

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES AND MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC PRESSURE AMONG STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of academic pressure among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised 100,056 respondents, consisting of students and counselling staff in four selected higher education institutions in Rivers State. A sample of 706 respondents was selected, comprising 650 students and 56 counselling staff. Data were collected using the Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Students' Stress Management Questionnaire (GCPSSMQ), while 684 completed copies were found usable for analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that guidance and counselling programmes were positively related to students' management of emotional pressure ($r = .462, p < .05$), workload stress ($r = .518, p < .05$), and performance anxiety ($r = .487, p < .05$). The findings indicate that guidance and counselling programmes are associated with students' ability to manage important dimensions of academic pressure. It was therefore recommended that higher education institutions should strengthen counselling services and ensure that students have regular access to professional guidance and counselling support for emotional pressure, academic workload and performance anxiety.

Keywords: *Guidance and counselling, academic pressure, emotional pressure, workload stress*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is an important avenue for developing human capacity and preparing individuals for productive participation in society. However, students in higher institutions are exposed to a range of academic demands, including lectures, assignments, examinations, presentations, projects and other assessment activities. These demands may generate different forms of academic pressure, particularly when students perceive that the demands placed upon them exceed their available coping resources. Academic pressure may manifest through emotional strain, workload stress and anxiety associated with academic performance, with possible consequences for students' concentration, motivation, psychological well-being and academic engagement (Ajayi & Akinola, 2021; Odetola & Adebayo, 2022).

Emotional pressure constitutes an important dimension of students' academic experiences. Students may experience tension, frustration, fear, worry and feelings of inadequacy when attempting to meet academic expectations. Family expectations, peer comparison, academic competition and concerns about future achievement may further intensify these experiences (Owolabi, 2020; Nwosu & Oladipo, 2022). Where such emotional demands are inadequately managed, students may experience reduced concentration, irritability, withdrawal and diminished engagement with academic activities. Workload stress is another important dimension of academic pressure. It arises when students perceive the volume, complexity or timing of academic tasks as difficult to manage. Assignments, examinations, projects, presentations and multiple course requirements may place considerable demands on students' time and energy. Studies have associated excessive academic workload with fatigue, sleep disturbances, anxiety, procrastination and reduced academic engagement (Ajayi & Akinola, 2021; Hussain, 2025). Effective time management, prioritization,

planning and appropriate coping strategies are therefore important for helping students respond constructively to academic demands.

Performance anxiety is associated particularly with examinations, presentations and other situations in which students' abilities are evaluated. Fear of failure, concern about grades and apprehension about negative evaluation may interfere with students' concentration and confidence. Excessive performance anxiety may consequently undermine academic engagement and performance (Eze & Chukwu, 2023; Nwosu & Oladipo, 2022). Appropriate psychological and academic support may help students develop confidence and coping strategies for dealing with evaluative situations.

Guidance and counselling programmes provide institutional support through individual counselling, group counselling, academic guidance, mentoring, stress management activities and other interventions designed to assist students in dealing with personal, social and academic challenges. Counselling can provide students with opportunities to understand their emotional responses, develop coping strategies, improve time management and challenge unhelpful patterns of thinking (Daulay et al., 2022). Evidence reviewed in the source study also indicates that counselling interventions can assist students in managing academic stress and anxiety through emotional support, problem-solving, cognitive restructuring and related strategies.

In Rivers State, higher education institutions serve large and diverse student populations and provide academic environments characterised by substantial educational demands. Although counselling services exist in the selected institutions, questions remain concerning the extent to which such programmes are related to students' management of emotional pressure, workload stress and performance anxiety. The present study therefore examines the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and these three dimensions of academic pressure among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, students in higher education should have access to effective guidance and counselling services capable of helping them cope with academic and emotional demands. Counselling programmes should provide students with appropriate opportunities to develop emotional regulation, time management, problem-solving and coping skills. Such support is expected to assist students in managing emotional pressure, coping with academic workload and approaching examinations and other evaluative activities with greater confidence.

