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Original Article

Effect of Stressors and Coping Strategies on Preservice Teacher-Trainees' Academic Performance in Ugandan Universities

Agrace Atwikirize[1,2], Joseph Ssenyonga[1] & Judith Biirah[1]*

[1] Kyambogo University, P. O. Box 1, Kyambogo, Uganda.
[2] Uganda Martyrs University, P. O. Box 5498, Kampala, Uganda.
[*] Author for Correspondence ORCID ID; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2107-2041; Email: atwikigrace@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

University students generally face numerous stressors that impede their academic performance. The study aimed at exploring how stressors and coping strategies affected the academic performance of preservice teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda. A sample of 554 teacher-trainees enrolled on the BA(ED) and BSc (Ed) programmes from three universities participated in the study to ascertain the effect of stressors and coping strategies used. The study further sought views from 346 respondents enrolled in years two and three to establish the effect of stressors and coping strategies on their academic performance. The first years were excluded since they had not received their results at the time of data collection. The results revealed that teacher-trainees used myriad coping strategies to avert the effects of stressors. Results further revealed a significant negative relationship between stressors and academic performance ($r= -0.239^{**}$, $p=0.000< 0.05$). This negative correlation implied that as stress increased, the academic performance of teacher-trainees reduced. Results further revealed a negative relationship between coping strategies and academic performance measured by their current CGPA ($r= -0.089$, $p= 0.099>0.05$). Thus, the way teacher-trainees coped with stress had a very minimal impact on their academic performance. Problem-focused coping had a positive relationship with academic performance, unlike emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies. The study concluded that problem-focused coping could improve academic performance compared to maladaptive strategies such as emotion-focused and avoidance coping strategies. The study recommended strengthening the orientation of new students into university life and continued mentorship throughout their stay at university. The university managers should strengthen counselling programmes and encourage peer counselling for the students. Lastly, students should be guided in setting realistic academic goals and managing their time appropriately.

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INTRODUCTION

Good academic performance is associated with positive outcomes such as knowledge acquisition (hard skills), technical skills transfer and utilisation for socio-economic transformation and innovation (Chankseliani et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2021). Despite the good attributes, academic performance has continuously been a subject of debate for many studies due to evolving dynamics in education such as increase in student population, curriculum modifications, adoption of modern technology in the teaching and learning process, and academic success metrics which differ from one institution to another that stress students (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020; Obrentz, 2012). Evidence from literature has demonstrated a plethora of glitches teacher-trainees encounter in pursuit of academic excellence that have progressively hindered their performance, such as adapting to a new environment, developing a positive self-identity, high parental academic expectations, financial crisis and peer pressure (Cao et al., 2024).

Mekonnen (2014) defined academic performance as the scholastic standing of a student at a given moment, as explained in terms of grades attained in a program or group of courses. This study conceptualised academic performance in terms of self-reported Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) and degree classification. Empirical studies have further argued that measuring academic performance in terms of Grade Point Average (GPA) and CGPA enables a better understanding of the students' academic process (Muwonge & Ssenyonga, 2015; York et al., 2015). Grade point averages are a single numerical figure that summarises a student's academic performance (Bwenvu, 2023). Although, academic performance measured by GPA and CGPA has been associated with several positive outcomes following college graduation such as a greater possibility of employment (Barr & Mcneilly, 2002; York et al., 2015), enhancing career potential, possibility of furthering education (Barkume, 1993), and better life outcomes (Kuncel et al., 2010) among others, it is faced with numerous challenges such as academic history and pre-entry university grades (Aciro et al., 2021), absenteeism and poor lecture attendance (Ngoma et al., 2017; Teixeira, 2016), failure and drop out (Ayala et al., 2018), stress and poor coping strategies (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019; Zia-ur-Rehman & Sharif, 2014). In Uganda, poor performance is further attributed to the commercialisation of education, with students largely joining university with low grades (Mamdani, 2007).

