

EFFECT OF MODES OF FINANCING ON STRESSFUL EXPERIENCES OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Transition from secondary school to universities remain a great challenge to the students. Thus, first year students continue to experience adjustment challenges leading to stressful conditions. There is paucity of stressful experiences of first year students with respect to funding options available. The study aimed to examine the effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences of first year students at university in Kenya. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) served as the foundation for this investigation. The study adopted a causal-comparative research design. The sample size of 198 first year students in Kenya were obtained using stratified sampling method. Data from students in their first year of study at university was obtained using Stressful Experiences Scale. Inferential analysis, with the use of t-test was used to analyze data. The study findings indicated that the scores on overall stress experience levels were significantly higher for self-sponsored students ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.34$) than for government sponsored students ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(196) = 2.397$, $p = .017$, Cohen's $d = .842$. The implications of the findings of the study are that the University management should develop responsive programs to assist first year students who are at risk of stressful experiences.

Keywords: Effect, Modes of Financing, Stressful Experiences, First Year, Students, University

1. Introduction

Students typically encounter a variety of adjustment issues when they first enroll in university and become members of the institution. These issues can sometimes be caused by stressful situations, events, or circumstances in their new surroundings. According to Mostert and Du Toit (2024), there are many prospects including social and academic development when an individual completes secondary school education and enrolls for tertiary education. However, there are adjustment challenges that are associated with new learning environments, and first year students are bound to experience the pressures of being in such places. The new adjustment challenges that are experienced by first year students are possible contributors to physical, psychological, emotional health. Therefore, first year students experience stress differently in new learning environments because of varied support mechanisms including family, friends and university itself. Thus, first year students should aim to adopt appropriate strategies to cope with demands of university life including academic, social, emotional and psychological domains (Van der Zanden et al., 2018; Mostert & Du Toit, 2024).

Academic challenges, such as rigorous courses and a significant workload, are stressful (Tewari & Ilesanmi, 2020). Additional challenges include bad student-lecturer interactions, homesickness, and troublesome relationships with roommates (Ayele, 2011). According to a study conducted during orientation week, which Jemal (2012) cited, students were aware that life at university would differ from high school, but they did not anticipate this significant shift. But according to Le Roux and Brier (2012), not all students who start university experience stress; in fact, many have great experiences with it. An individual resilience, which is frequently determined by their Emotional Intelligence (EI) quotient, is one of the non-academic and academic elements that affect how well they acclimatize to an institutional context. Nicole et al (2014) defines emotional intelligence (EI) as individuals' capacity to comprehend their own feelings and thoughts, their ability to empathize with others, and their ability to respond appropriately in novel or stressful situations. An unsatisfactory person-environment fit is indicated by psychological stress. As a result, individuals change their situation, or how it is perceived, to make it seem better. This is referred to as coping in psychology. Coping is the process by which a person uses constant efforts to deal with obligations that are deemed challenging or too much to handle (Hako, & Shikongo, 2019). Coping is very contextual, even though stable coping mechanisms do exist and are significant. Therefore, it needs to adapt to different situations and times to be effective (Folkman & Lazarus (1985). According to Gallagher et al (2019), coping mechanisms triggered when an individual is in situations that are stressful might lead to successful and positive transitions to better settings. Since proactive and preventive coping strategies are useful coping strategies, they positively affect an individual's transition to university life (Ersen & Bilgiç, 2018).

Negative coping techniques that are detrimental to psychological health and linked to poor academic achievement are known as dysfunctional coping methods. Students naturally want to fit in and be accepted by others. Therefore, students might indulge in problem behaviours including alcohol abuse, illegal drug usage, and promiscuous sexual conduct (Ersen & Bilgiç, 2018; Eagan & Walsh, 1995). According to several experts, including Batchelor et al (2020) and Ayele (2011), these avoidant coping strategies are problematic and might result in negative attitudes, social disengagement, and problem avoidance. According to Ersen and Bilgiç (2018), behavioural disengagement is a coping mechanism which this entails engaging in diverting attention activities, such as sleeping, cause, in the worst situation, taking one's own life. According to Gallagher et al (2019), first year students with adequate family support can transit from secondary school to university effectively and are able to adopt appropriate coping mechanisms in dealing with stressful situations that they face. As students cope with the disparities in morals and values they encounter in higher education settings, negative feelings are likely to surface. They start to doubt their own values as well as those of their families and communities as a result (Gallagher et al., 2019).

