Predictors Of Academic Stress And Academic Adjustment Among Form Three Students Post Covid-19 Pandemic In Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract
Background: *Academic workload and expectations affect students' stress and adjustment. However, little is known about how both factors together influence these outcomes among students who are preparing for high stakes examinations. The current study aimed at investigating academic workload and expectations as predictors of academic stress and academic adjustment among Form Three students in the Nairobi City County. The study was done immediately after Covid-19 pandemic.*
Materials and Methods: *Mixed-method explanatory research design was used to investigate the relationship that existed between the predictor and the criterion variables among the Form three students. The researcher selected 394 students from 31 schools. The instruments used in data collection were; the Questionnaire for Academic workload, the Academic expectation Scale for Adolescents, the Academic Stress Scale for Adolescents, and Academic Adjustment Scale for Adolescents in High School. To supplement quantitative data, the researcher employed an interview schedule to gather qualitative data.*
Results: *After analysis the results indicated that the relationship between academic workload and academic stress was not statistically significant, while there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between academic expectations and academic stress. The results also showed that academic workload had a weak, negative and significant relationship with academic adjustment. On the other hand, there was a weak, positive, and statistically significant relationship between academic expectations and academic adjustment. In addition, the study revealed that academic stress among the students was jointly influenced by academic expectations and academic workload.*
Conclusion: *Academic workload and academic expectations jointly predicted academic stress. However, Academic workload alone was not a significant predictor of academic stress. Academic expectations positively and significantly predicted academic stress. Academic workload negatively and significantly predicted academic adjustment while the academic expectations positively and significantly predicted academic adjustment.*
Keywords: *Academic workload, Academic expectations, Academic stress, Academic adjustment,*

I.   Introduction To The Study

Academic stress has been reported widely in education circles and it has raised concern among the education stakeholders over the years (Steare et al., 2023; Pascoe et al., 2020). It has been defined as the way in which the body responds to academic responsibilities and demands that is beyond students' capability to adapt from the students' perspective (Francisco et al., 2022). Academic stress has evolved over time due to socio-economic and socio-emotional changes affecting students in the education sector, the recent one being the effects of Covid-19 pandemic (Versteeg & Kappe, 2021). Research studies done in the past focused more on causes of academic stress and the coping mechanisms that learners adopt in order to overcome stress due to academic pressure (Graves et al., 2021). Some of the factors associated with academic stress as outlined by Francisco et al. (2022) were teacher influence, learning environment, learning opportunities and academic demands. Among the academic demands, workload has been widely discussed as one of the factors that has contributed to academic pressure among students.

High school students have reported high levels of stress emanating from academic demands such as fear of getting poor grades, fear of examinations and limited time to catch up on academic work. Furthermore, according to Pascoe et al. (2020) higher number of high school students have reported poor grades and examinations as the major source of academic stress. High stress was also associated with poor mental well-being which impacted negatively on academic achievement. In most of the countries worldwide, the final two years of

high school education have been characterized by high levels of stress and in some cases distress since students were subjected to many examinations (Wuthrich et al., 2021). The emphasis on examination performance put pressure on the students to perfect their grades above some set standards in the so-called high stakes tests or examination. The college opportunities available, prestigious academic courses and career choices in most of the countries have been determined by the level of achievement in these examinations. The process of attaining the required grades and the failure to reach the set pass mark has been causing stressful moments in students' lives.

In addition to examination pressure, there has been other workload related stressors such as too many assignments, peer competition, and remedial classes (Nandagaon & Raddi, 2020; Ward, 2021). In a normal learning process the remedial classes were scheduled for the students to attend in order to repeat and refine subject areas of difficulty and improve their academic performance.

