

STRESS MANAGEMENT: AN APPROACH TO ENSURING HIGH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract: *This paper is specifically prepared to examine the concept of stress management as an approach to ensuring high academic performance of Business Education students. A conceptual framework was developed by the authors in illustrating the inter-relationship that exist among the associated variables on stress. A brief history of the concept of stress was examined and the concept of stress was defined as the biological responses to events that threaten to overwhelm the individual capacity to cope satisfactorily in the environment; and the causes of stress(stressors) was equally examined. The various kinds of stress discussed in this paper includes: Eustress, distress, anticipatory, traumatic, acute, chronic, time, encounter and situational stress. The implication of stress on the academic performance was also of interest to us in this paper. Stress management was looked at and the common strategies of possibly managing stress were examined and they include: avoid the stressor, alter the stressor, adapt to the stressor and accept the stressor. The researchers equally advanced some recommendations among which are: Business Education students should learn to set up SMART goals and they should execute task based on their mental and physical capacities and abilities.*

Keywords: *Stress, Stress Management, Students and Business Education*

INTRODUCTION

Stress management is an integral aspect of management and the implication of stress on the achievement of goals cannot be over emphasized. Stress is the condition that results when person/environment transactions lead the individual to perceive a discrepancy-whether real or not – between the demands of a situation and the resources of the person's biological and social system. According to Oyerinde (2004), stress is the biological responses to events that threaten to overwhelm the individual capacity to cope satisfactorily in the environment. Oniyangi (2006) opined that stress is encountered by the individual in his everyday life.

There are various kinds of stress often experienced by different individuals. Aboriho (2008) classified stress to be acute, chronic and traumatic. Other kinds of stress includes: eustress, distress, anticipatory, encountered and time stress. Stress arises from various sources and it is referred to as stress sources (stressors). Hong and Zhang (2011) defined stress sources as those factors causing stress reactions, including biological, spiritual, social and environmental stress sources. Stress sources can also be classified as physical and mental stress sources.

Business Education students like any other students are faced with series of challenges which is described as 'stresses in this context. The need to achieve goals that brought them into the institutions is of great concern to them. Some of the common mental stress sources may include: study factors, social factors, life, economic and career factors. The need for proper management of stress by Business Education students cannot be over-emphasized and this is the bases for this paper.

