Effect of Study Skills and Academic Stress on Under-Graduate Nursing Students' Academic Achievement

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Abstract: Objective: The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of study skills and academic stress on under-graduate nursing students' academic achievement. **Subjects & method:** A descriptive research design was used. This study was conducted at the Faculty of Nursing, Assiut University. The study sample involved (400) undergraduate nursing students, one hundred from each academic year who were assessed for academic stress and study skills. Systemic random sampling was used for selection of the study subjects. Three tools were used: Tool I: Socio-demographic Profile Sheet, Tool II: Study Skills Assessment Questionnaire, Tool III: Perceived Stress Scale. **Results**: Students were good as regards all study skills items except for time management & procrastination, and writing. More than two thirds of the studied students had a moderate level of stress. Academic stress is higher in senior and female students. There was a negative correlation between students' stress and their study skills. There were statistically significant relations between academic achievement, study skills and stress level of the studied students. **Conclusion:** there were statistically significant relations between academic achievement, study skills and stress level of the studied students. **Recommendation:** A study skills training intervention could be a reliable intervention to combat students' academic stress.

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Keywords: Study Skills, Academic Stress, Academic achievement, Nursing Students.

1. Introduction:

Historically, the Latin word “stress” has been in common language since the seventeenth century and was used to address hardship, adversity, or affliction. Stress is increasingly becoming a part of our daily lives. However, stress is best described as a situation where environmental demands exceed the capacity for effective response by the individual and can potentially have physical and psychological consequences **(Bamuhair et al., 2015).**

Indeed, there is evidence that medical students face unique academic challenges that render them more vulnerable to stress and anxiety than students of other disciplines **(Schmitter, 2008).** College students, especially freshmen, are particularly prone to stress due to the transitional nature of college life, where college life compels students to acquire entirely new social skills and also to take responsibility for their own personal needs **(Shields, 2001).**

The World Health Organization **(WHO)** became alarmed and cited stress as a global epidemic **(WHO, 2002, cited in Azila-Gbettor et al., 2015).** Accordingly, work-related stress has become an important subject for studies in academic circles especially in the field of behavioral science **(Agolla and Ongori, 2009; Agolla, 2009).** Academic stress, among college students in particular, has been a topic of interest for many years **(Shields, 2001, cited inShiferaw et al., 2015).**

Kumar and Jejurkar (2005) concluded in their studies that academic factors were mainly responsible for a higher level of stress among undergraduate students. **Wilks, (2008)** stated that students experience stress due to many different factors including issues of time management, financial matters, interaction with lecturers, personal subjective goals, social behavior, adjustment in the academic culture, and lack of support system**.**

Dahlin, et al., (2005) cited in **Kumar and Nancy (2011)** stated that stress can have a significant effect on students long term physical and mental well-being. The students may become irritable, show lack of concentration, insomnia, absenteeism, poor interpersonal relations, anddecreased academic performance **(Pheukphan, 2011; Papazisis and Ulasidis, 2011).**

Among college students, a strong relationship is found between stressful life events and reduced academic achievement. Also there is a link between health-related quality of life and stress **(khan et al., 2013).** Over the years, academic achievement at different levels of education is measured in terms of examination performance **(Kyoshaba, 2009).**

In the educational parlance, performance manifests through academic achievement, which is the manifestation of a student's skills of study and they in turn are formed and strengthened through education. The development of good study skills is equally

relative and helpful not only in academic work but in career actualization **(Siahi and Maiyo, 2015).**

Prior to any study task, it is necessary to acquire some study skills including the reading and thinking skills **(Walker & Masterman, 2006).** According to **Motevalli, et al., (2013) ,** learning skills are the constituents of a learning strategy that include the skills of reading, writing, finding and organizing information, while a learning strategy refers to the process of selecting and organizing the skills of the learner.

Hassanbeigi et al. (2011) stated that study skills can play an important role in the improvement of students' academic achievement and that study skills includes the following skills; time management and procrastination, concentration & memory, study aids and note taking, test strategies and test anxiety, organizing & processing information, motivation and attitude, reading & selecting the main idea.

Aim of the study:

To assess the effect of study skills and academic stress on the academic achievement of under-graduate nursing students in Assuit University.

