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University Students' Classification of Factors Affecting Their Well-Being and Psychological Distress

Konabe BENE[1]

Sofia A. ADAN[2]

Maïmounata Marie Beatrice KERE[3]

ABSTRACT

Background: Higher education has been undermined by a multitude of difficulties that have directly affected university students' learning and quality of life in French speaking West African universities. Among others, massification, student pauperization, high rate of unemployment, current living environments, university managerial systems, and university poor infrastructures alongside terrorism threats on education have affected students' lifestyles, learning, achievements, mental health but also teaching, and learner-instructor interrelationship.

Purpose: The present study aimed to gauge university students' classification of factors that have significant impacts on their current studies and well-being, and aimed to gauge whether the classified factors predict students' psychological distress

Methodology: Participants included 348 male and female university students. Descriptive and regression analyses were utilized to assess significant factors that affect students' learning and life quality.

Major findings: The findings suggested that economic challenges, perceived unemployment, and difficulties relating to the students' areas of study were respectively the three main factors that affect students' life quality and cause psychological distress. The latter are followed by potential sicknesses and social factors such as loneliness, and attitudes pertaining to instructors, family members, and friends.

General conclusion: The study revealed significant effects of economic challenges on students' levels of depression and stress, and a significant effect of family members' attitude on students' levels of anxiety. The researchers discussed the findings and made important recommendations.

Keywords*:* Higher education, Difficulties, Classification, Psychological distress, Well-being

[1] Assistant Professor of Psychology, Department of General Studies, Prince Sultan University, P.O.Box No. 66833 Rafha St, Riyadh 11586, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, kbene@psu.edu.sa/konabe.bene@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-9608-9772

[2] Lecturer, Department of General Studies, Prince Sultan University, sadan@psu.edu.sa

[3] Doctoral Student, Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, Department of Psychology, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, beatrice4kere@gmail.com

1. Introduction

University students represent a specific population with concerns, burdens and worries that differ from other age and occupational groups. While students' experiences are sometimes thrilling and stimulating, they can also be nerve-wracking and possibly activate diverse forms of psychopathologies (Mikolajczyk, Brzoska, Maier, et al., 2008).

In the light of this, it was argued that suitable guidelines and procedures were in demand to offer students support due to low educational performance and challenging health-related behaviors such psychological distress. Different socio-demographic, environmental and scholastic factors have been said to be possible foundations to distress affecting students.

For example, overwhelming pressure due to increased responsibilities during university were found to be innately stressful and yet unavoidable (Sharp &Theiler, 2018). Poor financial standing has been linked to university students' poor mental health (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, et al., 2007; Verger, Guagliardo, Gilbert Rouillon, et al., 2010.)

According to a study conducted in Ethiopia, students who struggled to make friends and who had disputes with their roommates had a higher prevalence of mental discomfort (Tesfaye, 2009). Another US study found that the prevalence of depression increased when there was weak social support (Wilson, Bohnert, Ambrose, et al., 2014). Transitioning to college has typically been viewed as a time when students experience a significant amount of stress, which has been demonstrated to worsen their discomfort and impair their self-esteem. Greater distress, more impaired functioning, and far worse self-esteem were linked to psychological distress (Besser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014). Other factors include acclimating to a new environment, making plans for life after graduation, and adjusting to changing roles and responsibilities. These pressures could lead to higher rates of psychological discomfort, which could have negative effects on students' ability to complete their education and advance their careers thus a negative correlation between psychological discomfort and self-esteem. (Thompson, Her, Fetter, et al., 2019; Becerra, Arias, Cha, et al., 2020).

Another aspect cited by students as a source of stress was academic-related, including the burden of the long hours of studying for examinations, a demanding syllabus, and ineffective higher education programs (Bhujade, 2017). In this vein, it was argued that medical students lamented their anxiousness about the oral clinical assessments. Other reported stressors were associated with the lengthy commute from home to the university campus (Hersi, Tesfay, Gesesew, et al., 2017) and the shortage of jobs. Findings in past studies suggested that unemployment promoted psychological stress, especially depressive symptoms, among new nurses (Silva & Marcolan, 2015).