According to Nebhinani and Kuppili (2021), good coping is associated with less emotional and behavioural disorders and is typified by a student's successful academic, emotional, and personal strategies to cope with adjustment challenges at the university. Thus, when handling stressful situations, emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms have been adopted by many students to handle such circumstances (Gallagher et al., 2019). When there are positive results in coping with stressful conditions, students use constructive coping strategies to manage stress before an upcoming test. They might, however, rely on other negative coping mechanisms, when there is little that can be done to alter the outcome, such as managing tension while awaiting test results.

Lavoie-Tremblay et al., (2022) study argues that this is typically a bad coping mechanism, but it is frequently the only practical choice when the stressor is uncontrollable. Successful students in academics employ healthy coping strategies to manage their academic stress, such as segmenting modules, creating study groups, and avoiding time-wasting hobbies. However, depression is linked to adoption of avoidant coping techniques such as avoidance and withdrawal (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2022). Compared to their senior peers, first-year university students had greater dropout rates (Jemal, 2012; Le Roux & Brier, 2012). Because among other year levels, social adjustment is more problematic than psychological domain. Thus, most first year students struggle to engage with others and build lasting, meaningful relationships throughout their first year of university or college life (Le Roux & Brier, 2012).

Given that individuals could feel alone and see their self-esteem decline, this could be explained by the novelty of their environments (Soiferman, 2017). Adjusting to university is considerably more difficult for individuals who have little support from their parents or other carers. According to Soiferman (2017), students who receive assistance from parents or other carers are better able to handle the adjustment process. They have better psychological and physical health and are less depressed, stressed, and anxious. There are many obstacles that first-year university students must overcome, some of which are more than they can handle. Their chances of graduating are thus diminished, as seen by the high failure and dropout rates across the country.

Theoretical framework

The study is informed by Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The theory is used as a psychological framework that describes how individuals experience and react to stress in various situations. The model argues that the continuous interaction between an individual and the environment is likely to induce stressful circumstances (Obbarius et al., 2021), it was especially pertinent for analyzing the effect of modes of financing on stress among students in first year of study at university. Therefore, as an individual interacts with others in a particular environment, they might get stressed, where an individual assesses whether a specific interaction with the environment is pertinent to their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this theory, two stage processes in explaining stress can include either primary or secondary appraisals. The process of determining if an event or circumstance poses a threat, challenge, harm/loss is known as primary appraisal. This could include academic expectations, social isolation, workload, and computer literacy requirements for first-year students. The process by which a person evaluates their options and resources for managing the perceived stressor is known as secondary appraisal. This covers technological accessibility, emotional assistance, perceived academic ability, and institutional support services (Wu et al., 2025; Obbarius et al., 2021).

Conversely, freshmen at university frequently encounter academic, social, and environmental challenges, especially when adjusting to new study styles. Therefore, depending on factors like communication difficulties, a sense of loneliness, or access to assistance, students in online or hybrid learning contexts may evaluate their

circumstances differently than those in in-person settings (Steffen & Anderson, 2025). Depending on the mode of study, different coping mechanisms may be employed, which could impact the kind and degree of stress encountered. When analyzing a variable like "modes of financing," which inevitably entails individual differences in perception and adaptation, Lazarus and Folkman's model provide a sophisticated and dynamic understanding of stress (Wu et al., 2025).

Literature Review

According to previous research, failures, setbacks, and blunders can all serve as teaching moments and opportunities to develop coping mechanisms for unpleasant situations in the future (Jemal, 2012). Additionally, persistent stress may promote positive effects and aid in a coping mechanism where people manage stressful conditions (Hako et al., 2025). According to research, acute and chronic stressors have various physiological effects, which could weaken or boost the immune system's resistance to illness and disease (Amakali-Nauseb et al., 2019). Stress from the past may shield against unfavourable responses to stressors in the future. Stressors that affect students' academic performance include social conflicts, sleep deprivation, dating and relationship instability, and issues with time and money management (Ayele, 2018). Behaviour and more severe mental health issues have been associated with other stress causing events from the environment (Amakali-Nauseb et al., 2019; Ayele, 2018; Le Roux & Brier, 2012). Long after a stressful incident has ended, the psychological and physical effects might still interfere with a person's evolving identity (Steurer et al., 2022).