Research questions:

1- What is the effect of academic stress on students' academic achievement?

2- What is the effect of study skills on students' achievement?

3- What is the relation between study skills, academic stress, and students' achievement?

2. Subjects and method:

Research design:

A descriptive research design was used in this study.

Setting:

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Nursing, Assiut University.

Subjects:

The study sample involved (400) under-graduate nursing students, one hundred from each academic year who were assessed for academic stress and study skills. Systemic random sampling was used for the selection of the study subjects. The sample size has been calculated using the EPI Info version 6 taken the 50% prevalence of student academic stress. A value of 5% is chosen as the precision at 95% level of confidence. The calculated sample size is 385 students that increased to 400 to guard against non-response.

Tools of the study:

Three tools were utilized for this study.

Tool I: Socio-demographic Profile Sheet:

It contained items such as age, sex, academic year, residence and students' current living state.

Tool II: Study Skills Assessment Questionnaire:

This Questionnaire was developed by **(Hassanbeigi, et al., 2011).** The researchers added another item which is the writing skill. So, the modified questionnaire consisted of eight sections including time management and procrastination, concentration and memory, study aids and note taking, test strategies and test anxiety, organizing and processing information, motivation and attitude, reading and selecting the main idea and finally writing skills. Each section of the questionnaire includes (8) items concerning the amount of study skills used by the subjects.

Scoring the questionnaire is done using a 4-Point Likert Scale: always (3) , usually (2) , sometimes (1) , never (0). More than 60% means good and below 60% means poor. The content validity of this questionnaire was established by a jury of seven experts in the related field of the Faculty of Nursing, Assuit University. The content validity index was (0.83). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach α test to measure internal consistency which yielded (0.83). Based on the current scientific evidence and the practical needs of students, we believe that the items of the questionnaire correspond greatly to the valid scientific sources and include the main determining factors that influence the students' educational performance.

Tool III: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-14) :

It was adopted from **Kumar and Nancy, 2011)** and was used to assess the stress level among nursing students based on their feelings and thoughts. Scoring the questionnaire is done using a 5-Point Likert Scale, varying from 0 = Never, 1 = Almost Never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4= very often, with a total of 14 items. The score range from 0 to 56 using the following scoring system to assess the students' level of stress: (low = score <50%, moderate = score 50-75 %, and good = score >75 %).

The content validity of the questionnaires was assessed by a jury of seven experts in the related field. The content validity index was (o.80). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach α test to measure internal consistency which yielded (0.85).

Method of data collection:-

Preparatory phase and administrative design (I

1- An official permission was obtained from the dean of the Faculty of Nursing for data collection after explaining the purpose of the study. Approval of the Nursing Ethical Committee at the faculty was obtained.

2- **Pilot study:** Before embarking on the actual study, a pilot study was carried out on (10 %) of the sample (40 students) to assess the tools for clarity, reliability and applicability. According to the results of the pilot study, no modification was carried out and these students were included in the study subjects.

II) Data collection

A) Ethical considerations

At the initial interview, each student was informed about the purpose and nature of the study, and the researchers emphasized that participation would be voluntary. The consent for participation was taken orally. In addition, the confidentiality of the data was maintained, explained and also printed in the questionnaire as follows: collected information was used only for the purpose of the study without referring to the personnel's participation through anonymity of the subjects that was assured by the coding of all data.

B) Practical work

Data was collected in the period from the 1st of February to the end of April, 2016. The researchers coordinated and organized the field work with teaching staff members who were responsible for the desired lecture. Researchers asked them about the preferred time for data collection, in the first or last part of the lectures. The researchers introduced themselves to the students; the purpose and nature of the study were explained. Then the researchers explained the main parts of the questionnaire. After that, the questionnaire forms were distributed to students and the students were asked to complete the questionnaires by selecting only one answer. Both scales were given to students in an Arabic form. The questionnaire took about (15-20) minuets to be filled. The researchers were present during data collection to clarify any questions from the students.