Conceptual Framework

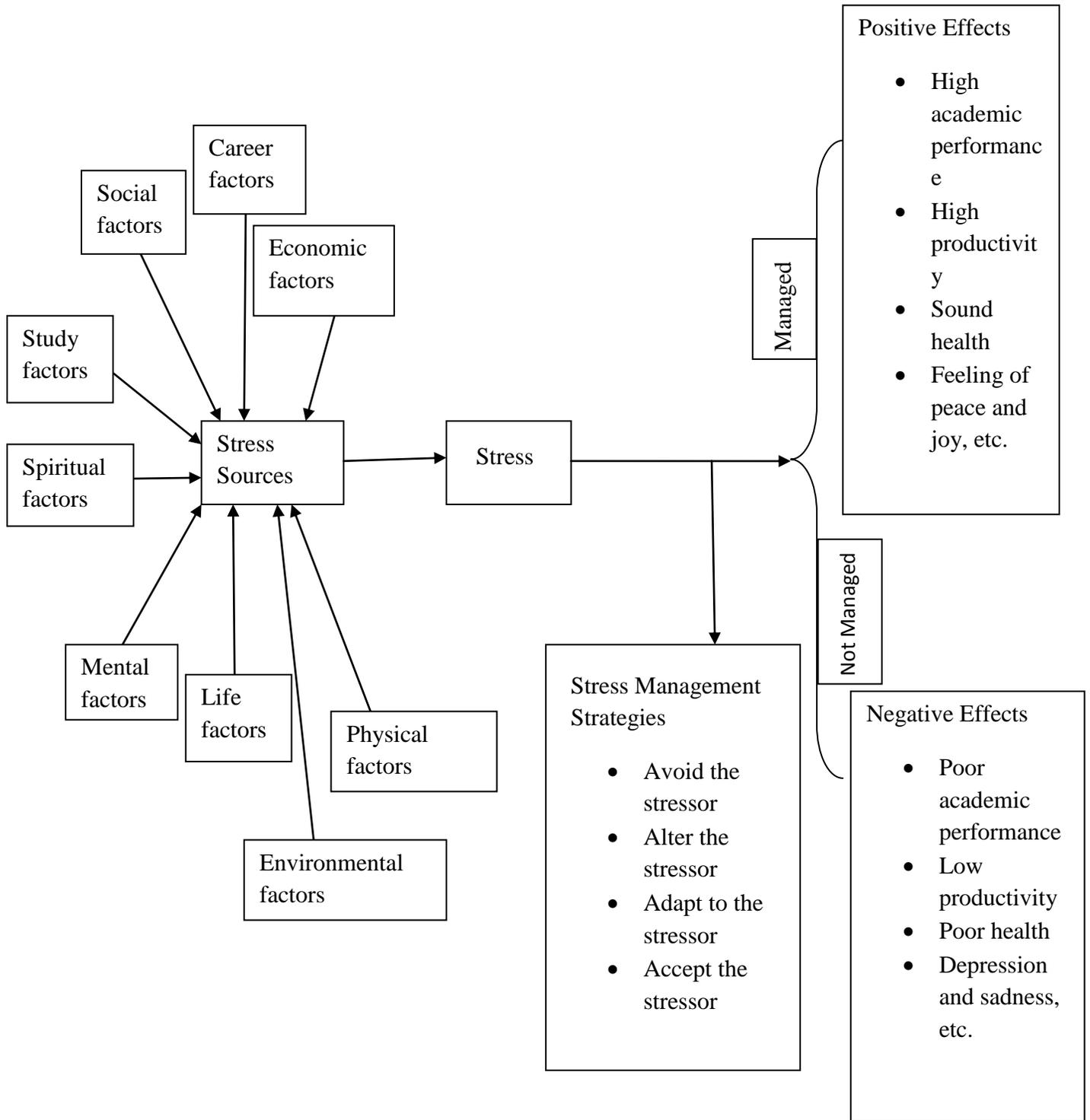


Fig. 1: Imeokparia and Ediagbonya Model on Stress Management

Source: Authors' fieldwork

The above model/conceptual framework illustrates the inter-relationship that exists among stress sources, stress, stress management strategies and the effects of stress on the academic performance on Business Education students. From the above model, stress sources refer to those things that are capable of bringing about stresses and these includes: social factors, physical factors, economic factors, environmental factors and mental factors. These factors can make Business Education students to be stressed. When a Business Education student is stressed, the next thing that will come to the mind of the student/individual is how to manage it. The model illustrates four (4) strategies of managing stress which includes: avoid the stressor, alter the stressor, adapt to the stressor and accept the stressor. Once these stress management strategies are well applied, it will result into positive effects such as high academic achievement/performance, high productivity, sound health, feeling of peace and joy. But when stress is not well managed, it results in negative effects such as low academic achievement, low productivity, poor health and others. This negative effects result into stress again and so on.

Concept of Stress

The concept of stress and stress management is increasingly gaining recognition in literature and the globe. Oyerinde (2004) describes stress as the biological responses to events that threaten to overwhelm the individual capacity to cope satisfactorily in the environment. Melinda, Ellen, Jeanne and Robert (2008) defined stress as a powerful neurochemicals and hormones that prepare one for action to fight or flee if one don't take action, the stress responses can lead to health problems.

The study of stress has remained an integral aspect of research work of the years. Cannon and Selye used animal studies to establish the earliest scientific basis for the study of stress. In their studies, they measured the physiological responses of animals to external pressures, such as heat and cold, prolonged restraint and surgical procedures, then extrapolated from these studies to human beings. As a follow-up to the above studies, Richard Rahe and others established the view that stress is caused by distinct, measureable life stressors, and further, that these life stressors can be ranked by the median degree of stress they produce. Stress was traditionally conceptualized to be a result of external insults beyond the control of those experiencing the stress. More recently, however, it has been argued that external circumstances do not have any intrinsic capacity to produce stress but instead their effect is mediated by the individuals' perceptions, capacities and understanding.