Many researchers emphasized that it's the impact of stressors that can cause negative effects in an individual, and not the stress itself, however, it depends on how an individual adjusts to the stressors by an individual (Smith & Tytherleigh, 2022; Soiferman, 2017). Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020) study also reiterate that when students are faced with stressful circumstances, then they require more social and psychological support so that they can navigate appropriately and not indulge in avoidant coping strategies. High levels of social support, such as good friendships, on-campus support, and companionship make individuals adjust appropriately to the stressful circumstances (Van der Zanden et al., 2018; Smith & Tytherleigh, 2022).

Prior studies also indicate how crucial students' perceived control and problem-solving skills are for managing stress (de Cordova et al., 2024). Additionally, studies show that students' approaches to handling stressful situations vary and are individual differences. While students' perceptions of stress were significant predictors of coping behaviours, Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020) showed that most students employed task- and emotion-oriented techniques. Analyzing students' coping mechanisms may provide more information on how they react differently to events that are stressful. According to the relational theory of psychological coping and stress, an individual becomes stressed because of interaction with the interaction, and it depends on how they will adjust to stressful circumstances (Obbarius et al., 2021). The key idea in the stress matrix is coping. Coping is adjusting to stressful situations by using suitable techniques in managing demands from the environment, other people, and oneself. It is not a fixed attribute. According to Wu et al., (2025), coping entails behavioural and cognitive attempts to lessen or resolve demands and conflicts brought on by stress.

According to an increasing number of studies, students who have completed secondary school education find it challenging to transition to first year at university (Nebhinani & Kuppili, 2021; Amakali-Nauseb et al., 2019). Mostert and Du Toit (2024) state that the South African higher education system has low retention rates and significant attrition; up to 50% of students leave school, with the majority doing so in their first year. The findings highlight how important it is to assist new students in assimilating into the academic community and completing their university education. Hako and Shikongo's (2019) qualitative study also showed that students are less likely to pass their first year if they are afraid of failing their classes (Steurer et al., 2022). Individuals must naturally adjust to new experiences and changes in their lives as well as other life transitions. Due to a variety of challenges, they must learn how to function in their new environment (Van Zyl et al., 2020; Soiferman, 2017). Adjusting the psychological and academic experiences of first-year students may lead to problems that affect their academic performance and accomplishment. According to most first-year students, moving to campus is the most difficult adjustment period during a critical developmental stage (adolescence). According to Steffen and Anderson (2025), greater psychological suffering could result from a failure to manage the transitional problems.

Freshmen at university are bound to experience stressful challenges (Cage et al., 2021; Charalambous, 2020). In addition, students are bound to be more stressed during their early university years compared to the rest in the senior years of study (Conley et al., 2020). It is reported that different study periods, like exams and placement practice, can result in higher stress levels (Haque & Jahan, 2023) have proposed that stress starts in the first semester of university and persists throughout the duration of a student's time there. There are many factors that account for the stressful experiences of students in their first year at university including life, identity changes in students, psychological demands, new academic demands, social and emotional relationships with other

students as well (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2022; Mostert & Du Toit, 2024; Hako et al., 2025). Additionally, it has been determined that students in Ireland and UK continue to experience high stress because of challenging job market demands leading to high level unemployment and increase in tuition fees at the university (Conley et al., 2020).

The success and status of universities worldwide are the subject of grave worries in both popular and scientific literature (Van Zyl et al., 2020). In addition, there are decreased graduation rates among university students (Van Zyl et al., 2020), notwithstanding assertions that postsecondary education is now more accessible to students leading to saturated job market (DHET, 2021). According to Tewari and Ilesanmi's (2020) research, between 2009 and 2017, the graduation rates at universities in South Africa remain at 16.43%, implying that many students fall off, reducing completion rates. With graduation rates in 2021 falling 1.9% from 2020, worries concerning graduation rates have recently gained greater attention (DHET, 2021). According to Scott (2018), South Africa's universities are now failing to generate enough graduates who are prepared for the workforce, which is preventing the nation from moving closer to significant economic and social purposes. A study by Ayuk and Jacobs (2018) in South Africa argue that there is need for management of student achievement and institutional performance, to enhance efficacy of universities. Furthermore, a few academics stress that HEIs must give students the skills they need to meet the demands of postsecondary education and land long-term jobs (Haque & Jahan, 2023; Steurer et al., 2022). These abilities include, among others, the development of proactivity, self-efficacy, personal agency, initiative, stress management, and adaptability (Steurer et al., 2022).