Statistical analysis:

The obtained data were reviewed, prepared for computer processing, coded, analyzed and tabulated. Date entry and data analysis were done using SPSS version 19 (Statistical Package for Social Science). Data were presented as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation. Chi-square test was used to compare between qualitative variables. Independent samples t-test was used to compare quantitative variables between two groups and ANOVA test for more than two groups. Pearson correlation was performed to measure the correlation between quantitative variables. P-value was considered statistically significant when $P < 0.05$.

3. Results

Table (1) showed that the mean age of students was (20.58±1.33). The majority of students were females (86.5%). More than half of them lived in rural areas in their family house (57.5 % and 54%, respectively).

Table (2) showed that the studied students were good as regards all study skills items except for time management and procrastination, and writing, which were poor (68.3% and 58.5%, respectively).

Figure (1) Data represented in fig 1 shows that more than two thirds (66.5 %) of the students experienced moderate stress level, and (14.5%) of them experienced high stress level.

Table (3) Data represented in table (3) shows that there was no statistically significant relation between stress level and the personal characteristics of the studied students like age, academic year, residence, and students' current living state but there was a statistically significant relation with sex ($p = 0.009$).

Table (4) revealed that **(66.5%)** of the study sample aged more than 20 years, (**68.5%**) of males, (**72.0%)** of third year students, and (59.7%) of those who lived in family house had good study skills. There was a statistically significant relation between students' study skills scores and their personal characteristics like age, and academic year ($p = 0.001$) , but there was no statistically significant relation with sex, residence and students' current living state.

Table (5) shows that there were statistically significant differences between students' stress and some variables of their study skills such as time management and procrastination, organizing and processing information, motivation and attitude, reading and selecting the main idea and writing, while no significant differences were detected for the other variables.

Figure (2) This figure showed that there was a negative correlation between students' stress and their study skills ($r = -0.195$).

Table (6) The data shown in table (6) show that there was a statistically significant relation between students' stress level and three items of their study skills: motivation and attitude, reading and selecting the main idea, and writing ($p = 0.000$, *0.030*, and 0.000*, respectively). However, no statistically significant relation was detected for the other items of study skills. Totally, there was a statistically significant relationship between students' stress level and their study skills ($p = 0.017$).

Table (7): Illustrated that there was a statistically significant relation among students' academic performance, study skills and stress level (p=0.000, 0.001, respectively)**.**

Table (1): Frequency distribution of the studied students according to their personal characteristics (n = 400).

Personal characteristic	No. (400)	%
Age:		
18 - 20 years	197	49.3
> 20 years	203	50.8
Mean ± SD (Range)	**20.58 ± 1.33 (18.0 – 24.0)**	
Sex:		
Males	54	13.5
Females	346	**86.5**
Academic year:		
First	100	25.0
Second	100	25.0
Third	100	25.0
Fourth	100	25.0
Residence:		
Rural	230	**57.5**
Urban	170	42.5
Students current living state		
Family house	216	**54.0**
University City	160	40.0
Private housing	24	6.0

Table (2): Frequency distribution of the studied students regarding their study skills (n = 400).

Study skills items	No. (n= 400)	%
Time Management and Procrastination:		
Poor (< 60%)	273	**68.3**
Good (≥ 60%)	127	31.8
Concentration and Memory:		
Poor (< 60%)	129	32.3
Good (≥ 60%)	271	67.8
Study Aids and Note Taking:		
Poor (< 60%)	85	21.3
Good (≥ 60%)	315	78.8
Test Strategies and Test Anxiety:		
Poor (< 60%)	130	32.5
Good (≥ 60%)	270	67.5
Organizing and Processing Information:		
Poor (< 60%)	147	36.8
Good (≥ 60%)	253	63.3
Motivation and Attitude:		
Poor (< 60%)	199	49.8
Good (≥ 60%)	201	50.3
Reading and Selecting the Main Idea:		
Poor (< 60%)	189	47.3
Good (≥ 60%)	211	52.8
Writing:		
Poor (< 60%)	234	**58.5**
Good (≥ 60%)	166	41.5
Total study skills:		
Poor (< 60%)	166	41.5
Good (≥ 60%)	234	58.5