Studies have broadly categorised coping strategies as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Otyola et al., 2021). Others included a third dimension of avoidant strategies that seem less useful but contribute immensely to coping (Carver et al., 1989). However, maladaptive coping

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strategies in the form of emotion and avoidant coping strategies are associated with negative consequences since they don't address the problem directly. Thus, stress is a normal and unavoidable part of life for university students, but how they cope with it has a significant impact on their overall performance (Anasuri & Anthony, 2018; Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). For instance, past studies in the USA, Canada, Romania, and Malaysia revealed high stress levels among university students, with the majority adopting maladaptive coping strategies such as abuse of drugs and alcohol, which eventually affected their performance (Boke et al., 2019; Perez et al., 2019; Yusoff et al., 2011). Furthermore, evidence from literature has shown that university students cope with stress through emotion-focused coping by turning to religion and seeking emotional support from family and peers (Barbe et al., 2025; Persaud & Persuad, 2016) and avoidant coping through different ways, such as watching movies, wishful thinking, and abuse of drugs (Ioana-Maria et al., 2016), whereas others use problem-focused coping, which involves dealing directly with the source of the problem (Avci & Gungor, 2023; Thornberg et al., 2023). Problem-focused coping strategies were associated with positive attributes such as the formation of positive attitudes, which are good for their mental health and psychological well-being. Selye (1976) pointed out that stress is brought on by negative beliefs of failure, too much academic work, poor performance, uncertainty following graduation, fear of failing to find employment, lack of professional knowledge, poor goal setting, personal, and institutional stressors. Students' behaviour and academic performance suffer greatly when they fail to adapt under immense pressure (Abdullah et al., 2020; Taj et al., 2024). Stressors are factors that cause distress, anxiety and tension in an individual's life, and academic activities for university students (Akacan, 2017). High level of stress among students is linked to inadequate adaptability, which might result in health issues (Dominguez-Lara, 2017; Restrepo, 2018) and low academic performance (Richardson, 2012). Stress phenomena is a significant challenge to teacher-trainees' well-being. Stress has both positive and negative effects and can enable some to succeed academically or cause health problems that can impair academic performance. This study conceptualised stressors as factors triggered by pressure emanating from academic difficulties, romantic problems, assorted social problems, alienation from academics, and time pressure.

Coping strategies are the specific behavioural and psychological techniques people use to learn to manage, tolerate, and minimise stressful situations in their lives (Ntoiti et al., 2024). Despite immense research on the global scene, limited studies have been conducted on the effect of stressors and coping strategies on the academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in Uganda, a gap this study bridges. The study is relevant to Uganda due to increased suicide cases induced by stress among university students in Higher Education Institutions (Asiteza, 2022; Kaggwa et al., 2021). Although the study suggested that teacher-trainees who adopted problem-focused coping strategies confronted the sources of the problem and performed better than those who used maladaptive coping strategies. There are contradictions in the literature that suggest that maladaptive coping strategies may not necessarily lead to negative outcomes and adaptive strategies to positive results, calling for a continued debate (Boke et al., 2019). Thus, the study provided a diverse perception on the effect of stressors and coping strategies on the academic performance of preservice teacher-trainees from the Ugandan perspective.

Objectives

- To assess the relationship between stressors and academic performance of teacher-trainees in Universities in the Central region, Uganda.
- To examine the relationship between coping strategies and academic performance of

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teacher-trainees in Universities in the Central region, Uganda.

Hypothesis

H_1: There is a significant relationship between stress and academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between coping strategies and academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stressors and Academic Performance

There is a plethora of empirical research on stress and academic performance of university students globally (Amponsah et al., 2020; Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2020). Stress encountered by teacher-trainees is caused by numerous stressors that are both academic and non-academic. Evidence from literature has shown a high prevalence of stress among university students (Suleyiman & Zewdu, 2018). Academic stress in form of heavy work load (Qin et al., 2022); fear for failure in tests and examinations (Saile et al., 2017; Veena & Shastri, 2016) as well as non-academic stressors such as financial pressure (Cainboy, 2024); large classes, roommates and peer's family background (Adjei-Twum et al., 2017) invoke distress that ultimately inhibit students' academic performance. Studies have further shown that the occurrence of stress-related behaviours among university students has a great impact on their academic performance. For instance, Kwaah and Essilfie (2017) recognised that persistence in negative and chronic stress had an adverse effect on students' academic performance and mental health. Additionally, Turner et al. (2015) in a different study noted that social distractors, the difficult journey on the programme, and family responsibilities immensely impacted students' academic performance. Social distractions specifically, significantly affected students' academic success as reflected in their inability to complete assignments on time.

