

An Assessment of the Prevalence of Religiosity and Spirituality as Coping Strategies for Academic Stress among Undergraduates in Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere—Ekiti (Bouesti)

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ABSTRACT

This study assess the prevalence of religiosity and spiritual as coping strategies for academic stress among the undergraduate students of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti (BOUESTI). The study aimed at investigating the prevalence of religious and spiritual activities or practices among the undergraduate students and how this had influence the level of academic stress exhibited by them. The study in this wise employed the descriptive research of the survey design, with 12,740 students of the 2023/2024 Academic Session of the university and 450 students used as the population and sample size for the study. The study employed a self-constructed questionnaire titled Religion, Spirituality and Stress Coping Strategies Questionnaire (RSSCSQ) as the instrument for the study. The instrument was validated by ensuring the face, content and criterion validity, with reliability inclusive. A 0.72 and 0.83 correlations coefficient was obtained for both the construct validity (Convergent) and reliability (Test-Retest) respectively. The study made use of descriptive statistics that includes frequency count and percentage alongside with Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to answer and test research questions raised and hypothesis generated respectively. The outcome of the study have it that the level of spiritual and religious activities/practices is highly prevalence among the students, while the level of academic stress exhibited by them is also high. It was found also that the prevalence of this spiritual and religious activities/practices has a significant effect on the academic stress of the undergraduate students. It was therefore recommended that spiritual and religious activities should be encouraged and allowed to thrive on campuses to support students' well-being. While the school management is advised to considered structuring academic calendars and activities to accommodate spiritual practices, and ensuring that students have the opportunity to engage in these activities without jettison their academic responsibilities.

Keywords: Religiosity, Spirituality, Academic Stress, Coping Strategy, Undergraduate

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual-religious coping is the use of religious beliefs, attitudes or practices to reduce the emotional distress caused by stressful events of life, such as loss or change, which gives suffering meaning and makes it more bearable. Cultivating spirituality within one's self helps coping with stress in multiple ways. It helps to uncover what is most important in life. Religion and spirituality are both rooted in trying to understand the meaning of life and, in some cases how a relationship with the Supreme Being may influence that meaning.

Stress is a common phenomenon in the society because it is part of everyday living. Most definitions agreed that stress can be positive when it motivates one to get things done and is negative when it threatens the health of an individual. Adeoye (2019) defined stress as a state of severe physiological and psychological tension.

Ajagbe (2018) looked at stress as an unpleasant state of emotional and psychological condition that people experience in situation they perceived as dangerous or threatening to life and their wellbeing. Akinboye, Akinboye. & Adeyemo (2020) defined stress as response to any undesirable, mental, emotional, social or environmental demands. Stress is the interference that disturbs a person mental or physical well-being.

The incidence of stress among students is alarming due to academic challenges or events that go with the academic demands of students (Ashaolu, 2019).

According to Pascoe et al. (2020), students in academic institutions are confronted with various stressors, which can be characterized as the typical day-to-day challenges of academic responsibilities. Several stressors, such as a heavy academic workload, intensive studying, challenges in time management, maintaining high grades, competitiveness in the classroom, financial worries, familial demands, and the process of adapting to a new environment contribute to the stress experienced by students (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Karyotaki et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019). Barbayannis et al. (2022) also confirmed that students undergo stress due to physiological and psychological transformations associated with adolescence and early adulthood.

Similarly, (Mofatteh, 2021) found that wrong expectations from the university and course, negative relationships with teachers and staff, studying in a non-native language, lack of subject mastery, and guilt from making mistakes in assignments also contribute to stress among undergraduate students. Social factors such as lack of a supportive social network or family, infrequent family visits, lack of involvement in social activities, internet addiction and excessive social media usage, sexual victimization, difficulties in forming new relationships, feeling isolated or homesick, and managing peer pressure also play a significant role in undergraduate stress (Mofatteh, 2021).

Coping mechanisms have proven essential for effectively managing stress among diverse populations (Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Coping mechanisms can provide students with appropriate strategies to handle their stress. Lavoie-Tremblay et al (2022) stated that coping mechanisms help mitigate the adverse effects of stress on students' mental well-being and academic performance. Efficient coping mechanisms can enable students to address stress sources actively, improving their resilience and adaptive ability. Additionally, adopting positive coping mechanisms enhances general well-being by alleviating the physiological and psychosocial effects of stress.

