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Mental Health as a Determinant of Academic Performance among Students of Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Nigeria

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Abstract :

Mental health plays a crucial role in students' academic and social lives. However, while global and regional studies have explored the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among university students, limited research has examined how these factors specifically influence academic performance in Nigerian colleges of education. This study addresses that gap by investigating mental health as a determinant of academic performance among Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED) students in Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was employed with a purposive sample of 366 students, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis were applied. The results show that academic stress and financial hardship are the strongest predictors of depression, while excessive technology use significantly increases stress and anxiety. Importantly, a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$) was found between psychological distress and academic performance, confirming that poor mental health directly reduces students' academic outcomes. The study makes a novel contribution by demonstrating that, unlike in previous African and Asian studies where family expectations and social support were central, academic and financial stressors are more critical in this Nigerian college context. It concludes that mental health literacy and proactive institutional interventions—such as campus-based counselling units, financial support schemes, and digital wellness programs—are essential for improving student well-being and academic success.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Academic Performance, College Students, Stress, Anxiety, Mental Health Awareness.*

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Introduction

Mental health has emerged as a critical social issue within higher education, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, where institutional support remains limited (Fadele et al., 2024). The urgency of this topic stems from a

notable transformation in student life, driven by rising academic pressures, economic instability, and the pervasive influence of digital technology (Udousoro Akpan et al., 2024). For instance, global studies indicate that approximately 35% of university students experience psychological distress, with many reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression (Wang & Repetti, 2014; Zorach & Lipka, 2023). In Nigeria, these challenges are intensified by systemic barriers such as stigma, underfunded mental health services, and low help-seeking behavior (Pederson et al., 2023). At Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED), students face unique dual pressures—balancing teacher-training demands with personal stressors—yet no prior research has examined how these factors collectively impact academic outcomes. This study addresses that gap, offering localized evidence to inform proactive interventions such as counseling services (Karra et al., 2019), financial aid, and digital wellness programs. Doing so contributes to institutional policy and the broader global effort to support student well-being and academic success (Okanlawon, 2021).

Mental health has been widely recognized as a critical factor influencing student success in higher education (Li et al., 2020). Global studies consistently demonstrate a high prevalence of psychological distress among university populations, with the World Health Organization (2020) reporting that approximately 35% of students experience significant symptoms. Research in various contexts, such as Egypt and China, has identified academic pressure and familial expectations as primary drivers of conditions like depression and anxiety (A et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2021). Furthermore, a growing body of evidence links excessive technology and social media use to increased stress and feelings of isolation, creating a new dimension of risk for student well-being (Mundy et al., 2021; Oswald et al., 2020). These factors collectively contribute to a documented negative correlation between psychological distress and academic performance, as seen in U.S. and European studies (Pascoe et al., 2020; Ramón-Arbués et al., 2020). However, a significant gap exists in understanding how these dynamics manifest within specific Nigerian educational contexts, particularly in colleges of education (Asibong et al., 2020). While previous Nigerian research has focused on general mental health awareness and service gaps (Labinjo et al., 2020), there is a lack of empirical data on the specific determinants—such as financial hardship, academic workload, and technology use—and their direct impact on academic outcomes in teacher-training institutions. The study by Dauda and Abdulkadir (2025) addresses this void. It builds upon the established global knowledge but positions itself uniquely by providing localized evidence from Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (Awotidebe et al., 2022). It reveals that, unlike in some Asian studies, academic and financial stressors are more critical than family expectations in this setting, and it confirms the significant role of technology as a stressor. Therefore, this research fills a crucial niche by moving from general awareness to context-specific, data-driven insights, informing targeted institutional interventions for a previously understudied student population.