In this paper, stress is defined as structural imbalance within the individual as a result of deficiency or shortfall in the individual's expectation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) asserted that stress can be thought of as resulting from an imbalance between demands and resources as occurring when pressure exceeds ones perceived ability to cope. Stress management was developed and premised on the idea that stress is not a direct response to a stressor but rather ones resources and ability to cope /mediate the stress response and are amenable to change, thus allowing stress to be controllable. For one to be able to adequately and effectively manage stress there must be some competencies to be possessed by the individual. Stress management competencies are a set of management skills, abilities and behaviours that have been shown to help managers in preventing and reducing stress at work. In a research work carried out by occupational psychologists at Goldsmiths, university of London and Affinity Health at work led to the development of a stress management competency framework with 4 core competencies and 12 sub-competencies.

Types of Stress

Over the years, various scholars have described or classified stress in different ways. In this paper, the following types of stress will be discussed:

- ✓ Eustress: this kind of stress is described as good or positive. This stress provides immediate strength to the individual. It is a result of haven achieved an outstanding feat in one's life. It may be in form of winning a game or race, being with a partner, child birth, passing an exam and others. This stress often occurs for a short period of time and it creates a sought of imbalance within the individual.
- ✓ Distress: this kind of stress is described as bad stress because it makes an individual vulnerable to illness.
- ✓ Acute stress: it is one of the most common kinds of stress. It is a psychological condition arising in response to a terrifying or traumatic event. Acute stress response was first described by Walter Cannon in the 1920s as a theory that animals react threats with a general discharge of the sympathetic nervous system. The

ensuring physiological changes constitute a major part of the acute stress response. Acute stress can be acute eustress mostly in small doses (pleasant, cheerful, thrilling, exciting stress) and acute distress mostly too much (cause of mental health problems and physical difficulties, tension headaches, upset stomach, exhausting). The symptoms of acute stress usually appear within minutes of the impact of the stressful stimulus or event and disappear within 2-3 days (often within hours).

- ✓ Chronic stress: it is described as chronic because the stressor is present around for a longer time. This is the grinding stress that wears people away day after day, year after year. Chronic stress destroys bodies, minds and lives. It wreaks havoc through long-term attrition. It is the stress of poverty, of dysfunctional families, of being trapped in an unhappy marriage or in a despised job or career. It is the stress of unrelenting demands and pressures for seemingly interminable periods of time. With no hope, the individual gives up searching for solutions. Some students find themselves studying the course they never intended to study because of admission problem. This scenario has given room to chronic stress all through the students' stay in the institution. The resultant effect of this kind of stress on student is poor academic performance and skill acquisition.
- ✓ Time stress: this kind of stress is the resultant effect of one's worry about time or the lack thereof. One worry about the number of things that one has to do, and fear that one will fail to achieve something important. One might feel trapped, unhappy or even hopeless. This stress is common in all facets of lives. Students are often faced with assignment deadlines, short test/exam notices and others. There is bound to be tension or imbalance within the individual if he/she perceived that there may be no enough time to complete a particular task. Time management skills have been advocated over the years as a useful tool in coping with this kind of stress.
- ✓ Anticipatory stress: this is the kind of stress that one experiences concerning the future. Sometimes, this stress can be focused on a specific event, such as an upcoming presentation that you are going to give, upcoming exams, job interview and event. Anticipatory stress is often occasioned by fear of failure. Most times, people are afraid that their performances may not be good enough and as such, this result to stress and stage fright as in the case of presentation. The use of positive visualization and meditation technique has been useful in dealing with this kind of stress.
- ✓ Situational stress: this stress occurs in a scary situation that one has no control over. This stress is not anticipated by the individual and as such it is always sudden. This situation normally places the individual under pressure thereby experiencing series of hormonal discharge and fast heart beating. Conflict has been identified as the major cause of situational stress and effective conflict resolution skills have equally been identified as a possible way out.
- ✓ Encounter stress: this is the kind of stress that is normally faced by people as a result of their contact with the people they are working with. Some persons by virtue of their profession/occupation are made to have contact with members of the public that may be stressed. Examples of these categories of workers/professional include medical doctors, psychologist, police officers and other. For instance, the stress faced by deceased relative may be transferred to the doctor or in the case of a police officer in a gun battle with an arm robbery.
- ✓ Traumatic Stress: It is one of the types of stress as classified by Aboriho (2008). It is the impact of an overwhelming tragedy, the trauma of which the victim keeps having memory of. This kind of stress has serious implication on students especially Business Education students. This may be in form of a student receiving a call before an examination about the death of his/her parents or a message about the sudden attack of a love one. Ones this happen, the students will definitely be destabilized and this in turn will negatively affect the productivity of the student.

