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The Interplay between Social Environment, Perceived Stress and Coping among Students: A Case of Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences

Sufyan Rashid[1], Flemmings Fishani Ngwira[1], & Janet Chikoja[1]
1) *Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences*, Malawi

Abstract

The social environment plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences and mental well-being, ultimately impacting their academic performance. The study examined the interplay between social environment, perceived academic stress and coping strategies. The study participants were 374 undergraduate students enrolled at the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences in Blantyre, Malawi. The students completed an online self-administered questionnaire, which was designed through Google Forms, a cloud-based data management tool, and was sent through different social media channels. The collected data were computed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics version 26. Reliability tests for the scales, descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted. The results indicated that the perceived stress is generally high among the students, but they used both functional and dysfunctional strategies to cope with their stress. Further, only support from lecturers, which is a functional coping strategy, negatively predicted academic stress, and dysfunctional coping strategies, such as alcohol abuse, positively predicted academic stress. These findings highlight the importance of reinforcing effective coping mechanisms and support networks to improve students' well-being and academic achievement.

Keywords

Social environment, academic stress, coping strategies, social support, academic performance

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Corresponding author(s): Flemmings F. Ngwira
Contact address: fngwira@mubas.ac.mw

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La Interacción entre el Entorno Social, el Estrés Percibido y las Estrategias de Afrontamiento entre Estudiantes: Un Caso de la Universidad de Negocios y Ciencias Aplicadas

Sufyan Rashid[1], Flemmings Fishani Ngwira[1], y Janet Chikoja[1]
1) *Universidad de Negocios y Ciencias Aplicadas de Malawi,* Malawi

Resumen

El entorno social es crucial para configurar las experiencias de aprendizaje de los estudiantes y, en última instancia, influye en su rendimiento académico. El estudio examinó la interacción entre el entorno social, el estrés académico percibido y las estrategias de afrontamiento. Participaron en el estudio 374 estudiantes universitarios matriculados en la Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences de Blantyre (Malawi). Los estudiantes rellenaron un cuestionario autoadministrado en línea, que fue diseñado a través de Google Forms y enviado a través de diferentes canales de medios sociales. Los datos recogidos se calcularon utilizando IBM® SPSS® Statistics versión 26. Se realizaron pruebas de fiabilidad de las escalas y estadísticas descriptivas e inferenciales. Los resultados indicaron que el estrés percibido es generalmente alto entre los estudiantes. Los estudiantes utilizaron estrategias tanto funcionales como disfuncionales para hacer frente a su estrés. Además, sólo el apoyo de los profesores, que es una estrategia de afrontamiento funcional, predijo negativamente el estrés académico. Las estrategias de afrontamiento disfuncionales, como el abuso del alcohol, predijeron positivamente el estrés académico. Estos resultados ponen de relieve la importancia de reforzar los mecanismos de afrontamiento eficaces y las redes de apoyo para mejorar el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes.

Palabras Clave

Entorno social, estrés académico, estrategias de afrontamiento, apoyo social, rendimiento académico

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Correspondencia con los autores: Flemmings F. Ngwira
Correo de contacto: fngwira@mubas.ac.mw

The social environment for university students can be referred to as any network of their interactions, relationships and cultural practices on campus. This social environment may encompass peer relationships, family relationships, social activities, faculty-student engagements, and campus community; all shaping student's social experiences and affecting their well-being and academic performance (Khan et al., 2023). Given the positive and negative nature of the social environment in contributing to student learning outcomes and mental well-being, a positive social environment is essential for enhancing student mental well-being and learning outcomes. Previous research has suggested that teacher support, one of the dimensions of social environment, is positively related to students' mental well-being (Aldridge et al, 2015). However, the effectiveness of dealing with various stressors depends on the social support and coping strategies available to the students. This study aims to examine the interplay between social environment, students' perceived stress, and their coping strategies to promote successful student learning.