In practice, however, students in higher education continue to encounter emotional pressure, excessive workload and performance anxiety. The source study indicates that students may face difficulties arising from academic expectations, multiple assignments, examinations, deadlines, fear of failure and pressure from teachers, peers and family. At the same time, challenges relating to awareness, accessibility, staffing and utilisation of counselling services may limit the extent to which students benefit from available support.

The problem, therefore, is not simply the existence of academic pressure but the uncertainty concerning the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' ability to manage its major dimensions. Although previous studies have examined counselling and academic stress, the evidence available for the selected higher education institutions in Rivers State remains limited. This study consequently investigates the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure, workload stress and performance anxiety among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and management of academic pressure among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure among students;

2. Determine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of workload stress among students; and
3. Assess the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of performance anxiety among students.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of workload stress among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of performance anxiety among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State.
- H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of workload stress among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State.
- H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of performance anxiety among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Guidance and Counselling Programmes

Guidance and counselling programmes are structured educational and psychological support services designed to assist students in dealing with personal, academic, social and career-related challenges. In higher education, such programmes may include individual and group counselling, academic guidance, career guidance, mentoring, stress management activities and referral services. Their broad purpose is to facilitate students' adjustment, personal development and academic functioning. The literature reviewed in the source study indicates that counselling can assist students in identifying sources of stress, regulating emotions and developing appropriate coping strategies. Daulay et al. (2022), for example, identified individual counselling, group guidance, rational-emotive approaches and problem-solving interventions as useful approaches to academic stress management. Counselling can therefore provide both emotional support and practical skills that enable students to respond more effectively to academic demands. However, the effectiveness of counselling programmes may depend on their accessibility, quality and responsiveness to students' needs. The source study identifies inadequate personnel, limited resources, insufficient awareness and stigma surrounding help-seeking as challenges that may constrain the utilisation of counselling services. These factors make empirical examination of counselling programmes particularly important within specific institutional contexts.

Emotional Pressure and Counselling

Emotional pressure refers to the emotional strain students experience when academic and related expectations become difficult to manage. It may involve anxiety, frustration, fear, worry and emotional exhaustion. Academic demands, family expectations, peer comparison and concerns

about academic achievement can contribute to emotional pressure among students (Gross & Jazaieri, 2020). Counselling may assist students in managing emotional pressure by providing opportunities for emotional expression, cognitive restructuring, problem-solving and development of coping skills. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping suggests that stress is influenced by how individuals appraise demands and the resources they perceive as available for coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). From this perspective, counselling may strengthen students' coping resources and help them interpret academic challenges in more manageable ways.

Empirical evidence reviewed in the source study supports this position. Daulay et al. (2022) reported that structured counselling interventions can reduce academic stress and its associated psychological consequences. Similarly, studies reviewed in the original work indicate that group counselling, emotional support and problem-solving interventions can improve students' coping capacity and emotional adjustment.

Workload Stress and Counselling

Workload stress arises when students perceive that the volume or intensity of academic responsibilities exceeds their capacity to organize and complete them effectively. Assignments, examinations, projects, presentations and multiple course requirements may create substantial pressure, particularly when students have limited time-management and organizational skills. Effective counselling may help students develop time-management, prioritization, goal-setting and study-planning skills. The source study's review of Kausar (2005) indicates that perceived academic workload was positively associated with stress, while problem-focused coping strategies such as planning and task prioritization were associated with better stress management. Counselling programmes may therefore contribute to workload management by helping students develop practical strategies for organizing their academic responsibilities. The source literature also indicates that counselling cannot eliminate the actual amount of academic work assigned to students. Rather, it may strengthen students' capacity to organize and cope with those demands. Consequently, counselling interventions may be more effective when complemented by supportive institutional practices relating to assessment scheduling, academic guidance and workload management.