Stress Sources and its implications on Business Education Students

Overtime, stress sources have been viewed by various scholars in different dimensions. According to Hong and Zhang (2011), stress sources refer to factors causing stress reactions, including biological stress sources, spiritual stress sources, and social and environmental stress sources.

Business Education students like any other students are faced with stress in the course of their study. Rawson, Bloomer, and Kendall (1994) asserted that mental stress sources of college students mainly include study factors, social factors, life and economic factors, and career factors. Heins as cited in Hong and Zhang (2011) opined that

there are two types of stress sources among college students. One type is about academic expectation and achievements, and the other is about social factors such as maintaining and developing social connections.

Most Business Education students are often worried (stressed) because of their academic workloads. The competitive nature of the labour market tends to put so much pressures on the students. The resultant effect of this pressure is mental stress and this ultimately affects the academic performance of the students.

Studies have shown that the mental stresses of college students come from two aspects: one is the personal stress, including stress from family, stress from adaptability, stress from health, stress from relationship, stress from low self-esteem and stress from frustration. The other is the social environmental stress including stress from interpersonal communication, stress from occupation choice, emotional stress, stress from college environment and stress from study (Zhang, Che and Li, 2003).

Concept of Academic Performance/Achievement in Relation with Stress

Academic performance has remained a focal point in most academic literature. A Business Education student pursuing a degree/diploma or certification will always be conscious of his/her performances that will possibly make him/her to be relevant in the world of work. The term academic performance or achievement is the outcome of education- the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals (Annie, Howard, & Mildred, 1996). Academic performance/achievement is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment (CA) but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important – procedural knowledge such as skill or declarative knowledge such as facts.

Studies have shown that there are so many factors that are capable of influencing the academic performance of students including Business Education students. Some of these factors include: socio-economic status, parental background, learning environment, students' intelligence and personality (Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse and Verschueren, 2011; Magnuson, 2007). Apart from the fore mention factors that are capable of influencing academic performance. Studies have equally shown that stress is capable of affecting/influencing students' academic performance (Hong and Zhang, 2011). A survey of a sample survey based on more that 10 million college students in China shows that 20.23% of college students face mental disorders due to mental stresses and 54.4% of drop-out college students are caused by mental stresses. Based on the above premise, it becomes very important to note that the academic performance of Business students and the likes is heavily dependent on the level of stress of the students. Though, Hong and Zhang (2011) opined that the mental stress of students comes from four aspects: study conditions, employment situations, economic conditions and personal factors (interpersonal communication, self-care ability and family condition).

Stress has been linked to symptomatic experiences such as headaches (Davis, Holm, Myers, & Suda, 1998; Fanciullacci, Alessandri, & Fanciullacci, 1998; Armstrong, Wittrock, Robinson, 2006; Bjouling, 2009), Musculoskeletal pain (Dyrehag, et. al., 1998; Finestone, Alfeeli, and Fisher, 2008), gastrointestinal upset (Whitehead & Schuster, 1985), hyperventilation (Ringsberg & Akerlind, 1999), insomnia (vgontzas et al., 1998) and fatigue (Maes, 2009). The experience of stress, particularly chronic stress, takes a significant toll on the well-being of the individuals in terms of emotional and physical discomforts as well as functional ability. All these discomforts are capable of influencing or affecting the overall academic performance of Business Education students.

Stress Management and Its Implication on Business Education Students

Stress management remains an integral aspect of management that must be given attention to if the goals/objectives of Business Education programme must be achieved. In this context, stress management can be described as those strategies, skills and techniques designed to put a check to the stress level of individuals. Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress. Managing stress is all about taking charge of the environment and the way one deals with the problems (Okaka & Okosun, 2009).