Academic expectations have been a major source of academic stress among high school and college students globally (Rani, 2021; Rose et al., 2023). The reason being that academic success has become a global priority and it has been used to place students for college opportunities which are very competitive (Poots & Cassidy, 2020). Hence, both parents and teachers expected the adolescents to perform exceptionally well in order to obtain placement for higher education and competitive career opportunities. As the academic expectations grow, academic pressure has been increasing in high school students lives (Pillai et al., 2023). It was also evident that pressure due to academic expectations was self-imposed as the students aspired to obtain high grades. In Kenya, entry into competitive careers involving fields such as accounting options, engineering options, medical training and all science-oriented courses require high qualifications. Therefore, parental and teacher academic expectations on the high school students were high. In addition, the students under investigation were just recovering from the effects of a long school closure due to Covid-19 pandemic that disrupted learning worldwide (Giannopoulou et al., 2020). After Covid-19, schools in Kenya adopted a shorter school calendar than normal to recover the lost time. In this study, it was anticipated that higher amounts of school work within a shorter school calendar would cause academic stress.

Further, it has been found that students respond differently to their parents' academic expectation, which has either positive or negative impact on the students. When the parental academic expectations failed to factor their children's academic abilities and capacity, the children felt subjected to unrealistic expectations hence they experienced pressure. The current study sought to find how academic expectations predicted academic stress and academic adjustment in the prevailing circumstances post Covid-19 pandemic in the African setting.

Evidently, some students did not cope with the emerging changes which impacted negatively on their well-being both socially and academically. Poor adjustment has been associated with poor time management, not meeting assignment deadlines, cheating or dishonesty, truancy or dropping out of school (Yangdon et al., 2021). In addition, students who spent long hours doing homework or studying deteriorated in mental well-being. Long hours on school assignments was associated with reduced hours of sleep and lack of rest. Adolescents were also in a developmental stage where they were transiting to adulthood. Hence, they also experienced physical, emotional and social changes that coupled the intensity of the demands placed on them. As a result, they needed balanced schoolwork life in order to negotiate the developmental milestone successfully.

Positive adjustment to academic demands needs to be cultivated among the adolescent students. Haktanir et al. (2021) defined academic adjustment as the ability of a student to adapt to the prevailing learning conditions. It constituted, academic motivation, academic activities performance, perception of instructional environment and student's study discipline. Students who were able to cope with difficult school circumstances excelled in their academic achievement as an indicator of positive adjustment (Khan, 2023).

Covid-19 pandemic affected academic adjustment among students in all levels of education globally. The severity of the situation depended on readiness of a country's learning and teaching online systems. Most of the learning institutions in African countries suffered poor connectivity and technological uptake in the background of socioeconomic and political challenges. As a result, there was weak online teaching methods which slowed down learning in most of the institutions. The situation caused anxiety and academic amotivation in most of the students during and after Covid-19 period (Patrick et al., 2021). The challenges brought in by the pandemic which included social distancing and restrictions of physical movement persisted even long after lockdown was lifted. The impact of Covid-19 added a burden on the students' academic responsibilities (Tau et al., 2024).

Studies showed that in most African universities and colleges, interactive learning technically stalled and the students had to individually bear academic challenges. Studies reported prevalence of mental health complications among students during and after Covid-19 pandemic. Najjuka et al. (2021) found that majority of the older students recorded high levels of anxiety, depression and stress. A situation that was related to the overwhelming academic responsibilities in difficult circumstances occasioned by limitations caused by Covid-19 pandemic. Dey et al. (2022) found that in the presence of academic stress, the effects of Covid-19 predicted psychological distress among the University students.

In the current study, both parents and teachers expected the learners to cover school syllabus within a shorter time than it was scheduled in the curriculum in normal circumstances. In the academic years 2021, 2022

and 2023 in Kenya, learners had shorter school holidays than the usual, as short as at times one week (Ministry of Education School Calendar, 2022/2023; Mabeya, 2020). Schools' Boards of Management together with teachers made various adjustments to accommodate the changes that came with Covid-19 pandemic in the education sector. In the year 2022, the forms one, two and three in secondary schools in Kenya covered two academic years in one and half calendar years (Malenya, 2021). Hence, there was need to find out how the learners coped with these changes and expectations in terms of levels of stress and academic adjustment. In addition, the onset of intense academic activities at school in preparation for a major examination presented changes in form three students' routine. The changes included increased academic workload, long hours in school, interrupted sleep hours and frequent examinations. How well the students adjusted to these changes determined their academic success.