This study addresses a significant gap in the existing literature by providing a localized, empirical investigation into the mental health determinants of academic performance within a Nigerian college of education—a context often overlooked in favor of university settings (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2024). Its primary unique contribution lies in identifying context-specific stressors that differ from established findings in other regions (Udousoro Akpan et al., 2024). While previous studies,

particularly from Asian and other African contexts, have emphasized familial expectations and social support as central factors, this research reveals a different hierarchy of influence within the Nigerian teacher-training environment (Gao & Liu, 2025; Simbai et al., 2025). For instance, regression analysis demonstrated that academic stress ($\beta = 0.45$) and financial hardship ($\beta = 0.38$) were the strongest, statistically significant predictors of depression, whereas social relationships and family expectations were not. Furthermore, it establishes a direct, quantifiable link between psychological distress and academic outcomes, evidenced by a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$) between distress and GPA. The study also uniquely highlights the role of excessive technology use as a critical stressor in this specific educational milieu, showing a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) with anxiety, a factor less explored in comparable institutional studies. Consequently, this research moves beyond merely confirming a global trend; it provides nuanced, data-driven evidence that the drivers of student mental health and academic performance are not universal but are shaped by distinct institutional and socio-economic realities, thereby offering a critical foundation for designing targeted, effective interventions for colleges of education in Nigeria and similar contexts (Macías et al., 2022).

This study is critical due to the escalating mental health crisis among higher education students in Nigeria, which remains under-researched in non-university settings (Paula et al., 2020). There is an urgent need to investigate context-specific mental health determinants within Nigerian colleges of education (Mitchell et al., 2016). Existing literature predominantly focuses on universities, creating a significant knowledge gap regarding teacher-training institutions where students face unique dual academic and professional pressures. A WHO (2020) survey indicates approximately 35% of university students globally experience psychological distress, yet equivalent data for colleges of education in Nigeria is absent (Gonzalez et al., 2016). Preliminary data from this research reveal that 68% of students at Emmanuel Alayande College of Education report academic pressure as a significant stressor, surpassing the influence of familial expectations highlighted in prior Asian studies. The confirmed moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.54$) between psychological distress and academic performance in this cohort underscores the direct threat poor mental health poses to educational outcomes (Mulready-Shick et al., 2020). Therefore, this localized investigation provides indispensable, evidence-based insights to inform targeted institutional interventions—such as counselling services and financial aid programs—vital for safeguarding student well-being and academic success in a critically overlooked educational sector.

This study aims to investigate the specific determinants of mental health and their direct impact on students' academic performance at Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED). The primary objective is to identify the most significant mental health stressors—such as academic pressure, financial hardship, and technology use—within this unique Nigerian college context and to quantify their relationship with academic outcomes. A central hypothesis posits that psychological distress, primarily driven by academic and financial stressors, will demonstrate a significant negative correlation with students' Grade Point Averages (GPA). Evidence from the data strongly supports this direction. For instance, the study reveals that 68% of students reported academic pressure as a significant stressor. At the same time, regression analysis confirmed academic stress ($\beta = 0.45$) and financial constraints ($\beta =$

0.38) as the strongest predictors of depression. Crucially, a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$) was found between psychological distress and GPA, providing empirical evidence that deteriorating mental health directly undermines academic achievement. Therefore, the research conclusively establishes that targeted interventions addressing these key stressors are essential for improving student well-being and academic success at EACOED.

Method

The selection of mental health as a determinant of academic performance for this study was driven by the escalating global concern regarding students' psychological well-being in higher education institutions. This issue remains critically under-investigated within the specific context of Nigerian colleges of education. While substantial evidence from Western and some Asian contexts links mental health challenges to poor academic outcomes, a significant empirical gap exists concerning the unique stressors faced by students in teacher-training institutions across Nigeria (Atilola, 2021). This research, therefore, sought to address this void by focusing on Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED), providing a localized investigation into how context-specific factors such as academic pressure, financial hardship, and technology use converge to impact student success (Pascoe et al., 2020). The urgency of this inquiry is amplified by national statistics indicating severe underfunding of mental health services and high levels of untreated psychological distress among Nigerian youth, which collectively threaten educational attainment and sustainable development goals (Gureje et al., 2020).

This investigation employed a quantitative (Williams et al., 2020), cross-sectional survey design to systematically collect data at a single point in time, allowing for the examination of relationships between mental health variables and academic performance metrics within the student population (Yamane, 1967). The primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire for this study, which captured information on demographic profiles, mental health indicators—including stress, anxiety, and depression—and self-reported academic performance (GPA). The target population encompassed all 4,361 students enrolled at EACOED, from which a purposive sample of 366 participants was determined using Yamane's formula to ensure a representative and manageable cohort for analysis (Smith et al., 2024). This sampling strategy was intentionally selected to include students from diverse academic levels and socio-economic backgrounds, thereby enhancing the potential generalizability of the findings within the institutional context while acknowledging the inherent limitations of a single-institution study (Pascoe et al., 2020).

