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**Problem-Focused Coping Mechanisms and Social Adjustment:
Implications for Resilience development among Students in the
University of Bamenda**

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Problem-Focused Coping Mechanisms and Social Adjustment: Implications for Resilience development among Students in the University of Bamenda



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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigated problem focused coping mechanisms and social adjustment: Implications for Resilience development among Students in The University of Bamenda. Social adjustment of students is an issue of great concern to many, especially parents, teachers, counsellors and psychologists. This is based on the notion that the students social dimension deals with interpersonal or public interactions with other individuals. Hence, the students, especially those in the university are faced with social problems as well as academic problems that seem to have become part and parcel of the university. The condition where students are unable to adjust socially in school has become a worrisome phenomenon because of its tendency to affect their academic outputs and the likelihood that they may resort to anti-social behaviours like drug use and abuse, robbery, alcoholism, rape among others as a coping mechanism. Hence, this study investigated the relationship between problem focused coping mechanisms and social adjustment of students' visa á vis the implications for resilient development among university students.

Materials and Methods: A concurrent nested mixed method design of both the descriptive survey and ethnographic design were used to conduct this study. A sample of 200 university

students was chosen for this study using convenient and purposive sampling techniques. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse collected data. Based on the above, it was realised that a moderate positive relationship ($R = 0.719$) exists between problem-focused coping mechanism and social adjustment of students thus fostering the development of resilience among students. Two theories were used to inform this study; The Resilience theory by Michael Rutter (2006) and the cognitive theory of coping by Folkman and Lazarus (1988).

Findings: The findings revealed that problem focused coping mechanisms has a positive relationship with the social adjustment of students in the University of Bamenda.

Implications to Theory, Policy and Practice: Based on these findings, some recommendations like; University management should have functional psychological testing and counselling centres in addressing students with social problems for proper social adjustment, teachers, administrators should pay more attention to undergraduate students with emotional problems and refer them to school psychological testing and counselling centres.

Keywords: *Problem-Focused Coping Mechanisms, Social Adjustment and Resilience Development*

INTRODUCTION

Social adjustment of university students is an issue of great concern to many, especially parents, teachers, counsellors and psychologists. This is based on the notion that the students social dimension deals with interpersonal or public interactions with other individuals. Hence, the students, especially those in the university are faced with social problems as well as academic problems that seem to have become part and parcel of the school. The condition where students are unable to adjust socially in school has become a worrisome phenomenon because of its tendency to affect their academic outputs and the likelihood that they may resort to anti-social behaviours like drug use and abuse, robbery, alcoholism, rape among others as a coping mechanism.

Today, many of the students at the secondary and university school level in Cameroon are perceived as being predisposed to many such social problems such as drug use and abuse, drop out, alcoholism, among others, coupled with their normal academic problems that seem to have become part and parcel of the school process. The reason as Akpama (2013) noted could be traced to the idea that these students are many a times faced with problems such as; the change in education system, living style, neglect from parents or guardians, unstable homes, lack of proper home training, lack of love and care and change of environment. These problems render the students, emotionally imbalanced, thereby pushing them into further problems like drug abuse, prostitution and other unwholesome behaviours which tend to affect the likelihood of their being adjusted in the society.

The adjustment for students could mean getting along with the members of the school as best as each student can. Adjustment according to Nirmala (2011) is a harmony between a person and his environment, and the extent to which a person fits happily and harmoniously into the environment or culture in which he or she finds self without having friction with others and without being frustrated. According to Azuji (2014), adjustment is the process and condition of being in harmony with the physical and social environment in which the individual lives, which is signified by the near absence of stress and the ability to maintain good personal relationship with others. Within the school settings, students are constantly faced with new challenges which include ever changing peer groups and different educational and behavioural expectations of different schools. These challenges according to Igbo et al (2016) have been recognised as having some bearing on the way students adjust in schools socially. This is probably because the ability of students to cope with certain standards, values, and norms of a community (home, school, and church) hinges on their ability to socially adjust in every given situation. Social adjustment from the foregoing could be seen as the extent to which an individual maintains a cordial relationship with other people. For example, a socially imbalanced student, can easily fall into problems like; drug abuse, prostitution and other unwholesome behaviours which tend to affect the likelihood of their being adjusted in the society.

As a consequence, achieving such a happy and harmonious life in the society may become a challenge. Nevertheless, the successful handling of such challenges in the society could lead to good social adjustment, while improper handling of such challenges could equally lead to social maladjustment of individuals. For example, a student adjusts to his or her social environment comprising of the peer group, the teachers, and other members of the community in which the individual lives. Based on the above, this study investigated the relationship between problem-focused coping mechanisms and social adjustment of students' vis-à-vis its implications for resilience development among students in the University of Bamenda.

