

**Academic Overload, Academic Stress and Social Development Among
Secondary School Students in Anambra State in a Period of Economic
Uncertainty**

By

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Abstract

The quest to ensure adequate preparation of students in an examination class for maximal achievement in external examinations has pushed many secondary schools into excessively drilling and exposing their students to academic overload despite the glaring debilitating impacts of economic uncertainty in Anambra State. This study explored academic overload as a determinant of academic stress and social development among secondary school examination class students in Anambra state. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at the 0.05 significance level guided the study. The study adopted a correlation research design. The population of the study comprised all the senior secondary 3 students in government-owned secondary schools in Anambra State. A multi-stage random sampling procedure was adopted in drawing 650 respondents for the study. Three sets of researchers' developed instruments titled Academic Overload Questionnaire (AOQ), Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ) and Social Development Questionnaire (SDQ) were used

for the study. The reliability of the instruments was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method and alpha coefficients of 7.0, 7.1 and 6.9 were obtained for AOQ, ASQ and SDQ respectively. Data collected were analyzed using linear regression statistics. The study's findings showed that academic overload accounted for academic stress and negatively affected the social development of examination class students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. It was recommended among others that policymakers should make a policy that will discourage academic overload and ensure proper supervision of schools for compliance.

Keywords: *Academic overload, economic uncertainty, academic stress, social development, secondary school students*

Introduction

The uncertainty that the economic reality of the nation is witnessing has brought anxiety, worry and untold hardship to its citizenry, especially in the middle and lower classes. This class of individuals make up the manpower in white-collar jobs and the artisans. Cases abound of agitations, protests and industrial actions by organized labour and concerned citizens to register their grievances and displeasure over the economic bite in the nation. The economic crunch could be attributed to some causative factors such as fuel subsidy removal, high rate of dollar to naira, exorbitant prices of goods and food, low salaries, and the government's negligence toward the welfare of the masses. Consequent to the economic uncertainty in the nation, parents seem to devote more time to their jobs and shops for more income to make ends meet. In a bid to make ends meet, most parents struggle to survive by cutting costs and avoiding lifestyles that could place extra demands on their meagre incomes. One of the factors that could exert pressure on the financial muscle of parents in this period of economic uncertainty is the financial demands of academic overload.

The issue of academic overload has become a great concern to many parents and well-meaning stakeholders in education due to not only its debilitating impacts on students but also its financial demands on parents. Cases abound in secondary schools in Nigeria where students especially those in examination classes are exposed to excessive academic workload (Eduwem & Ezeonwumelu, 2020; Kanu & Simon, 2020; Ogba, 2020) possibly, as a means of getting them adequately prepared for external examinations. It is noteworthy that secondary education in Nigeria is divided into junior and senior levels. Each of the levels lasts for 3 years. Once the students in either the junior or senior level get to the third year which marks the end of each level, they are referred to as students in examination class. Examination class students sit for external examinations such as the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) or WAEC/JAMB to certify them for either moving from junior to senior secondary level of education or from senior secondary level to tertiary education respectively. This certification is paramount and calls for serious preparations of the examination class students.

Preparation of students in examination classes for any of the external examinations for junior or senior students requires serious academic efforts and engagement which often takes a toll on not only the students involved but also on the teachers and parents. The efforts by teachers most often come in the form of making the students stay back in school after the official school hours for extra-mural classes, giving excessive take-home assignments, making available different past external examinations question papers for study to possibly cover lost grounds as per external

examination curriculum for the period. On the part of parents, they spend so much to buy various books, ensure that their wards study most of the time and spend late nights either studying or writing assignments. Parents also pay exorbitant fees for the extra-mural classes despite their struggle in this period of economic uncertainty and pay other sundry levies the school usually place on students in the name of preparing them for external examinations. Parents' desire to have their wards perform well in external examinations would drive them to make efforts geared towards ensuring that their wards participate in preparatory experiences for external examinations. It may not be out of place to insinuate that most secondary school authorities resort to academic overload as a means of showcasing their schools for public attraction when outstanding achievement is recorded by their students which will no doubt, attract more students to enrol in their schools. Thus, in a bid to ensure that students are adequately prepared for external examinations, most schools subject their students in examination classes to excessive academic activities and learning experiences.