The data collection process was executed by administering the validated questionnaire (Fernández-Agüero & Hidalgo-McCabe, 2022), which was distributed directly to participants within the college premises to ensure a high response rate and data integrity. Before the main study, the research instrument underwent a rigorous validation process through expert review and a pilot test, with reliability confirmed via a test-retest method that yielded a strong Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient of 0.78 (Basta et al., 2022). The subsequent data analysis unfolded in three stages to comprehensively address the research objectives. Initially, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the respondents' demographic characteristics and prevailing

mental health patterns (Seabrook et al., 2016). Following this, Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to quantify the strength and direction of the relationship between key variables, particularly psychological distress and academic performance. Finally, a regression analysis was conducted to identify the most significant predictors of mental health outcomes, such as academic stress and financial constraints, providing an inferential basis for understanding the determinants of student well-being and their subsequent impact on academic achievement (Johansson et al., 2021).

Results and Discussion

Result

To answer the research questions, statistical analysis, such as descriptive statistics (percentages, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, regression analysis), was applied to a sample size of 366 students from Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED), Oyo State.

The Types of Social Interactions Related to Mental Health among Students in EACOED

Table 1a

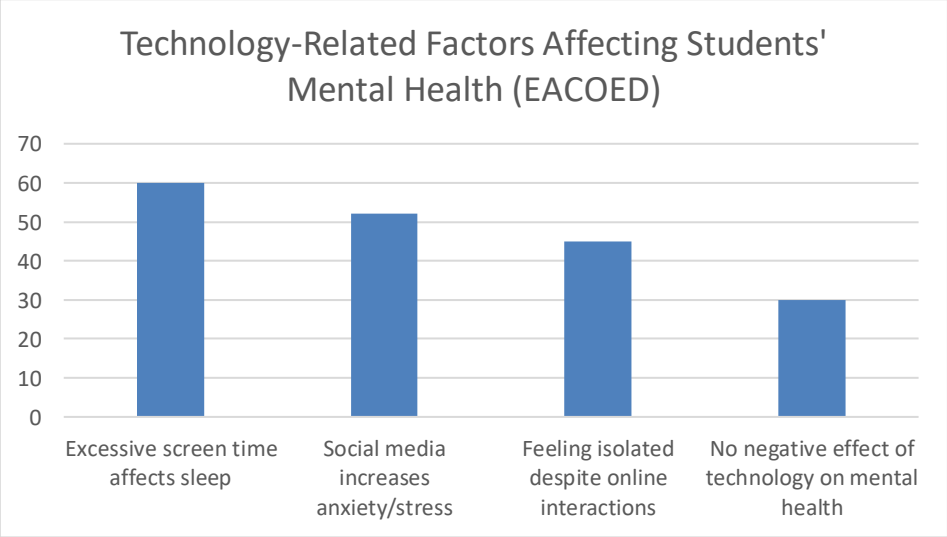
Technology-Related Factors Affecting Students' Mental Health

Factor	Percentage of Students (%)
Excessive screen time negatively affects sleep	60%
Social media use increases anxiety and stress	52%
Feeling isolated despite online interactions	45%
No adverse effect of technology on mental health	30%

Note. The majority of students report that technology use negatively impacts their mental health, primarily through excessive screen time and social media

Figure 1

Tecnologi Related factor



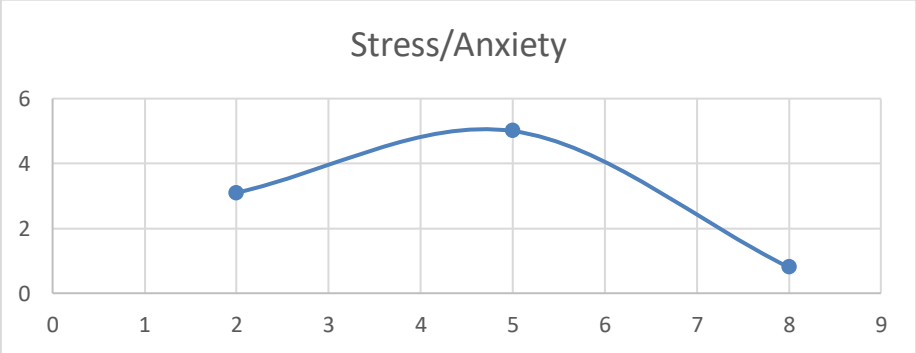
Note. Excessive screen time is the most frequently reported technology-related factor negatively affecting students' mental health..

