

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC WORKLOAD AND ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN ENUGU STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State, with specific focus on Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The population of the study will consist of all undergraduate students of ESUT. Sample of 400 undergraduate students was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique; including stratified and simple random sampling methods. There are three research questions and one hypothesis. Data was collected using a structured instrument titled: *Academic Workload and Academic Stress Questionnaire (AWASQ)*, validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha with the reliability index of 0.70. Data analysis was carried out using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the revealed a significant positive relationship between academic workload and academic stress ($r = .303, p < .05$). The study also found a very low positive relationship between gender and academic stress suggesting that gender does not significantly influence stress levels. Furthermore, regression analysis showed that academic workload significantly predicts academic stress. The study concluded that academic workload is a major determinant of academic stress among undergraduates. It was therefore recommended that universities implement effective workload management strategies and provide adequate psychological support services to enhance students' well-being and academic performance.

Keywords: Academic workload, academic stress, undergraduate students

Introduction

Higher education is widely recognized as a critical stage in human development, where individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for personal and societal advancement. However, this stage is often accompanied by numerous academic demands that may exert pressure on students. Among these demands, academic workload has emerged as a major factor influencing students' psychological well-being, particularly in relation to academic stress (Benítez-Agudelo, Restrepo, Navarro-Jimenez, 2025). Academic workload refers to the quantity and complexity of academic tasks assigned to students within a given period, including lectures, assignments, projects, examinations, and other learning activities (Faizah, & Oktawiranto, 2019). When these demands become excessive, they may overwhelm students' coping capacities and lead to stress-related outcomes.

Stress, in general, is an adaptive physiological and psychological response to perceived challenges or threats. In the academic context, stress arises when students perceive that academic demands exceed their available resources to cope effectively. According to Otu, Dike, Ebizie, Chigbu., & Otu, (2022), stress emerge from faulty learning. Academic stress, therefore, can be described as the psychological, emotional, and behavioral reactions experienced by students when faced with academic demands such as

heavy coursework, tight deadlines, and high expectations (Grace, Benedicta, Chima, Chigbu & Uzoekwe (2022); Brata, Susanto, & Zubaidah, 2025) . While moderate levels of stress may enhance motivation and performance, excessive or prolonged academic stress can have detrimental effects on students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. In this study, stress refers to the level of psychological and emotional strain experienced by undergraduate students as a result of academic demands such as assignments, tests, deadlines, and course load. Thus, stress will be measured based on students' self-reported reactions (e.g., feeling overwhelmed, anxious, fatigued, or pressured) specifically in relation to their academic workload.

In higher institutions, particularly among undergraduates, academic workload is often characterized by multiple assignments, continuous assessments, demanding curricula, and pressure to achieve high grades. These demands are further compounded by factors such as limited time, inadequate learning resources, and competing social responsibilities. Empirical evidence suggests that academic workload is one of the primary contributors to academic stress among university students (Faizah, et al 2019). For instance, Faizah, et al (2019) has shown that heavy workloads, overlapping deadlines, and examination pressures significantly increase stress levels among students. Similarly, research findings indicate a positive relationship between academic workload and academic stress, implying that as workload increases; stress levels tend to rise correspondingly (Deng, Jun, & Choi, 2025). The relationship between academic workload and academic stress can be explained using the transactional model of stress, which posits that stress results from an imbalance between environmental demands and an individual's coping resources (Zhang, Zheng & Chen, 2022). When students perceive academic tasks as exceeding their abilities or available time, they are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and academic burnout. This condition may manifest in various forms, including emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic performance. Academic stress has also been linked to negative psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and reduced life satisfaction.

Globally, academic stress has become a significant concern in higher education due to its prevalence and impact on students' well-being. Studies indicate that a large proportion of university students experience moderate to high levels of stress, largely attributable to academic demands (Fentahun, et al 2025). In many cases, students struggle to balance academic responsibilities with personal and social obligations, leading to increased vulnerability to stress-related disorders. Furthermore, the competitive nature of higher education, coupled with the prerequisite of obtaining academic certificates and the accompanying pressure to secure employment after graduation, significantly intensifies the burden on students. In the Nigerian context, particularly in Enugu State, the issue of academic workload and stress among undergraduates is becoming increasingly relevant. Universities in this region often operate under conditions such as large class sizes, limited facilities, and demanding academic schedules, which may contribute to students' stress levels (Barbayannis, Bandari, Zheng, Baquerizo, Pecor, & Ming, 2022). Additionally, socio-economic challenges, including financial constraints and inadequate support systems, further exacerbate the stress experienced by undergraduates (Hadi, Noviekayati, & Suhadianto, 2025). A work done by Onyinyechukwu, Nwankwo, Ibe Ijeoma & Nwanokwara, (2024) on Perspectives of Undergraduate Students on the Academic Workload and Suicidal Thoughts at Nigerian University showed that the students agreed that excess academic workload can lead to depression, limit someone's social life, and contribute to suicidal thoughts among undergraduate students and that unplanned, the

changes in academic workload negatively impact on someone's mental well-being. These contextual factors make it imperative to examine how academic workload influences academic stress among students in this setting.