The social and psychological support an individual receives or perceives as available to students is a resource in the social environment derived from family, friends or peers, teachers or faculty, and other staff (Arifin et al. 2018; Chao, 2012; McLean et al., 2021). The family influences attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours from childhood into adulthood. Within this period, friends or peers strongly influence character formation and behaviours. Inadequate family income or support, as a key factor in the social environment, is linked to increased perceived stress among students, which in turn, negatively impacts their learning (Alsaleem et al., 2021). Furthermore, peer groups provide an experience that cannot be obtained from family or school. Teachers or faculty and school are responsible for developing students in terms of physical well-being, and intellectual, emotional, and social aspects. Other staff within the university set-up provide instrumental, informational, and emotional support (McLean et al., 2014).

These social environmental aspects can either positively enhance students' behaviours, academic achievement, and motivation or negatively contribute to students' low motivation to learn, poor academic performance, and delinquent behaviours such as playing truant, loitering, and bullying (Arifin et al. 2018; Khan et al., 2023).

College students' life is full of stress emanating from academic work, uncertainty about the future, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, self-doubt, and family issues. Perceived stress is a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised as exceeding available resources (Chao, 2012). According to Alsaleem, et al. (2021) and Chao (2012), high perceived stress is a substantial problem among university students and positive social support provides coping tools for handling the stress and maintaining student well-being. Several students experience stress during the initial weeks of commencing university and such experiences lead to a range of academic problems (McLean et al., 2021; Pascoe et al., 2019). Previous studies established that perceived stress is associated with coping strategies (Lim et al., 2013) and students use these strategies to cope with their perceived stress (Al-Sowygh, 2013).

Coping refers to mental processes and behaviours that individuals use to manage stressful situations, internally and externally (Graves et al., 2021). According to Prinz et al. (2012), students use both functional and dysfunctional coping strategies to reduce stress and functional coping strategies have been reported to be effective. One of the functional strategies students

use to handle stress is social support (instrumental, informational, or emotional assistance) from families and friends (Chao, 2012). The success of adopted coping strategies, among other factors, depends on whether the strategies are problem-focused or emotion-focused, of which the latter is the preferred style (Esia-Donkoh et al., 2011).

Some previous studies have focused on appropriate stress coping strategies among adolescents (eg. Esia-Donkoh et al., 2011), the effectiveness of coping strategy training in reducing students' academic stress (eg. Zarei et al., 2016) and the association between perceived stress and social environment (eg. Kaczmarek & Trambacz-Oleszak, 2021). However, comprehensive research on the university students' social environment, various stressors, and coping strategies is rather scarce. The present study extends the previous findings on stress and coping strategies by examining the interplay between social environment, perceived stress, and coping among students in a university context of a developing country, Malawi. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the social environment, perceived stress, and coping strategies among students in developing countries.

Methods

Study Design and Participants

The population of this descriptive cross-sectional study was 4,777 college students enrolled in five schools of the Malawi University of Business and Applied Studies (MUBAS) located in Blantyre, Malawi. Using a stratified sampling, with schools being the strata, 374 undergraduate students were recruited for the study, and they completed an online self-administered questionnaire, which was designed through Google Forms, a cloud-based data management tool, which was sent through different social media channels (e.g. WhatsApp) on their official groups.

Instruments

The online self-administered questionnaire consisted of structured questions on participants' demographic characteristics, perceived social environmental support, perceived academic stress and coping strategies. Perceived social support was measured by an adapted version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) questionnaire (Zimet et al., 1988). The survey comprises 12 items designed to assess perceived social support from three specific sources: family (4 items), friends (4 items), and significant others (4 items), scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey has been validated by previous studies, demonstrating good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 (Lashari, Kaur, & Awang-Hashim, 2018). However, for this study, only items related to support from family and friends were used, and we added other items for faculty support (4 items). Finally, we wanted to assess students' perceived support from other administrative departments at the University, namely, Accounts, Library, Registry and Welfare, specifically on accommodation. We, therefore, added 4 independent items measuring students' perceived support in these areas.

Perceived academic stress was assessed using part of the validated student stress inventory (Zeidner, 1992), which is originally comprised of 53 items with two major categories: (a) items related directly to academic stress and (b) items related to an event that is not directly linked to the academic life. For this study, we used category (a), which directly assessed academic stress. The scale had 25 items measuring academic stressors such as exams and securing study materials. The items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all stressful)* to 5 (*extremely stressful*).