Students may enhance their coping abilities and develop a more balanced lifestyle by utilizing various coping strategies such as physical activity, social support systems, and professional support (Nuetzel, 2023). This will provide students with the necessary skills to effectively handle stress and promote a culture of resilience, strength and well-being among educational institutions (Freire et al., 2020; Nuetzel, 2023).

The use of spirituality and religiosity as coping mechanisms has been found to be a potent resource in providing solace, tranquilly, and resolution for people facing severe disease, burnout or stress (Bryan et al., 2016; Dunn & Robinson-Lane, 2020; Jit Singh et al., 2023). Dunn & Robinson-Lane (2020) affirmed that using spiritual coping mechanisms to manage stress has globally improved physical, psychological, and social well-being. Similarly, Bryan et al (2016) analyzed the effect of religious coping on depression and anxiety. Similarly, Aggarwal et al (2023) have also stated that religiosity and spirituality have been researched to yield positive effects on mental health. Božek et al (2020); De Diego-Cordero et al (2022) and Grill et al (2020) stated that since the dimensions of health and well-being include spiritual health, there is a rationale to incorporate religion and spirituality into health-related quality of life. Hence, it is necessary to incorporate religiosity and spirituality as comprehensive, patient-centered care to stress to obtain better physical and mental outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of stress in tertiary institutions is notably high, impacting students' academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. Various studies have highlighted significant stress levels among college and university students stemming from academic pressures, financial concerns, and social challenges. Asif et al (2020) found that 84.4% of students in a university reported experiencing stress, with primary stressors

including academic workload, time management, and post-graduation plans. Similarly, Alsaleem et al (2021) revealed that 12.7% prevalence of stress among university students. Yikealo et al (2018) also revealed that majority of students (71%) expressed moderate stress, with 13% reporting severe stress and 16% reporting low stress.

Current coping mechanism among Nigerian students include a variety of techniques such as social support, physical activities, and academic strategies. A number of students also turn to friends, family, and peers to provide emotional support as well as practical counsel. Others engage in physical pursuits such as sports and fitness exercise to seek relief from physical stress. Academic practices, such as time management and study groups also help students deal with academic stress (Adaramola et al., 2022; Freire et al., 2020; Ozoemena et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, Nigeria is one of the most dedicated country in terms of religion. This religion which are spiritual in dealings includes, Christianity, Islamic and Traditional. Many of the faithful's strongly believe to seek redress or solution to any problem what so ever through different or certain religious or spiritual means. Engaging in spiritual activities such as praying, singing, reading the sacred books are even considered as a coping strategies for stress management of mitigation against life hurdles. Though some research highlighting the benefits of religion and spirituality as coping mechanisms have been conducted in the western countries, leaving a void in understanding how these practices may function in diverse cultural settings, such as among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Aggarwal et al., 2023). This study therefore intends to examine the prevalence of religiosity and spirituality as coping strategy for academic stress in public universities in Ekiti State.

Purpose of the Study

This study intends to examine level of the prevalence of religiosity and spirituality as coping strategy for stress among undergraduates in Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti (BOUESTI).

The study specifically, will;

- examine the level of the prevalence of religious and spiritual practices among the students,
- investigate the level of academic stress exhibited by the undergraduate students in tertiary institutions
- evaluate the effect of the prevalence of religious and spiritual practices on academic stress among the undergraduates.

Research Questions

- What is the level of prevalence of religious and spiritual practices among the undergraduate students?
- What is the level of academic stress exhibited by the undergraduate students?