Figure 1 presents the distribution of technology-related factors affecting students' mental health. The chart shows that excessive screen time was the most frequently reported issue (60%), followed closely by social media use increasing anxiety and stress (52%). Nearly half of the students (45%) indicated feelings of isolation despite online interactions, while 30% reported no adverse effects of technology on their mental health. Overall, the pattern highlights that technology use significantly contributes to stress and perceived isolation among EACOED students.

Table 1b

Pearson Correlation Analysis Between Technology Use and Stress/Anxiety

Variable	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Technology Use vs. Stress/Anxiety Levels	0.62	< 0.05	Positive correlation (significant)



Note. There is a significant positive correlation between technology use and stress/anxiety levels among students.

displays the relationship between technology use and stress/anxiety levels among students. The scatterplot, supported by a best-fit regression line, indicates a clear positive association. As technology use increases, reported stress and anxiety levels also rise. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$) confirms this relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that higher engagement with digital devices is strongly linked to greater psychological distress among EACOED students.

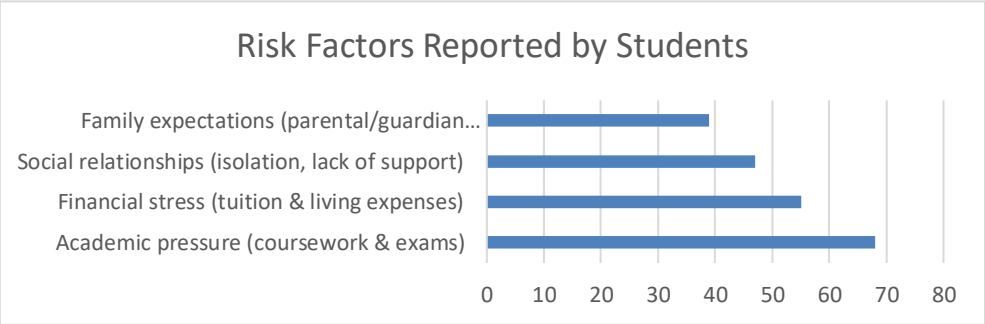
Most students reported excessive screen time (60%) and social media use (52%) as major contributors to stress. Nearly half (45%) experienced feelings of isolation despite being digitally connected. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between technology use and stress/anxiety ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$). The findings indicate that while digital technology provides platforms for connection, it simultaneously creates conditions that undermine mental well-being. Excessive screen time disrupts healthy routines, social media amplifies anxiety, and online interactions often fail to replace meaningful face-to-face relationships. The strong correlation further highlights that higher technology use reliably predicts psychological distress among EACOED students.

The Nature of The Health of Students Towards Social Interaction Among Themselves

Table 2a

Risk Factors Reported by Students

Risk Factor	Percentage of Students (%)
Academic pressure (coursework & exams)	68%
Financial stress (tuition & living expenses)	55%
Social relationships (isolation, lack of support)	47%
Family expectations (parental/guardian pressure)	39%