Academic overload seems to be prevalent in schools in Nigeria, especially at the secondary school level. Scholars aver that Nigeria is faced with the burden of curriculum overload (Ogba, 2020; Uwadileke & Madu, 2019; Ahmadi & Luckmann, 2015) and this could be the reason most schools resort to excessively drilling their students as a means of getting them adequately prepared for external examinations. Academic overload in secondary schools especially in Basic 12 or SS3 manifests through information overload, excessive homework, extra-mural classes, and an over-loaded curriculum experience possibly, to ensure that the students perform better in official, scholarship and university admission examinations (Ismail, 2022; Eduwem & Ezeonwumelu, 2020; Kanu & Simon, 2020; Ogba, 2020; Anierobi, Okeke, Nwikpo & Unachukwu, 2019; Ezechukwu & Osuala, 2019; Solomon, Edward & Wanlo). It is a fact that most secondary schools especially in Nigeria commence academic activities between 8.00 a.m. and stretch same till around 6.00 pm (Anierobi, Okeke, Nwikpo & Unachukwu, 2019; Agommuoh & Kalu-Joseph, 2019; Onyekanmi, 2019) perhaps, in the name of preparing their students in examination classes for external examinations despite the attendant consequences on both teachers and the students.

Academic overload does not go without diverse consequences on both the teachers and the students. For instance, academic overload hampers mental health and leads to depression and dropping out of school (Kanu & Simon, 2020). In his perspective, Uganga (2012) asserted that over-drilling of students could overstimulate the brain which can negatively affect the learners' brains. Scholars showed that academic overload on the child leads to pressure, and limits students' activities outside school boredom/stress, fatigue, and inadequate time for play/exploring their environment (Omede & Jimba, 2019; Regoli, 2019). Regoli cautioned that improving the cognitive competence of the students is paramount but without negligence to social setting This could be because curriculum overload negatively impacts both the teachers and the students due to the lack of emotional rest and coping skills arising from inadequate time to cover the curriculum content (Okogba in Ogba, 2020; Majoni, 2017). Despite the recorded negative impact of curriculum overload on teachers and students, parents have a different perception of the academic overload of students. To the parents, academic overload has no negative impact on the student's mental, social, physical, and emotional development (Ovute & Ovute, 2019).

Although Okeke, Anene and Agu (2022) revealed that excessive academic activities have a tremendous impact on the academic achievement of students, others show that it has little impact on the student's academic achievement (Oyekanmi, 2019;

Ezechukwu & Osuala, 2019). Similarly, but from a general perspective, Eduwem & Ezeonwumelu (2020) observed that academic overload promotes learning effectiveness among students. In their study, Solomon, Edward and Wanlo (2019) found no significant difference between the academic achievement of students who were involved in extra-lessons and others who were not and further showed that almost all the students were not interested in extra-lessons. Nevertheless, Oyekanmi (2019) further showed that most students involved in excessive academic workload are irregular to school, do not pay enough attention to teachers, suffer from returning home late and have the tendency to drop out of school. One can, thus, adduce from Oyekanmi that the negative experiences that students exhibit due to academic overload could be a pointer to the manifestation of academic stress.

Contextually, academic stress is a negative psychological construct arising from fatigue and undue mental pressure because of studying or engaging in academic tasks beyond the attention span of the student. Generally, humans face stress in their daily life activities and no profession or vocation is without a touch of stress. Most times, people subject themselves to undue pressure making them vulnerable to stressors perhaps, to meet up with the demands of their profession or vocation. The demands of schooling and academic responsibilities make students vulnerable to stress. Edjah, Ankomah, Domey and Laryea (2020) opined that stress relates to students' lives. This could be attributed to the fact that there are always challenging academic demands which in a bid to be fulfilled can no doubt make students struggle with some level of discomfort and put them under stress. Buttressing this assertion, Eduwem and Ezeonwumelu (2020) aver that contemporary students have curriculum overload and excessive daily academic activities to contend with. Though, Edjah et al (2020) showed that stress positively impacted both the academic and social life of students, while on the other hand, Venna and Shailaja (2016) and Wani et al (2018) found that stress hurts and decreased the academic performance of students. Apart from experiencing possible academic stress, students exposed to academic overload can have their social development affected.