*** <60% means Good **≥60 % means Poor**

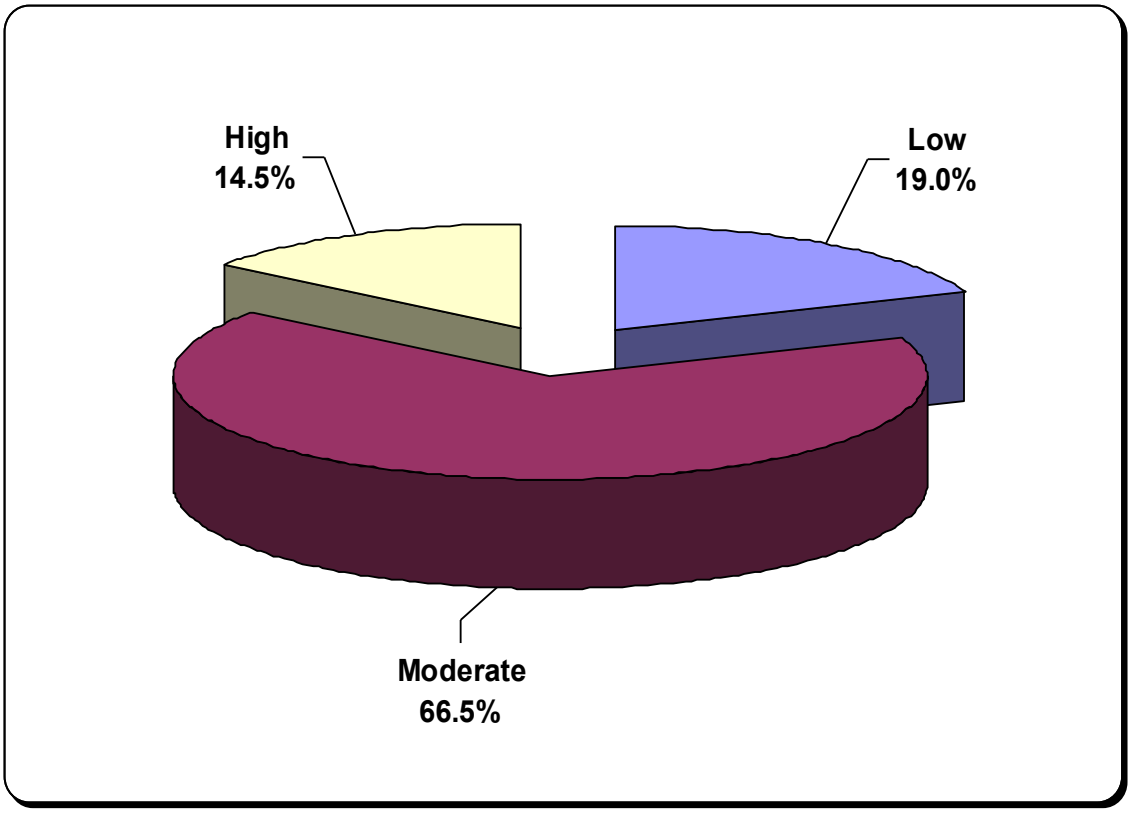

Fig. 1: Pie diagram showing the stress level of nursing students

Table (3): Relation between the personal characteristics of the studied students and their stress level (n = 400)

Personal characteristics	Stress level						P-value
	Low (n= 76)		Moderate (n= 266)		High (n= 58)		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Age:							
18 - 20 years	45	22.8	121	61.4	31	15.7	0.085
> 20 years	31	15.3	145	71.4	27	13.3	
Sex:							
Male	16	29.6	26	48.1	12	22.2	**0.009***
Female	60	17.3	240	69.4	46	13.3	
Academic year:							
First	14	14.0	66	66.0	20	20.0	
Second	26	26.0	65	65.0	9	9.0	0.175
Third	16	16.0	68	68.0	16	16.0	
Fourth	20	20.0	67	67.0	13	13.0	
Residence:							
Rural	39	17.0	161	70.0	30	13.0	0.226
Urban	37	21.8	105	61.8	28	16.5	
Students' current living state:							
Family house	44	20.4	143	66.2	29	13.4	
University City	28	17.5	105	65.6	27	16.9	0.703
Private housing	4	16.7	18	75.0	2	8.3	

***Significant at p< 0.05**

Table (4): Relation between the personal characteristics of the studied students and their study skills scores (n = 400).