Understanding the relationship between academic workload and academic stress is essential for developing effective interventions aimed at improving students' academic experiences and mental health. By identifying the extent to which workload contributes to stress, educators, counsellors, and policymakers can design strategies such as workload management, academic counselling, and stress reduction programs to support students. This is particularly important in enhancing academic performance, promoting psychological well-being, and reducing dropout rates among undergraduates. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State. The study is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical insights into how academic demands influence students' stress levels within the Nigerian higher education context.

Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the recognized importance of higher education in fostering individual and societal development, undergraduate students are increasingly confronted with intense academic demands that may adversely affect their psychological well-being. Academic workload, characterized by numerous assignments, continuous assessments, and rigorous academic schedules, has become a central feature of university education. While these demands are intended to enhance learning outcomes, there is growing concern that excessive academic workload may overwhelm students' coping capacities and consequently lead to heightened levels of academic stress. Empirical studies have consistently identified academic workload as a significant predictor of academic stress among university students. However, the persistence of stress-related outcomes such as anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and reduced academic performance suggests that existing institutional measures may be insufficient in addressing this challenge. This problem is further compounded by the increasing competitiveness of higher education and the pressure on students to obtain academic qualifications required for future employment, thereby intensifying the burden experienced by undergraduates. In the Nigerian context, particularly in Enugu State, the situation appears more critical due to contextual challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning facilities, demanding academic timetables, and limited access to academic and psychological support services. Additionally, socio-economic pressures, including financial constraints and family expectations, may exacerbate students' vulnerability to academic stress. Recent observations also indicate that excessive academic workload may contribute to severe psychological outcomes, including depression and suicidal ideation among undergraduates. Despite these concerns, there is a paucity of empirical studies that specifically examine the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State. This gap in knowledge limits the development of context-specific interventions aimed at reducing students' stress levels and improving their academic experiences. Therefore, the problem of this study is to determine the extent to which academic workload influences academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State, with a view to providing evidence-based recommendations for effective academic and psychological support strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate academic workload as correlates of academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated:

1. The relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology.
2. The relationship between gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology.
3. The relationship between academic workload, gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology?
2. What is the relationship between gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology?
3. What is the relationship between academic workload, gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis guided the study and was tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

- H01:** There is no significant relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology.

Methods

This study adopted a correlational survey research design. This design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to examine the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates without manipulating any variables (Nworgu, 2006). It also allows for the collection of data from a large population within a relatively short period. The study will be conducted at Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), located in Enugu State, Nigeria. The institution comprises various faculties and departments with a diverse population of undergraduate students, making it suitable for investigating issues related to academic workload and stress. The population of the study will consist of all undergraduate students of ESUT. This includes students across different faculties and levels of study (100–500 level), representing a broad spectrum of academic experiences and workload demands. A sample size of 400 undergraduate students was selected for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: Stratified sampling to ensure representation across faculties and levels of study. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of the larger student population. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire titled: “Academic Workload and Academic Stress Questionnaire (AWASQ)”. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A: Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, level, faculty) , Section B: Items measuring academic workload (e.g., number of assignments, deadlines, course demands) and Section C: Items measuring academic stress (e.g., anxiety, fatigue, emotional strain) Responses will be measured using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree (4)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*. The instrument will be subjected to face and content validity by experts in educational psychology, guidance and counselling, and measurement and evaluation. Their input ensures that the items adequately capture the

constructs of academic workload and academic stress. The reliability of the instrument will be determined using the Cronbach Alpha method. A pilot study was conducted using a small sample of students from a similar institution, and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or above will be considered acceptable. The researcher was the questionnaires directly to the respondents with the help of trained research assistants. This will ensure a high return rate and proper clarification of items where necessary. Data collected will be analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics: hypothesis will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology?