Man, no doubt is a social being and proper socialization contributes to the wholesome development of individuals. Socialization starts at home with parents, siblings, and significant others. As individuals get to the secondary school level which can be considered as the period of adolescence, they begin to break away from family to socialize with peers (Anierobi et al, 2020). Socializing with peers becomes their preference over their stay with parents and significant others. In the bid to socialize and be accepted by peers, these students begin to form affiliations with peer groups and cliques. According to Anierobi et al (2016), students in their adolescence stage join different peer groups and identify themselves with these groups by participating in their activities in order not to be rejected. Nwikpo et al (2020) posited that adolescents are made socially adaptable through the process of socialization stressing further that socialization with peers provides adolescents with an avenue to form lifestyles suitable to them. Adequate socialization experiences by adolescents can stimulate social development in them while it can be adduced that lack of adequate socialization can hamper the social development of students.

Literature Review

Overview of Academic Overload

Academic overload refers to overindulging, excessively subjecting and overdrilling students through academic activities. Kamel (2018) posited that academic overload occurs when students feel encumbered by the demands of their academic

lives. In other words, it implies engaging and burdening students with an excessive academic workload which could be detrimental to their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development (Umezulike & Osuala, 2019). Academic overload may take many forms such as presenting students with a curriculum above their grade level, subjecting them to extra-mural classes that make them stay back in school after the official school hours, giving students excessive take-home assignments, and subjecting them to weekend classes against the official school days. In their perspective, Umezulike and Osuala (2019) listed the causes of academic overload as follows: parents enrolling their children on extra-mural classes to have time for their businesses instead of taking part in their children's learning; ignorance of the consequences of excessive academic workload on students; the quest for academic diamond and to maintain family's pride; excessive urge to make money by schools and lack of monitoring by necessary authorities over the implementation of the planned curriculum.

Academic Overload and Academic Stress

Previous studies were inconsistent in linking academic overload with academic stress. For instance, Adom, Chukwuere and Osei (2020) observed proper management of stress which could arise from academic overload helps in both promoting academic work and eliciting of good academic outcomes from students. Subtly, Ovute & Ovute (2019) showed that academic overload has no negative impact on the student's mental, social, physical, and emotional development. In other words, Ovute and Ovute could not marry academic overload with academic stress. Nevertheless, some schools of thought observed that academic pressures arising from external and internal expectations of the students are major causes of academic stress (Oji, Ondieki & Ouko, 2021; Aafreen et al, 2018; Reddy et al, 2018). Similarly, Omar et al (2019), connected excessive demands and pressures of academic activities and poor time management with academic stress. Academic pressure can indirectly emanate from academic overload experiences. Okeke et al (2019) revealed that academic overload leads to academic stress through their study on the impact that academic overload has on the intellectual and emotional development of pupils. In line with this thought, Gogoi and Sahoo (2019) construed that academic stress is a mental cum emotional pressure related to new challenges related to acquiring academic knowledge. Given this diverse finding by scholars, the researchers posit that:

1. The relationship between academic overload and the academic stress of secondary school examination class students in Anambra State will be positive.
2. There will be no significant relationship between academic overload and the academic stress of secondary school examination class students in Anambra State

