learning increased anxiety among university students. In Nigeria, Eze (2019) reported that first-year undergraduates in public universities often struggle with the volume of course materials, overcrowded lecture halls, and multiple daily lectures, which intensify their workload and perceived stress.

In the Nigerian context, large class sizes, overcrowded lecture halls, and limited access to academic resources can further complicate the learning process and increase perceived workload. A study by Eze (2019) found that many undergraduates in Nigerian public universities, including first-year students, frequently complain about the overwhelming volume of course materials they are expected to study independently, in addition to attending multiple lectures per day. For students who lack prior exposure to such demanding environments, the workload can quickly become unmanageable, triggering academic stress.

Furthermore, the perceived workload is not only influenced by the actual volume of work but also by students' academic preparedness, motivation, and ability to cope. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Cognitive Appraisal Theory, students who perceive academic tasks as threats (rather than challenges) are more likely to experience heightened stress. This means that two students with the same academic load may experience different levels of stress depending on their individual coping mechanisms and emotional resilience.

Another critical dimension to consider is how academic workload affects students' social life and well-being. Students who are overwhelmed by academic obligations often isolate themselves from peers, reduce their participation in extracurricular activities, and experience declines in mental and physical health. This imbalance can lead to burnout, a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to academic pressure without adequate rest or relief (Owusu *et al.*, 2015).

The impact of academic workload on first-year students is particularly concerning because it sets the tone for their overall university experience. Students who encounter severe academic stress early on may develop a negative perception of university life, leading to low motivation, poor academic performance, absenteeism, and even dropout in extreme cases (Yikealo, Yemane, & Karvinen, 2018). Therefore, academic institutions must recognize the role that workload plays in student stress and consider strategies such as improved scheduling, workload balance, academic advising, and access to stress-management resources.

Course Demands and Academic Stress

Course demands refer to the expectations, instructional activities, assessment requirements, and learning outcomes that students are required to meet in each course (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012). These include the volume and complexity of course content, the frequency and type of assessments, expectations for active participation, and requirements for independent reading or research. For first-year students, these demands are often perceived as intense and multifaceted, especially when they are introduced abruptly and without adequate orientation or support.

Empirical evidence has established a clear link between course demands and academic stress. Misra and Castillo (2004) reported that university students exposed to frequent assignments, large volumes of reading, and limited instructional guidance experienced significantly higher stress levels. Womble (2003) found that first-year students, in particular, expressed anxiety and fear of failure when faced with multiple assessment components in core courses, especially when those assessments had a high weighting towards final grades. Eze (2019) observed that Nigerian undergraduates often take up to ten credit-bearing courses in a semester, each with its own assignments, tests, term papers, and final examinations, which collectively create a heavy burden.

The nature and clarity of course requirements also influence stress levels. Yikealo, Yemane, and Karvinen (2018) found that ambiguous assessment criteria, vague assignment instructions, and inconsistent grading systems increased students' uncertainty and anxiety. Similarly, Oduwaiye, Yahaya, Amosa, and Ajani (2017) showed that compulsory courses perceived as irrelevant or uninteresting led to disengagement, which, in turn, heightened academic stress because students still needed to meet performance standards in those courses.

In the Nigerian higher education system, the shift from secondary school's teacher-directed learning to university's self-directed learning is a major adjustment. Many first-year students are accustomed to structured lesson delivery, close supervision, and frequent teacher feedback. Upon entering university, they are expected to manage independent readings, undertake research, and complete assignments without daily oversight. Kadapatti and Vijayalaxmi (2012) found that this abrupt shift increased stress levels for students who had underdeveloped self-regulation skills. Misra and Castillo (2004) similarly observed that

inadequate preparation for self-directed learning was a strong predictor of academic stress in first-year populations.

Assessment load is another critical element of course demands. Continuous assessment systems, common in Nigerian universities, require students to complete assignments, quizzes, and projects throughout the semester while simultaneously preparing for mid-semester and final examinations. According to Womble (2003), such continuous high-stakes assessment can create a sustained pressure cycle that limits students' ability to recover from stress between evaluation periods. For students still adapting to new study environments, this constant evaluation can lead to chronic anxiety, sleep disturbances, and reduced academic performance.

The structural environment also plays a role. Eze (2019) highlighted that in many Nigerian universities, including the University of Benin, large class sizes make it difficult for students to interact directly with lecturers, seek clarification, or receive timely feedback. This lack of access to academic support increases the challenge of meeting course requirements, particularly when instructions are complex or when students are unfamiliar with the subject matter. Misra and Castillo (2004) also found that reduced access to instructors and limited feedback time were correlated with higher reported stress levels.

Another dimension of course-related stress is the issue of relevance and interest. Oduwaiye *et al.* (2017) reported that students enrolled in compulsory general studies courses often perceive them as unrelated to their career aspirations. This perception can result in a lack of motivation, lower engagement, and increased stress when trying to meet course demands. For first-year students in the Faculty of Education, compulsory foundation courses

and general studies modules can be particularly stressful when they require mastery of unfamiliar concepts within a short timeframe.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that course demands influence academic stress through multiple pathways: the sheer quantity of tasks, the complexity of content, the clarity of requirements, the frequency of assessments, the degree of student interest, and the level of institutional support. High and poorly supported course demands are consistently associated with greater academic stress, especially in first-year students still adapting to the university environment. This evidence highlights the importance of structured course guidelines, effective communication of assessment criteria, smaller class sizes where possible, and enhanced access to academic support services to reduce the stress associated with course requirements.