Relatedly, Gottschlich and Atapour (2024) in a study in Canada identified key stressors as high expectations, heavy workload, poor time management, competition from peers and limited resources. High academic pressure was found to heavily impact on students' academic performance negatively. Similarly, Taj et al. (2024) in another study in Pakistan found that personal-family, educational and environmental factors greatly contributed to student stress, which eventually affected their academic performance. The findings confirmed that academic and non-academic stress equally affected academic performance in both private and public universities. Furthermore, Malak et al. (2022) in a study in Jordan found a strong direct effect between student stress induced by social media addiction and poor academic performance. Additionally, Shiraly et al. (2024) in their study among 5th and 7th-year medical students in Iran found a strong association between social media use and maladaptive coping strategies, which increased anxiety, leading to depression that ultimately affected their academic output. The findings have shown that the new trend of social media addiction among university students has a negative effect on their academic performance if not coped with appropriately. In another study in the USA, Flowers and Bernard (2020) found that higher stress levels strongly predicted decreased academic performance of first-year physical therapy students. The findings were in line with Alkhawaldeh et al. (2023) in a study in Oman that revealed that students with chronic stress levels reported a low CGPA. The students drew stress from four different sources, but mainly from physical and environmental stressors, especially those living alone.

However, evidence from literature further revealed that not all stress is bad and some form of eustress has been associated with positive outcomes. For instance, Alsaleem et al. (2021) in their study in

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Saudi Arabia pointed out that high prevalence stress levels among students were negatively correlated with high perceived stress levels and the GPA, which implied that some reasonable stress was adequate to propel the students to academic excellence. However, maladaptive coping strategies such as smoking were highly correlated with perceived stress and this affected the student's GPA. In addition, Calafell et al. (2024) in their study in Spain found that teacher-trainees who reported low perceived stress levels were emotionally stable, which enabled them to perform well academically. The empirical studies noted that some studies focused on stress negatively. There are findings to support the narrative that stress can push students to academic excellence.

Additionally, evidence from the literature revealed that some students find stress normal and manageable. For example, Zavaleta et al. (2021) in their study in Peru studied stress on three dimensions of physical, psychological and behavioural stressors. The findings revealed no significant relationship between the three dimensions of stress and academic performance. The implication was that stress wasn't new to students and they always coped with it appropriately. The findings also revealed a form of eustress that motivated the students to perform better. Furthermore, Basith et al. (2021) in a study in China found that students experienced moderate academic and cognitive stress. This implied that students set priorities and mitigated challenges associated with the stressors and their performance wasn't very much affected. In their study in Ethiopia, Suleyiman and Zewdu (2018) found a high prevalence of stress among university students triggered by fear of failure, family disappointment, lack of motivation and poor interpersonal relationships. The study also revealed a negative correlation between stress and academic performance. This implied that as stress levels increased, academic performance dropped.

Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

Teacher-trainees, particularly, are prone to stress emanating from sources such as heavy academic workload, financial and relationship problems. Despite the stress experienced, prolonged exposure is detrimental to one's psychological wellbeing, which calls for an appropriate coping response. Coping refers to a person's reaction to stressful conditions and can be categorised as either psychological or physical coping mechanisms that students adopt or use to eliminate the stressors (Donguines et al., 2021). There are mainly two approaches to coping with stress in the literature. Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused coping involves dealing with the source of the problem, while emotion-focused coping dwells on managing emotional distress to lessen the effects of the problem (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). Studies, however, added a third paradigm of avoidance coping strategy which involves denying the stressor and psychologically disengaging through approaches such as sleeping more, daydreaming, wishful thinking and alcohol use to numb oneself from thinking about the problem (Carver et al., 1989). For example, a teacher-trainee who engages in avoidance coping portrays behaviours such as living in denial, distracting the mind, or escaping when they perceive a threat or stressor as overwhelming or uncontrollable. The avoidant coping strategy involves diverting attention instead of confronting and dealing with it directly. There is a dearth of evidence from literature that suggests that avoidance coping has negative consequences, such as increased anxiety, decreased problem-solving, and negative impact on mental health (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2022).

Nevertheless, problem-focused coping is seen as the most adaptive for coping with stress, unlike emotion and avoidant coping strategies that are maladaptive and less effective. Ndegwa et al. (2017) pointed out that a maladaptive coping strategy in the form of increased consumption of alcohol negatively

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affected the academic performance of students in Kenya. Additionally, Gustems-Carnicer et al. (2019) in their study in Spain found that poor coping strategies were correlated with low academic performance. Teacher-trainees who used avoidance coping strategies were prone to maladaptive behaviours such as alcohol, smoking and drug abuse, which negatively impacted their academic performance. Furthermore, in their study in Kenya, Ntoiti et al. (2024) confirmed previous studies that mental distress was significantly associated with low GPA. Besides, maladaptive coping strategies were reported to contribute to student underachievement.