It is estimated that only 47% of Kenyan learners accessed Digital learning programs during Covid-19 pandemic, majority of whom live in urban and semi-urban areas. The disadvantaged students came from low to middle income households who could not afford virtual learning gadgets such as smart phones, digital television and internet access. The undermining effects of Covid-19 pandemic on global and national economies were magnified in various aspects of students, especially those from low income homes. These included inadequate home spaces for learning, lack of internet, food insecurity and health care (Ngwacho, 2020).

Internet access being an important component required for learning during the Covid-19 period, more than half of the Kenyan student population lagged behind in syllabus coverage (Jepkemei & Munyao, 2022) which was mandatory to cover within their school life. The situation caused anxiety and academic pressure among majority of the learners. It was more evident among the ones who were preparing for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) which was a national examination. In addition, majority of the teachers lacked digital literacy which contributed to limited digital learning during Covid-19 pandemic (Ngeno et al., 2020). These challenges were too overwhelming for an adolescent student. The rate at which students adapted to changes in the academic environment was associated with success in the educational process (Jepkemei & Munyao, 2022).

Most of the adolescents in Nairobi City County were reported to have mental health problems associated with social isolation, unmet social needs and parental absence or guidance during Covid-19 pandemic (Gichangi et al., 2023) in both the in-school and out-of-school adolescents. Although the out-of-school adolescents had more mental health disorders, the in-school adolescents also manifested adverse mental health problems. Similar to other cities, psycho-social and physical dynamics differentiate the characteristics of the adolescents in urban set up from those in the rural set up (Mbithi et al., 2023). Therefore, the findings elicited the need to investigate the impact of two key school factors; academic workload and academic expectations, on the adolescents' academic stress and academic adjustment in semi-urban and urban set up.

Statement of the problem
Academic stress has become a tangible reality among learners at all levels of learning as supported by various research findings. Academic demands such as examination grade targets, assignment deadlines, remedial classes after school, high parental expectations, teacher expectations and self-expectations are major causes of stress among high school students. Due to such demands, it has been observed that many students drop out of school, post low academic achievement, develop suicidal ideation and express other forms of poor mental health. The students in the current study were in adolescence stage and as a result, they experienced developmental changes which demanded psychological, physical, biological, emotional and social adjustment. Most of the adolescents find it a hurdle to deal with both developmental challenges and academic demands successfully.

Academic adjustment is a vital component in student's academic progress and success. Research has pointed out that poorly adjusted students in school exhibited low self-esteem, low academic efficacy, unstable relationships with peers, low school grades and low interest in school activities. Covid-19 pandemic was a new challenge in the 21st century and it affected all spheres of human life. Education sector was not spared and many learning institutions continued to adapt to the new normal in post Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, it was imperative to investigate how the students responded to the changes and how they adjusted to the academic demands.

Research Objectives
i. To find out how academic workload and expectations predicted academic stress among the Form Three students in Nairobi City County post Covid-19 pandemic.
ii. To find out how academic workload and expectations predicted academic adjustment among the Form Three students in Nairobi City County post Covid-19 pandemic.

Significance of the Study
The study would benefit the teachers in making them aware of the effects of academic workload and academic expectations on the students. The school administrators would use the findings of the current research to come up with effective school timetables and routine that promote high academic adjustment and reduced

academic stress especially in challenging situations. The policy makers in the Ministry of Education would use the results of the findings to ensure that the developed curriculum corresponds with time allocated in the annual school calendar. Too much subject content done in squeezed school calendar would hinder optimum academic adjustment. Parents would become aware of effects of their expectations on their children and how to regulate the same according to each child's academic ability.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on two theories namely the Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS) and Transactional Theory of stress.

Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS)

According to the cognitive activation theory of stress, the mental evaluation of life events as either unmanageable or life threatening had physical and psychological impact on mental health manifested in measurable outcomes. How the students cognitively appraised the stressors in their academic environment has a significant impact on their academic adjustment and consequently their achievement. In the current study, academic workload and academic expectations were considered as stress stimuli or the stressors, academic stress as stress experience, and academic adjustment as the response outcome. The stress experience could have been positively appraised resulting to eustress or negatively appraised leading to distress.