Adjustment to Academic Environment and Academic Stress

The academic environment plays a vital role in shaping the university experience of first-year students. Adjustment to this new environment encompasses students' ability to cope with the physical, social, and instructional changes that occur as they transition from secondary school to tertiary education. Empirical evidence suggests that difficulties in adjusting to these new academic settings significantly increase academic stress among first-year students (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Fasoro, Francis, & Ayeni, 2019).

Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment involves adapting to the academic expectations, teaching styles, assessment formats, and self-regulatory demands of university life (Fasoro *et al.*, 2019). First-year students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin often face challenges due

to the shift from structured, teacher-led secondary school instruction to a more autonomous, student-centered university approach. Yikealo, Yemane, and Karvinen (2018) found that students with low prior academic preparedness, weak study skills, or limited self-efficacy reported higher levels of stress during this adjustment period. Similarly, Misra and Castillo (2004) observed that first-year students exposed to new assessment formats, larger course loads, and independent learning expectations frequently experienced anxiety and reduced academic confidence.

Institutional Factors Contributing to Stress

Several institutional factors exacerbate adjustment-related stress. Nigerian universities, including the University of Benin, face infrastructural and organizational challenges that make academic environments less conducive for first-year students. Large class sizes, limited access to academic advisors, outdated learning facilities, and bureaucratic procedures can overwhelm students and increase feelings of helplessness (Eze, 2019). Womble (2003) reported that students in institutions with overcrowded lectures and limited guidance were more likely to experience elevated academic stress and decreased engagement. Misra and Castillo (2004) also highlighted that unfamiliar teaching methods and high workload expectations without adequate orientation increase stress levels among students adjusting to the academic environment.

Psychosocial Adjustment and Peer Influence

Adjustment extends beyond academics. First-year students often face the challenge of managing personal responsibilities, living away from home, and interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds (Owusu, Essel, & Opoku, 2015). These social transitions can contribute

to loneliness, homesickness, and emotional strain, indirectly affecting academic performance. Peer influence plays a dual role: positive peer support fosters belonging and academic assistance, while negative peer behaviors, such as skipping classes or prioritizing social activities, have been found to increase academic stress (Owusu *et al.*, 2015; Fasoro *et al.*, 2019). Empirical studies demonstrate that strong peer networks can buffer stress, whereas poor social integration intensifies stress reactions.

Role of Orientation and Support Services

Orientation programs and counseling services are designed to ease the academic adjustment process. However, in many Nigerian universities, these services are brief, poorly implemented, or absent (Afolabi, 2020). First-year students without structured guidance struggle to navigate administrative systems, locate lecture halls, access libraries, or meet lecturers for clarification. Misra and Castillo (2004) found that students lacking orientation support reported significantly higher stress levels and lower confidence in managing academic responsibilities. Fasoro *et al.* (2019) also emphasized that consistent mentorship and academic guidance are critical for reducing stress during early university life.

Emotional Impact of Poor Adjustment

Failure to adjust adequately to the academic environment can have severe emotional consequences. Students may experience anxiety, depression, fear of failure, and reduced self-efficacy (Oduwaiye, Yahaya, Amosa, & Ajani, 2017). Research indicates that poor adjustment often creates a cycle of stress and low performance. For instance, first-year students who struggle with new academic demands may disengage from learning, experience

declining motivation, and eventually face academic failure (Yikealo *et al.*, 2018). Empirical evidence highlights that emotional distress resulting from adjustment difficulties is a key predictor of academic stress, making interventions such as structured orientation, peer mentorship, and counseling essential for supporting first-year students.

Overall, previous studies show that adjustment to the academic environment is a multidimensional process involving academic, social, and institutional factors. Difficulties in adapting across these domains consistently predict higher levels of academic stress among first-year undergraduates. Institutions must provide comprehensive support, including orientation programs, structured guidance, peer mentoring, and accessible counseling, to facilitate successful adjustment and reduce stress (Afolabi, 2020; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Fasoro *et al.*, 2019; Owusu *et al.*, 2015).

Pressure to Achieve High Academic Performance and Academic Stress

One of the most significant sources of academic stress for first-year university students is the intense pressure to achieve high academic performance. This pressure may come from internal expectations, parental demands, peer comparisons, or institutional standards. For many students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, this pressure becomes particularly overwhelming during their first year, when they are still adjusting to the academic rigor and independence of university life.

In the Nigerian education system, academic success is often perceived as the primary determinant of future opportunities, such as scholarships, employment, and social mobility. As such, students are frequently encouraged and sometimes coerced by parents, guardians, or societal norms to achieve exceptional academic results (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012). For

many first-year students, gaining admission into a university marks a major milestone, which then comes with heightened expectations to perform well and justify the investment made in their education.

This intense focus on academic outcomes can lead students to develop perfectionist tendencies, where only top grades are considered acceptable. As students encounter more difficult coursework and less structured learning environments than they experienced in secondary school, this expectation may clash with reality, triggering self-doubt and stress (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

Psychological Impact of Performance Pressure

The constant need to excel academically can lead to serious psychological consequences for students. Symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, panic attacks, and even depression have been linked to performance-related academic stress (Fasoro, Francis, & Ayeni, 2019). In trying to meet high academic expectations, students may sacrifice sleep, social interaction, and physical activity factors that are essential for a balanced and healthy academic life.