Research Hypothesis

- Religious and spiritual practices will not significantly influence academic stress among undergraduate students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Stress

Hans Selye (1991) who was named the father of stress originally defined stress as “a specific response of the body”. Stress is a natural occurrence in every facet of human existence. Stress is an emotional imbalance triggered by a variety of things, including exams, papers, projects, competitiveness, financial concerns, and future employment prospects. (Herold, 2018). Stress is a mental or physical phenomenon that develops as a

result of interactions with the environment and is shaped by an individual's cognitive assessment of the stimulus (Rustam & Tentama, 2020). The existence of the stressor determines whether stress is present. Stressors are described as anything that stimulates a person's body or mind or tests their capacity for adaptation (Islam, 2020; O'Connor, *et al.*, 2021). The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) defined stress as a condition of anxiety or mental strain brought on by a challenging circumstance stating that everyone goes through periods of stress, and it motivates us to deal with obstacles and dangers in our lives. However, our general well-being is significantly impacted by how we handle stress (WHO, 2023).

Several studies have identified different types of stress. Acute stress is a type of stress that happens quickly and is frequently predicted. It can cause temporary mental imbalance but can also be beneficial to health because it can lead to adaptive reactions (Floriou-Servou *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, an abrupt and expected type of stress called episodic acute stress upsets mental balance. Its brief duration does not lessen its effects, which might include psychological disorders like anxiety and melancholy as well as physical ones like joint pain and cardiovascular problems (Chettri, *et al.*, 2021). Maddock (2024) defined chronic stress as a prolonged, often overwhelming feeling of stress that can negatively impact a person's daily life. Regularly experiencing chronic stress throughout one's life has a negative impact on one's physical and mental well-being and may even result in burnout (Maddock, 2024).

Excessive work pressure or damaged relationships with family, friends, colleagues, or supervisors can lead to emotional stress, which is frequently more severe than other types of stress and has a negative impact on one's mental and physical well-being (Foster & McCloughen 2020). Additionally, burnout has also been termed as a form of stress. When someone experiences burnout, they feel as though they have no control over their life. Everyone wants to do well in school and at work, but there are a number of obstacles in the way, including a lack of resources, a lack of promotion possibilities, and hectic schedules. When people are unable to handle problems on their own, burnout results, which has a detrimental effect on both their physical and mental health (Edú-Valsania *et al.*, 2022.).

Undergraduate students face numerous stressors that significantly impact their health and academic performance. Academic pressure is a primary source of stress, as students strive to maintain high grades, meet tight deadlines, and manage heavy workloads. This pressure often leads to heightened levels of stress and anxiety as students try to meet the expectations of themselves and their professors (Adegboyega, 2020).

Mechanisms through Which Religion and Spirituality Alleviate Stress

Religion and spirituality employ various techniques such as prayer, meditation, and religious ceremonies to alleviate stress. These practices offer a structured approach to stress management, enhancing emotional and psychological resilience. For example, prayer provides a calming and comforting feeling, giving individuals a sense of support during challenging times. It allows people to reframe their problems within the context of a larger, divine plan, reducing stress. Participating in group prayer sessions also fosters a sense of belonging and support from the religious community (Pittman, 2022).

Meditation, another spiritual practice, activates the relaxation response, lowering blood pressure and heart rate, and reducing physical symptoms of stress. Regular meditation enhances emotional regulation, reducing anxiety and promoting calmness. It increases self-awareness, helping individuals recognize their stressors and their reactions to them (McClintock, 2019). Religious rituals offer stability and predictability, giving individuals a sense of control in uncertain times. These rituals often involve gathering with others, fostering a sense of community and social support. Rituals also imbue life with a sense of purpose and meaning, helping individuals find significance in their experiences and reducing existential anxiety (Shattuck & Muehlenbein, 2020).

Sacred texts provide moral and ethical guidance, helping individuals navigate difficult situations with a clear understanding of right and wrong. The lessons and stories in these texts can inspire resilience and hope, offering comfort in challenging times (Pittman, 2022). A strong faith and belief system provide a sense of purpose, helping individuals find meaning in stressful situations, reducing their emotional impact. Faith

promotes a positive outlook on life and the future, fostering resilience to stress. Belief in a benevolent higher power or an afterlife can alleviate fears of death and existential anxiety (Shattuck & Muehlenbein, 2020).