Academic Overload and Social Development

Empirical studies showed that academic overload hinders students from adequately interacting and socializing with their environment (Anierobi et al, 2019; Ezechukwu and Osuala, 2019). This implies that the time spent by students in giving attention to homework, overloaded curriculum and extramural classes eats deeply into the students' leisure time limiting their opportunity for interacting with and exploring their wider environment. More so, scholars (Omede & Jimba, 2019; Okonkwo, 2014) revealed that academic overload has negative consequences not only on psychosocial development but also on the overall development of the child. The child's overall

development includes his psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being, which can be grossly affected by excessive academic pressures and stress. Sharing the same perspective, Myrtaj (2018) reported that excessive homework affects the social and emotional development of students. Despite these findings on the negative impacts of academic overload on the socialization of students, Ovute & Ovute (2019) observed differences in their study which showed that academic overload has no negative impact on students' social development. Given this diverse finding by scholars, the researchers posit that:

3. The relationship between academic overload and the social development of secondary school examination class students in Anambra State will be positive.
4. There will be no significant relationship between academic overload and the social development of secondary school examination class students in Anambra State

This study hinges on the import of developmental theories asserting that effective learning should cultivate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains which make for the proper development of the learner. For instance, the theory of psycho-social development by Erik Erickson (1963) accentuated the significance of social interactions and exploration of the environment in learning and development which give room for creativity, independent thinking, reflections, and the development of one's skills. This healthy experience could be mostly stifled by academic overload which has become a norm in public secondary schools in Anambra State, especially for examination classes. Despite various studies on the causes, perceptions, consequences and impacts of academic overload on students, there seems to be a dearth of studies on such factors as the relationship academic overload has with academic stress and the social development of students which is the focus of this study.

Method

The study adopted a correlation research design given that the researchers intend to determine the relationship existing between academic overload as the independent variable and each of the dependent variables namely: academic stress and social development. The participants of the study include all senior secondary class 3 students in the 257 government secondary schools in Anambra State. A sample size of 595 senior secondary class 3 students was drawn through a multi-stage random sampling procedure, from the education zones in Anambra State. Firstly, purposive random sampling was used to draw three education zones, namely: Onitsha, Nnewi and Awka which are considered urban areas where parents would likely place high value on education and pay any price to ensure adequate preparation that could lead to academic success of their children. Secondly, simple random sampling was further used in drawing three schools each from Onitsha, Nnewi and Awka. Finally, simple random sampling by balloting system was used to draw SS3 students in the schools at the time of distributing the questionnaires. The students' consent was sought before the process of sampling, and they were assured anonymity. This was to give the respondents room to willingly be part of the study. After filling the questionnaires, 49 copies were invalid and not used for the analysis. Consequently, a total number of 546 (Male, 235 and females, 311) formed the sample size used for the study.

Three sets of researchers' developed instruments titled: Academic Overload Questionnaire (AOQ), Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ) and Social Development Questionnaire (SDQ) were used for data collection. AOQ is a 7-item questionnaire, ASQ is a 12-item questionnaire while SDQ is a 7-item questionnaire and all were structured on a four-point response scale of always (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) and never (1). The instruments were validated by three scholars in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe Azikiwe University, Awka. The instruments were trial tested to ensure that they are reliable for use using the Cronbach Alpha method statistics and alpha coefficients of 7.0, 7.1 and 6.9 were obtained for AOQ, ASQ and SDQ respectively. Data collected were analyzed using the Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient to answer research questions while linear regression statistics was used for testing the null hypotheses.

Results

Table 1: Students' Socio-demographic Characteristics

	Mean	SD	Frequency
Percentage (%)			
Age	16.97	1.24	-
-			
Gender			
Male	-	-	235
39.5			
Female	-	-	311
52.3			
Total	-	-	546
91.8			
Missing Values	-	-	49
8.2			

Source: Field Work (2023)

Table 1 shows students' socio-demographic characteristics. In terms of gender of the respondents, males comprised 39.5% while their female counterparts comprised 52.3% with a mean age of 16.97. The missing value comprised 8.2%.

Table 2: Simple Correlation Matrix of Academic Overload and Academic Stress and

S/N	Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2
29.	Academic Overload	546	19.90	1.03	1	
30.	Academic Stress	546	20.44	3.01	.259**	1
31.	Social Development	546	18.43	3.96	-.445**	-

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

Social Development

N= number of participants; M= mean score; SD= standard deviation

Table 2 showed that academic overload has a positive relationship ($r = 2.59$) with academic stress of SS3 public secondary school students in Anambra while its relationship ($r = -.445$) with their social development is negative.