Background to the Study

According to Crick and Dodge, 1994, social adjustment is the degree to which an individual engages in competent social behaviour and adapts to the immediate social context. It has been recognised that social adjustment is influenced by psychological factors, among them self-esteem has shown that the way in which individuals perceive themselves has an influence on their social academic and emotional adjustment. Students must adapt to others outside the family environment to achieve the goals of adult socialisation patterns and adolescent must make new adjustments. The development of social life during university is influenced by one important aspect, namely social adjustment. Students who are able to make social adjustment during high school often succeed in making social adjustment well in the university. Galor (2012) suggest that the factors that influence social adjustment are as follows; the role of the family which includes socio-economic status, family needs, attitudes, and habits of parents, as well as the status of the child. Second, the role of the school includes structural and organisational schools, as well as the teachers in teaching and learning activities, the third the role of the work environment.

Folkman and Lazarus (1988) define problem focused coping as all the active effort to manage stressful situation and alter a troubled person-environment relationship to modify or eliminate the resources of stress via individual behaviour. Problem-focused coping is a problem-solving technique in which an individual addresses a problem or stressor directly in an attempt to alleviate or eliminate it. It is also referred to as problem-centred coping. For example, a student who is nervous about giving a presentation at a research event may cope by practicing the presentation each night before the event, attending seminars on how to give presentations, or asking friends to listen to the presentation in order to provide feedback to make sure they are fully prepared for the event.

According to Southwick and Charney, (2012), resilience is the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning. Every individual experience stressful events and the majorities are exposed to trauma at some point during life. Therefore, understanding how one can develop and enhance resilience is of great relevance to not only promoting coping mechanisms but also mitigating maladaptive coping and stress response in psychiatric illnesses such as depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although the understanding of resilience is overall still at an early stage, recent investigations have identified mechanisms encompassing genetic, epigenetic, developmental, psychological, and neuro chemical factors that underlie the development and enhancement of resilience and factors that predict vulnerability to stress and susceptibility to psychiatric disorders in the face of stress and trauma. This review outlines discoveries from recent years from studies that have considerably advanced our understanding of resilience to stress and trauma and will likely move forward the development of pharmacological and psychological interventions for enhancing resilience.

Basically, coping refers to an individual's attempt to tolerate or minimize the effect of the stress, whether it is the stressor or the experience of stress itself. Coping theories can be classified according to orientation or focus (trait-oriented or state-oriented) and approach (macroanalytic or microanalytic). Psychodynamics is the systematized study and theory of psychological forces that underlie human behaviour. This theory is relevant to this study in that it emphasize mitigating or getting rid of social adjustment of a problem. For example, students suffering from anxiety will need cognitive behavioural counselling to help them address the symptoms of their anxiety. Psychodynamic theory, however, explores a person's deeply rooted drives, needs and desires. It's considered a more global approach to therapy than a modern, problem-

based therapy. In the context of the University of Bamenda, coping mechanisms refers to the strategies that students use to manage stress and adversity. Common coping mechanisms include seeking social support, engaging in physical activity, and using relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing.

Social adjustment, on the other hand, refers to the ability of students to adapt to the social environment of the university. This includes forming relationships with peers and faculty, participating in extracurricular activities, and feeling a sense of belonging within the university community. Therefore, it is important for universities like the University of Bamenda to provide resources and support for students to develop coping mechanisms and social adjustment skills. This can include counselling services, peer support group, and extracurricular activities that promote social interaction and community building, by fostering resilience among students, universities can help to ensure that their students are well equipped to succeed academically and personally.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) used the term coping to describe the “cognitive and behavioural efforts” a person employs to manage stress, generally categorized as emotion focused or problem focused coping. Not an individual trait, coping is instead conceptualized by Lazarus and Folkman as a process (Rew, 2005). Stress and coping models such as Lazarus' (1990) transactional stress-coping process and Moos' (2002) model of context, coping, and adaptation (transactional model), and the theoretical work of Carver and colleagues (Carver, 1997; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) and Frydenberg and Lewis (1990) have advanced the science regarding stress, coping, and the measurement of these constructs. These theorists have built upon the original work of Selye (1978), who proposed the term stress to explain responses being observed in the general adaptation syndrome, a syndrome identified as an “initial alarm reaction followed by a state of adaptation called the stage of resistance” (Rew, 2005, p. 136). Selye was also the first to identify a “stressor,” or cause of subsequent stress. A healthy response to stress resulted in adaptation, according to Selye, whereas an unhealthy or resistant response would lead to exhaustion.