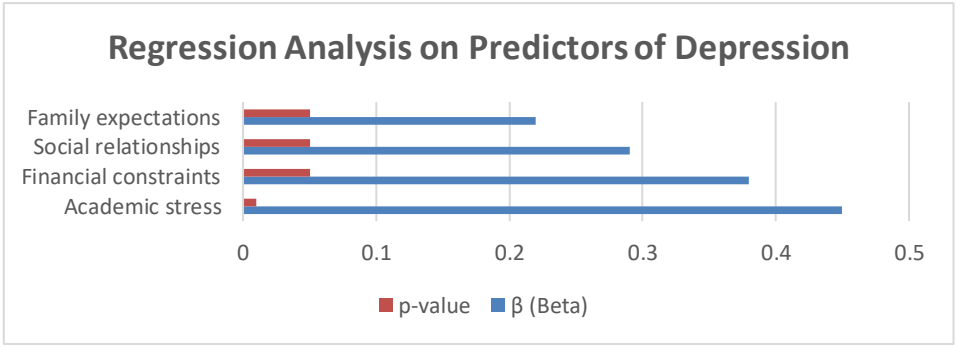
Note. Academic pressure is the most prevalent risk factor for mental health issues among students, reported by 68% of respondents.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of risk factors reported by students as contributing to depression. Academic pressure emerged as the most frequently cited factor (68%), followed by financial stress (55%). Social isolation accounted for 47%, while family expectations were the least reported at 39%. The chart highlights academic workload and financial hardship as the most prominent challenges influencing students' mental health at EACOED.

Table 2b

Regression Analysis on Predictors of Depression

Predictor Variable	β (Beta)	p-value	Interpretation
Academic stress	0.45	< 0.01	Strong, significant predictor
Financial constraints	0.38	< 0.05	Significant predictor
Social relationships	0.29	> 0.05	Not significant
Family expectations	0.22	> 0.05	Not significant



*Note***.** Academic stress and financial constraints are significant predictors of depression, while social relationships and family expectations are not.

Figure 2
Regression Coefficient Chart

As shown in Figure 4, academic stress (β = 0.45) emerged as the strongest predictor of depression, followed by financial constraints (β = 0.38). Both were statistically significant. By contrast, social relationships (β = 0.29) and family expectations (β = 0.22) were weaker predictors and not statistically significant. This confirms that academic and financial pressures are the most critical drivers of depression among students at EACOED.

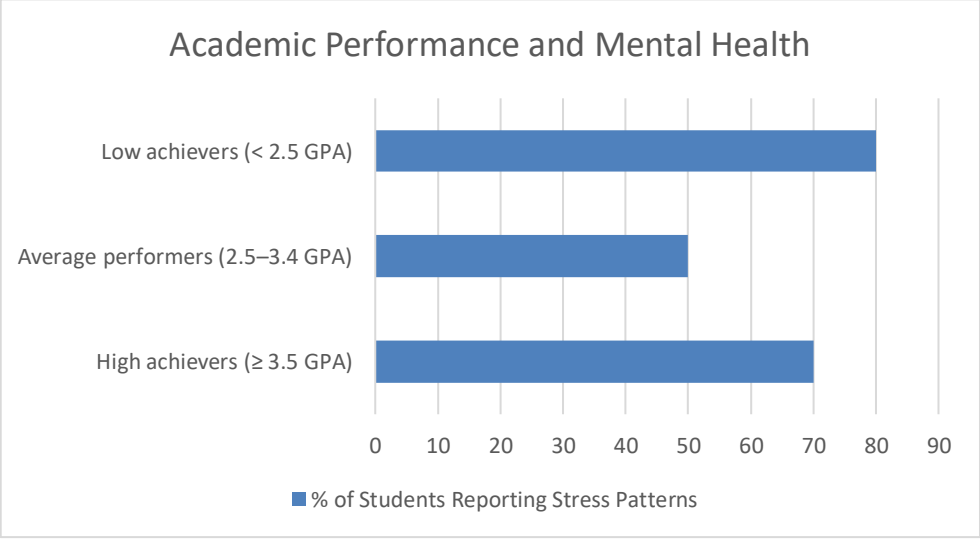
Academic pressure (68%) was the most frequently reported stressor, followed by financial stress (55%). Nearly half of students cited social isolation (47%), while family expectations (39%) were the least reported. Regression analysis showed that academic stress (β = 0.45, $p < 0.01$) and financial constraints (β = 0.38, $p < 0.05$) are the only statistically significant predictors of depression. Social relationships and family expectations, though reported by many, did not significantly predict depression after controlling for other factors. The results indicate that academic workload and financial hardship are the most potent drivers of depression among EACOED students. Although social isolation and family expectations also affect students' well-being, their influence is comparatively weaker when considered alongside academic and financial pressures. This suggests that targeted interventions addressing workload management and financial support will likely significantly reduce psychological distress within the student population.