Table 3: *Linear Regression Analysis for Academic Overload and Academic Stress*

Model Sig.	Unstandardized		Standardized	T
	Coefficients		Coefficients	
	B	Std Error	Beta	
Constant			5.364	2.42
2.22	.027			
Academic Overload		.758	.121	.259
6.25	.000			
R	.259			.0
00				
R ²	.067			.0
00				
F				
39.019	.000			

22. Dependent Variable: Academic Stress

Table 3 revealed an F-ratio ($F = 39.019$, $N = 546$); R^2 ($\beta = .067$) with associated probability value ($p < .05$, 0.000). The p-value ($p \leq .005$) is less than 0.05 and therefore, found significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Inference drawn was, therefore, that there is a significant and positive relationship between academic overload and SS3 students' academic stress in Anambra State.

Table 4: *Linear Regression Analysis for Academic Overload and Social Development*

Model Sig.	Unstandardized		Standardized	T
	Coefficients		Coefficients	
	B	Std Error	Beta	
Constant			52.488	2.94
17.829	.000			
Academic Overload		-1.712	.148	-.445
11.585	.000			
R	.445			.0
00				
R ²	.198			.0
00				
F				
134.129	.000			

18. Dependent Variable: Social Development

Table 3 revealed an F-ratio ($F = 134.129$, $N = 546$); R^2 ($\beta = .198$) with associated probability value ($p < .05$, 0.000). The p-value ($p \leq .005$) is less than 0.05 and therefore, found significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Inference drawn was, therefore, that there is a significant but negative relationship between academic overload and SS3 students' social development in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

The researchers set out to determine the relationship between academic overload as an independent variable and academic stress and social development as dependent variables. The study's findings showed that academic overload has a positive relationship with the academic stress of senior secondary class 3 students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. When further subjected to testing, the

result was significant. This positive relationship implies that the academic stress that the students experience increases as their academic load increases. This finding validates existing literature that links academic overload to academic stress among students (Oji, Ondieki & Ouko, 2021; Okeke et al, 2019; Omar et al 2019; Aafreen et al, 2018; Reddy et al, 2018).

The study found that academic overload has a negative relationship with the social development of senior secondary class 3 students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. When subjected to further testing, the result was significant at the 0.005 level of significance. This reveals that the social development of the students decreases as their academic load increases. This finding aligns with Anierobi et al (2019) and Ezechukwu and Osuala (2019) who found that academic overload hinders students from adequately interacting and socializing with their environment. This implies that the time spent by students in giving attention to homework, overloaded curriculum and extramural classes eats deeply into the students' leisure time limiting their opportunity for interacting with and exploring their wider environment. It also agrees with Omede and Jimba, (2019) and Okonkwo, (2014) who showed that academic overload has negative consequences not only on the psychosocial development but on the overall development of the child. The child's overall development includes his psychological, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being. The finding equally corroborates with Myrtaj (2018) that excessive homework affects the social and emotional development of students. However, the finding of this study disagrees with Ovute and Ovute (2019) who showed that academic overload has no negative impact on students' social development. This disparity could be because of the class level of participants involved in both studies. Preparing for external examinations is taken more seriously by schools, parents and students alike due to the critical stage of the students, than other students that are not examination classes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that academic overload is a factor in academic stress experienced by senior secondary class three students and impacts negatively on their social development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

20. In this period of economic uncertainty in the nation, policymakers should make a policy that will discourage academic overload and ensure proper supervision of schools for compliance.
21. Parents should be enlightened through organized programmes on the debilitating impacts of academic overload on the general well-being and development of their children.
22. School authorities should ensure that students are exposed to the curriculum scope meant for their chronological age without keeping them beyond the official school closing time.
23. Educational psychologists should be employed in secondary schools to help students in managing academic stress.

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