Performance Anxiety and Counselling

Performance anxiety refers to apprehension associated with situations in which students' knowledge or abilities are evaluated. Examinations, presentations, practical assessments and other forms of academic evaluation can trigger fear of failure, self-doubt and concern about negative judgement. Excessive anxiety may interfere with concentration, confidence and performance (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Counselling programmes may help students manage performance anxiety through cognitive restructuring, relaxation, positive self-talk, preparation strategies and behavioural rehearsal. The source study reports evidence from Al-Qaisy et al. (2023), Musa and Ahmed (2024), Kaur and Singh (2023) and Okoro and Nwankwo (2022), indicating that structured counselling and cognitive-behavioural interventions were associated with reductions in academic or test anxiety and improvements in students' coping and confidence. The evidence suggests that counselling may provide students with psychological and practical resources for approaching performance situations more effectively. Nevertheless, performance anxiety may also be influenced by previous academic experiences, family expectations, peer competition and perceived consequences of failure. Counselling should therefore be understood as one component of a broader system of academic and psychological support.

Empirical Review

The empirical studies reviewed in the source document generally indicate positive relationships between counselling support and students' management of academic stress. Studies of counselling interventions have reported improvements in emotional regulation, coping skills, time management and confidence. Daulay et al. (2022) reported beneficial effects of counselling interventions on

academic stress, while Kausar (2005) highlighted the importance of coping strategies in managing workload-related stress. Al-Qaisy et al. (2023) and Okoro and Nwankwo (2022) reported reductions in performance-related anxiety following counselling interventions. Although these studies provide useful evidence, variations in population, educational setting, intervention and methodology indicate the need for context-specific research. The present study addresses this need by examining the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and three dimensions of academic pressure among students in selected higher education institutions in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was appropriate because the study sought to determine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' management of emotional pressure, workload stress and performance anxiety without manipulating the variables.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Rivers State, Nigeria. The selected institutions were Rivers State University, University of Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic. The institutions were selected because of their sizeable student populations and the availability of guidance and counselling services.

Population and Sample

The population comprised students and staff involved in guidance and counselling programmes in the four selected institutions during the 2024/2025 academic session. The combined student population was approximately 100,000, while 56 staff were involved in guidance and counselling services. The sample consisted of 706 respondents: 650 students and 56 counselling staff. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used for the students, while total enumeration was used for counselling staff.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample by Institution

Institution	Student Population	Student Sample	Counselling Staff	Total Sample
Rivers State University	28,000	182	28	210
University of Port Harcourt	38,000	247	11	258
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education	25,000	163	12	175
Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic	9,000	58	5	63
Total	100,000	650	56	706

Instrumentation

Data were collected using the Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Students' Stress Management Questionnaire (GCPSMSMQ). The instrument contained demographic information and statements relating to guidance and counselling programmes and the three dimensions examined in the present journal paper. Responses were structured on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree = 1.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Guidance and Counselling, Educational Psychology, and Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability was established using the test-retest procedure with 30 respondents outside the study area, and the two administrations were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted for interpreting the four-point scale. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to

test each null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. A probability value below 0.05 constituted a basis for rejecting the null hypothesis.

Data Analysis and Results

A total of 706 questionnaires were administered, while 684 usable responses formed the basis of the statistical analysis. The results are presented according to the three research questions and corresponding hypotheses.

Research Question One

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure among students?

Table 2: Respondents' Responses on Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Emotional Pressure

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Guidance and counselling programmes address emotional pressures related to academic demands.	550	85	40	9	684	3.71	0.66	Accepted
2.	Counselling programmes provide support when students experience emotional strain.	530	110	35	9	684	3.68	0.66	Accepted
3.	Counselling programmes help students regulate their emotions effectively.	540	100	38	6	684	3.71	0.64	Accepted
4.	Counselling services help students cope with anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed by academic tasks.	510	125	40	9	684	3.65	0.68	Accepted
5.	Counselling support helps students control emotional responses to academic pressure.	545	95	35	9	684	3.70	0.65	Accepted
Grand Mean						684	3.69	0.66	Accepted

Criterion mean = 2.50.