Transactional Theory of Stress

The theory explains that, it is the interaction between environment and an individual that produces stress experience. There has to be transaction between the individual and learning environment where they give meaning to their learning environments. The emotions from the experience are appraised as either favourable or unfavourable. In case of unfavourable emotions were elicited, it prompted the individual to engage coping mechanisms. Coping was viewed as continuously changing students' efforts both cognitively and behaviourally to effectively manage an academic-related situation that was deemed to be too demanding. How the learner appraised the academic demands determined their level of academic stress and their ability to adjust to learning. If an academic task was interpreted as difficult or unmanageable, stress feelings were aroused towards the task.

II.   Literature Review

In an earlier research, continuous learning stress caused difficulties in adapting to achieve meaningful academic outcomes among University students in their first year. In the qualitative study, Shabana and Naeem (2024) pinpointed academic workload as one of the major factors that contributed to the adaptation problems. The conveniently sampled students reported that they struggled with time management, heavy workloads, new setting and new social groups, all at the same time. Further, medical students in a research study reported to have serious adjustment problems due to academic related pressure according to Agarwal (2024). The online study collected data using questionnaires through google form. Academic workload was among the top three reported stressors. It also emerged that the younger medical students, below 21years of age, recorded more severe adjustment problems compared to the older medical students, above 25 years of age.

Zhao and Shartner (2023) carried out a longitudinal research among international post graduate students and found that the unregulated academic workload was one of the barriers of academic adjustment. Another study by Lau et al. (2022) on the transfer students from community colleges to the government funded Chinese university education found that it was difficult to adjust in the degree programs due to increased study workloads and shorter study periods. These included extra credit requirements, more assignments and more examinations which were meant to help them be at par with the non-transfer students.

Conefrey (2021) explored the effect of High Impact Practices (HIP) on first generation university students' adjustment and found that the nature of academic programs introduced to students had a potential to determine their academic success. Engaging activities such as learning communities, ePortifolios, and intensive writing helped the students to overcome their social and academic challenges hence attained high levels of academic adjustment. Despite the amount of academic workload, the students who participated in the study were found to have high self-efficacy, high academic motivation and positively engaged in learning. Positive adjustment was considered a requirement for academic success.

Ye et al. (2022) found that Chinese adolescents' adjustment difficulties were positively predicted by the perceived online learning difficulties when the adolescents perceived lack of support by their parents. In addition, teacher interaction and friendly relationships perceived as positive expectation, predicted a higher academic engagement and less mental health problems. High Parental expectation shadowed in authoritarian parenting towards online learning predicted more mental health problems than the accommodating and supportive parents.

A study by Klootwijk et al. (2021) on parental support and positive mood as determinants of academic motivation during Covid-19 pandemic revealed that low academic motivation was associated with lower levels

of parental support. Parental support and involvement was also defined as perceived positive parental expectation (Wilder, 2023). Therefore, from the study, it could be implied that parental expectations were associated with academic motivation which is a subset of academic adjustment (Branje & Morris, 2021). Academic motivation, instructional environment, academic discipline and academic activities performance were the sub-variables of academic adjustment.

In a study to investigate the predictors of resilience, Kwarikunda et al. (2023) found that direct effects of students' academic expectations and their parents' expectations positively contributed to their resilience. Moreover, a study carried out by Ibrahim and Mohamed (2023) among university students found that academic workload was a significant predictor of academic stress. Further, a study done in Kenyatta university by Muthuuri (2021) on psycho-social challenges facing first year students, established that academic workload and academic expectations contributed to instability in adjustment.

III.   Research Methodology

Research Design

The study used a mixed-method explanatory research design to establish the relationship between academic workload, academic expectations, and the criterion variables academic stress and academic adjustment. The design supplemented the objective findings from the quantitative research with the subjective findings from qualitative research. This was meant to give adequate depth and breadth in terms of data to give answers in response to research questions (Dawadi et al., 2021)

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size
***Sampling Techniques*:** Nairobi City County was purposefully sampled out of the 47 counties with a view to bring out the effects of the predictor variables on academic stress and academic adjustment among students in varied socio-economic status. The secondary schools and the Form three students were randomly sampled from the population. This method of sampling was necessary since the researcher intended to sample based on the original population distribution (Rahman et al., 2022) and ensure a representative sample.