Finally, coping was measured using the Brief COPE scale, which is a short version of the COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997). The Brief COPE consists of 28 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1), to 'strongly agree' (4). The scale has 14 different dimensions of coping strategies which were grouped into functional coping (active coping, planning, acceptance, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, positive reframing, humor, and religion), and dysfunctional coping (behavioural disengagement, venting, denial, self-distraction, use of substance and self-blame (Carver, 1997).

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were computed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics version 26. Preliminary analyses, such as reliability tests for the scales, descriptive statistics, and Pearson correlation were conducted. Independent samples *t*-tests were also used to determine the levels of SES, academic stress, and coping strategies among undergraduate students. Furthermore, one-sample t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to identify disparities among different demographic subgroups. Finally, linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictor of academic stress among students. The independent variables were the social environmental support and the coping strategies.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

A sample of 374 undergraduate students at Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences who studied at the institution during the academic year, 2023, was recruited for the study. Out of 374 students, there was a slight balance on gender (51.9% male and 48.1% female students) with Christians (94.4%) outnumbering Muslims (05.6%) and those residing off campus (82.1%) outnumbering those on campus (17.9%). Further details of participants' demographic characteristics are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants (n = 374)

Participants groups	Sub-groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	194	51.9
	Female	180	48.1
Religion	Christianity	353	94.4
	Islam	21	05.6
Year of study	Year 1-2	236	63.1
	Year 3-5	138	36.9
Residence	On campus	67	17.9
	Off campus	307	82.1
Region of origin	North	114	30.4
	Centre	121	32.4
	South	139	37.2
School	SECOMS	82	21.9
	SOBES	75	20.0
	SOST	72	19.3
	SOBE	73	19.5
	SOE	72	19.3

SECOMS: School of Education, Communication and Media Studies
SOBES: School of Business and Economic Sciences
SOST: School of Science and Technology
SOBE: School of Built Environment
SOE: School of Engineering

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations

To measure the instrument's internal consistency, we assessed the reliability of the scales using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The perceived social environmental support scale comprised three subscales, and all the subscales achieved acceptable alpha levels: family support (α = 0.83), peer support (α = 0.82), and lecturer support (α = 0.87). The perceived academic stress scale demonstrated strong reliability with an alpha of 0.91. For perceived coping strategies, two subscales were used, and both subscales yielded acceptable alpha coefficients: dysfunctional coping (α = 0.76) and functional coping (α = 0.85).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis for six study variables. Correlation results showed that there were significant negative relationships between academic stress and peer support, and between dysfunctional coping and family support. As expected, positive correlations have been observed among social and environmental sub-scales and functional coping. Pearson correlation results indicated that the ecoefficiencies were largely moderate to very weak, ranging from 0.45 to 0.01. The moderate to weak correlation postulates that the variables do not have a strong relationship, which suggests minimal shared variability between them.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations among Study Variables (n = 374)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SES Family	4.08	0.93	1					
2. SES Peer	3.77	0.86	0.45***	1				
3. SES Lecturer	3.24	1.00	0.22***	0.34***	1			
4. Academic Stress	3.15	0.72	-0.07	-0.12*	-0.38***	1		
5. COPE dysfunctional	2.37	0.53	-0.15*	-0.03	-0.05	0.20***	1	
6. COPE functional	3.02	0.51	0.20***	0.37***	0.27***	-0.01	0.32***	1

*** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.001$ level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed)

Levels of Social Environmental Support, Academic Stress and Coping

To examine undergraduate students' perceived levels of social environmental support in terms of family, peer, and lecturer support, academic stress, and their perceived coping, one-sample *t*-test was used. We used the test score of 3.0 as a median for social environmental support's and academic stress' 5-point Likert scale, and 2.5 as a median for the coping variables' 4-point Likert scale. Means significantly below 3.0 and 2.5, respectively, indicate disagreement with the item statement, suggesting lower support, academic stress and coping. The findings indicated that students perceived higher levels of social-environmental support from family members, peers and lecturers. They further perceived higher levels of academic stress and employed functional coping strategies at a higher level. However, the *t*-test results for dysfunctional coping showed that students employed the coping strategies on a minimal level (see Table 3).