Being part of a spiritual or religious group offers a robust support system. These communities provide emotional support to their members during difficult times, reducing stress. They can also offer practical help, such as financial support, childcare, and food during tough times. Feeling a sense of unity and understanding among community members with shared beliefs and values is comforting (Shattuck & Muehlenbein, 2020). Practices like forgiveness and compassion, emphasized in religious and spiritual teachings, reduce negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and bitterness, which are significant sources of stress. Acts of kindness and compassion foster positive emotions, improving overall well-being and reducing stress. Through practices that promote emotional comfort, cognitive reappraisal, social support, and a sense of meaning and purpose, religion and spirituality offer a multidimensional approach to stress management, enhancing resilience and improving mental health (McClintock, 2019).

Pargament's Theory of Religious Coping

Pargament's theory of religious coping has gained recognition for its comprehensive approach to understanding how religion aids in managing stress and hardship. The theory comprises seven main components that highlight the spiritual and dynamic nature of religious coping (Torbjørnsen et al., 2021). It defines religion as a process of seeking significance related to the sacred and views spirituality as a search for the sacred (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). Religion is seen as an accessible and effective coping mechanism, particularly for those with strong religious inclinations (Pargament & Exline, 2021).

The theory describes religious coping as a dynamic process involved in all phases of coping, helping individuals discover, preserve, and transform meaning in response to changing circumstances (Pargament, 2020; Pargament & Exline, 2021). It identifies five functions of religious coping: finding purpose, taking charge, seeking solace in a relationship with God, building relationships with others, and changing one's life (Pargament et al., 2021). The RCOPE tool evaluates these complex coping strategies. Religion often acts as a conservational force, helping maintain feelings of purpose, mastery, and spiritual connectedness. It also facilitates transformative coping strategies, such as religious conversion, when traditional religious meanings are questioned (Pargament, 2021; Pargament & Exline, 2021).

The theory distinguishes between positive and negative religious coping mechanisms. Positive coping involves a secure relationship with a transcendent power and a benevolent worldview, while negative coping indicates underlying spiritual issues and is likely to be harmful (Pargament et al., 2021). Pargament's religious moderator-deterrent model explains how religious coping can mediate between stressors and outcomes. It suggests that religious coping can both moderate the impact of stress and predict better outcomes regardless of stress level (Stauner, 2019). Overall, Pargament's theory offers a detailed framework for understanding the supportive role of religion in overcoming stress and hardship, emphasizing its importance, flexibility, and utility in difficult circumstances (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020).

Pargament's theory of religious coping makes a substantial addition to the study of religion and coping. Its thorough analysis of religious coping, objective viewpoint on religious coping, and empirical foundation are some of these features. Pargament's theory provides an in-depth examination of religious coping beyond simple measures of religiosity, considering how individuals use religion to manage stress in specific contexts (Trevino et al., 2019). Unlike many studies that assume religion is inherently beneficial, Pargament's theory acknowledges both the positive and negative effects of religious coping (Wu et al., 2023). Numerous studies by Pargament and colleagues demonstrate the connection between positive religious coping and well-being, as well as the detrimental effects of negative religious coping (Sharma & Gupta, 2023; Pargament et al., 2021; Abu-Raiya, 2020).

Effectiveness of Religion and Spirituality (R/S) as Coping Strategies

The majority of empirical research has demonstrated that students' capacity for stress management can be positively impacted by religious and spiritual coping. Grim & Grim (2019) conducted a research among

American adolescents and stated that religious activities have been demonstrated to help cope better with social and psychological stress, and young moms have found success using religious coping to efficiently manage day-to-day obstacles. Graça & Brandão (2024) conducted a research among 109 Portuguese students and found that higher levels of positive religious/spiritual coping to be associated with better overall psychological functioning, and lower levels of depression, distress, and psychopathology.

Park et al (2017) also conducted a research among 630 students and found that regular religious activities, such as praying, going to services, seeking spiritual support and making benevolent religious reappraisals can provide students with a sense of belonging, stability, and support all of which are essential for managing stress. The author also stated that religiosity lessens the effects of stress in students' life, especially when faced with difficult circumstances, and aids students in processing unpleasant emotions. Ahmadi et al (2023) also conducted a research on 159 respondents and revealed that religious beliefs and spirituality are effective in providing comfort, power, good feelings which helps in reducing stress and improves overall health.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive research of the survey design, basically to investigate the prevalence of spiritual and religiosity as coping strategy for academic stress among the undergraduate students of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere- Ekiti (BOUESTI), without any manipulation and to ensure that all sections of the population in consideration is effectively represented. The population of the study were the 12,740 students of the 2023/2024 Academic Session of the university from which a total of 450 students were selected as the sample size using multi stage sample and sampling technique. The study as well made use of a self- constructed questionnaire as the research instrument, the instrument was validated by ensuring the face, content and criterion validity, with reliability inclusive. A 0.72 and 0.83 correlations coefficient was obtained for both the construct validity (Convergent) and reliability (Test-Retest) respectively.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Research Question 1