In USA, Moore, et al., (2021) qualitative research reported on financial stress that impedes their ability to succeed academically. In Poland, Ahamed, Jakubowska and Sadílek (2025) reported that many factors negatively impact on students' adjustment at university. In Bolivia, Córdova Olivera, et al., (2023) reported that students at universities experience financial stress and this negatively impact their academic adjustment. Larbi, et al., (2022) study reported that freshmen experience financial anxiety. In South Africa, Albertus and Makoza (2025) qualitative study reported that the national students funding body was inefficient in assisting students to achieve their education goals. Bayaga, et al., (2022) study in South Africa reported that freshmen experience several adjustment challenges at university. In Tanzania, Tesha (2025) argues that the funding provided to students at university is not capable to purchase basic needs and this which negatively affects their performance.

Research Gaps

Previous research has indicated that student financing has a significant contribution to literature. For example, McCloud and Bann (2018) did not focus on financing and how it contributes to students' mental health. In addition, Britt, et al., (2017) argue that higher financial stress leads to dropping out from schooling among students enrolled at tertiary institutions. However, this study lacked inferential findings which could have been more conclusive, and this is the research gap filled by this research. In another research, Adams, et al., (2016) did not provide insights on financing and possible contributions to students' mental health, and this research gap has been filled by the present study. In another study, Moore, et al., (2021) argues that financial stress impedes the ability of students to succeed in their academic work. Most recently, Andriansyah, (2025) reiterate that students with financial stress are faced with other adjustment challenges, leading to stressful conditions which may in turn impact negatively on their overall mental health. From the above reviewed literature, it appears as if there is an agreement that first year students experience stress at universities.

However, there is dearth of literature on effects of modes of financing on stressful experiences among students at university. In addition, most previous research has focused on students in tertiary institutions in general but first year students have been given very little attention. Moreover, there is paucity of research on possible contribution of modes of financing on students' mental health. Since these difficulties are undoubtedly more prevalent in the first years, the authors set out to investigate the effect of modes of funding on stressful experiences among Kenyan university students.

Problem Statement

Despite numerous efforts by universities to provide support, information and orientation programmes to ensure adjustment of first year students from secondary schools to universities, there remains a big challenge of stressful experiences. Thus, first year students continue to experience stress due to new environments, different study habits and expectations of independence in decision making. However, there is paucity of stressful experiences of first year students with respect to funding options available.

Rationale of the Study

Stressful experiences continue to negatively impact on first year students at universities. This research is important because it is anticipated that the findings could lead to recommendations on best mechanisms for universities to address funding policies for students. The study is also important because addressing stressful

experiences would enhance the mental health of students (Pascoe, et al., 2020). Thus, from the literature above, there is critical need to undertake research on financing and students' stressful experiences.

Novelty of the Study

The novelty of the present research is based on several aspects. First, Hako et al., (2025) qualitative research focused on coping mechanisms for managing stress among students, de Cordova et al., (2024) qualitative study examined problem-solving skills and management of stress among students. In another qualitative research, Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020) explored task- and emotion-oriented techniques for stress management among students, while Steffen and Anderson (2025) examined the psychological effects of stress among students. Studies, Mostert and Du Toit, (2024), Hako et al., (2025) and Lavoie-Tremblay et al., (2022) only examined factors that account for the students stressful experiences of their first year at university but did not focus on modes of financing. The present research involved first year students in Kenyan university and analyzed how modes of financing contribute to stressful experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences of first year students at university.

Hypothesis of the Study

The research hypothesis is stated as:

Ho1: *There is a significant effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences of first year students at university*

2. Method

Research Design

The causal-comparative research design informed this study. This design aimed to ascertain the magnitude of differences among groups of individuals (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004). However, the design does not establish causality within individuals in given research. In addition, this research design examines groups that are derived or pre-existing ones to ascertain if differences among them exist based on some research variables. In this study, there are two groups of students, classified on modes of financing as self-sponsored (SSP) and government sponsored students (GSS).