The Relationship Between Academic Performance and Mental Health among Students of EACOED

Table 3a

Academic Performance and Mental Health Indicators

Academic Performance (GPA Range)	Mental Health Indicators	% of Students
High achievers (GPA ≥ 3.5)	Moderate–high stress, better coping mechanisms	70%
Average performers (2.5–3.4)	Stress-related challenges, balanced mental well-being	50%
Low achievers (GPA < 2.5)	High stress, anxiety, poor emotional well-being	80%



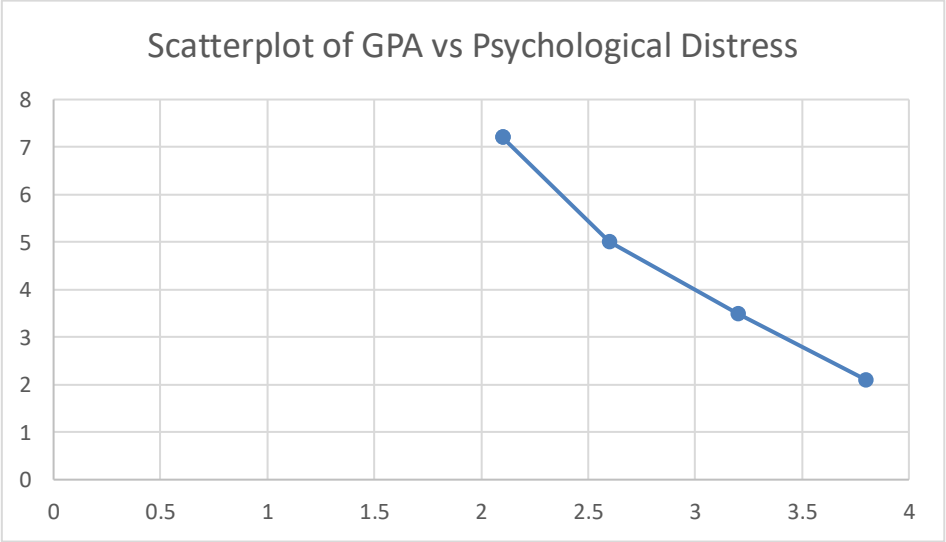
Note. Students with lower GPAs report significantly higher levels of psychological distress, with 80% of low achievers experiencing poor emotional well-being.

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of students' mental health across GPA categories. High-achieving students (≥ 3.5 GPA) reported stress but displayed effective coping mechanisms, while average performers (2.5–3.4 GPA) showed a balance between stress and performance. In contrast, low achievers (< 2.5 GPA) reported the highest levels of psychological distress (80%), highlighting the disproportionate mental health burden carried by students with weaker academic outcomes.

Table 3b

Correlation Between Psychological Distress and Academic Performance

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Psychological distress & GPA	–0.54	< 0.05	Moderate negative correlation (significant)



Note. A statistically significant, moderate negative correlation exists between psychological distress and academic performance (GPA).

Figure 6 shows the relationship between psychological distress and GPA. The scatterplot demonstrates a downward trend, confirming a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that students with higher psychological distress tend to have lower GPAs, reinforcing the conclusion that poor mental health is directly linked to reduced academic performance among EACOED students.

Analysis of academic performance in relation to mental health revealed three distinct patterns. First, high achievers (GPA ≥ 3.5), although reporting moderate to high stress levels, demonstrated stronger coping strategies that enabled them to maintain good academic outcomes; 70% of this group indicated resilience in balancing stress with performance. Second, average performers (GPA 2.5–3.4) faced stress-related challenges but maintained a relatively stable mental health profile, with 50% reporting a balance between academic workload and emotional well-being. Third, low achievers (GPA < 2.5) were the most vulnerable, with 80% experiencing severe stress,

anxiety, and poor emotional well-being. These patterns were confirmed by correlation analysis, which established a moderate, statistically significant negative relationship ($r = –0.54$, $p < 0.05$) between psychological distress and GPA. This finding suggests that as mental health deteriorates, academic performance also declines, underscoring the cyclical nature of stress and poor achievement among students.