Additionally, the fear of failure can inhibit learning. Students under intense pressure may develop exam phobia, burnout, or resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as cheating, substance use, or withdrawal from academic activities. Instead of focusing on learning and understanding concepts, they may begin to prioritize grades at any cost, which is detrimental to long-term academic growth (Afolabi, 2020).

Coping Mechanisms and Institutional Support

Without adequate emotional and academic support, first-year students under performance pressure often suffer in silence. While some may seek help from peers or counselors, many others internalize their struggles. This underscores the need for university counseling centers, stress management workshops, and academic advising services tailored specifically for first-year students.

Institutions can also reduce academic stress by redefining success to include personal growth, skill acquisition, and overall well-being not just grades. Encouraging collaborative learning, providing formative feedback, and promoting realistic goal-setting are all strategies that can mitigate the harmful effects of pressure for high academic performance.

The pressure to achieve high academic performance is a major contributor to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. This pressure originates from multiple sources familial, peer-related, and institutional and often leads to emotional distress, unhealthy behaviors, and academic disengagement. To address this issue, universities must create supportive academic environments that prioritize student well-being alongside performance, particularly for those just beginning their higher education journey.

Summary of Reviewed Literature

Academic stress among first-year university students has been widely studied, with researchers identifying key stressors that affect students' academic performance and psychological well-being. Previous studies have consistently shown that factors such as academic workload, course demands, adjustment to the university environment, administrative inefficiencies, and performance pressure are major contributors to academic

stress (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Yikealo, Yemane, & Karvinen, 2018). For instance, Misra and Castillo (2004) investigated the stress experienced by first-year students during the transition from secondary school to university and found that sudden exposure to autonomous learning and multiple assessments significantly increased stress levels. Similarly, Yikealo *et al.* (2018) examined students' adjustment to university life and reported that inadequate coping with new academic expectations led to anxiety, low self-confidence, and reduced academic performance.

Other studies have focused on the role of institutional and administrative factors. Igere and Blessing (2020) explored how delays in registration, poor administrative support, and long queues contribute to student frustration and academic stress. Fasoro, Francis, and Ayeni (2019) emphasized the pressure to attain high academic performance, noting that first-year students often experience psychological strain, which may result in unhealthy coping strategies such as social withdrawal or burnout. These studies provide important insights into the sources of stress; however, most of them were conducted in general university populations or in contexts outside the Faculty of Education.

The present study builds on these findings but specifically focuses on first-year students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin, a population that has not been examined in depth in previous research. Unlike earlier studies, this study investigates how academic workload, course demands, adjustment to the academic environment, administrative procedures, and performance expectations uniquely interact to influence academic stress within this faculty. Additionally, while previous research primarily measured stress levels and general adjustment, the present study aims to identify the specific stressors

within the Faculty of Education and assess their relative influence, providing a context-specific understanding of academic stress.

Overall, the literature indicates that academic stress is a multifaceted problem influenced by personal, academic, and institutional factors. The current study addresses the gap by focusing on a defined student population in a particular faculty, thereby offering practical insights for targeted interventions to improve academic adjustment, reduce stress, and promote mental well-being among first-year undergraduates in the Faculty of Education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the method and procedures used by the researcher in carrying out the research are provided under the following subheadings;

- Design of the study
- Population of the Study
- Sampling and sampling techniques
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument

- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

Design of the Study

The design for this study is the survey research design. The design is considered appropriate for the study because it involves a careful observation of the existing features of a particular event, as it exists at the time of the time of the study. Survey design is the foundation of gathering reliable information through surveys. It involves crafting clear questions, choosing the right question format, and structuring the survey in a logical flow. By designing a well-constructed survey, researchers can ensure they are asking the right people the right questions in the right way, ultimately leading to trustworthy and actionable data.

Population of the Study

The target population was first-year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The population of the study comprises of all first-year students admitted into nine academic departments within the Faculty namely; Continuing Education & Development Studies (ADT), Curriculum & Instructional Technology (CIT), Educational Foundations (DEF), Educational Management (DEM), Educational Evaluation & Counselling Psychology (EECP), Health, Safety & Environmental Education (HSE) and Human Kinetics & Sports Science (HKS) within the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus, Edo State.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for the study was 140 students. The random sampling technique was used in this study. Considering the size of the population, the researcher selected seven (7) departments within the Faculty of Education. A number of twenty (20) first-year students was randomly selected from each department as respondents, which gave a total of 140.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used for the collection of data for this study is a structured questionnaire titled “Academic Stress among First Year Students in the Faculty of Education, University Of Benin Questionnaire”. The questionnaire is divided into two sections, A and B. Section A seeks demographic information’s/data of the respondents, while Section B contains twenty-five (25) items designed to gather information on the various aspects of academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Responses to the items on the questionnaire are on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Validity of the Instrument

The face validity of the instrument was established. The initial drafted copy of the instrument was validated by the researcher’s project supervisor, and two other lecturers in the faculty of education. The comments, observations and corrections made by these experts was effected. These modifications gave rise to the final researchable items in the questionnaire used for the study.

Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method of reliability was used to determine the consistency of the opinion of the respondents. The instrument was administered twice to 20 first year students at other faculties in the University of Benin which are not part of the study area in an interval of two weeks. The Cronbach Alpha method was used and a reliability index of 0.73 was obtained.