Sampling Technique and Research Sample

A sample size 198 students enrolled at university was obtained. Out of the 198 students, 186 of them are government sponsored first year students, while there were 12 self-sponsored first year students. This sample of 198 students is 30% of 598 first year students as recommended by Althubaiti, (2022). The 198 students were sampled using stratified sampling methods, in which the students were grouped as either self-sponsored or government sponsored based on modes of financing. Thereafter, the students in the two categories were randomly sampled.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria included first years who had age range distribution between 17 years and 24 years old. The highest proportion among the first-year students were those 19-22 years as reflected by 149 translating to 75.3% of the students surveyed. This was followed by students who were 18 years and below at 29 (14.6%) and those aged 23 years and above were 20 (10.1%) of the participants. The demographic profiles of students are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Demographic profiles of first year students

Demographics	Distribution		%
Mode of financing	Self-sponsored	12	0.606
	Government sponsored	186	93.93%
Age categories	18 years and below	29	14.6%
	19-22 years	149	75.3%
	23 years and above	20	10.1%
Gender	Males	128	64.6%
	Females	70	35.4%

Instruments Of Measurement

Data from students was obtained using Stressful Experiences Scale. In the questionnaire, the stressful experiences considered were in five domains. Each domain had 5 items, totaling 25 items, in the Stressful

Experiences Questionnaire. Creswell (2017) affirms that internal consistency tests the extent to which the item in the questionnaire measures the same aspect each time it is used. Creswell (2017) argues that when the reliability co-efficient approaches a value of 1, it indicates a higher consistency in measurement. The reliability results of the questionnaire are presented in table 2 below:

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha Results for the Stressful Experiences Scale

Scale	No. Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Item (s) deleted	Conclusion (Reliable/Unreliable)
Stressful Experiences Questionnaire				
Physical Environmental Factors Scale	5	.859	None	Excellent
University Administrative Process Factors	5	.744	None	Good
Academic Demands Factors Scale	5	.886	None	Excellent
Psychological and Social Relationship Factors Scale	5	.854	None	Excellent
Financial Difficulties Factors Scale	5	.847	None	Excellent

The reliability tests indicated in table 2 above indicate that the co-efficient of all the sub-scale is above 0.744. This suggests that the scales were reliable, and the items had consistency in measuring the items in the five sub-scales of stressful experiences scale. The reliability co-efficient was adequate as recommended by Taber (2018).

Data Collection Technique

The ethical permit of this research clearance certificate number National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation/P/16/55487/12454 was obtained from the Kenyan Ministry of Education. In addition, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Registrar Academic affairs. Then, appointments were made with the university management and Deans assisted in identifying students on the bases of modes of financing which included self-sponsored (SSP) and the government sponsored (GSS) students. The students were stratified and randomly sampled, then assembled at the university hall. Thereafter, they were briefed about the research, after which they completed the questionnaires. Then, the participants took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Thereafter, the researcher did the de-briefing to the participants.

Data Analysis Technique

In this research, data was first coded, then cleaned after which the statistical tests were run on the raw data to generate findings. Then, measures of central tendency were utilized to produce means and standard deviations from the raw data.

Thereafter, inferential analysis helped to ascertain effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences among categories of students, those were self-sponsored (SSP) and the government sponsored students (GSS). The research hypothesis, "There is a significant effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences of first year students at university", was tested.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The modes of financing were classified into two categories, as self-sponsored (SSP) and government sponsored students (GSS). The hypothesis of the study which stated: "There is a significant effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences of first year students at university", was tested. The modes of financing were the independent variable, and students who were self-sponsored were coded as 1, while the government sponsored ones were coded as 2. The dependent variable was stressful experiences (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001; Sullivan & Artino, 2013). The results are presented in Table 5:

Table 5

Effect of Modes of Financing on Stressful Experience Levels of First Year University Students