Table 2 shows that all five items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.69 indicates a high level of agreement that guidance and counselling programmes are associated with the management of emotional pressure. The responses suggest that counselling provides emotional support, assists students in regulating emotions and helps them cope with anxiety arising from academic demands.

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure among students.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Emotional Pressure

Variables	N	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Guidance and counselling programmes	684	0.462	0.000	Reject H ₀₁
Management of emotional pressure	684			

Table 3 indicates a positive correlation of $r = 0.462$ between guidance and counselling programmes and management of emotional pressure. Since $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, the result indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of emotional pressure among students.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of workload stress among students?

Table 4: Respondents' Responses on Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Workload Stress

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	SD	Decision
6.	Counselling programmes provide practical strategies for managing academic workload.	555	80	38	11	684	3.73		Accepted
7.	Time-management advice obtained through counselling sessions reduces students' stress.	535	105	35	9	684	3.70		Accepted
8.	Counselling interventions help students prioritise academic tasks.	560	75	38	11	684	3.73		Accepted
9.	Guidance and counselling support helps students meet academic deadlines.	505	130	36	13	684	3.65	0.70	Accepted
10.	Counselling programmes help students cope with the volume of academic assignments and tasks.	525	115	35	9	684	3.69	0.67	Accepted
Grand Mean						684	3.70	0.68	Accepted

Criterion mean = 2.50.

Table 4 indicates that all five items recorded mean scores above 2.50. The grand mean of 3.70 demonstrates strong agreement that guidance and counselling programmes are associated with the

management of workload stress. Respondents particularly agreed that counselling provides practical strategies, improves time management and assists students in prioritising academic tasks.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of workload stress among students.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Workload Stress

Variables	N	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Guidance and counselling programmes	684	0.518	0.000	Reject H ₀₂
Management of workload stress	684			

Table 5 shows a positive correlation of $r = 0.518$ between guidance and counselling programmes and management of workload stress. The probability value of 0.000 is below the 0.05 significance level. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and management of workload stress.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of performance anxiety among students?

Table 6: Respondents' Responses on Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Performance Anxiety

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	SD	Decision
11.	Counselling programmes provide strategies for coping with examination anxiety.	520	115	35	14	684	3.67	0.71	Accepted
12.	Counselling sessions help students develop confidence in their academic abilities.	550	95	30	9	684	3.73	0.65	Accepted
13.	Participation in counselling reduces fear of failure.	495	135	40	14	684	3.63	0.72	Accepted
14.	Counselling programmes help students manage anxiety before examinations and presentations.	535	105	30	14	684	3.69	0.70	Accepted
15.	Counselling helps students learn relaxation and cognitive techniques for managing performance anxiety.	515	125	30	14	684	3.67	0.70	Accepted
16.	Grand Mean					684	3.68	0.70	Accepted

Criterion mean = 2.50.

Table 6 shows that all five items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.68 indicates that respondents generally agreed that guidance and counselling programmes are associated with the management of performance anxiety. The highest mean of 3.73 was recorded for the statement that counselling sessions help students develop confidence in their academic abilities.

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of performance anxiety among students.

Table 7: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Performance Anxiety

Variables	N	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Guidance and counselling programmes	684	0.487	0.000	Reject H ₀₃
Management of performance anxiety	684			

Table 7 indicates a positive correlation of $r = 0.487$ between guidance and counselling programmes and management of performance anxiety. The significance value of 0.000 is below 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result establishes a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and the management of performance anxiety among students.

Summary of Findings

The study produced three major findings.

First, guidance and counselling programmes were significantly related to the management of emotional pressure among students. The descriptive analysis produced a grand mean of 3.69, while the hypothesis test produced $r = 0.462$, $p = 0.000$.

Second, guidance and counselling programmes were significantly related to the management of workload stress. The responses produced a grand mean of 3.70, while the corresponding hypothesis test produced $r = 0.518$, $p = 0.000$.