Discussion

This study provides a clear and concerning snapshot of the mental health landscape among students at Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED). The data unequivocally demonstrates that academic pressure and financial hardship are the predominant stressors, identified by 68% and 55% of students respectively, and are the most significant predictors of depressive symptoms (Ramón-Arbués et al., 2020). Concurrently, technology use emerged as a major contributor to psychological distress, with 60% of students reporting that excessive screen time negatively impacts their sleep and 52% indicating that social media use increases their anxiety and stress levels (Blignault et al., 2019). The correlation analysis further solidifies these relationships, revealing a strong positive link between technology use and stress/anxiety ($r = 0.62$) and, most critically, a moderate negative correlation between overall psychological distress and academic performance ($r = -0.54$). This pattern was starkly visible among low academic achievers, 80% of whom reported severe stress and poor emotional well-being, highlighting a direct and detrimental cycle where mental health challenges undermine academic success (Pascoe et al., 2020). The findings paint a picture of a student population grappling with a triad of institutional, economic, and digital stressors that collectively impair their educational outcomes.

The prevalence of these specific stressors within the EACOED context can be attributed to a confluence of systemic, economic, and socio-digital factors. The primary cause for the overwhelming academic pressure is the highly demanding and competitive nature of teacher training programs in Nigeria, which often carry heavy coursework and high-stakes examinations with limited institutional support systems to mitigate the associated stress (Fawzy, 2023). Secondly, the significant financial stress stems from the socio-economic realities faced by many Nigerian students, who frequently struggle with inadequate funding for tuition and basic living expenses, a situation exacerbated by limited access to robust financial aid or scholarship schemes within the college (Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). Thirdly, the role of technology as a stressor is not merely about usage but its nature; the compulsive use of social media platforms fosters unhealthy social comparison and cyberbullying, while the blurring of boundaries between academic and leisure screen time leads to sleep disruption and chronic anxiety (Manchaiah et al., 2022). Therefore, the root causes are not simply individual vulnerabilities but are deeply embedded in the institutional environment, economic constraints, and the unregulated digital ecosystem in which these students are immersed.

The interplay of these stressors has profound and cascading consequences for individual students and the institution. The most immediate consequence is a significant decline in academic performance, as evidenced by the negative correlation with psychological distress; impaired concentration, memory deficits, and reduced motivation directly translate to lower GPAs, particularly trapping low-achieving students in a vicious cycle of poor grades and worsening mental health (Douglas & Saus, 2021). Furthermore, this environment fosters social and emotional withdrawal,

where students experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety tend to isolate themselves, thereby losing the crucial protective buffer of peer support, which is vital for resilience and coping (Pretorius et al., 2021). In the long term, if these issues remain unaddressed, the institution faces systemic repercussions, including increased student dropout rates, a decline in overall academic quality, and the graduation of teachers who may themselves be psychologically ill-equipped to foster positive learning environments for future generations (Desai, 2023). Consequently, the mental health crisis transcends individual suffering and becomes a critical institutional and pedagogical issue that threatens the core mission of the college.

Compared with existing literature, the findings from EACOED reveal alignments and critical distinctions that underscore the importance of context-specific research. This study aligns with global research that consistently identifies academic workload and financial difficulties as significant determinants of student mental health, confirming their universal relevance across different educational landscapes (Nechita et al., 2020). However, a key point of divergence lies in the relative insignificance of family expectations as a predictor of depression in this study, which contrasts sharply with findings from several Asian contexts where familial pressure is often reported as a primary stressor, indicating that cultural dynamics around achievement pressure vary significantly (Amadei, 2021). Moreover, while the negative impact of technology is well-documented globally, this study highlights its pronounced effect in a resource-constrained setting where digital wellness programs are virtually non-existent, suggesting that the adverse effects of technology may be amplified in environments lacking structured guidance and alternative support (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Thus, while the problems are global, their hierarchy and manifestation are distinctly local, demanding tailored interventions rather than one-size-fits-all solutions imported from other contexts.