Materials and Methods

Method

Methodologically, the study employed a mixed method research design (concurrent nested mixed method research design). This method was chosen for this study because the study sought to generate both quantitative and qualitative data on the relationship between problem-focused coping mechanisms and social adjustment vis á vis its implications for resilience development among students in the University of Bamenda.

A sample of two hundred (200) students was selected using both the convenient and purposive sampling techniques. In this light, quantitative data was collected using questionnaire (a Likert scale, structured closed- ended questionnaire) while qualitative data was generated from respondents with the aid of a Focus Group Discussion Guide (open ended questions). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Quantitative data were analysed in the form of frequencies, percentages and pie charts. The Linear Regression analysis coefficient was used to test the hypothesis. All the statistics were presented at the 95% confidence level (CL). Content thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Measures

Items were measured with the aid of a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire whereby respondents were required to state how they feel about each item, that is by stating whether they strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD), pertaining to the variables of the study. See table 1 below for details.

Table 1: Problem-Focused Coping

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Stdev	Ranking
I you use forms of relaxation such as meditation and muscle relaxation	157(52.3%)	118(39.4%)	20(6.6%)	5(1.7%)	3.45	0.80	1
Actively seeking information about the problem	120(40%)	165(55%)	15(5%)	(0%)	3.32	0.80	3
Planning concrete steps to address problems	101(33.7%)	174(58%)	25(8.3%)	(0%)	2.71	0.84	5
I attend professional counselling or other services	131(43.7%)	156(52%)	13(4.3%)	(0%)	3.42	0.51	2
I talk with people I know who can do something to solve my problem	90(30%)	188(62.7%)	22(7.3%)	(0%)	2.79	1.11	4
Total average	119.8	160.2	19	1	3.13		

Table 1 show that 52.3 % of the respondents strongly accepted that they use forms of relaxation such as, meditation, and muscle relaxation, 39.4 % agreed, 6.6% disagreed while 1.7% strongly rejected the idea with the mean of 3.45 and the standard deviation of 0.80, with a ranking position of 1.

Looking at item 2, 40% of the respondents strongly agreed that they actively seek information about the problems that they face, 55 % agreed, 5% disagreed while 0% strongly opposed the opinion with the mean of 3.32 and the standard deviation of 0.80, with a ranking position of 3. Furthermore, 33.7% of the respondents strongly affirmed that they plan concrete steps to address problems that come their way, 58% agreed, 8.3% refuted, 0% strongly opposed the opinion with the mean of 2.71 and the standard deviation of 0.84, with a ranking position of 5.

Again, 43.7% of the respondents strongly accepted that they attend professional counselling or other services, 52% agreed, and 4.3% disagreed while 0% strongly rejected the idea with the mean of 3.42 and the standard deviation of 0.51, with a ranking position of 2. To proceed, 30% of the respondents strongly agreed that they talk with people they know who can do something to solve their problem, 62.7% agreed, 7.3% disagreed while 0% strongly disagreed to the view with the mean of 2.79 and the standard deviation of 1.11 , with a ranking position of 4.

FINDINGS

Table 2 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.719 ^a	.517	.502	52.97729

The model summary as shown in Table 2 indicates that a moderate positive relationship ($R = 0.719$) exists between problem-focused coping mechanism and social adjustment of students. The R-Square for the overall model is 0.517 with an adjusted R of 0.502.

Table 3 Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	15.016	13.766		1.091	.000
	problem-focused coping mechanism	.807	.136	.719	5.942	.000

According to Table 3, the regression coefficients indicates that the regression equation as given by social adjustment of students = $15.016 + 0.807$ problem-focused coping mechanism. Thus, when there is problem-focused coping mechanism, the social adjustment of students is at 15.016 but when problem-focused coping mechanism increases by one unit, the problem-focused coping mechanism by 0.807. This increase is significant as indicated by the p-value of 0.000.

Table 4 ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	99102.714	1	99102.714	35.311	.000 ^b
	Residual	92617.572	33	2806.593		
	Total	191720.286	34			

The ANOVA in table Qualitative findings were analysed using the content thematic analysis. They consist of the questions, categories, themes, code, groundings and quotations.

Table 4 shows that $F(35.311)$ with $p = 0.000$. This suggests that there is a significant effect of problem-focused coping mechanisms on the social adjustment of students. Consequently, H_{01} was rejected and H_a upheld. It can therefore be concluded that problem-focused coping mechanism has an effect on the social adjustment of students thus fostering the development of resilience among students.