Method of Data Collection

The copies of the questionnaire was personally be distributed by the researcher to the respondents and all the questionnaire that was administered was collected on the spot to ensure high return rate

Method of Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies were used in analyzing the bio-data of the respondents; statistical mean was used to answer the research questions and Person Product Moment Correlation for all the hypotheses formulated for the study. The data collected was presented in tables for clarity sake. The criterion mean is placed at 2.50. This means that any item with a mean of 2.50 or above acceptable mean was accepted while those items which its mean is less or below 2.50 were rejected.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented and the findings discussed.

Presentation of Results

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Department of Respondents	Continuing Education & Development Studies	20	14.3

Curriculum & Instructional Technology	13	9.3
Educational Foundations	19	13.6
Educational Management	27	19.3
Educational Evaluation & Counselling Psychology	25	17.9
Health, Safety & Environmental Education	19	13.6
Human Kinetics & Sports Science	17	12.1
Total	140	100.0

Table 1 presents the departmental distribution of the participants. The result shows that 20 (14.3%) of the respondents were from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies, 13 (9.3%) from Curriculum and Instructional Technology, and 19 (13.6%) from Educational Foundations. Furthermore, 27 (19.3%) of the respondents were from Educational Management, 25 (17.9%) from Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, 19 (13.6%) from Health, Safety and Environmental Education, and 17 (12.1%) from Human Kinetics and Sports Science.

This indicates that the highest proportion of respondents came from the Department of Educational Management, followed closely by Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology. The representation across all departments shows that students from every unit of the Faculty of Education participated in the study, ensuring that the views expressed reflect a balanced perspective of academic stress among first-year undergraduates within the faculty.

Research Question One: To what extent does academic workload contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education?

Table 2: Extent to Which Academic Workload Contributes to Academic Stress among First-Year Students

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	\bar{X}	DECISION
1	I often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work required of me.	49 (35.0)	54 (38.6)	20 (14.3)	17 (12.1)	140	2.96	Agree
2	I have multiple assignments due at the same time which causes me stress.	50 (35.7)	63 (45.0)	13 (9.3)	14 (10.0)	140	3.06	Agree
3	The number of courses I take in a semester is more than I can manage.	51 (36.4)	63 (45.0)	15 (10.7)	11 (7.9)	140	3.10	Agree
4	I struggle to keep up with lectures, readings, and assignments.	60 (42.9)	49 (35.0)	14 (10.0)	17 (12.1)	140	3.09	Agree
5	I feel academically stressed due to the high workload of my current academic programme.	53 (37.9)	50 (35.7)	17 (12.1)	20 (14.3)	140	2.97	Agree

Decision rule: Mean (\bar{X}) \geq 2.50 = Agree; Mean $<$ 2.50 = Disagree.

Table 2 presents respondents' opinions on the extent to which academic workload contributes to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The results reveal that most respondents agreed that they often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work required of them (\bar{X} = 2.96). Similarly, a large proportion of respondents agreed that having multiple assignments due at the same time causes them stress (\bar{X} = 3.06).

The respondents also agreed that the number of courses taken in a semester is more than they can manage (\bar{X} = 3.10), and that they struggle to keep up with lectures, readings,

and assignments ($\bar{X} = 3.09$). Furthermore, most respondents reported feeling academically stressed due to the high workload of their current programme ($\bar{X} = 2.97$).

Overall, the mean scores for all items range from 2.96 to 3.10, which are all above the benchmark of 2.50. This indicates that first-year students generally agree that academic workload significantly contributes to their experience of academic stress. The findings suggest that the volume of academic work, the frequency of assignments, and the difficulty in keeping up with coursework collectively impose substantial pressure on students in their first year of university study.

Research Question two: To what extent do course demands contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education?

Table 3: Extent Course Demands Contribute to Academic Stress Among First-Year Students in the Faculty of Education

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	\bar{X}	DECISION
1	The academic expectations in my courses are too high.	50 (35.7)	55 (39.3)	24 (17.1)	11 (7.9)	140	3.03	Agree

2	The content of my courses is too complex to understand within the allocated time.	56 (40.0)	55 (39.3)	19 (13.6)	10 (7.1)	140	3.12	Agree
3	I feel anxious during tests and presentations because of the nature of the course demands.	46 (32.9)	60 (42.9)	25 (17.9)	9 (6.4)	140	3.02	Agree
4	I often have insufficient time to prepare adequately for continuous assessments.	44 (31.4)	59 (42.1)	21 (15.0)	16 (11.4)	140	2.94	Agree
5	The frequency of tests and class assignments increases my stress levels.	42 (30.0)	50 (35.7)	24 (17.1)	24 (17.1)	140	2.79	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree, Mean < 2.50 = Disagree

Table 3 presents the respondents' views on how course demands contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education. The results show that respondents agreed that academic expectations in their courses are too high ($\bar{X} = 3.03$). Similarly, they agreed that the content of their courses is too complex to understand within the allocated time ($\bar{X} = 3.12$).

Respondents also agreed that they feel anxious during tests and presentations due to course demands ($\bar{X} = 3.02$). In addition, they agreed that they often have insufficient time to prepare adequately for continuous assessments ($\bar{X} = 2.94$), and that the frequency of tests and class assignments increases their stress levels ($\bar{X} = 2.79$).

Overall, the findings indicate that course demands contribute significantly to academic stress among first-year students. The consistent agreement across all items, with mean scores above 2.50, suggests that students experience considerable pressure from high expectations, heavy workload, and frequent assessments within their academic programmes.

Research Question three: Are first-year students in the Faculty of Education stressed by the challenges of adapting to the university's academic environment?