Table 3

One Sample T-Test Results for SES, Academic Stress and Coping Strategies

Variable	Mean	*SD*	*t*(372)	*p* - value
1. SES Family	4.08	0.93	22.39***	< 0.001
2. SES Peer	3.77	0.86	17.22***	< 0.001
3. SES Lecturer	3.24	1.00	4.57***	< 0.001
4. Academic Stress	3.15	0.72	4.08***	< 0.001
5. COPE dysfunctional	2.37	0.53	-4.59***	< 0.001
6. COPE functional	3.02	0.51	19.85***	< 0.001

*** = $p < .001$

Using paired samples *t*-test on social environmental support sub-scales and coping sub-scales, all pairs were significantly different (see Table 4), suggesting that students perceived family support higher than any other support ($p < 0.001$), and they employed functional coping strategies more than dysfunctional coping strategies ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4

Paired Samples t-test Results for SES and Coping Strategies

Variables (paired)		M	SD	Paired *t*-test			
				t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Pair 1	SES Family	4.08	0.93	6.07	373	0.000	
	SES Peer	3.77	0.86				
Pair 2	SES Family	4.08	0.93	12.93	373	0.000	
	SES Lecturer	3.24	1.00				
Pair 3	SES Peer	3.77	0.86	8.96	373	0.000	
	SES Lecturer	3.24	1.00				
Pair 4	COPE dysfunctional	2.37	0.53	2.39	373	0.017	
	COPE functional	3.02	0.51				

The study further sought to assess students' perceived support from other administrative departments at the University, namely, Accounts, Library, Registry, and Welfare, specifically on accommodation. Students significantly perceived high support from the Accounts, Library, and Registry. However, they significantly perceived low support for welfare – accommodation ($p < 0.05$).

Socio-Demographic among Study Variables

To find out if there were differences in the study constructs regarding gender, residence, years of study, and religion, an independent samples *t*-test was used (see Table 5). Concerning gender, the findings indicated that female students perceived higher social support from family and, at the same time, experienced higher academic stress than their male counterparts, and male students perceived higher lecturer support than their female counterparts ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, male students used more dysfunctional coping strategies than female students ($p < 0.01$). There were no significant differences between male and female students on other study variables ($p > 0.05$). Concerning students' accommodation, there were no significant differences between those residing on campus and those residing off-campus on all the study constructs ($p > 0.05$); they both had lower mean scores.

Findings on differences between students in junior classes and those in senior classes indicated that those in junior classes of years 1 and 2 perceived higher support from lecturers than their senior counterparts of years 3 to 5 ($p < 0.001$). There were no significant differences between them on all the remaining variables ($p > 0.05$). On religion, Muslim students perceived higher support from lecturers than Christian students; they also employed functional coping strategies more than their Christian students' counterparts ($p < 0.01$). Christian students perceived higher academic stress than their Muslim counterparts ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5

T-test Statistics Values Regarding Gender Differences (n = 374)