In a different study in the Philippines, Austria-Cruz (2019) revealed that most students coped through spirituality, a form of emotion-focused coping, which is the most common and prevalent coping strategy in the Philippines. Kimo and Ayele (2021) in their study in Ethiopia found out that the majority of the students used avoidance coping strategies to curb stressful situations, which negatively affected their academic achievement. Poor performance could be attributed to the student's weakness in managing the sources of their problems. However, students who use adaptive coping strategies posted good academic performance. Kuncharin and Mohamad (2017) in their study in Malaysia found out that the majority of the students used problem-focused coping strategies, such as creating action plans to solve their stressful problems. The study confirmed that adaptive coping strategies were instrumental in improving students' academic performance. Similarly, Govender et al. (2015) pointed out that problem-focused coping, specifically through positive and seeking social support, was vital in mitigating stress. The findings further pointed out that the majority of students adopted multiple coping strategies to mitigate stress, such as seeking social support, effective time management, engaging in self-care and academic adjustments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This quantitative study employed a correlational design to examine the effect of stress and coping strategies on the academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda. A correlational design aided in examining the relationships among variables where information sought was analysed and interpreted (Curtis et al., 2016). Quantitative approach is appropriate in understanding the strength and direction of the relationship between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). With a quantitative approach, numerical data was analysed statistically and findings generalised. The study was grounded in the positivist paradigm that argues that reality is objective, quantifiable and can be studied using scientific methods (Ugwu, 2021). Positivists assume realism as a single reality. Based on objective ontology, the knowledge generated is accurate, measurable, verifiable, and quantifiable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ryan, 2018). With objectivism, the researcher and objects are independent entities and cannot influence each other (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher was therefore independent of participants and adhered to scientific methods of inquiry.

Sample Size

The population size for the study was 7,502 teacher-trainees from the schools and faculty of education in three universities in the Central region, Uganda [1 private and 2 public] from two programmes of study [Bachelor of Arts with BA(ED) and Bachelor of Science with Education BSc(Ed)]. A sample size of 610 at a confidence level of 99% and a degree of accuracy of 5% was obtained using the research advisor's sampling table (The Research Advisors, 2006). From each university, a simple random sampling strategy was preferred since it offered equal chances of participation for all teacher-trainees. The teacher-trainees were equally distributed across the year of study and aggregated

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by gender. Random numbers were used to select respondents from the respective matriculation lists. Numbers one and two were randomly placed in a box and only those who selected number two were included in the study.

Measures

***The Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE) Scale*:** Data was collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. A 49-item Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE) tool developed by Kohn et al. (1990) was used to measure stress. This inventory has seven sub-scales namely, developmental challenges (10-items, α=.79), time pressure (7-items, α=.79), academic alienation (3-items, α=.79), romantic problems (3-items, α=.73), assorted annoyances (5-items, α=.47), general social mistreatment (6-items, α=.76), and friendship problems (3-item, α=.68) but only five sub-scales with 28 items were considered. The sub-scales considered in this study were development challenges, romantic problems, general social mistreatment, time pressure, and academic alienation. However, developmental challenges were reworded to academic difficulties and general social mistreatment to social alienation, to generate relevant data for the current study. The ICSRLE tool was measured on a four-point Likert scale as follows: 4 =Very much part of my life, 3 = Distinctly part of my life, 2 = Only slightly part of my life, and 1=Not at all part of my life. The sub-scales of the ICSRLE tool in the current study were all reliable. Academic difficulties α = 0.806, romantic problems α = 0.834, social alienation α = 0.811, academic alienation α = 0.813 and time pressure α = 0.865, and the overall alpha for the tool was α = 0.884.

Coping Operations Preference Enquiry (COPE) Inventory: A 52-item COPE inventory was used to measure coping strategies (Carver et al., 1989). The COPE inventory has three sub-scales, namely, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping. Problem-focused coping is a 5-sub-scale with four items each on five sub-scales of active coping (4-items, α =.62), planning (4-items, α =.80), suppression of competing activities (4-items, α =.68), restraint coping (4-items, α =.72) and seeking of instrumental social support (4-items, α =.75). Emotion-focused coping is a 5-sub-scale with four items each on, seeking of emotional social support (4-items, α =.85), positive reinterpretation and growth (4-items, α =.68), acceptance (4-items, α =.65), denial (4-items, α =.71), and turning to religion (4-items, α =.92). Three scales measured avoidant coping responses; focus on and venting emotions (4-items, α =.77), behavioural disengagement (4-items, α =.63), and mental disengagement (4-items, α =.45). The COPE inventory was measured on a four-point scale Likert scale as follows 4 = I usually do this a lot, 3 = I usually do this a medium moment, 2 = I usually do this a little bit, 1 = I usually don't do this at all.

