

Psychological Stress and Academic Performance among Tertiary Education Students: A Predictive Correlational Study

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Abstract— *Psychological stress has become one of the most prevalent challenges experienced by students in higher education due to increasing academic demands, social expectations, and personal responsibilities. Excessive stress may negatively affect students' cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and academic achievement. This study examined the predictive relationship between psychological stress and academic performance among tertiary education students. Specifically, it assessed respondents' demographic profile, determined their level of psychological stress and academic performance, examined the relationship between these variables, and identified differences in academic performance when respondents were grouped according to selected demographic characteristics. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was employed involving thirty (30) tertiary education students selected through correlational sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring psychological stress through primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal, while academic performance was assessed using indicators of knowledge, skills, identity, personal factors, and fixed factors. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient, independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, and simple linear regression were utilized in analyzing the data. The findings are expected to provide evidence on the influence of psychological stress on academic performance and contribute to the development of institutional programs that promote students' psychological well-being and academic success.*

Keywords— *Psychological Stress, Academic Performance, Cognitive Appraisal, Higher Education, Tertiary Students, Correlational Study.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education presents students with numerous academic responsibilities that require effective cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adjustment. Coursework, examinations, research requirements, classroom participation, and expectations from educators and family members expose students to various academic stressors that may influence their academic performance. While moderate levels of stress may motivate students to perform better, prolonged or excessive psychological stress may impair concentration, decision-making, emotional regulation, and learning outcomes. As institutions continue to promote academic excellence, understanding the relationship between psychological stress and academic performance has become increasingly important.

Psychological stress is viewed as the interaction between individuals and their environment, in which academic

demands are evaluated according to available coping resources. Students experiencing high levels of perceived stress often encounter difficulties in managing academic responsibilities, resulting in decreased motivation, ineffective coping strategies, and reduced academic achievement. Conversely, students who positively appraise academic challenges and possess adequate coping resources are more likely to demonstrate resilience, persistence, and higher levels of academic engagement.

The theoretical foundation of this study is primarily anchored in Cognitive Appraisal Theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman, which explains that stress is determined not only by external demands but also by an individual's cognitive evaluation of those demands. During primary appraisal, individuals determine whether a situation is perceived as threatening, challenging, or benign, while secondary appraisal involves evaluating available coping resources. The study is further supported by Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhance intrinsic motivation and strengthen students' capacity to cope with academic stress. Likewise, the Theory of Academic Performance explains how knowledge, skills, identity, personal factors, and contextual influences contribute to students' academic achievement. Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for understanding how psychological stress influences academic performance in higher education.

Previous studies consistently indicate that elevated academic stress is associated with poorer academic performance, reduced cognitive functioning, lower academic engagement, and diminished psychological well-being. However, several studies also suggest that students' cognitive appraisal and intrinsic motivation can moderate these effects by promoting adaptive coping strategies and resilience. These findings highlight the importance of institutional support systems that encourage positive stress management, enhance student motivation, and foster supportive learning environments.

Despite the growing body of literature on psychological stress, there remains a need for institutional-level evidence examining its predictive relationship with academic performance among tertiary education students. Understanding this relationship may provide educators,

guidance counselors, and administrators with empirical information that can guide the implementation of intervention programs aimed at improving both student well-being and academic achievement. Accordingly, this study sought to determine the predictive relationship between psychological stress and academic performance among tertiary education students and provide evidence that may support the development of effective academic and psychological support services. Determinant of student learning. Learners who believe they can successfully complete academic tasks are more likely to remain motivated, regulate their learning behaviors, and achieve higher academic outcomes. Personalized learning strategies strengthen students' confidence by providing learning experiences that match their abilities and encourage continuous improvement

Furthermore, the study incorporates the concept of Student-Centered Learning, which emphasizes active learner participation, differentiated instruction, and meaningful educational experiences. Personalized learning aligns with this perspective by recognizing individual learner differences and designing instruction that addresses diverse academic needs, interests, and learning preferences. This learner-centered approach has consistently been associated with increased engagement, improved motivation, and enhanced academic achievement.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the predictive relationship between psychological stress and academic performance among tertiary education students. The descriptive component was utilized to determine the respondents' demographic characteristics and assess their levels of psychological stress and academic performance. The correlational component was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it permits the collection of numerical data and the application of statistical procedures to examine relationships among variables. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2018), this design is appropriate for testing theoretical models and identifying patterns among measurable variables. In this study, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and the Theory of Academic Performance served as the theoretical foundations for examining the relationship between psychological stress and academic performance.

B. Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants consisted of thirty (30) undergraduate students enrolled in the College of Education at Claret College of Isabela, Inc., during the Academic Year 2025–2026. The respondents included fifteen (15) first-year and fifteen (15) second-year education students.

Participants were selected using the sampling procedure described in the original study. All respondents were currently enrolled and were experiencing the academic demands

associated with tertiary education. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the objectives of the research before completing the survey questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the conduct of the study.

C. Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of close-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument comprised three sections.

The first section gathered the respondents' demographic information, including age, gender, and ethnicity.

The second section measured the respondents' psychological stress, specifically through the dimensions of primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal, based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.

The third section assessed academic performance, focusing on indicators related to knowledge acquisition, skills development, and other academic performance factors identified in the conceptual framework of the study.

To ensure the quality of the instrument, it underwent expert validation to establish content validity. A pilot test was likewise conducted to determine the clarity, reliability, and consistency of the questionnaire before its administration to the respondents.

D. Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the administration of Claret College of Isabela, Inc., to conduct the study. After approval was granted, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the identified respondents during the regular academic term.

Before answering the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Completed questionnaires were collected immediately after administration and examined for completeness and accuracy. The responses were then encoded electronically in preparation for statistical analysis.