Qualitative Findings

Table 5 Coping and Social Adjustment of Students

Questions	Categories	Themes	Code descriptions	Groundings	Quotations
As university students, what can you say about your different problem focused coping strategies that you make use of and your social adjustment to university life?	Affirmative	Managing challenges	Problem solving	Majority	“...I take action whenever am face with a problem and I plan before I solve a problem , also I don't suppress my problems , I like to solve my problems not others doing it for me....”
From your experience as students, how does your different problem focused coping strategies that you make use of help you to socially adjust and cope with university life?	Obvious	Resolution of problems	Quick action	Majority	“...I don't allow my problems go worse before I solve them, I take action immediately and I plan before solving any problem so that I make the right decision about it....” “...i doesn't suppress my problems I let them out by talking to my friend about it so that we bring out the best way to solve the problem.”

Table 5 shows that, as university students, their opinion about the different problem focused coping strategies that they make use of and their social adjustment to university life, was categorized as affirmative. The theme was based on Managing challenges and Problem solving was the code description. Majority of them grounded the idea meanwhile the quotation says “...I take action whenever am face with a problem and I plan before I solve a problem , also I don't suppress my problems , I like to solve my problems not others doing it for me....”

To proceed, on their experience as students, how does their different problem focused coping strategies that they make use of help them to socially adjust and cope with university life, the respondents categorized it to be obvious with a theme Resolution of problems and the code description of Quick action. Majority grounded the idea meanwhile the quotation says “.....I do not allow my problems go worse before I solve them, I take action immediately and I plan before solving any problem so that I make the right decision about it....” “...i do not suppress my problems I let them out by talking to my friend about it so that we bring out the best way to solve the problem.”

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed that based on the total average of 3.13 showing a high level of problem-focused coping mechanisms and social adjustment of students in The University of Bamenda. It can therefore be concluded that problem-focused coping mechanism has an effect on the social adjustment of students. The following were realised as problem solving coping mechanisms used by students in order to adjust well and be resilient; they actively seek for information about the problem, planning concrete steps to address it, taking direct action to change the situation, evaluating pros and cons of different options, seeking support to find solutions, and generally trying to modify the stressful circumstance itself rather than just managing emotions around it. These findings are consistent with the following findings of other authors as shown below. According to Folkman (2008), problem-focused coping (take-charge strategies that deal with the problem at hand or eliminate the stressors through problem solving) often enhances feelings of control and reduces stress and its adverse consequences, assuming that the situation can be change. According to Lazarus and Folkman in McNulty (2014), coping strategies have been dichotomized into problem-focused coping strategies, or making attempts to actively alter a problematic situation, and emotion-focused coping strategies, or managing emotional responses to a problematic situation. Lenz (2010) defined problem-focused coping as a situation in which individuals make effort to directly confront and manage the source of their stress. Individuals prefer to tackle directly with the stress by confronting, controlling, or managing stressful tasks. Aspinwall and Taylor in Khan (2013) posited that problem-focused coping is an example of active coping. According to Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (2011), active coping is the process of taking active steps to try to remove or eliminate the stressor or to weaken its effects.

Emotion-focused coping is viewed by Lenz (2010) as individuals trying to control their emotional response to stress. Individuals manage the emotional aspect of the stress rather than tackle the tasks. Aspinwall and Taylor in Khan (2013) stated that emotion-focused coping is an example of avoidant coping. Lenz (2010) defined avoidant coping as removing or distancing oneself from the source of stress.

McNulty (2014) explained that the ways people cope depend on the resources that are available to them. He posited that one important psychological resource for coping is viewing oneself positively. Others include problem-solving skills, social skills, social support, and material resources. To him, coping has two important functions; control of emotions or distress (emotion-focused coping) and management or elimination of the problem that is causing the distress (problem-focused coping).

A study of the relationship between adjustment and problem focused coping in international students' experience was conducted by Lin (2006). The results of the study were in line with the literature that problem focused coping helped the students between adjustment to the college and campus life. Furthermore, the study revealed that the university staff support offered the new corners acceptance and assurance. Even the mails and messages sent to the students helped to relieve pressure and stress.

Ward and Kennedy (2007) found an interesting result in their study with 113 British citizens living in Singapore. In their study, they examined the relationship between the coping styles and adjustment, and social support was accepted as one way of coping in the study. While they found a significant relationship between avoidant coping, humour, approach coping and adjustment, acceptance and social support were found to be unrelated to the adjustment process.

Yasin and Dzulkifli (2010) investigated the relationship between problem focused coping and psychological problems among students in Malaysia. Correlation coefficient was used to measure the relationship between problem focused coping and psychological problems. The findings revealed that there were significant negative relationship between problem focused coping and psychological problems suggesting that the higher the problem focused coping, the lower the psychological problem.