The Brief Cope: A 28-item with 14 subscales and 28 items was also used to measure coping strategies. The study used one sub-scale of substance abuse (2 - items, α = .90) since the factor loading was higher than the original long COPE (Carver, 1997). The Brief Cope was coded as follows: 4= I usually do this a lot, 3= I usually do this a medium moment, 2= I usually do this a little bit, 1= I usually don't do this at all.

Degree Classification Scale: University academic performance was measured using GPA or CGPA from the degree classification scale. The self-reported GPA or CGPA on the grading scale was categorised as first class (4.40-5.00), second class upper division (3.60-3.59), second class lower division (2.80-3.59), and third class-pass (2.00-2.79). A similar grading system is used in all universities in Uganda.

Data Management: Before data was analysed, it underwent a number of processes that included data processing and management. Data collected involved several steps, such as coding, entering, and cleaning, which was done both manually and electronically to detect and correct key errors,

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incomplete data, and detection of outliers. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS) version 25. Diagnostic tests were conducted to test for normality, linearity and collinearity. Frequency tables were further used to detect wrong data entry and outliers and thereafter they were removed.

Data Analysis: Data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software. Descriptive analysis was conducted to analyse the GCPA and classification of the degree and findings presented using a frequency table. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and regression analyses were conducted to determine the relationships and magnitude of effect of stressors and coping strategies on the academic performance of teacher-trainees.

Ethics: The researchers received ethical approval from Mbarara University of Science and Technology Research Ethics Committee (MUST-2024-1722) and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (SS3485ES). Clearance was further sought from the deans of the respective schools and faculties of Education. Consent forms were signed since all respondents were adults after explaining the advantages of the study. Privacy and confidentiality was ensured through concealment of the identity of the participants.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study sought views on the effect of stressors and coping strategies on the academic performance of teacher-trainees from year one to year three of study. Respondents from first and second years were approximately the same number, with 208 teacher-trainees (37.5%) from the first year and 207 teacher-trainees (37.4%) from the second year. The third year had the least with 139 (25.1%) respondents. The majority of the respondents were female 54.2% and males 45.8%. Most of the respondents were enrolled on the BA(ED) programme (60.1%) and (39.5%) in the BSc(Ed).

Academic Performance of Teacher-Trainees

Results in Table 1 indicate the respondents' current CGPA up to semester one of the academic year (AY) 2024/2025 to ascertain their academic performance.

Table 1: Current CGPA of Respondents in Years Two and Three

Class of Degree	Frequency	Percent
4.40-5.00	20	3.6
3.60-4.39	186	33.6
2.80-3.59	135	24.4
2.00-2.79	5	0.9
Total	**346**	**62.5**
Excluded	**208**	**37.5**

The results in Table 1 show the distribution of CGPA for the second and third year teacher-trainees. The findings indicate that most respondents 186 (33.6 %) scored between 3.60-4.39 (second class upper), 135 teacher-trainees (24.4%) scored between 2.80-3.59 (second class lower), 20 teacher-trainees (3.6%) scored between 4.40-5.00 (first class), and 5 teacher-trainees (0.9%) scored between 2-00-2.79 (pass degree). Although views on the effect of stressors and coping strategies used were sought from all the 554 teacher-trainees from year one to year three, 208 (37.5%) teacher-trainees in their first year of study were excluded from further analyses on the impact of stressors and coping strategies on academic performance since they had not received their semester one results at the time of data collection.