Table 4: Extent to Which First-Year Students Are Stressed by the Challenges of Adapting to the University's Academic Environment

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	\bar{X}	DECISION
1	I find it difficult to adjust to the learning style at the university level.	47 (33.6)	56 (40.0)	25 (17.9)	12 (8.6)	140	2.99	Agree
2	The academic environment is very different from what I was used to in secondary	37 (26.4)	64 (45.7)	19 (13.6)	20 (14.3)	140	2.84	Agree

	school.							
3	I sometimes feel lost or confused in large lecture classes.	47 (33.6)	55 (39.3)	17 (12.1)	21 (15.0)	140	2.91	Agree
4	I feel stressed because I lack adequate guidance on how to navigate my academic journey.	38 (27.1)	54 (38.6)	33 (23.6)	15 (10.7)	140	2.82	Agree
5	I have difficulty adjusting to the level of independence expected in the university.	54 (38.6)	51 (36.4)	21 (15.0)	14 (10.0)	140	3.04	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree, Mean < 2.50 = Disagree

Table 4 presents respondents' views on whether first-year students in the Faculty of Education are stressed by the challenges of adapting to the university's academic environment. The results show that respondents agreed that they find it difficult to adjust to the learning style at the university level ($\bar{X} = 2.99$). They also agreed that the university academic environment is very different from their previous secondary school experience ($\bar{X} = 2.84$).

Furthermore, respondents agreed that they sometimes feel lost or confused in large lecture classes ($\bar{X} = 2.91$) and that they experience stress due to a lack of adequate academic guidance ($\bar{X} = 2.82$). In addition, they agreed that they have difficulty adjusting to the level of independence expected at the university ($\bar{X} = 3.04$).

Overall, the findings indicate that first-year students experience significant stress as they adapt to the university's academic system. The mean values, all above the 2.50 threshold, suggest that adapting to the university's learning style, academic independence, and large class environment contributes notably to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education.

Research Question four: Does the pressure to achieve high academic performance contribute significantly to the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education?

Table 5: Extent to Which Pressure to Achieve High Academic Performance Contributes to Academic Stress Among First-Year Students in the Faculty of Education

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	N	\bar{X}	DECISION
1	I feel intense pressure to maintain a high CGPA.	47 (33.6)	55 (39.3)	21 (15.0)	17 (12.1)	140	2.94	Agree
2	High family expectations increase the pressure I feel to do well academically.	51 (36.4)	53 (37.9)	19 (13.6)	17 (12.1)	140	2.99	Agree
3	I worry constantly about failing or underperforming.	50 (35.7)	56 (40.0)	17 (12.1)	17 (12.1)	140	2.99	Agree
4	The fear of losing my scholarship or support from my	42 (30.0)	62 (44.3)	21 (15.0)	15 (10.7)	140	2.94	Agree

5	family makes me anxious. I feel emotionally stressed because I want to be among those at the top of the class.	49 (35.0)	52 (37.1)	25 (17.9)	14 (10.0)	140	2.97	Agree
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Decision Rule: Mean \geq 2.50 = Agree, Mean $<$ 2.50 = Disagree

Table 5 presents the respondents' views on the extent to which the pressure to achieve high academic performance contributes to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education. The results show that respondents agreed that they feel intense pressure to maintain a high CGPA ($\bar{X} = 2.94$) and that high family expectations increase their academic pressure ($\bar{X} = 2.99$).

Similarly, respondents agreed that constant worry about failing or underperforming ($\bar{X} = 2.99$) and fear of losing scholarships or family support ($\bar{X} = 2.94$) contribute to their stress levels. Furthermore, they agreed that emotional stress resulting from the desire to be among the top students in their class also adds to their academic strain ($\bar{X} = 2.97$).

Overall, the findings indicate that the pressure to achieve and maintain strong academic performance significantly contributes to the academic stress experienced by first-year students. The mean scores, all above the 2.50 decision threshold, show that performance-related expectations from self and family are key factors that intensify students' academic stress in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Hypothesis One: Academic workload does not significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Academic Workload and Academic Stress among First-Year Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	Std.	r (Correlation	Sig. (2-	Decision
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			Deviation	Coefficient)	tailed)	
Academic Workload	140	2.93	0.94			
Academic Stress	140	2.88	0.91			
Correlation between Academic Workload and Academic Stress	140	—	—	0.319	0.000	Significant

Decision Rule: If $p < 0.05$, reject the null hypothesis; if $p \geq 0.05$, accept the null hypothesis.
Level of Significance: 0.05 (two-tailed)

The result in Table 6 shows that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between academic workload and academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as students' academic workload increases, their level of academic stress also tends to increase. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.319$) suggests a low to moderate positive relationship between the two variables. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that academic workload does not significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin is rejected. This implies that academic workload significantly contributes to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Hypothesis Two: Course demands do not significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Table 7: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Course Demands and Academic Stress among First-Year Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r (Correlation Coefficient)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Course Demands	140	2.95	0.95			

Academic Stress	140	2.88	0.91			
Correlation between Course Demands and Academic Stress	140	—	—	0.366	0.000	Significant

Decision Rule: If $p < 0.05$, reject the null hypothesis; if $p \geq 0.05$, accept the null hypothesis.
Level of Significance: 0.05 (two-tailed)

The result in Table 7 reveals that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between course demands and academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin ($r = 0.366$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that as course demands increase, the level of academic stress experienced by students also increases. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.366$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that course demands do not significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin is rejected. Therefore, the study concludes that course demands significantly contribute to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Hypothesis Three: Challenges in adapting to the university's academic environment do not significantly influence academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Table 8: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Adaptation and Academic Stress among First-Year Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r (Correlation Coefficient)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Adaptation	140	2.92	0.97			