Personal characteristics	Study skills				P-value
	Poor (< 60%) (n= 166)		Good (≥ 60%) (n= 234)		
	No.	%	No.	%	
Age:					
18 - 20 years	98	49.7	99	50.3	**0.001***
> 20 years	68	33.5	135	**66.5**	
Sex:					
Male	17	31.5	37	**68.5**	0.108
Female	149	43.1	197	56.9	
Academic year:					
First	56	56.0	44	44.0	
Second	42	42.0	58	58.0	**0.001***
Third	28	28.0	72	**72.0**	
Fourth	40	40.0	60	60.0	
Residence:					
Rural	95	41.3	135	58.7	0.926
Urban	71	41.8	99	58.2	
Students' current living state:					
Family house	87	40.3	129	**59.7**	0.858
University City	69	43.1	91	56.9	
Private housing	10	41.7	14	58.3	

***Significant at p< 0.05**

Table (5): Correlations between students stress and their study skills

Study Skills items	Stress	
	R-value	P-value
Time Management and Procrastination	-0.132	**0.008***
Concentration and Memory	-0.043	0.392
Study Aids and Note Taking	0.007	0.896
Test Strategies and Test Anxiety	-0.063	0.206
Organizing and Processing Information	-0.118	**0.018***
Motivation and Attitude	-0.324	**0.000***
Reading and Selecting Main Idea	-0.166	**0.001***
Writing	-0.247	**0.000***
Total Study skills	-0.195	**0.000***

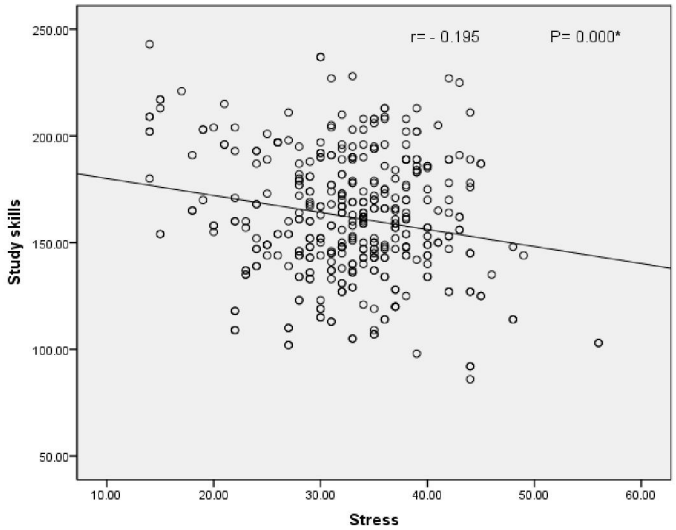

Fig. (2): Correlations between students' stress and their study skill

Table (6): Correlation between students' study skills items and their stress levels (n = 400)

Study Skills Items	Stress level			P-value
	Low (n= 76)	Moderate (n= 266)	High (n= 58)	
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	
Time Management and Procrastination	17.95 ± 5.99	17.13 ± 4.57	16.03 ± 5.05	0.086
Concentration and Memory	21.51 ± 5.63	21.83 ± 4.50	21.19 ± 5.09	0.622
Study Aids and Note Taking	22.50 ± 5.34	23.29 ± 4.28	22.64 ± 5.98	0.349
Test Strategies and Test Anxiety	21.64 ± 5.45	21.58 ± 4.59	20.79 ± 5.95	0.527
Organizing and Processing Information	21.78 ± 5.17	21.24 ± 5.20	20.10 ± 6.00	0.187
Motivation and Attitude	21.76 ± 5.19	19.86 ± 4.93	17.29 ± 5.79	**0.000***
Reading and Selecting the Main Idea	20.87 ± 6.11	19.09 ± 4.80	19.21 ± 5.53	**0.030***
Writing	20.78 ± 6.05	17.74 ± 4.64	17.26 ± 4.87	**0.000***
Total study skills	168.79±33.00	161.76±26.55	154.52±31.54	**0.017***

***Significant at p< 0.05**

Table (7): Relation among students' academic performance, study skills and stress level.