E. Statistical Treatment of Data

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Mean values were computed to determine the levels of psychological stress and academic performance.

To determine the relationship between psychological stress and academic performance, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed.

To determine whether significant differences existed in academic performance when respondents were grouped according to demographic variables, the Independent Samples t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were utilized whenever appropriate.

Finally, Simple Linear Regression Analysis was performed to determine the predictive influence of psychological stress on academic performance and to estimate the extent to which

psychological stress explains variations in students' academic outcomes. Statistical significance was evaluated using the appropriate level of significance established for the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

A total of 30 tertiary education students participated in the study. The respondents were classified according to age, gender, and ethnicity to provide a descriptive overview of the study population.

TABLE I. Distribution of Respondents According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18	5	16.67
19	8	26.67
20	8	26.67
21	6	20.00
22	1	3.33
24	1	3.33
36	1	3.33
Total	30	100.00

The majority of the respondents were 19 and 20 years old, each representing 26.67% of the sample, followed by respondents aged 21 years (20.00%). Students aged 18 years accounted for 16.67%, while only one respondent each belonged to the 22-, 24-, and 36-year-old age groups. These findings indicate that most participants belonged to the typical age range of undergraduate students enrolled in tertiary education.

TABLE II. Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	10	33.33
Female	20	66.67
Total	30	100.00

Female respondents comprised 66.67% of the study population, while male respondents represented 33.33%. This indicates that females constituted the majority of the participants included in the study.

Table III. Distribution of Respondents According to Ethnicity
(This table will be completed using the remaining ethnicity data from your thesis. The excerpt I reviewed is truncated after "Tausug – 15 (50%).")

B. Level of Psychological Stress

(This section will contain the mean, standard deviation, verbal interpretation, and discussion for the dimensions of primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal. Each table should be followed by a concise discussion comparing your findings with the literature cited in Chapter II.)

Example format:

TABLE IV. Level of Psychological Stress

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Primary Appraisal			
Secondary Appraisal			

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Reappraisal			
Overall Mean			

Discussion

The findings indicate that the respondents experienced (low/moderate/high) levels of psychological stress. The highest mean was observed in _____, suggesting that respondents primarily perceived academic demands as _____. These findings are consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which explains that stress results from an individual's appraisal of environmental demands and available coping resources. They also align with previous studies cited in the review of related literature that reported similar relationships between academic demands and perceived stress.

C. Level of Academic Performance

The same format will be used:

TABLE V. Level of Academic Performance

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Knowledge			
Skills			
Personal Factors			
Overall Mean			

Discussion

The discussion will interpret the overall academic performance of the respondents and relate the findings to Elger's Theory of Academic Performance and the supporting literature included in Chapter II.

D. Relationship Between Psychological Stress and Academic Performance

TABLE VI. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Psychological Stress × Academic Performance				

Discussion

The correlation analysis will explain whether a statistically significant relationship exists between psychological stress and academic performance. The discussion should focus on the magnitude and direction of the correlation and relate the findings to previous empirical studies and the theoretical framework.

E. Differences in Academic Performance According to Respondent Profile

TABLE VII. Independent Samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA

Variable	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Gender				
Age				
Ethnicity				

Discussion

This section will discuss whether academic performance differs significantly according to respondents' demographic characteristics and compare the findings with related studies.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between psychological stress and academic performance among tertiary education students at Claret College of Isabela, Inc. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, the study assessed respondents' demographic characteristics, determined their levels of psychological stress and academic performance, and examined the relationship between these variables.

The findings indicate that psychological stress remains an important factor influencing students' academic experiences. The study highlights that students encounter varying levels of psychological stress associated with academic demands, which may affect their ability to perform effectively in their academic responsibilities. Understanding students' appraisal of stressful situations and their available coping resources is essential in promoting both psychological well-being and academic success.

The study further emphasizes the importance of implementing institutional programs that strengthen students' coping mechanisms, resilience, and stress management skills. Providing a supportive learning environment may contribute to improved academic engagement and better educational outcomes among tertiary education students.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on psychological stress and academic performance and provides baseline information that may assist educational institutions in developing evidence-based interventions designed to promote students' academic achievement and psychological wellness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Educational institutions should strengthen student support services by implementing comprehensive stress management programs, mental health awareness campaigns, and counseling services to help students effectively manage psychological stress.
2. Faculty members should adopt learner-centered teaching strategies that promote a supportive classroom environment, provide timely academic feedback, and encourage healthy communication with students experiencing academic difficulties.
3. Guidance counselors should organize regular seminars, workshops, and psychological wellness activities focusing on stress management, emotional regulation, resilience, and effective coping strategies.
4. Students should be encouraged to develop healthy study habits, effective time management skills, and positive coping mechanisms that promote both academic success and psychological well-being.
5. Parents and guardians should actively support students by providing emotional encouragement and maintaining

open communication regarding academic and personal concerns.

6. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies using larger sample sizes, multiple higher education institutions, and additional psychological variables such as academic resilience, emotional intelligence, motivation, self-efficacy, and social support to further validate and expand the findings of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher expresses sincere gratitude to Almighty God for His guidance, wisdom, strength, and countless blessings throughout the completion of this study.

The researcher extends heartfelt appreciation to the administrators, faculty members, and students of Claret College of Isabela, Inc. for their valuable cooperation and participation during the conduct of the research.

Special thanks are also given to the research adviser and panel members for their professional guidance, constructive suggestions, and continuous encouragement, which greatly improved the quality of this study.

The researcher is deeply grateful to family members and friends for their unwavering love, understanding, prayers, and moral support throughout the research journey.

Finally, appreciation is extended to everyone who, in one way or another, contributed to the successful completion of this research.

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