What is the prevalence of religious and spiritual practices among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions?

This question is answered descriptively, using frequency and percentages and the answer is presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the prevalence of religious and spiritual practices among undergraduate students

Level	N	Percentage (%)
High (30-40)	321	73
Moderate (19-29)	98	22
Low (8-18)	19	5
Total	438	100

This table presents a descriptive analysis of the prevalence of religious and spiritual practices among undergraduate students. As shown in Table 1, the prevalence of these practices is notably high, with 73% of

students engaging in them frequently. In contrast, 27% of students exhibit a moderate or low level of engagement, with 22% practicing at a moderate level and 5% at a low level.

Research Question 2

What is the level of academic stress exhibited by the undergraduate students in tertiary institutions?

This question is answered descriptively, using frequency and percentages and the answer is presented in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the level of academic stress exhibited by undergraduate students

Level	N	Percentage (%)
High (30-40)	357	81
Moderate (19-29)	52	12
Low (8-18)	29	7
Total	438	100

The table above showed the evidence of the level of academic stress exhibited by the undergraduate students. The table revealed that 81% of the students are highly stressed academically, while just 12% and 7% of the students are moderately or minimally stressed academically. This indicated that many of the students are facing the challenges of academic stress.

Hypothesis

Religious and spiritual practices will not significantly influence academic stress among undergraduate students.

This hypothesis is tested using Analysis of Variance and the result is presented in the table 3 below.

Table 3: ANOVA analysis of the effect of religious and spirituality practices on academic stress among undergraduates.

ANOVA					
Prevalence Score					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Between Groups	13402.877	1	13402.877	178.180	.000
Within Groups	32796.294	436	75.221		
Total	46199.171	437			

This table presents an analysis of the effect of religious and spiritual practices on stress reduction among undergraduates. The results indicate that these practices have a significant effect on stress reduction, with an F-value of 178.180, degrees of freedom (1, 436), and a p-value of 0.000. This implies that engaging in religious and spiritual activities significantly influences stress reduction among undergraduates.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the role of religiosity and spirituality as coping strategies for managing academic stress among undergraduates at Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti (BOUESTI). It assessed the prevalence of religious and spiritual practices among the students, revealing that such practices are very high. This prevalence may be attributed to Nigeria's strong religious and spiritual culture, where most individuals and families are devoted to a belief system, be it Christianity, Islam, or traditional beliefs.

The level of academic stress exhibited by the students was looked into and it was discovered that the stress level is high. This might be synonymous to the fact that getting high grades becomes one of the most reliable ways of getting a slot in the labor market considering the millions of unemployed graduates in Nigeria that the students will eventually be competing with for job. Struggling to get high grades amidst the list of courses and hurdles of lectures, assignments, practical and field trips could aggravate academic stress.

The study also analyzed the effect of religious and spiritual practices on academic stress by comparing mean scores between students highly engaged in the practices and those less engaged. Results showed that the effectiveness of these practices is statistically significant, supporting findings by Park et al. (2017) that regular religious activities such as praying, attending services, and seeking spiritual support can foster a sense of belonging, stability, and support, all critical for managing stress.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the prevalence of religious and spiritual activities among undergraduate students in Ekiti State is both very high and statistically significant, likewise the level of academic stress. Furthermore, the practices/activities were found to be highly and significantly effective in managing academic stress among the undergraduate students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Spiritual and religious activities should be encouraged and allowed to thrive on campuses to support students' well-being.
- Academic calendars and activities should be structured to accommodate and balance spiritual practices, ensuring that students have the opportunity to engage in these activities without compromising their academic responsibilities.

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