Variable	**Male**		**Female**				
Gender	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	***df***	***p***
1. SES Family	3.99	0.98	4.18	0.87	-1.99*	372	0.048
2. SES Peer	3.77	0.87	3.77	0.86	0.03	372	0.976
3. SES Lecturer	3.41	1.03	3.05	0.95	3.47**	372	0.001
4. Academic Stress	3.03	0.70	3.29	0.72	3.57***	372	0.000
5. COPE dysfunctional	2.46	0.54	2.29	0.51	3.12**	372	0.002
6. COPE functional	3.00	0.53	3.05	0.48	-1.12	372	0.264
Residence	*On campus*		*Off campus*				
1. SES Family	4.26	0.82	4.04	0.95	1.81	372	0.071
2. SES Peer	3.90	0.82	3.74	0.86	1.38	372	0.170
3. SES Lecturer	3.18	1.07	3.25	0.99	-0.56	372	0.578
4. Academic Stress	3.23	0.72	3.13	0.72	1.00	372	0.316
5. COPE dysfunctional	2.37	0.56	2.37	0.53	-0.09	372	0.929
6. COPE functional	3.01	0.57	3.03	0.50	-0.30	372	0.764
Year of study	*Year 1-2*		*Year 3-5*				
1. SES Family	4.04	0.93	4.14	0.93	-1.02	372	0.309
2. SES Peer	3.73	0.87	3.82	0.85	-0.90	372	0.368
3. SES Lecturer	3.34	0.95	3.00	1.06	3.66***	372	0.000
4. Academic Stress	3.10	0.71	3.23	0.73	-1.65	372	0.099
5. COPE dysfunctional	2.35	0.52	2.41	0.55	-1.05	372	0.295
6. COPE functional	3.01	0.48	3.03	0.55	-0.28	372	0.781
Religion	*Christianity*		*Islam*				
1. SES Family	4.08	0.93	4.05	1.03	0.16	372	0.875
2. SES Peer	3.75	0.87	4.11	0.71	-1.86	372	0.064
3. SES Lecturer	3.21	0.99	3.68	1.16	-2.08*	372	0.038
4. Academic Stress	3.17	0.71	2.79	0.70	2.36*	372	0.019
5. COPE dysfunctional	2.37	0.53	2.50	0.51	-1.87	372	0.278
6. COPE functional	3.01	0.51	3.31	0.43	-2.65**	372	0.008

*** = $p < 0.001$, ** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to measure how students from different schools and regions perceived SES and academic stress, and how they employed the coping strategies. Regarding differences depending on the schools students are affiliated with, significant disparities were observed in lecturer support only [$F(4,369) = 3.32$, $p < 0.05$]. There were no significant differences in other variables ($p > 0.05$). The post hoc comparisons on lecturer support using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for students from School of Built Environment was significantly higher than the mean score for students from School of Education, Communication and Media Studies ($MD = 0.482$, $p = 0.023$); School of

Business and Economic Sciences Studies (*MD* = 0.483, *p* = 0.027); and School of Science and Technology (*MD* = 0.488, *p* = 0.027). Concerning differences depending on the region one comes from, no significant differences were observed among students from the North, Centre, and South on all the constructs ($p > 0.05$).

The Role of Social-Environmental Support and Coping on Academic Stress

Another key objective of this study was to determine whether students' social environmental support and coping strategies significantly predict their levels of academic stress. We used linear regression to test the assumptions, and the prediction model was statistically significant, F (5, 368) = 15.781, $p < 0.001$, and accounted for approximately 18% ($R^2 = 0.177$) of the variance of academic stress. The results indicated that Lecturer support negatively predicted academic stress, meaning that the higher the support, the lower the academic stress. As expected, dysfunctional coping positively predicted academic stress, meaning that the higher the negative coping, the higher the academic stress (see Table 6).

Table 6

Linear Regression Results for Academic Stress (n = 374)

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		
Variable		B	Std. Error	Beta	*t*(368)	*p*-value
1	SES Family	0.034	0.042	0.044	0.818	0.414
2	SES Peer	-0.014	0.048	-0.017	-0.299	0.765
3	SES Lecturer	-0.272	0.037	-0.381	-7.413***	0.000
4	COPE dysfunctional	0.237	0.070	0.176	3.393**	0.001
5	COPE functional	0.052	0.079	0.037	0.664	0.507

*** = $p < 0.001$, ** = $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The present study sought to examine the interplay between the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS) undergraduate students' social environment, perceived stress, and coping strategies. Encouragingly, the results revealed that students perceive high support from family, peers and faculty. Additionally, the findings revealed that students perceive significantly higher levels of support from administrative departments such as Accounts, the Library, and the Registry, while support from the Welfare and Accommodation services was notably lower. Literature highlights that such support brings a positive social environment, which is essential for enhancing student mental well-being and learning outcomes (Aldridge et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2023). With these results, faculty members are encouraged to prioritise providing sufficient academic and social support to undergraduate students to foster a conducive learning environment and enhance overall student well-being. Student welfare, especially regarding accommodation, needs to be improved; it might be a major source of students' stress if unchecked.