Regarding learners' and their teachers' relationship, the existing literature review suggested some instructors' attitudes as factors of college student psychological distress. Overall, faculty members' attitudes were defined as a faculty member who supports student needs, responds to calls and emails in a timely manner, and is accessible. (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002). University power structures that are hierarchical and gendered, however, have entrenched sex contracts in which some male academics believe it is a right to require sex from female students in exchange for grades. It was discussed that these transactional sex practices involve cognitive fraud. This is because it

reflexively contributes to social pressure to minimize recognition and academic achievement for women (Morley, 2011). According to the findings, 75.6% of students would report sexual approaches made by lecturers for better grades, whereas just 20.5% would not. Additionally, 3.9% of respondents were unsure, depending on a variety of criteria. Respondents were willing to report the conduct because it violated their human rights and was unethical and an abuse of power, among other reasons. Respondents who declined to report did not know who to contact, as they feared being bullied, and reported no evidence of advanced sexual behaviors (Awaah, 2019).

The present study

The investigators utilized descriptive and inferential survey research designs to collect data and analyzed university students' descriptions and rankings of factors that they perceived as impacting their higher education and overall quality of life. The purpose of the current study was to gain understanding of how university students perceive the variables that have an impact on their lives. The initial goal was to investigate how students perceive the elements that contribute to increases in their psychological distress. The following queries were addressed in the current study: (a) How do university students rank potential influences on their studies and quality of life? (b) Do the named factors predict students' psychological distress?

2. Materials and Methods Participants

Students who were accessible on campus at the time of the data collection and who offered to participate in the study were recruited using a convenient sampling technique. They were 348 university students whose ages ranged from 18 to 35. Their average age was 25.06 (SD = 2.99). The sample size included 172 (49.4%) female and 176 (50.6%) male students. Table 1 provides further details about the student participants' characteristics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sample characteristics

Variables	**Demographics**	***N***	***%***
Age distributions			
	Below 20	9	2.59
	From 20 to 24	150	43.10
	From 25 to 29	162	46.55
	30 years and above	27	7.75
Genders			
	Women	N= 172 Average age = 24.62	49.4
	Men	N= 176 Average age = 25.49	50.6
Grade Point Average (out of 20.0)			
	Below 10	81	23.27
	From 10 to 15	260	74.71

	Above 15	7	2.01
	women's mean GPA	10.30/20	
	Men's mean GPA	11.27/20	
Educational Attainment			
	Freshmen	68	19.54
	Sophomores	150	43.10
	Juniors	75	21.55
	Master's students	52	14.94
	Doctoral students	1	.28

Measures

A demographic questionnaire that was meticulously designed by the researchers was the first tool utilized for data collectin. Participants were expected to provide information about their gender, age, current educational status, and academic information including their grade point average (GPA). Participants were also asked to rank circumstances that might lead to an increase in their levels of stress, anxiety, and depression on a table that was provided, with the raw number 1 being the most important factor and the raw number 10 representing the least important element. The contributing elements were: (1) the difficulty of the field of study; (2) unemployment; (3) economic difficulties; (4) illness; (5) loneliness; (6) the attitudes of the teachers; (7) friends' attitudes; (8) attitudes of family; (9) one's own self-esteem; and (10) other circumstances.

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale was the second tool (DASS-21). The fundamental symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress are measured by the DASS scale, a 21-item test (Carmin & Ownby, 2004). Due to its reliable psychometric qualities, the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) has gained increasing support. The DASS-21 has outstanding internal consistency, great convergent validity, and good discriminative validity, according to the discussion. Studies showed that the DASS-21 might be used with older people in place of other scales designed to measure related topics (Gloster et al. 2008). For the Depression subscale, the internal consistency reported in the initial instrument validation research was .81, .73 on the anxiety subscale and .81 on the stress scale (Tonsing, 2014).

Procedures

Prior to collecting data from the Ki-Zerbo University's main campus in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, ethical approval, and authorization were provided. Participants also agreed to participate by completing the survey. Students had to read each statement and then circle one of the following numbers to indicate how they felt about it personally: 0, 1, 2, 3, or 5. All questionnaires were filled out on campus within two weeks using convenient sampling methodologies. Each survey took 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The data were entered into an excel sheet, transferred to SPSS version 28.0, cleaned, inspected for missing data and outliers, and then analyzed.