Academic Stress	140	2.88	0.91			
Correlation between Adaptation and Academic Stress	140	—	—	0.482	0.000	Significant

Decision Rule: If $p < 0.05$, reject the null hypothesis; if $p \geq 0.05$, accept the null hypothesis.
Level of Significance: 0.05 (two-tailed)

The result in Table 8 shows a statistically significant positive relationship between adaptation and academic stress among first year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin ($r = 0.482$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that students who experience more difficulty adapting to the university's academic environment tend to have higher levels of academic stress. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.482$) suggests a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables. Although adaptation is typically considered a protective factor that should reduce stress as it increases, the positive correlation obtained in this study reflects that the measure used focused on difficulties in adaptation rather than successful adaptation. If adaptation had been measured as a strength or ability, one would logically expect a negative correlation such that as adaptability increases, academic stress decreases. However, since the scale assessed challenges in adapting, a positive correlation is consistent with theoretical expectations, as greater adaptation difficulty leads to higher stress. Given that the p value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. The study therefore concludes that adaptation difficulties significantly influence the academic stress levels of first year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Hypothesis Four: The pressure to achieve high academic performance does not significantly contribute to the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Table 9: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Pressure to Achieve and Academic Stress among First-Year Students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r (Correlation Coefficient)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Pressure to Achieve	140	2.97	0.96			
Academic Stress	140	2.88	0.91			
Correlation between Pressure to Achieve and Academic Stress	140	—	—	0.737	0.000	Significant

Decision Rule: If $p < 0.05$, reject the null hypothesis; if $p \geq 0.05$, accept the null hypothesis.
Level of Significance: 0.05 (two-tailed)

The result presented in Table 9 indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between pressure to achieve and academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin ($r = 0.737$, $p < 0.01$). This means that as the pressure to achieve high academic performance increases, the level of academic stress experienced by students also rises. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.737$) signifies a high degree of association, implying that the pressure to maintain a high CGPA, meet family expectations, or attain academic recognition greatly contributes to students' stress levels.

Since the calculated p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis stating that the pressure to achieve high academic performance does not significantly contribute to the academic stress experienced by first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin is rejected. The study therefore concludes that the

pressure to achieve high academic performance significantly contributes to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of research question one revealed that academic workload contributes significantly to academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Respondents generally agreed that they often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work, the number of courses, and the frequency of assignments. The correlation result ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.01$) confirmed a positive and significant relationship between academic workload and academic stress, indicating that as workload increases, stress levels rise correspondingly. This finding supports the observations of Owolabi and Ogunsanya (2020), who found that heavy coursework and overlapping deadlines create psychological pressure that negatively affects students' concentration and well-being. Similarly, Akinola and Eze (2019) reported that the increasing volume of academic demands, especially during the first year of university, significantly contributes to stress and burnout among undergraduates. The consistency between these findings suggests that academic workload remains a key determinant of academic stress in higher education environments where academic tasks are intense and deadlines are strict.

The findings of research question two showed that course demands also contribute significantly to academic stress among first-year students. Respondents agreed that high academic expectations, complex course content, and frequent tests increase their anxiety and stress levels. The correlation result ($r = 0.366$, $p < 0.01$) indicated a moderate positive relationship between course demands and academic stress. This aligns with the study of

Adeyemo and Afolabi (2021), who found that high course expectations and continuous assessments often heighten stress and anxiety, especially among first-year students still adjusting to university standards. Similarly, Usman (2020) observed that the intensity of course requirements and assessment frequency in universities can overwhelm students, particularly those with limited coping mechanisms. Therefore, the present study confirms that course-related pressures are a major contributor to stress, reflecting the broader challenge of academic adjustment in higher institutions.

The findings of research question three revealed that the challenges of adapting to the university's academic environment significantly influence academic stress among first-year students. Respondents agreed that adapting to new learning styles, large lecture classes, and the level of independence expected in university life contributes to their stress. The correlation result ($r = 0.482$, $p < 0.01$) showed a moderately strong positive relationship between adaptation challenges and academic stress. This is consistent with the findings of Nwokolo and Igwe (2022), who reported that students who struggle to adapt to university systems often experience higher stress levels, poor academic engagement, and low self-esteem. Similarly, Obike and Nnamdi (2019) found that first-year students frequently experience stress due to the sudden change in learning environment and expectations compared to secondary school. The current study thus affirms that poor adaptation to the academic culture of the university is a critical factor influencing stress among new entrants, suggesting the need for stronger orientation and mentoring programmes.

The findings of research question four showed that the pressure to achieve high academic performance strongly contributes to academic stress among first-year students.

Respondents agreed that the pressure to maintain a high CGPA, meet family expectations, and avoid failure adds emotional strain. The correlation analysis ($r = 0.737$, $p < 0.01$) indicated a strong positive relationship, confirming that students experiencing greater performance pressure tend to have higher levels of academic stress. This result corroborates the study of Salami and Akande (2020), who found that family and societal expectations significantly influence students' stress levels, especially among those striving for excellence. Likewise, Adegboyega and Lawal (2021) highlighted that the competitive nature of university grading and scholarship maintenance creates a continuous cycle of anxiety and emotional exhaustion. The present study therefore establishes that performance-related pressure is one of the most dominant sources of academic stress among first-year students, as they often face unrealistic self-imposed or external expectations.