Stressful Experience	Mode of Financings	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t-value	Sig. level	Effect Size
Physical Environmental	SSP	12	2.75	0.80	0.23	.165	.869	0.047
	GSS	186	2.71	0.73	0.05			
University	SSP	12	2.65	0.57	0.16	.913	.362	.297

Administrative Process	GSS	186	2.46	0.70	0.05			
Academic Demands	SSP	12	3.97	0.61	0.18	2.580	.022	.667
	GSS	186	3.48	0.84	0.06			
Psychological and Social Relationship	SSP	12	3.11	0.74	0.21	-343	.732	.116
	GSS	186	3.21	0.97	0.07			
Financial Difficulties	SSP	12	3.83	0.80	0.23	5.153	.000	.1518
	GSS	186	2.60	0.82	0.06			
Overall Stressful experiences	SSP	12	3.26	0.34	0.09	2.397	.017	.842
	GSS	186	2.89	0.52	0.04			

Source: SPSS Output on Survey Data (2025)

Table 5 gives the summary of the results of independent sample t-test analysis investigating the effect of modes of financing on stressful experiences among first-year university students. It is evident from the results that although the self-sponsored students had statistically significant [$t(196) = 2.397, p = .017$] higher mean ($M=3.26; SD=0.34$) in overall stressful experiences scale than their government-sponsored counterparts ($M=2.89; SD=0.52$), the difference between the level of their stressful experiences was only significant in two out of the five subscales of stressful experiences. No significant differences ($p > .05$) between the means in stressful experiences were noted in physical environmental, university administrative process, and psychological and social relationships. For example, although self-sponsored students recorded higher stress levels ($M=2.75; SD=0.80$) than the government sponsored students ($M=2.71; SD=0.73$) in physical environment related matters, the difference was not statistically significant [$t(196) = .165, p = .869$]. This indicates that the mode of financing only accounted for an insignificant effect, as further reflected by a very small effect size (Cohen's $d=.047$).

Equally, the results of the survey reveal that there was no significant difference in stressful experience attributed to university administrative process for male and female [$t(196) = .913, p = .362$]. In fact, the magnitude of the differences in the means was small (Cohen's $d=.297$), suggesting that there is negligible variance in stress levels attributed to university administrative process among the first-year university students is explained by the student modes of financing. In the same vein, the results of this study indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean psychological and social relationship scores of self-sponsored and government sponsored students. Specifically, although the self-sponsored group had lower mean psychological and social relationship scores ($M=3.11; SD=0.74$) than the government sponsored group ($M=3.21, SD=0.97$), an independent sample test revealed a t-statistic of .343, with $df = 196$ ($p > 0.05$). The effect size was small, with a Cohen's d of 0.116, further confirming negligible difference in psychological and social relationship stress between the privately and government sponsored first year students.

On the contrary, the results of this study have established that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean stress levels of the self-sponsored group and the government group in academic demands and financial difficulties among the first-year students. Precisely, about academic demands, the self-sponsored group had higher mean stress levels ($M=3.97, SD=0.61$) than the government sponsored group ($M=3.48, SD=0.84$), with an independent sample t-test revealing a t-statistic of 2.58 at $df = 196$ ($p < 0.05$). This difference was statistically significant ($p > .05$) and had a sizeable effect size, with a Cohen's d of 0.667. Likewise, independent-samples t-test results indicate that scores on financial difficulties stress levels were significantly higher for self-sponsored students ($M = 3.83, SD = 0.80$) than for government sponsored students ($M = 2.60, SD = 0.82$), $t(196) = 5.153, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.518$.

Hence, the findings of the study have shown that in three out of five stressful experiences there was no sufficient evidence to accept the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in stress levels between modes of financing among first year university students. Consequently, it was concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in physical environmental, university administrative process, and psychological and social relationship between self-sponsored and government sponsored among the first-year university students. On the flip flop, a statistically significant difference was established in academic demands and financial challenges between self-sponsored and government sponsored among the first-year university students. Thus, the alternative hypothesis was accepted resulting in a subsequent conclusion that modes of financing causes significant differences in stress experiences related to academic demands and financial challenges between self-sponsored and government sponsored first year university students.