Data Analysis

To answer question 1(*How do university students rank potential influences on their quality of life?*) about students' perceptions of factors that may worsen their quality of life, researchers analyzed students' ranking of the 10 proposed factors by their importance, using descriptive statistics. Factors include: (1) difficulty in studying, (2) unemployment, (3) financial difficulties, (4) illness, (5) loneliness, (6) attitudes of teachers, (7) attitudes of friends, (8) attitudes of family members, (9) self-esteem and (10) other factors. To answer question 2 (*Do the named factors predict students' psychological distress?)* the researchers ran correlation including the more advanced regression analyses. Whereas the independent variables were the students' ranked factors, the dependent variables included students' reported levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Before interpreting the findings of the inferential analyses, the researchers verified the various assumptions of the multiple regression analyses.

According to Creswell (2009), there is a risk to the validity of statistical inferences when the examination assumptions are incorrect due to a lack of statistical power or interference from statistical probability. The assumptions of linearity, measurement accuracy, homoscedasticity, and normalcy have been the ones that have been most thoroughly explored. Simple visualizations were used to verify that assumptions one and two were true.

The inclusion of two or more independent variables that are either continuous or categorical was al so necessary. Initially, they stipulated that the dependent variables be measured on a continuous scale We evaluated all other hypotheses, including the hypotheses of linearity, reliability of measurement, homoscedasticity, and normality, using IBM SPSS software version 28.0, IBM Corp (2021). Results of the multiple regression analyses were interpreted because all the assumptions were satisfied and none of them were violated.

3. Results

The descriptive results suggested that economic challenges, perceived unemployment, and difficulties of the students' majors are respectively the three most important factors that affect students' psychological distress. The latter are followed by the fear of being sick or being sick, and social factors consecutively ordered as feeling alone, instructors' attitudes, family members' attitudes, and friends' attitudes. Finally, other unspecified factors, and students' cognitive factors such as self-esteem were classified as ninth and tenth factors. See table 2 for more detailed information.

Table 2. Students' ranking of the most important factors that could associate with their mental health

	Primary causes	Secondary causes	Tertiary causes	Fourth causes	Fifth causes	Total
	n (%)	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*

Difficulty of field of study	21 (6.03)	80 (23)	101(29.0)	61(17.5)	22(6.3)	**285(82)**
Unemployment	85 (24.43)	73 (21.0)	71(20.4)	60(17.2)	23 (6.6)	**312(90)**
Economic challenges	158(45.40)	84 (24.1)	39 (11.2)	26 (7.5)	18 (5.2)	**325(93)**
Sickness	41(11.78)	63 (18.01)	64 (18.04)	44(12.6)	47(13.5)	**259(74)**
Loneliness	14 (4.0)	24 (6.9)	23(6.6)	69(19.8)	56(16.1)	**186(53)**
Instructors' attitude	20 (5.7)	9 (.6)	19 (5.5)	36(10.3)	77(22.1)	**161(46)**
Friends' attitude	3(.9)	4(1.1)	9(2.6)	12 (3.4)	32 (9.2)	**60(17)**
Family members' attitude	4 (1.1)	8(2.3)	14(4.0)	27 (7.8)	40(11.5)	**93(27)**
Self-esteem	1(.3)	2(.6)	7(2.0)	7 (2.0)	10 (2.9)	**27(8)**
Other factors (unspecified)	1(.3)	0 (0.00)	1(.3)	6 (1.7)	22 (6.3)	**30 (9)**
Total	**348**	**347**	**348**	**348**	**347**	

Also, correlational analysis showed significant associations between several of the variables. Economic challenges and sickness correlated positively with depression, anxiety, and stress. Family members' attitudes correlated negatively with depression, anxiety, and stress. Students' self-esteem correlated negatively with depression and stress. Other factors did not reveal significant correlations. See table 3 for more information regarding the correlation analysis.

Table 3: Correlations

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**
1. Difficulty of field of study													
2. Unemployment													
3. Economic challenges													
4. Sickness													
5. Loneliness													
6. Instructors' attitude													
7. Friends' attitude													

8. Family members' attitude								
9. Self-esteem								
10. Other factors								
11.	Anxiety	.121* .024	.132* .014	-.246** < . 001			.550** <.001	.498** <.001
12.	Depression	.146** .006	.142** .008	-.237** < . 001	- .143** .007	.550** <.001		.583** <.001
13.	Stress	.208** < .001	.155** .004	-.189** <. 001	-. 168** .002	.498** <.001	.583** <.001	

** p < .01, * p < .05.

Furthermore, multiple regression analyses showed a significant effect of economic challenges on depression (F (10, 330) = 3.470), p < .001, with Adjusted R2 = .07, suggesting that 7 % of the variance were predicted by the listed factors. See table 4. Multiple regression analyses showed a significant effect of economic challenges on Stress (F (10, 330) = 3.386), p < .001, with Adjusted R2 = .07, suggesting that 7 % of the variance were predicted by the listed factors. See table 5. Multiple regression analyses showed a significant effect of family members' attitude on Anxiety (F (10, 330) = 3.756), p < .001, with Adjusted R2 = .08, suggesting that 8 % of the variance were predicted by the listed factors. See table 6.