Sample Size: Yamane formula was used by the researcher to determine the sample size of the study (Asenahabi & Ikoha, 2023; Yamane, 1967) and sampled 394 form three students. The sample size of schools was also guided by Mugenda and Mugenda (2018) principle of 10% and above on the population (Mchopa, 2021).

The students, and schools from each category were proportionately selected. Table 3.1 shows the targeted population and the selected sample.

Table 1: Sampling Frame

	Target Population			Sample Size		
	Schools	Gender		Schools	Gender	
Type of school	N	Boys	Girls	n	Boys	Girls
Public Boys	19	5137	-	2	63	-
Public Girls	26	-	6558	3	-	82
Private Boys	9	756	-	1	9	-
Private Girls	21	-	1294	2	-	16
Public Co-educational	71	6362	5768	7	79	71
Private Co-educational	157	3083	2940	16	38	36
Sub Total		15, 338	16,560		189	205
Total	303	31, 898		31	394	

Instruments

The Quantitative data was obtained using adopted standard questionnaires while the qualitative data was collected using interview schedules.
Questionnaires: The four rating scales were administered to all the 394 sampled students in form three class. The participants consisted of students from public boys, public girls, private boys, private girls, co-educational public and co-educational private secondary schools.
Interview schedules: The research participants were put in focus groups where they responded to open ended questions through interviews.

Data Collection

Research authorization was granted by Kenyatta University graduate school after which a permit was obtained from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Further, research authorization was granted by Regional Education Office, Nairobi, and State department for internal security and

national administration. An agreeable arrangement was done with the schools' administration of the sampled schools.

Questionnaires were administered to the students face-to-face in the sampled schools with the aid of research assistants. Interview schedules were used to collect qualitative data on all the variables through focus groups. Quantitative data was analyzed using Multiple regression in SPSS while the qualitative data was analyzed NVIVO software by coding the unstructured data into themes.

Research findings
Quantitative Data

After the tests of assumptions of the data were confirmed, regression analysis was carried out on the variables to test hypotheses.

Hypothesis one: Academic workload and academic expectations do not predict significantly academic stress among Form Three students in Nairobi City County.

After multiple regression, the results indicated that academic workload and academic expectations predicted academic stress as shown in Table 1.

Results showed, weak positive correlation between academic expectations and academic workload when correlated with academic stress (R=.28 for academic workload, adjusted $R^2 = .7$ and $R^2 = .8$). The R square value indicated that academic expectations and academic workload contributed 8 % of the total variance in students' academic stress. The model indicated a good and significant model of fit, $F (2, 389) = 16.52$, $p < .05$.

Table 2: *Model Summary for the Prediction of Academic Stress*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Ch.ange
1	.28[a]	.08	.07	15.94	.08	16.52	2	389	.00
a. Predictors: (Constant), Academic Expectations, Academic Workload									

ANOVA test was conducted to find out whether the joint influence of academic expectations and academic workload was significant. The results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *ANOVA in the Prediction of Academic Stress*

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8390.85	2	4195.42	16.52	.00[b]
	Residual	98785.47	389	253.95		
	Total	107176.32	391			
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Stress						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Academic Expectations, Academic Workload						

The table 3 showed similar results as was obtained in the model summary results. These results confirmed that both academic expectations and academic workload had a joint significant relationship with academic stress, $F (2, 389) = 16.52$, $p < .05$.

The predictive values for both academic expectations and academic workload on academic stress were computed through regression analysis. The results were shown in Table 3. The results indicated that academic workload had a positive and non- significant relationship with academic stress, $\beta = .13$, t = 1.3. $p > .05$

Table 4: *Regression Analysis for Academic Workload and Academic Expectations*

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	40.06	8.20		4.89	.00
	Academic Workload	.13	.10	.06	1.30	.20
	Academic Expectations	1.00	.18	.28	5.69	.00
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Stress						

This meant that by holding academic expectations constant, a unit change in academic workload resulted to .13 change in academic stress with no significant effects. Secondly, academic expectations had a significant relationship with academic stress, $\beta = 1.00$, $t = 5.69$, $p < .05$. This meant that by holding academic workload constant, a unit change in academic expectations leads to 1.00 change in academic stress with significant effects. The prediction equation for model 1 is as below

$\hat{Y} = 40.06 + 0.13X_1 + 1.00X_2 + \acute{\varepsilon}$

Where $\hat{Y}$ = Predicted academic stress; X_1 = academic workload, X_2 = academic expectations, and $\acute{\varepsilon}$ = standard error.