Concerning academic stress, findings revealed that undergraduate students perceive higher levels of academic stress. This is not surprising considering that similar previous studies elsewhere have reported that school work and academic workload are some of the major stressors among students (Kausar, 2010; Magaya, Asner-Self & Schreiber, 2005; Sheroun et al., 2020). Results further showed that at MUBAS, female students experience higher academic stress than their male counterparts. This finding is contrary to a previous study (Sheroun et al., 2020), which found no gender differences in perceived academic stress. High perceived stress negatively impacts students' learning (Alsaleem et al., 2021). Fortunately for these students, the social environment, especially from family members, friends, and lecturers, is positive. They can leverage such a positive environment to curb their stress and improve their well-being and academic performance (Alsaleem et al., 2021; Chao, 2012).

Regarding how the students coped with their stress, the findings indicated that the students use both functional and dysfunctional strategies to cope with their stress. The result is in line with previous study findings where participants used both functional, such as social support from family and dysfunctional coping strategies, such as alcohol and drug use (Chao, 2012; Erschens et al., 2018) to reduce their academic stress. This means that the students take an active role in dealing with critical situations but also avoid or develop compensatory behaviours for other situations simultaneously (Denovan et al., 2017; Karaman et al., 2019). However, the use of functional coping strategies in this study was significantly higher than dysfunctional coping strategies. Dysfunctional coping strategies are considered risk factors for adverse responses to stress (Samson-Akpan et al., 2017), and as this study has revealed, dysfunctional coping strategies positively predict stress, meaning that the more students use these strategies, the more they become stressful.

Social environment factors and coping strategies were also tested to predict the level of students' perceived academic stress. The support from lecturers, which is a functional coping strategy, negatively predicted academic stress, meaning that the higher the support from lecturers, the lower the stress level among students. Elsewhere, teacher support has been found to positively relate to students' mental well-being (Aldridge et al, 2015). This finding underscores the vital role that lecturers and educators play in promoting not only academic success but also the emotional and psychological well-being of students. Supportive teachers create an environment where students feel valued, understood, and encouraged, which can alleviate stress, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance overall well-being (Saxer et al., 2024). Teacher support further influences academic self-concept and enjoyment in learning, which in turn enhances student engagement and overall achievement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024).

Finally, as expected, dysfunctional coping strategies such as alcohol abuse positively predicted academic stress, meaning that the higher the use of dysfunctional coping strategies, the higher the perceived academic stress. Among students, dysfunctional coping strategies, such as avoidance, denial, and emotional disengagement, have been linked to heightened stress levels and negative academic outcomes. For instance, Aloka et al. (2024) found that students who frequently employed dysfunctional coping strategies experienced significantly higher levels of academic stress compared to those using more adaptive strategies. In another study, MacCann et al. (2011) reported that reliance on maladaptive coping methods, such as substance use, further hindered students' academic performance; the methods were negatively associated with students' grade point average (GPA). Dysfunctional coping strategies are considered risk

factors for adverse responses to stress (Samson-Akpan et al., 2017), and students need to be discouraged from using.

Conclusion

This study highlights the crucial role of the social environment in shaping students' learning experiences and mental well-being at MUBAS. By examining the influence of family, peers, lecturers, and administrative support on academic stress, the findings reveal that while students experience high levels of stress, they adopt both functional and dysfunctional coping strategies. Notably, lecturer support emerged as a key protective factor, reducing academic stress and promoting healthier coping mechanisms, whereas dysfunctional coping strategies, such as alcohol abuse, were linked to increased stress levels. These results emphasise the need to strengthen functional coping strategies and social support systems, particularly from faculty, to enhance student well-being and academic success.

Building on the work of Chao (2012) and Erschens et al. (2018), this study offers a broader perspective by examining social support from multiple university stakeholders, including peers, faculty, and administrative services, within a developing country context. While Chao (2012) primarily explored the relationship between social support and dysfunctional coping among college students, this study extends the analysis by incorporating both functional and dysfunctional coping strategies. Similarly, it builds on Erschens et al. (2018) by assessing these strategies in a university setting, emphasising their impact on academic stress. The findings highlight the crucial role of faculty engagement and institutional policies in mitigating stress, discouraging maladaptive coping mechanisms, and fostering positive strategies. By prioritising supportive academic and social structures, universities can enhance student resilience, reduce stress, and ultimately improve academic performance.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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