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis of difficulty of field of study, unemployment, economic challenges, sickness, loneliness, instructors' attitude, friends' attitude, family members' attitude, self-esteem, and other factors on depression

Variables	Beta	SE	95% LL	UL	β	P
Difficulty of field of study	.060	.186	-.307	.426	.023	.749
Unemployment	.154	.164	-.169	.477	.070	.348
Economic challenges	.279	.145	-.007	.564	.164	.055
Sickness	.195	.141	-.083	.473	.126	.168
Loneliness	.099	.138	-.172	.371	.063	.471
Instructors' attitude	.197	.141	-.080	.473	.119	.163
Friends' attitude	.088	.132	-.171	.347	.054	.503
Family members' attitude	-.215	.136	-.481	.052	-.135	.114
Self-esteem	-.009	.132	-.269	.251	-.006	.946
Other factors (unspecified)	.030	.123	-.212	.272	.021	.806

- Dependent variable: Depression
- P < .001.

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis of difficulty of field of study, unemployment, economic challenges, sickness, loneliness, instructors' attitude, friends' attitude, family members' attitude, self-esteem, and other factors on Anxiety

Variables	Beta	SE	95% LL	UL	β	P
Difficulty of field of study	.230	.184	-.132	.593	.089	.212
Unemployment	.103	.163	-.217	.423	.048	.525
Economic challenges	.115	.144	-.168	.397	.068	.425
Sickness	.173	.140	-.102	.448	.113	.218
Loneliness	-.022	.137	-.291	.247	-.014	.871
Instructors' attitude	.117	.139	-.157	.391	.071	.403
Friends' attitude	-.061	.130	-.318	.195	-.038	.637
Family members' attitude	-.312	.134	-.576	-.048	-.198	.021
Self-esteem	-.038	.131	-.296	.219	-.027	.770
Other factors (unspecified)	-.050	.122	-.290	.189	-.035	.680

- Dependent variable: Anxiety
- P < .001.

Table 6: Multiple regression analysis of difficulty of field of study, unemployment, economic challenges, sickness, loneliness, instructors' attitude, friends' attitude, family members' attitude, self-esteem, and other factors on Stress

Variables	Beta	SE	95% LL	UL	β	P
Difficulty of field of study	-.023	.207	-.430	.385	.008	.913
Unemployment	.276	.183	-.084	.535	.113	.133
Economic challenges	.417	.162	.100	.735	.219	.010
Sickness	.242	.157	-.067	.551	.140	.124
Loneliness	.128	.154	-.174	.430	.073	.404
Instructors' attitude	.252	.156	-.056	.391	.560	.108
Friends' attitude	.044	.146	-.244	.332	.024	.765
Family members' attitude	-.093	.151	-.389	.204	-.052	.540
Self-esteem	-.038	.147	-.327	.252	-.024	.797
Other factors (unspecified)	.106	.137	-.164	.375	.065	.440

- Dependent variable: Stress
- P < .001.

4. Discussion

Although past studies found that financial factors, social factors such as friends or roommates, and personal factors such self-esteem were associated with students' psychological distress, the factors have not been ranked as in the present study (Verger, et al.2010; Wilson, et al. 2014; Besser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014). Silva and Marcolan (2015) argued that unemployment also caused depression among students, yet more particularly nurses who have graduated recently.

Results in previous studies furthermore suggested that difficulty of field of study were described as extended hours of study for exams, stress resulting from oral tests, and frequent travels from residential areas to campus (Hersi, et al. 2017). A substantial body of research revealed that sicknesses such as those associated with intellectual disabilities affect university students' lives and performances. Despite a rise in the number of people with psychological disabilities (PD) enrolling in colleges and universities, students with PD are less likely than their counterparts without disabilities and those with other disabilities to complete their college degrees (Stein, 2014). Their performance in several facets of life, such as their studies, may be impacted by these psychological problems (Mahdavi, Valibeygi, Moradi, et al., 2021).