Generally, the test of hypotheses revealed that all four independent variables; academic workload, course demands, adaptation challenges, and pressure to achieve had significant positive relationships with academic stress. This implies that as these academic and psychosocial pressures intensify, students' stress levels increase correspondingly. The findings support the broader theoretical framework of academic stress, which posits that excessive academic demands, difficulty in adjustment, and high performance expectations collectively heighten psychological strain among students (Lazarus & Folkman, 2020). The results also reinforce the conclusion of Adeyemi (2021), who stated that stress among university students is a multidimensional phenomenon arising from both institutional and personal factors.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations arising from the findings of the study.

Summary

This study investigated academic stress among first year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Four research questions guided the study, and four corresponding hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised all first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, while a total of 140 respondents were selected through a random sampling technique. Data were collected using a

structured questionnaire designed to measure the influence of academic workload, course demands, adaptation challenges, and pressure to achieve on students' academic stress. The instrument's reliability was confirmed using the Cronbach's Alpha method, which showed a high level of internal consistency. Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) were employed to test the hypotheses with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The major findings of the study are summarised as follows:

1. The study revealed that academic workload significantly contributes to academic stress among first-year students. Respondents agreed that they often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work, multiple assignments, and the pressure of numerous courses within a semester. The correlation result ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.01$) confirmed a positive and significant relationship between academic workload and academic stress.
2. The findings also indicated that course demands significantly influence academic stress. High academic expectations, complex course contents, and frequent assessments were reported as major sources of stress. The correlation result ($r = 0.366$, $p < 0.01$) demonstrated a moderate positive relationship between course demands and academic stress.
3. The study showed that challenges in adapting to the university's academic environment also contribute significantly to academic stress. Respondents reported difficulty adjusting to new learning styles, large lecture sizes, limited academic

guidance, and the level of independence expected in university life. The correlation result ($r = 0.482$, $p < 0.01$) showed a moderately strong relationship between adaptation challenges and academic stress.

4. The result further revealed that pressure to achieve high academic performance strongly contributes to academic stress among first-year students. Students reported high levels of anxiety due to family expectations, fear of failure, scholarship concerns, and competition for top grades. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.737$, $p < 0.01$) indicated a strong positive relationship between pressure to achieve and academic stress.

In summary, the study established that academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin is significantly influenced by multiple interrelated factors. These include heavy academic workload, high course demands, challenges in adapting to the university environment, and strong pressure to achieve. Among these, the pressure to achieve high academic performance emerged as the most significant contributor to students' stress levels.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that academic stress among first-year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin arises primarily from excessive academic workload, demanding course expectations, adaptation challenges, and pressure to attain high academic achievement. These factors collectively indicate that many first-year students encounter substantial academic and emotional strain as they transition into the university environment.

The results suggest that the first year represents a period of significant adjustment, during which students are expected to adapt quickly to new learning styles, increased academic responsibilities, and greater independence. The difficulty experienced in meeting these expectations shows that the early stage of university life places students in a position where their coping skills and preparedness are tested more intensely than before.

The strong influence of pressure to achieve also highlights the role of psychological and social expectations in shaping academic stress. Students often feel compelled to meet high personal and family standards, maintain competitive grades, and avoid academic failure. These pressures amplify the effects of academic workload and course demands, creating an environment where emotional tension becomes intertwined with academic performance.

Furthermore, the positive relationships observed across all measured variables indicate that the experience of stress is not driven by any single factor but by the combined effect of multiple academic and personal pressures. This pattern shows that academic stress among first-year students is multidimensional, arising from the interaction between institutional demands and the personal challenges students face as new entrants.

The study concludes that academic stress among first-year students is a complex issue that reflects both academic structures and student expectations. Reducing the level of stress experienced by students will require targeted support systems that strengthen their ability to adjust, encourage healthy study practices, and promote emotional wellbeing throughout their academic journey.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Academic workload should be reviewed by faculty administrators to ensure a balanced distribution of courses and assignments. Course instructors should coordinate deadlines to reduce the clustering of multiple tasks within short periods.
2. Lecturers should adopt student-centred teaching methods that promote understanding and reduce pressure. Simplified course delivery, timely feedback, and clear communication of course expectations will help students manage stress more effectively.
3. Orientation and mentorship programmes should be strengthened to assist first-year students in adapting to university life. Senior students and academic advisers should be assigned as mentors to guide new students on study habits, time management, and coping strategies.
4. Psychological and counselling support services should be made more accessible within the Faculty. The University Counselling Centre should organise regular stress management workshops and awareness programmes to help students identify and manage stress early.
5. Family and societal expectations should be managed through awareness campaigns. Parents and guardians should be educated on the psychological impact of excessive academic pressure and encouraged to provide emotional rather than purely performance-based support.

6. The University management should promote a supportive learning environment by ensuring adequate facilities, smaller class sizes where possible, and improved communication between lecturers and students.
7. Regular seminars on emotional resilience and academic coping strategies should be organised by the Faculty of Education to equip students with practical tools for balancing academic and personal wellbeing.
8. Further research should be conducted on the psychological coping mechanisms used by students to manage academic stress, as this will help institutions design more targeted interventions.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING
PSYCHOLOGY (EECP)**

To be responded by first year students in Faculty of Education, University Of Benin

This is a study on “Academic Stress among First Year Students in the Faculty of Education, University Of Benin”. Please complete the structured questionnaire by ticking the relevant box or filling the blank spaces. If you have any question, please ask before you start. Provide the details below and then proceed to answer the questions. Please note that the information you are giving would be used for research purposes and would be treated with confidentiality.