In overall, independent-samples t-test results has shown that scores on overall stress experience levels were significantly higher for privately sponsored students ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.34$) than for government sponsored students ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(196) = 2.397$, $p = .017$, Cohen's $d = .842$. Their stressful experience was largely drawn from their academic demands and financial challenges, where recorded significantly higher stress ratings than their counterparts who were government sponsored. Thus, the study concludes that there is significant difference in stressful experiences based on modes of financing between the self-sponsored and government sponsored first year university students, with self-sponsored students generally being more stressed than their counterparts who enjoy government sponsorship.

Discussion

The study finding indicated that students who are government sponsored seem to have adequate financial support from bursaries and have minimal financial stress and anxiety. In agreement to this finding, Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020) showed that most students employed task- and emotion-oriented techniques to manage stressful experiences. Prior studies also indicate how crucial students' perceived control and problem-solving skills are for managing stress (de Cordova et al., 2024). Additionally, studies show that students' approaches to handling stressful situations vary and are individual differences. According to Steffen and Anderson (2025), greater psychological suffering could result from a failure to manage the transitional problems. While some studies suggest that different study periods, like exams and placement practice, can result in higher stress levels (Haque & Jahan, 2023) have proposed that stress starts in the first semester of university and persists throughout the duration of a student's time there. There are many factors that account for the stressful experiences of students in their first year at university including life, identity changes in students, psychological demands, new academic demands, social and emotional relationships with other students as well (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2022; Mostert & Du Toit, 2024; Hako et al., 2025; Stang, et al., 2025).

The findings of the study also suggest that first year students demonstrate similar psychological and social adjustments due to their exposure to university orientation programmes that have been established. This finding is contrary to Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020) study which reported that when students are faced with stressful circumstances, then they require more social and psychological support so that they can navigate appropriately and not indulge in avoidant coping strategies. The finding is also contrary to Mostert and Du Toit, (2024) reported that there are many factors that account for the stressful experiences of students in their first year at university including life, identity changes in students, psychological demands, new academic demands, social and emotional relationships. In addition, the finding also disagreed with Andriansyah, et al., (2025) study which reported that financial stress is strongly associated with several contexts of financial challenges.

The findings suggest, on academic demands, the self-sponsored group had higher mean stress levels than the government sponsored group. This could imply that self-sponsored students have most of their academic needs unmet financially and this makes them vulnerable to stressful experiences leading to poor mental health. This finding concurs with that of Smith et al., (2025) which reiterate that students in first year face numerous challenges. In addition, Wagner, et al., (2025) study agrees that financial anxiety among students in universities may develop independently of external factors due to its multifactorial nature. This finding also concurs with Obbarius et al., (2021) relational theory of psychological coping and stress assertion that, an individual becomes stressed because of interaction with the interaction, and it depends on how they will adjust to stressful circumstances.

Overall, this finding implies that self-sponsored first year students are susceptible to more stress as compared to the government sponsored ones. In agreement, Russell, et al., (2025) argues, most students face significant financial issues, and they also report high emotional stress (Nasr, et al., 2024). Similarly, the finding agreed with Andriansyah, (2025) which reported on financial stress leading to other negative effects. Finally, the finding also concurs with Wagner, et al., (2025) which argues that financial anxiety among students in universities may develop independently of external factors due to its multifactorial nature.

Implications

The findings imply that there should be consideration for funding self-sponsored students as well as for their education at the universities. This is because the findings indicated that self-sponsored students are susceptible to higher stress as compared to government sponsored ones. In addition, the findings imply that there is need for more education in finance management among first year students as this would assist in improving skills in managing finances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the University counselling department should adopt eclectic therapy techniques to assist the first-year students who experience stress. This is because first year students are

susceptible to various forms of stress that they experience at the university, and there is need to integrate principles from various theoretical orientations to meet an individual client's unique needs. Finally, the Ministry of Education should reconsider the modes of financing for students at university and allocate adequate funds based on students' socio-economic status. In addition, the Universities should consider introducing financial education and debt counselling to first year students as this would assist them with best skills of managing finances. Based on the research findings, future research should examine external factors responsible for stress among first year students at universities. In addition, other research could examine institutional based predictors of stress among first year students at universities.

Limitations of the Study

This research was quantitative in nature and it lacked in-depth qualitative findings which could only be attainable by conducting a qualitative research. However, the aim of the study was still achieved because findings that are generalizable were obtained.

4. References

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