Hypothesis 2: Academic workload and academic expectations do not predict significantly academic adjustment among Form Three students in Nairobi City County.

Further analysis was conducted to establish how academic workload and academic expectations predicted academic adjustment. The results were presented in Table 5. The results showed that R square value for model 1 was 0.08 indicating that 8% of the variance in academic adjustment among the respondents was jointly influenced by academic expectations and academic workload. The multiple regression coefficient of 0.28 indicated a weak correlation between academic expectations, academic workload, and academic adjustment.

Table 5: Model Summary Prediction of Academic Adjustment from Academic Workload and Academic expectations

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.28ᵃ	.08	.08	8.75	.08	17.00	2	389	.00
a. Predictors: (Constant), Academic Expectations, Academic Workload									

ANOVA test was conducted to establish if the predictive values of academic expectations and academic workload were significant and results were presented in Table 6.

Table 6: *ANOVA Test for the Prediction of Academic Adjustment from Academic Expectations and Academic Workload*

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2604.46	2	1302.23	17.00	.00ᵇ
	Residual	29793.83	389	76.59		
	Total	32398.28	391			
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Adjustment						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Academic Expectations, Academic Workload						

The ANOVA test showed that the academic workload and academic expectations had a joint significant relationship with academic adjustment, $F(2, 391) = 17.00$, $p < .05$.

The predictive values for academic workload and academic expectations were computed through regression analysis as shown in Table 7. The results indicated that academic workload had a negative and significant relationship with academic adjustment, $\beta = -.22$, t = -4, $p < .05$. This meant that by holding academic expectations constant, a unit change in academic workload led to -.22 change in academic adjustment.

Table 7: *Regression Analysis for Academic Workload and Academic Expectations*

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	78.01	4.50		17.33	.00
	Academic Workload	-.22	.05	-.20	-4.00	.00
	Academic Expectations	.38	.10	.19	3.91	.00
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Adjustment						

Secondly, academic expectations had a positive and significant relationship with academic adjustment, $\beta = .38$, $t = 3.91$, $p < .05$. This meant that by holding academic workload constant, a unit change in academic expectations leads to .38 change in academic adjustment.
The prediction equation for model 1 was as below:
$\hat{Y} = 78.01 - 0.22X_1 + 0.38X_2 + \acute{\varepsilon}$ $p < .05$
Where $\hat{Y}$ = Predicted academic adjustment; X_1 = academic workload, X_2 = academic expectations, and $\acute{\varepsilon}$ = standard error.

The research results were summarized in the model shown in figure 2. confirmed that academic stress and academic expectations were jointly significant predictors of academic stress and academic adjustment.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was coded and categorized into themes. The themes that were drawn from the responses includes, workload perception, pressure to perform, fear of failure, Perceived Pressure from Parents

and Teachers and Influence of Workload on Academic Adjustment. The students' responses pointed to the fact that they experienced academic pressure from the academic demands. One student made the remarks, *"I feel that the assignments are excess and should be reduced. Too much of it gives me stress leading to less focus on classwork and my studies."* The students felt that their parents and teachers put undue pressure upon them to perform well in academics. Another student was recorded saying, *"My parents want me to score very high marks, and when I don't meet their expectations, I feel like I've disappointed them."* These remarks indicated dissatisfaction in the students about their parents' expectations. Teacher expectations were also reported to have impact on the students' academic stress and academic adjustment. For instance, a student said that, *"My teachers give me too much pressure as they want me to perform highly in their subjects. This causes me great stress."*

Although quantitative results showed high values in academic adjustment, most of the students reported struggling to cope with academic demands post Covid-19 pandemic. A student stated that, "*We get so much homework. Sometimes I don't do it, and it makes me hate school. With homework, tests, and after-school lessons, I don't even have time to relax and play. It seems like we are machines."*The quest to recover the lost learning time after the Covid-19 pandemic lock down, was evident in the measures implemented by the Ministry of Education in schools.