SECTION A: BIODATA

Instruction: please tick [✓] where appropriate

Department: _____

SECTION B: kindly tick () the option that is applicable to you.

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

ACADEMIC WORKLOAD

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1	I often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work required of me.				
2	I have multiple assignments due at the same time which causes me stress.				
3	The number of courses I take in a semester is more than I can manage.				
4	I struggle to keep up with lectures, readings, and assignments.				
5	I feel academically stressed due to the high workload of my current academic programme.				

COURSE DEMANDS

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
6	The academic expectations in my courses are too high.				
7	The content of my courses is too complex to understand within the allocated time.				
8	I feel anxious during tests and presentations because of the nature of the course demands.				
9	I often have insufficient time to prepare adequately for continuous assessments.				
10	The frequency of tests and class assignments increases my stress levels.				

ADAPTATION

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
11	I find it difficult to adjust to the learning style at the university level.				
12	The academic environment is very different from what I was used to in secondary school.				
13	I sometimes feel lost or confused in large lecture classes.				
14	I feel stressed because I lack adequate guidance on how to navigate my academic journey.				
15	I have difficulty adjusting to the level of independence expected in the university.				

PRESSURE TO ACHIEVE

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
16	I feel intense pressure to maintain a high CGPA.				
17	High family expectations increase the pressure I feel to do well academically.				
18	I worry constantly about failing or underperforming.				
19	The fear of losing my scholarship or support from my family makes me anxious.				
20	I feel emotionally stressed because I want to be among those at the top of the class.				

APPENDIX II

Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	20	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	20	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.730	20

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING
PSYCHOLOGY (EECP)

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SECTION A: BIODATA

Instruction: please tick [] where appropriate

Department: _____

SECTION B: kindly tick () the option that is applicable to you.

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

ACADEMIC WORKLOAD

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1	I often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work required of me.				
2	I have multiple assignments due at the same time which causes me stress.				
3	The number of courses I take in a semester is more than I can comfortably manage.				
4	I struggle to keep up with lectures, readings, and assignments.				
5	I feel academically stressed due to the workload of my current academic programme.				

COURSE DEMANDS

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
6	The academic expectations in my courses are too high.				
7	The content of my courses is too complex to understand within the allocated time.				
8	I feel anxious during tests and presentations because of the nature of the course demands.				
9	I often have insufficient time to prepare adequately for continuous assessments.				
10	The frequency of tests and class assignments increases my stress levels.				

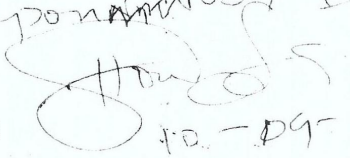
ADAPTATION

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
11	I find it difficult to adjust to the learning style at the university level.				
12	The academic environment is very different from what I was used to in secondary school.				
13	I sometimes feel lost or confused in large lecture classes.				
14	I feel stressed because I lack adequate guidance on how to navigate my academic journey.				
15	I have difficulty adjusting to the level of independence expected in the university.				

PRESSURE TO ACHIEVE

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
16	I feel intense pressure to maintain a high GPA.				
17	Family expectations increase the pressure I feel to do well academically.				
18	I worry constantly about failing or underperforming.				
19	The fear of losing my scholarship or support makes me anxious.				
20	I feel emotionally stressed because I want to be among ^{those at} the top of ^{my} class.				

I feel emotionally stressed because I want to be among those at top of the class. Consider it validate, subject to correction. Hypomania I.H.

2

 10-09-2025

QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION AND COUNSELLING
PSYCHOLOGY (EECP)

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SECTION A: BIODATA

Instruction: please tick [] where appropriate

Department: _____

SECTION B: kindly tick () the option that is applicable to you.

Key: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

ACADEMIC WORKLOAD

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1	I often feel overwhelmed by the volume of academic work required of me.				
2	I have multiple assignments due at the same time which causes me stress.				
3	The number of courses I take in a semester is more than I can comfortably manage.				
4	I struggle to keep up with lectures, readings, and assignments.				
5	I feel academically stressed due to the workload of my current academic programme.				

COURSE DEMANDS

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
6	The academic expectations in my courses are too high.				
7	The content of my courses is too complex to understand within the allocated time.				
8	I feel anxious during tests and presentations because of the nature of the course demands.				
9	I often have insufficient time to prepare adequately for continuous assessments.				
10	The frequency of tests and class assignments increases my stress levels.				

ADAPTATION

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
11	I find it difficult to adjust to the learning style at the university level.				
12	The academic environment is very different from what I was used to in secondary school.				
13	I sometimes feel lost or confused in large lecture classes.				
14	I feel stressed because I lack adequate guidance on how to navigate my academic journey.				
15	I have difficulty adjusting to the level of independence expected in the university.				

PRESSURE TO ACHIEVE

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
16	I feel intense pressure to maintain a high GPA. <i>CGPA</i>				
17	High Family expectations increase the pressure I feel to do well academically.				
18	I worry constantly about failing or underperforming.				
19	The fear of losing my scholarship or support <i>from my family</i> makes me anxious.				
20	I feel emotionally stressed because I want to be among the top of my class.				

17 High family expectations in my academics increase the pressure I feel to do well academically. Validated
 Hebit Olorun
 10/09/2025