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Effect of Stressors on Academic Performance

The first objective was to determine whether a relationship existed between stressors and academic performance. Thus, to establish whether stressors affected the academic performance of teacher-trainees, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was conducted and the findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Stressors and Academic Performance

		Coping	Academic Performance (CGPA)
Stressors	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	554	
Academic Performance (CGPA)	Pearson Correlation	-0.239**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	346	346

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results in Table 2 above revealed a significantly negative relationship between stressors and academic performance of teacher-trainees in three universities in the Central region, Uganda, where ($r=-0.239^{**}$, $p=0.000< 0.05$). This negative correlation implied that as stress increased, the academic performance of teacher-trainees reduced. The linear regression analysis was used to evaluate whether stressors had a significant relationship with the academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region of Uganda. The regression analysis findings are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Regression Model for Stressors and Academic Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.239[a]	0.057	0.055
a. Predictors: (Constant), Stressors			

Source*: Primary data*

Results in Table 3 present the linear regression results for stressors and academic performance. The findings revealed the correlation coefficient (R = 0.239), coefficient of determination R Square = 0.057 and Adjusted R Square = 0.055. An Adjusted R Square of 0.055 implied that stressors accounted for 5.5% of the differences in the academic performance of teacher-trainees in the three universities in the Central region, Uganda. Thus, besides stressors, other factors contribute to the academic performance of teacher-trainees that were not considered in this study.

Additionally, in order to establish whether the model was significant, further analyses were conducted and the ANOVA and correlation findings are presented in Table 4 below.

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Table 4: ANOVA and Regression Coefficients for Stressors and Academic Performance

		ANOVA		Coefficients		
Model	Df	F	P	Un Standardized Beta Coefficient	T	P
Regression	1	20.900	0.000[b]	-0.201 -4.572		0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance (CGPA)
b. Predictors: (Constant), Coping Strategies

The results in Table 4 showed the ANOVA regression model for stressors and academic performance. In order to determine whether the model was significant, the p-value had to be less than 0.05. This model was found to be statistically significant (F= 20.900, df= 1, p=0.000< 0.05). The findings implied that stressors were significant predictors of academic performance. The regression analysis was further intended to ascertain how each of the measures of stressors impacted academic performance and the results are included in Table 5 below.

Regression Coefficients for Individual Measures of Stressors and Academic Performance

The study further sought to establish the impact of each measure of stressors on the academic performance of teacher-trainees. A multivariate regression analysis was conducted and the results are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Multivariate Regression Analysis for Specific Stressors and Academic Performance

Coefficients[a]								
Unstandardised Coefficients				Standardised Coefficients		95% Confidence Interval for B		
Model		B	Std Error	B	T	Sig	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	4.127	0.111		37.316	0.000	3.909	4.344
	RP	-0.061	0.027	-0.133	-2.248	0.125	-0.113	0.008
	ASP	0.030	0.032	0.052	0.929	0.354	-0.033	0.093
	AL	-0.039	0.028	-0.075	-1.383	0.168	-0.095	0.017
	TP	-0.062	0.033	-0.114	-1.870	0.062	-0.126	0.003
	AD	-0.059	0.039	-0.089	-1.502	0.134	-0.136	0.018

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance (Current CGPA)
Key: RP= Romantic Problem, ASP= Assorted Social Problems, AL=Academic Alienation, TP=Time Pressure, AD= Academic Difficulties

The results in Table 5 showed the regression effect of the different measures of stressors on academic performance. The findings revealed that romantic problems had a small negative impact on academic performance (B=-0.061, p=0.125>0.05). This implied that the effect of romantic problems on academic performance was minimal and thus was not a strong predictor of academic performance thus didn't affect teacher-trainees much. Furthermore, the finding revealed that assorted social problems did not have a significant relationship with academic performance (B=-0.30, p=0.0354>0.05. This implied that the associated social problems had a negative impact on academic performance. Additionally, the findings further revealed that academic alienation had a negative impact on academic performance (B = -0.039, p=0.168>0.05). The negative relationship implied that academic alienation has a minimal negative impact on academic performance. Also, time pressure was found to have a small negative impact on academic performance (B=-0.062, p=0.062>0.05). Lastly,

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academic difficulties were found to have no significant impact on academic performance (B=-0.059, p=0.134>0.05). Although stressors were found to have a significant impact on academic performance in Table 2, none of their measures could independently explain the variance in academic performance. Thus, this implied that a combination of academic and non-academic stressors affected teacher-trainees' academic performance.

Effect of Coping Strategies on Academic Performance

The second objective sought to determine whether a relationship existed between coping strategies and academic performance, and a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was conducted and the findings are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Correlation Matrix for Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

		Coping	Academic Performance (CGPA)
Coping	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	554	
Academic Performance (CGPA)	Pearson Correlation	-0.089	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.099	
	N	346	346

*. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

The results in Table 6 above show that there was a negative relationship between coping strategies and academic performance measured by the current CGPA of teacher-trainees in three universities in Central Uganda (r=-0.089, p= 0.099>0.05). The findings further revealed a weak negative correlation between coping strategies and academic performance. This implied there was no significant correlation between coping strategies and academic performance. Thus, the way teacher-trainees coped with stress had a very minimal impact on their academic performance.