The qualitative data enriched the interpretation of the quantitative data by highlighting the complex interaction between academic expectations and academic adjustment. Across the two data sets, self-generated expectations were a robust and consistent predictor of academic adjustment. Students managed their studies better and were more resilient if they had definite, realistic academic expectations.

IV.   Discussion Of The Results

Multiple regression results revealed evidence of a weak correlation between academic expectations, academic workload and academic stress. In addition, the results revealed that academic stress among the students was jointly influenced by academic expectations and academic workload. These results were similar to those of other studies carried out by different researchers.

In a study undertaken to establish the major factors that contributed to the adaptation problems among first year university students, Shabana and Naeem (2024) found that, academic workload was a major factor that contributed to the adaptation problems. These results agreed with those of the current study. In an online study conducted on medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic, Agarwal (2024) reported that the medical students had serious adjustment problems due to academic related pressure. Academic workload was among the top three reported stressors in that study and they agreed with those of the current study.

In a study undertaken among international post graduate students on enablers and barriers to adjustment in various aspects, Zhao and Shartner (2023) found that unregulated academic workload was one of the barriers of academic adjustment. Lau et al. (2022) also found that the transfer students from community colleges to the government funded Chinese university education found it difficult to adjust in the degree programs due to increased study workloads and shorter study periods. These results were consistent with those of the current study. Similarly, Conefrey (2021) in a study done to explore the effect of High Impact Practices (HIP) on first generation university students' adjustment found that the nature of academic programs introduced to students had a potential to determine their academic adjustment and hence academic success.

In a study conducted by Ye et al. (2022) among Chinese adolescent middle school students, it was found that teacher-student interaction and friendly relationship which was perceived as a positive expectation predicted a higher academic engagement and less mental health problems. Conversely, high parental expectation shadowed in authoritarian parenting towards online learning predicted more mental health problems than in the more accommodative and supportive parents. These results agreed with the findings of the current research study. Another study undertaken to investigate the determinants of academic motivation during Covid-19 pandemic, Klootwijk et al. (2021) revealed that low parental support was correlated with low academic motivation. Parental support and involvement which could be perceived as positive parental expectation was associated with academic motivation which was a subset of academic adjustment (Branje & Morris, 2021). These results support the findings of the current study.

In a study done in Uganda by Kwarikunda et al. (2023) the findings were confirmed by the current study's findings. The study found that self and parental academic expectations had direct effects on resilience which was closely related to adjustment. Students who were resilient, were also capable of adjusting to difficult situations and unanticipated changes. The current study results also corroborated with earlier study findings on predictive role of academic workload and academic expectations on the both academic stress and academic adjustment. Ibrahim and Mohamed (2023) found that academic workload was a significant predictor of academic stress among college students in Southwest Nigeria. Current study findings further confirmed results from a study done among university students in Kenya by Muthuuri (2021) which established that academic workload and academic expectations contributed to instability in academic adjustment.

V.   Conclusion

Multiple regression results revealed existence of a weak correlation between academic expectations, academic workload and academic stress. Moreover, multiple regression results revealed that academic stress among the students was jointly and significantly influenced by academic expectations and academic workload. However, the impact of academic workload on academic stress was not significant while the academic expectations predicted positively and significantly on the academic stress. Therefore, academic expectations had higher influence on academic stress than academic workload.

Academic adjustment regressed on academic workload showed that there was a weak and negative correlation between the two variables. Further, it indicated that too much Academic workload predicted negative academic adjustment. The students reported difficulties in academic adjustment due to especially too many assignments and long learning hours in remedial classes. The results revealed that the students were satisfied by the mode of examination schedules in school. When academic adjustment was regressed on academic expectation, the results showed that academic expectations correlated positively with academic adjustment. It indicated that academic expectations predicted positively academic adjustment. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The quantitative results were confirmed by the qualitative results. The students who were interviewed reported experiencing more stress from high academic workload and high self-expectations. Teachers and parental pressure were reported to have considerable impact on the adolescents' stress levels. The students also reported difficulties in adjustment at school due to the overwhelming academic work and pressure to obtain high grades at school.

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