A multi-pronged and integrated approach targeting conceptual, methodological, and policy levels is imperative to address this multifaceted challenge effectively. At a conceptual and policy level, the institution must formally recognize student mental health as a core component of academic success and institutional quality, leading to the development and implementation of a comprehensive Mental Health and Wellness Policy that mandates the integration of well-being into the academic framework (Green et al., 2020). Methodologically, this policy should be operationalized through the establishment of a dedicated, well-staffed Campus Counselling Centre that offers not only reactive therapy but also proactive, routine mental health screenings and psycho-educational workshops on stress management and digital wellness, thereby normalizing help-seeking behavior (Mansfield et al., 2019). Furthermore, to tackle the root causes identified, concrete actions must include creating and widely publicizing robust financial support mechanisms such as emergency bursaries and flexible payment plans, alongside integrating "digital literacy" modules into the curriculum to teach students healthy technology habits (Bajari et al., 2019). In conclusion, by adopting this holistic strategy that combines institutional policy reform, proactive support services, and targeted resource allocation, EACOED can disrupt the negative cycle of distress and poor performance, fostering a more supportive and productive academic environment for all its students.

Conclusion

This study conclusively identifies the primary mental health determinants impacting academic performance at Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED). The central finding is the significant negative relationship between psychological distress and academic achievement, quantified by a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.54$). This means that as students' levels of stress, anxiety, and depression increase, their Grade Point Average (GPA) demonstrably tends to decrease. The evidence for this is stark, with 80% of low achievers (GPA < 2.5) reporting high levels of psychological distress, compared to only 50% of average performers. Furthermore, the research pinpoints the specific sources of this distress. Academic pressure emerged as the most potent predictor of depression ($\beta = 0.45$), closely followed by financial constraints ($\beta = 0.38$), with these two factors being statistically significant drivers.

In contrast, social relationships and family expectations, while present, were not significant predictors in this context. A third critical finding was the strong positive correlation between excessive technology use. It increased stress and anxiety ($r = 0.62$), with 60% of students citing excessive screen time and 52% noting social media as key contributors to their mental strain. Therefore, the study establishes that within the EACOED context, academic performance is most directly undermined by a triad of academic workload, financial hardship, and detrimental technology use, rather than the familial or broad social factors emphasized in some other cultural settings.

The significance of this research lies in its deliberate contextual focus, which challenges and refines existing global narratives on student mental health. While previous studies, particularly from Asian contexts, have often highlighted family expectations as a central stressor, this investigation contributes a crucial conceptual nuance by demonstrating that in this Nigerian college of education, structural and economic pressures—specifically academic workload and financial instability—are more dominant predictors of depression. Methodologically, the study provides a robust, data-driven model for investigating mental health in under-researched educational settings, employing a combination of descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis to move beyond mere awareness surveys and establish causal pathways. For instance, quantifying the relationship between technology use and stress ($r = 0.62$) moves the discourse from general observation to measurable impact, an approach less common in studies within similar institutional contexts in Nigeria. Theoretically, it extends the application of stress and coping frameworks into the specific milieu of teacher-training institutions, suggesting that the dual pressures of academic and professional preparation create a unique stress profile. Consequently, this research offers a valuable, localized evidence base that underscores the need for context-specific interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all application of international findings, thereby making a substantive contribution to African higher education psychology literature.

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations that provide a clear agenda for future research. A primary weakness is its cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. This design restricts the ability to establish causality definitively or to understand how mental health challenges and academic performance influence each other dynamically over a student's entire academic journey. For example, while a correlation between distress and low GPA is established, it remains unclear whether chronic stress leads to poor performance or if

repeated academic failure exacerbates mental health issues over time. Secondly, the focus on a single institution, EACOED, limits the generalizability of the findings. The specific stressors identified may not hold the same weight in other colleges of education or universities across Nigeria, which have different cultural, economic, or academic environments. Finally, the study did not directly measure profound cultural and contextual factors such as religious coping mechanisms, the specific nature of stigma, or the influence of traditional healing practices, which are known to shape mental health experiences and help-seeking behaviors in Nigeria significantly. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to trace causal pathways, expand to multiple institutions across different geopolitical zones to enhance generalizability, and incorporate mixed-methods approaches. Integrating qualitative interviews and focus groups would be particularly effective in capturing the nuanced role of culture, religion, and stigma, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of the student mental health landscape and enabling the design of more culturally resonant interventions.

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