The regression analysis was used to evaluate whether stressors had a significant relationship with coping strategies of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda. The regression analysis findings are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Regression Model for Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.089[a]	0.008	0.005
a. Predictors: (Constant), Coping			

Results in Table 7 showed the regression results for coping strategies and academic performance of teacher-trainees as measured by their current CGPA. The findings revealed the correlation coefficient (R = 0.089), coefficient of determination = R Square (= 0.008) and Adjusted R Square = 0.05. An Adjusted R Square of 0.05 implied that coping strategies accounted for 5% of the differences in the academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda. Thus, besides coping strategies, other factors contributed to the academic performance of teacher-trainees that were not considered in this study. The regression analysis confirmed the findings that coping strategies had no significant influence on the academic performance of teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda. The study therefore rejected the research hypothesis that was stated as: There is a significant relationship between coping strategies and academic

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performance among teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda.

Furthermore, as a way of determining whether the model was significant, further analyses were conducted and the ANOVA and regression coefficient results are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8: ANOVA and Regression Coefficients for Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

	ANOVA			Coefficients		
Model	Df	F	Sig.	Standardized Beta Coefficient	T	p
Regression	1	2.744	0.099	-0.089	27.2011	0.000

c. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance (CGPA)

d. Predictors: (Constant), Coping Strategies

Source*: Primary data*

The results in Table 8 showed the ANOVA regression model for coping strategies and academic performance. In order to determine whether the model was significant, the p-value had to be less than 0.05. This model was found not to be statistically significant (F = 2.744, df =1, p=0.099> 0.05). Thus, the results implied that coping strategies were not significant predictors of academic performance and thus other factors could be contributors other than coping strategies.

Regression Coefficients for Individual Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

A multivariate regression analysis was conducted to determine how the three coping strategies of problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies impacted the academic performance of teacher-trainees as measured by their current CGPA. The results are included in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Regression Analysis for Specific Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

Coefficients[a]								
Unstandardised Coefficients				**Standardised Coefficients**			**95% Confidence Interval for B**	
Model		**B**	**Std Error**	**B**	**T**	**Sig**	**Lower Bound**	**Upper Bound**
1	(Constant)	3.906	0.143		27.267	0.000	3.624	4.187
	PFC	0.089	0.056	0.111	1.589	0.113	-0.021	0.200
	EFC	-0.098	0.058	-0.123	-1.705	0.089	-0.212	0.015
	ACS	-0.087	0.045	-0.114	-1.938	0.053	-0.174	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance (Current CGPA)

The results in Table 9 showed the regression effect of the different measures of coping strategies on academic performance. The findings revealed that the problem-focused coping strategy had no significant positive relationship with academic performance (B = 0.089, p = 0.113 > 0.05). This implied that the effect of problem-focused coping on academic performance was minimal and thus was not a strong predictor of academic performance. Therefore, teacher-trainees who used this strategy could have experienced a slight improvement in their academic performance. Additionally, the finding further revealed that emotion-focused coping had no significant negative relationship with academic performance (B=-0.89, p=0.089>0.05. This implied that emotion-focused coping had a negative impact on academic performance and thus should be avoided. Thus, an increase in the use of

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emotion-focused coping could affect academic performance negatively. Lastly, the findings further revealed that avoidance coping strategies had a significant negative impact on academic performance, B=-0. 089, p= 0.053<0.05). The negative relationship implied that avoidance coping was negatively associated with academic performance and thus, teacher-trainees who used it as a coping measure had a negative effect on their CGPA. Therefore, the study concluded that adaptive coping strategies through the use of problem-focused coping had the capacity to improve academic performance, even though the impact was small compared to maladaptive strategies such as emotion-focused and avoidance coping strategies.

DISCUSSION

Relationship between Stressors and Academic Performance

The results in the current study revealed a significant negative relationship between stressors and academic performance, where an increase in stress negatively affected the teacher-trainees' academic performance. This was in agreement with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory, which stated that the relationship between stress and coping strategies influenced many outcomes, such as academic performance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, the findings were in congruence with Kavindi et al. (2024) in their study, which revealed that psychological distress was found to affect academic performance. However, an increase in stress significantly affected academic performance negatively. The findings were supported by other scholars such as Rajamanickam and Senthilnathan (2019), who found a negative correlation between stress and academic performance. Additionally, Malak et al. (2022) in their study found that stress influenced anxiety, which directly affected students' academic performance.