Table 1: Pearson’s correlation showing the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology

		Academic workload	Academic Stress	Decision
Academic workload	Pearson Correlation	1	.303	Very high positive relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N	400	400	
Academic Stress	Pearson Correlation	303	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	.69	.303	

Table 1 ascertains the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The table shows that the value of the correlation coefficient (r) is .303. This indicates that the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology is in a very high positive relationship.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology?

Table 2: Pearson Correlation showing the relationship between gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology

		Gender Intelligence	Academic stress	Decision
Gender Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.002	Very low positive relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.307	
	N	400	400	
Academic stress	Pearson Correlation	.002	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	307		
	N	.69	69	

Table 2 ascertained the relationship between gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The table shows that the value of the correlation coefficient (r) is .002. This indicates that the relationship between gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology is in a very low positive relationship.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between academic workload, gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology?

Table 3: Pearson Correlation showing the relationship between academic workload, gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology

		Gender	academic workload	academic Stress	Decision
Gender	Pearson Corellation	1	.002	.002	Very high positive relationshi p
	Sig. (2-tailed)		312	307	
	N	69	400	400	
academic workload	Pearson Corellation	.002	1	303	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	312		.000	
	N	400	400	400	
academic Stress	Pearson Corellation	.002	303	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	307	.000		
	N	400	400	400	

Table 3 ascertained the relationship between academic workload, gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The table shows that the value of the relationship coefficient (r) is .303. This indicates that the relationship between academic workload, gender and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology is a very high positive relationship

HO1: There is no significant relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology.

Table 4: Summary of regression analysis for the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology

Variables	N	F	R2	B	Sig.	Decision
academic workload	400	434.47	301	303	.000	Rejected
academic Stress						

Note: A Dependent Variable: academic Stress b. Predictors: (Constant), academic Workload; df: 1,68; p<.05).

Table 4 indicated that the probability associated with the calculated value R2 (.301) for the relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology is 0.000. Since the probability value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance (p<.05), the null hypothesis was rejected, implying that there is a significant relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The R2 value of 301 shows that academic workload accounts for 89% of the variance in academic stress. The Beta (β) weighting of .303 indicates that for every standard deviation unit change in academic workload and academic stress will rise by .303 (89%) among undergraduates in Enugu state University of Science and Technology.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the correlation coefficient ($r=.303$) indicates a positive relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State, Nigeria. This result, as further supported by the regression analysis ($r^2 = .301$; $\beta =.303$), shows that academic workload significantly influences academic stress. By implication, the higher the academic workload, the higher the level of academic stress experienced by undergraduates. This finding is consistent with Zhang et al. (2022), who reported a strong positive relationship between academic workload and academic stress. Similarly, Onyinyechukwu et al. (2024) affirmed that academic workload is a key determinant of academic stress among students.

The findings of the study revealed that the relationship between gender and academic workload among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology is very low and positive ($r = 0.002$). This suggests that gender has minimal influence on academic workload among undergraduates. In contrast, this finding disagrees with Deng, Jun, and Choi (2025), who reported that female students tend to experience higher academic stress compared to their male counterparts.

The findings of the study revealed that the combined relationship between academic workload, gender, and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State is positive and significant ($r = .303$). This indicates that both variables jointly relate to academic stress, although academic workload appears to be the stronger contributing factor. This finding is not in line with Deng et al. (2025), who observed that males and females do not significantly differ in levels of academic workload.

Recommendations

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

1. University management should regulate academic workload by ensuring that assignments, tests, and examinations are evenly distributed to avoid overwhelming students.
2. Institutions should strengthen guidance and counselling units to provide psychological support and stress management programs for students.
3. Workshops and seminars should be organized to equip students with effective time management and study skills to cope with academic demands.
4. Academic curricula should be periodically reviewed to ensure that course requirements are realistic and aligned with students' capacity.
5. Lecturers should be sensitized on the effects of excessive workload and encouraged to adopt flexible and student-friendly teaching approaches.
6. Universities should improve access to learning resources such as libraries, study spaces, and digital tools to ease academic pressure.
7. Regular assessments should be conducted to monitor students' stress levels and identify those at risk of academic burnout or psychological distress.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between academic workload and academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. This implies that as academic workload increases, students' stress levels also increase. Academic workload was also found to be a significant predictor of academic stress, highlighting its critical role in students' psychological well-being. Additionally, the study revealed that gender has no significant influence on academic stress, indicating that both male and female students

experience similar levels of stress under academic demands. Overall, the study underscores the need for institutions to pay closer attention to the volume and structure of academic tasks assigned to students.

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