Stress is a health problem that affects people and it is difficult to find any man/students that are not stressed. Almost everybody experience stress in one way or the other because we need to achieve our objectives in life (Oniyangi, 2006). Business Education students just like any other people are equally faced with stress. Business Education

programme being a Theory-Practice based course tend to expose the students to a lot of activities that can lead to stress if not properly managed. For instance, a Business Education student that is given a specified time to complete a typing task will definitely not find it easy because the student will want to meet up with the time. In a similar vein, the student that is given shorthand dictation will also experience similar stress. When this occurs, the blood pressure and the psychological disposition of the students will change. The pressures of trying to meet up with assignment deadlines have been observed to be one of the primary causes of stress among Business Education students.

Several scholars have proposed different ways of managing stress. Oyerinde (2004) listed some management strategies and control of stress to include:

- Having a fix time daily for exercise at least 15-20 minutes daily.
- Choosing an activity that is enjoyable and cherishable.
- Avoid being alone, having companion always.
- Be full of zeal
- Refusing to exhaust the body energy, start everything from simple to complex.
- Preparing a data of activities and improvement.
- Evaluating the daily routine activities.
- Consult physician before the start of regiment especially if one is old or ill.
- Dressing to task and the taste of the public.
- Not carrying issues so much on the mind.
- Being friendly at all times to people around.
- Not rushing off activities.
- Avoid been under pressure.
- Avoid use of more energy and undertake more work, etc.

According to Melinda, Ellen, Jeanne and Robert (2008), there are four methods of managing stressful situations and these will be useful to Business Education students. They methods are:

- Avoid the stressor
- Alter the stressor
- Adapt to the stressor
- Accept the stressor

Avoid the Stressor: The stressor in this context is those things that are capable of bringing about stressful situations. According to Melinda, Ellen, Jeanne and Robert (2008), one should learn to know ones limits and stick to them, avoid people who can consistently cause stress in one's life, taking control of one's environment, avoiding hot-button topics and analyze one's schedule, responsibilities and daily tasks. As Business Education students, if one's educational goals must be achieved, one should as a matter of principle avoid all those situations, tasks or friends that can bring about stressful situations.

Alter the Stressor: There are some stressful situations that cannot be avoided and as such, the best way to manage them is to try changing them from their original positions/state. This involves the way one communicates and operates in daily life. Business Education students under this circumstance should be willing to compromise, be more assertive and managing time better.

Adapt to the Stressor: One can conveniently adapt to stressors that cannot be changed. One can adapt to stressful situations and regaining sense of control by changing one's expectations, standards, ideas and behaviour (Okaka&Okosun, 2009). Business Education students are encouraged to be flexible in order for them to easily respond to stressful situation.

Accept the Stressor: Some stressors can neither be avoided nor changed such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, a national recession/disaster, failure in examinations or elongated/extended school calendar due to industrial actions/strikes. These things have happened, and the best way to manage the stressor is to accept it since one really doesn't have the power to change the situations. For instance, when a Business Education student that is suppose to

spend 18 months in a programme is spending more time due to strike or delay in results preparation will be stressed. But the way out is to accept the stressor since one cannot change it. Though, it may be difficult but in the long-run, it will be easier than railing against a situation that cannot be changed (Okaka&Okosun, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This paper has been able to examine stress management as it relates to the academic performance of Business Education students. Based on this paper, stress has been identified as having positive correlation with the academic performance of Business Education students and the knowledge of various types of stress and stress management strategies will be of great benefit to the students.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above, the following recommendations are therefore important:

- Business Education students should learn to set up SMART goals.
- They should execute task based on their mental and physical capacities and abilities.
- They should learn to prioritize their activities or task.
- They should learn to complete their assignments or tasks on time to avoid rush and undue pressure accompany late submission of assignments.
- They should learn to associate with those that can add value to their lives and avoid those that will bring stress to them.
- They should learn to strike a balance among academic, religious and social life.
- They should engage in regular and meaningful exercise.

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