Stewart and Suldo (2011) investigated the relationship between social determinants, psychopathology, and wellbeing in a sample of 390 middle-school adolescents by looking at how perceived social support from parents, peers, and instructors was independently and jointly predicted. High student academic achievement's protective qualities in the context of the connections amongst social support and mental health were also studied by Stewart and Suldo. Life satisfaction and all mental health results were significantly predicted by social supports.
Parental support was found to be the most powerful predictor of all indicators of mental health, despite the fact that support from classmates and teachers was a substantial unique predictor of learners'' internalizing and externalizing symptoms, respectively.

In another study, 19.8% was found to be the point prevalence of mental discomfort. Being female, earning $100 USD or less per month, and not having fulfilling relationships with family members and friends were all related with mental discomfort (Hersi, et al. 2017).

The present findings suggested that instructors-related factors have stronger impact on students' psychological distress. The nature of the instructors' attitudes yet was not clarified. Total scores for instructors' attitude across all five levels (primary to fifth causes) was 161 (46%). Twenty (5.7%) students reported instructors' attitudes as primary causes of psychological distress, nine (.6%) as secondary causes, 19 (5.5%) as tertiary causes, 36 (10.3%) and 77 (22.1%) as the fourth and fifth causes. However, the contribution of instructors' attitude in predicting students' depression, anxiety, and stress was not statistically significant.

The existing literature suggested that instructors' attitudes can be described as a power relationship between students and some faculty members in which the student being the weaker, is oftentimes compelled to accept sexual intercourses for grades. The victimized students have no one to report the unwanted behaviors. According to Morley (2011), these transactional sex practices combine spatial and mental inequities since they fuel social demands on women to minimize their visibility

and academic success. Faculty members must be conscious of how their attitudes and actions affect whether students choose to remain at the university (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002). The present paper did not find any discrepancy between the number of female and male students who reported that faculty attitudes impact their wellbeing, suggesting that instructors' attitude could mean something else. For example, supporting students' needs, promptly responding to calls and emails, and being approachable have been defined as positive instructors' attitudes (Lundquist, Spalding, & Landrum, 2002).

The relationship between teachers and students has positively improved (Baruch, Hershkovitz & P.Ang, 2015). The main causes for students to stop studying at a specific level are the teachers' poor communication and their lack of availability (Dinu, 2015). According to Davis (2001), students' self-worth and capacity to express themselves nonverbally contribute to the development of their relationships with their professors. According to Khan et al. (2017), a teacher's ability to effectively communicate with students directly influences their achievement.

The multiple regression analyses revealed that economic hardships had a substantial impact on sadness and stress, and other social factors including the attitude of family members also had a significant impact on anxiety. The present results are supported by the results in past studies. Depression was observed to be more prevalent among students with low socioeconomic level (Çelik, Ceylan, Ünsal, & Çağan, 2019). Older students (20 years and over), who were women, Malays, and those from low- or high-income families showed considerably greater stress scores than those from middle-class families (Shamsuddin, Fadzil, Ismail, et al. 2013). Regarding the effects of family members' attitudes, recent research revealed that 7.5% of student participants reported parental conflict, 15.0% were continuously apprehensive about their future, 21.9% had strained relationships with family, 22.5% were unhappy with their bodies, and 18.7% were dissatisfied overall. Indicative signs of depression, anxiety, and stress were seen in 60 (32.0%), 75 (40.1%), and 82 (43.8%) students, correspondingly (Sachdeva, 2018).

Limitations and conclusion

The data was gathered using a convenient sample strategy, which might not have given an accurate representation of all university students in the key demographic. The present study used self-reported data, so it was possible that the students' answers were skewed. The researchers recommend the utilization of hybrid types of course delivery in West African universities to tackle the issue of student massification. With online teaching students can stay in their dorms or with their families while participating in the distant courses, thus reducing economic difficulties and their level of loneliness. The researchers also argued that West African universities should consider providing students with mental health centers that prevent and treat students' intellectual disabilities. Courses related to stress and coping strategies should be provided to all students alongside techniques that help learners maintain a high level of self-esteem. Providing universities with outdoor activities and encouraging students to actively participate in those activities can reduce the spread and severity of intellectual disabilities as suggested in past investigations.

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