Third, guidance and counselling programmes were significantly related to the management of performance anxiety. The descriptive analysis produced a grand mean of 3.68, while the hypothesis test produced $r = 0.487$, $p = 0.000$.

Discussion of Findings

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Emotional Pressure

The first finding established a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and management of emotional pressure among students. The grand mean of 3.69 indicates that respondents generally perceived counselling programmes as useful in helping them cope with emotional strain arising from academic demands. The correlation coefficient of 0.462 further indicates a moderate positive relationship between the variables. The finding is consistent with Daulay et al. (2022), who reported that counselling interventions can assist students in managing academic stress and associated emotional difficulties. The result also corresponds with the literature reviewed in the source study, which indicates that counselling can provide emotional support, problem-solving opportunities and strategies for regulating negative responses to academic challenges. The finding suggests that accessible counselling may help students recognise sources of emotional pressure and develop more adaptive ways of responding to them. However, the moderate magnitude of the correlation also indicates that counselling is not the only factor associated with emotional pressure. Family expectations, financial circumstances, academic experiences, peer relationships and institutional conditions may also influence students' emotional

experiences. Consequently, counselling services should form part of a broader student-support system.

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Workload Stress

The second finding showed a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and management of workload stress. The grand mean of 3.70 indicates strong agreement among respondents, while the correlation coefficient of 0.518 represents a moderate positive relationship. This finding is consistent with Kausar (2005), whose study linked perceived academic workload with stress and highlighted the importance of problem-focused coping strategies such as planning and task prioritization. It also agrees with the evidence reviewed in the source study indicating that stress management interventions can assist students in developing practical strategies for coping with academic demands. Counselling may assist students to organize their academic responsibilities, establish priorities, develop study schedules and approach deadlines more systematically. Nevertheless, counselling does not itself reduce the actual quantity of academic work. Workload stress may also be influenced by course requirements, assessment schedules, teaching practices and institutional resources. Effective workload management therefore requires cooperation among counsellors, students, lecturers and institutional administrators.

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Management of Performance Anxiety

The third finding established a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and management of performance anxiety. The grand mean of 3.68 indicates that respondents generally agreed that counselling programmes provide useful support for examination anxiety, fear of failure and anxiety associated with presentations and other academic evaluations. The correlation coefficient of 0.487 indicates a moderate positive relationship. The finding is consistent with Al-Qaisy et al. (2023), who reported reductions in academic performance anxiety following structured counselling interventions. It also agrees with Okoro and Nwankwo (2022), whose study reported reductions in anxiety following cognitive-behavioural counselling involving relaxation and cognitive restructuring techniques. The result suggests that counselling can help students develop academic confidence and psychological strategies for coping with evaluative situations. However, performance anxiety is influenced by several factors, including previous academic experiences, family expectations, peer competition and fear of failure. Counselling should therefore be complemented by appropriate academic preparation, supportive assessment practices and realistic academic expectations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, guidance and counselling programmes have statistically significant positive relationships with the management of emotional pressure, workload stress and performance anxiety among students in the selected higher education institutions in Rivers State. The results indicate that students who reported stronger counselling support also tended to report better management of these dimensions of academic pressure.

The findings reinforce the importance of guidance and counselling as part of student-support services in higher education. However, the moderate correlations observed across the three dimensions indicate that counselling is one of several factors associated with students' management of academic pressure. Institutional practices, family expectations, peer relationships, academic workload and students' individual coping resources may also influence their experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Guidance and counselling units should strengthen emotional-support services by providing accessible individual and group counselling sessions through which students can discuss academic and personal pressures and develop appropriate emotional coping strategies.

2. Higher education institutions should incorporate workload-management programmes into counselling services, with emphasis on time management, prioritization, study planning, goal setting and effective preparation for academic deadlines.
3. Counselling units should provide structured interventions for performance anxiety, including examination preparation, relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, confidence-building activities and appropriate academic-support programmes.

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