However, the findings were not in congruence with Ntoiti et al. (2024) in their study on mental distress, coping strategies and academic achievement measured by GPA disagreed that coping strategies didn't mediate the relationship between mental distress and academic performance. The findings revealed that high mental distress didn't necessarily lead to low academic performance.

Relationship between Coping Strategies and Academic Performance

The second objective was to establish the relationship between coping strategies and academic performance among teacher-trainees. In this study, academic performance was limited to the current CGPA of the teacher-trainees. The hypothesis, which stated that there is a significant relationship between coping strategies and academic performance among teacher-trainees in universities in the Central region, Uganda, was not supported. The correlation findings revealed that there was a weak negative relationship between coping strategies and academic performance. For instance, how teacher-trainees coped with stress did not significantly impact their academic performance. The results further revealed that teacher trainees who used emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies had a negative impact on their grades. The findings were in agreement with Crego et al. (2016), who revealed that most students coped through emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies, especially venting of emotions. Students who experienced immense pressure emanating from academic stress were found to have poor grades. Additionally, Yazon et al. (2018) revealed that teacher-trainees coped mainly through active coping and seeking social support. The teacher-trainees who coped positively with their academic workloads performed better academically.

More so, Vizoso et al. (2018) in their study on coping, academic engagement and performance in university students found out that academic engagement mediated the relationship between adaptive coping and academic performance. The students became absorbed in their studies, unlike

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those who used maladaptive coping strategies. The findings are in agreement with Martínez et al. (2019), who reported that coping strategies, specifically problem-focused and avoidant coping, contributed to the academic performance of the student. Furthermore, Daraman and Decano (2021) in their study found a significant relationship between stressors and coping strategies among education students that were triggered by factors related to academics, among others.

Additionally, the study confirmed previous studies, such as Kuncharin (2017), that social support from family and peers was instrumental in improving the academic performance of the undergraduate students. The study also identified that most students coped through problem-focused coping, specifically active coping, positive reframing of the problem and planning as mitigating measures to their challenges. In the same vein, Bodys-Cupak et al. (2018) reported that the majority of students coped with stressful situations through the use of active coping methods and searching for emotional and instrumental support. Additionally, Salam et al. (2019) found that the majority of students used task-oriented coping in coping with stressful situations. They further reported a significant difference between years of study, with year ones working harder and planning their tasks in order to fit in the new environment. Olson et al. (2024) pointed out that the majority of teacher-trainees at a mid-public university used problem-focused coping strategies specifically seeking instrumental support, which implied they got support from peers and family in managing difficult situations. Also, they utilised active coping. Positive reframing and planning which was instrumental in managing stress and achieving their academic goals.

The study findings were also in agreement with Baaleis and Ali (2018); Kimo and Ayele (2021), whose studies found no significant association between GPA and coping strategies. Kimo and Ayele (2021) specifically found out that the majority of year one students used avoidance coping strategies and because averting the source of the problem affected their academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the current study revealed a negative correlation between stressors and academic performance. Thus, the higher stress levels negatively impacted teacher-trainees' academic performance. Additionally, the results found a negative relationship between coping strategies and academic performance. Problem-focused coping was found to have a significant positive effect on academic performance, whereas emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies negatively impact academic performance. It was therefore noted that teacher-trainees used myriad coping strategies to mitigate pressure from stress.

Recommendations

There is a need to strengthen counselling programmes to enable students to manage a stressful academic journey. The university counsellors could adopt a peer counselling strategy to access many students. Orientation for new students and continuous mentorship and support should be availed to students. The student should be guided in setting realistic goals that would enable them to navigate through their studies successfully.

The results may enable university managers to prioritise mentorship programmes for students to prepare them for life after university. Most students, especially in their final academic year, tend to experience stress from expectations after campus. Thus, the use of adaptive coping strategies would enable them to cope with perceived stress positively.

Research Limitations

The key limitation in this study was that the academic performance of first-year students was excluded from the study since data collection was at a point before receiving their semester one results. Thus, a study can be extended to other universities in Uganda and includes results for all years of study.

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The study further focused on two programmes and could be extended to other programmes and faculties.

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