Friedlander et al (2007) examined the joint effects of stress, social support, problem focused coping and self-esteem on adjustment to university first-year undergraduate students (N=115) were assessed during the first semester and again 10 weeks later, during the second semester of the academic year. Result showed that from the fall to winter semesters, increased social support from friends, but not from family, predicted improved adjustment. The influence of parental social support was examined in a study by Cutrona et al (2007) which examined whether parental social support would predict academic performance in college students. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between parental social support and predicted pre-college academic performance.

Salami (2011) examined the contribution of problem-solving coping mechanisms to the prediction of adjustment to college. Regression analysis revealed that problem solving coping mechanisms predicted adjustment among first year college of education students.

Hamarat, et al (2001) conducted a study on the effect of Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies on Academic Stress during Examinations. A college student has to face a cut-throat competition and a number of other demands throughout the graduation. These demands lead to academic stress among them. If students can cope effectively with academic stress, then can enjoy their college life. The present study aimed to investigate the effect of coping strategies on academic stress of college students. Participants for this study included 600 undergraduate students. Data was obtained through Academic Stress Scale for College Students and Ways of Coping Questionnaire. The data was analysed through one-way ANOVA, and Scheff's post hoc multiple comparison tests. Results indicated that coping strategies significantly affect the academic stress level of college students. Scheffe's post-hoc test revealed that students those who are not using any kind of coping strategies are suffering from academic stress in a vast amount. Moreover, students who are using emotion focused coping strategies during examination period are better tackle with stress compare to those who are using problem focused strategies

In 2006, Rutter defined resilience as, "An interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" (Rutter, 2006). He makes the point that resilience is more than social competence or positive mental health; competence must exist with risk to be resilience. His definition has remained stable over time, with his 2013 definition stating that resilience is when, "Some individuals have a relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stresses or adversities their outcome being better than that of other individuals who suffered the same experiences" (Rutter, 2013). Much of Rutter's work is based on his early research into children of parents with schizophrenia. In this work, he was originally focused on psychopathology and then noticed that some children were experiencing the risk but emerging relatively unscathed. This encouraged Rutter to search for competence in children who had experienced adversity, rather than his original focus on pathways of psychopathology.

Implications of Findings

The student-grantees, therefore, utilize their internal resources in the form of diverse coping strategies to deal with the adjustment problems. They too are blessed with a very supportive, caring and nurturing family, school and community environment. Coping strategies has a predictive ability and value. The higher the level of coping, the better is the academic performance and social adjustment. A student who is able to make a good adjustment in terms of coping performs well academically. Thus, coping plays a substantial role in helping the grantees attain a very satisfactory academic standing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that coping strategies training enhanced the social adjustments of students. It seems that teaching these strategies can reduce the stress and anxiety of students in stressful situations and help them to have better mental health. Considering that students with learning disabilities have emotional problems, coping skills training can prevent or decrease their mental disorders and increase their emotional adjustment.

It could be concluded from the findings that out of the ten strategies used, planning and positive reinterpretation and growth were the two most predominant strategies for problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles respectively. Again, the coping styles preferred the emotion-focused style in coping with stress to the problem-focused style. The implications that can be drawn from these findings are that the management of the university should take steps to strengthen the Counselling of students.

Therefore, social support can be viewed as subjective through various social relationship based on the social network of an individual or its objective impact on the individual. By helping an individual cope with and recover from difficult situation and adversity and improving an individual's positive mental state, social support plays a critical role in an individual's mental resilience.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are given on the basis of findings of this research

- University management should have functional psychological testing and counseling centers in addressing students with social problems for proper adjustment.
- Teachers, administrators should pay more attention to undergraduate students with emotional problem and refer them to school psychological testing and counseling centers by adopting this will reduce the emotional challenges.
- Similarly, Parent should improve on providing more financial support to their children to help in addressing their financial problems. This enables the student to be more emotionally and socially adjusted to the school environment.
- University management should encourage both male and female students or set aside a social programme week for both male and female, this will encourage all participation in social activities thereby increasing their social adjustment.
- Similarly, University management should provide more security posts in the area of social gathering in order to encourage both male and female participation in social program; this will reduce their emotional tension.
- Parents being more involve in the student's life through being educated in identifying the signs that their student is not coping and assisting them to deal with daily stressors through attending workshops.

- Schools/teachers can assist parents with these workshops where both the parent and student can attend.
- An intervention program can also be implemented and form part of the curriculum

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