Variables	Academic performance										P-value
	Excellent (n= 67)		Very good (n= 78)		Good (n= 131)		Fair (n= 85)		Poor (n= 39)		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Study skills:											
Good	57	85.1	54	69.2	76	58.0	40	47.1	7	17.9	**0.000***
Poor	10	14.9	24	30.8	55	42.0	45	52.9	32	82.1	
Stress level:											
Low	23	34.3	18	23.1	24	18.3	10	11.8	1	2.6	**0.001***
Moderate	39	58.2	51	65.4	90	68.7	57	67.1	29	74.4	
High	5	7.5	9	11.5	17	13.0	18	21.2	9	23.1	

4. Discussion

The present research studied the effect of academic stress and study skills on student's performance and the consequences of some demographic variables like gender, age and educational level. The results of this study revealed that the mean age of the studied students was (20.58±1.33), the majority of students were females and more than half of them lived in rural areas, and in their family houses.

As regards students' study skills, the results illustrated that the studied students were good as regards to all study skills items except for time management **&** procrastination, and writing. These results are consistent with **Hassanbeigi et al., (2011)** who suggested that approximately 95% of all college students procrastinate. These results also agree with **Çapan (2010)** who estimated that the prevalence of procrastination among college students vary between 25% and 50% depending on the type of academic tasks being completed.

Data of the present research indicated that more than two thirds of the students were good as regards concentration and memory. These results are in line with **Alloway & Alloway (2010)** who mentioned that students frequently need to rely on working memory to perform a range of activities, and that poor working memory leads to failures in simple tasks such as remembering instructions to more complex activities that involve storing and processing information and keeping track of progress in difficult tasks. Working memory impairments lead to learning deficits as well as difficulty in performing daily activities. One explanation for this is that working memory acts like a bottleneck for learning.

Concerning study aids and note taking, more than three quarters of the students were good. Our results are in agreement with the study of **Haghverdi, et al. (2010)** who revealed that note-taking strategy instruction had significant effects on the students' achievement. These findings support the view that in academic performance, the process effect of note taking is of great importance. However, these results disagree with **Lammers, et al. (2001; cited in Nakalema and Ssenyonga, 2013)** who found that there were weaknesses in note taking among

undergraduates. Also, the results disagree with **Alexander and Onwuegbuzie (2007**) who noted that there was laxity among students in note taking in anticipation of accessing the notes after class.

As regards stress level, the present study showed that more than two thirds of the studied students had a moderate level of stress. The results disagree with the findings of **Kumar and Nancy (2011)** who reported that out of 180 nursing students 34.4% had moderate stress.

The results of this study shows that academic stress is higher in senior students than in younger students. This can be explained by the fact that the academic demands on the seniors like having supervised clinical rotation are much more. Furthermore, senior students are required to write their research dissertations, which exposes them to additional stress. These results disagree with **Mazumdar, et al. (2012)** who mentioned that academic stress is higher in younger students than in older students, as younger students are not as much adjusted to academic stress of university as seniors are. They feel adjustment problems but the older students reported enhanced time management skills as compared to younger students, because they have learned and adjusted themselves with successful time management behaviors which in turn leads to less academic stress and anxiety.

Also the results were inconsistent with **Khan, et al. (2013)** who stated that academic stress is higher in less qualified students (juniors) than in highly qualified students (seniors), as less qualified students are less experienced, have a low maturity level and are more victimized by academic stress of university as compared to the seniors who are not only mature and experienced but are also well-adapted and well-adjusted to academic stress.

The results indicated that there was a significant difference between males and females in perceptions of stress, female students being more prone to more academic stress. This may be due to the fact that females experienced higher levels of academic stress because of negative appraisals of the stressful event and focus on the emotional challenges in the wake of the stressful event. These results agree with **Azila-Gbettor, et al. (2015)** who stated that males and females differ in their perception of stress. They also agree with **Nakalema and Ssenyonga (2013)** who mentioned that stress levels vary by gender of the students.

Also the results are consistent with **Bang (2009)** who stated that the levels of academic related stress differed among male and female students with female students having experienced more academic stress than males. However, the results disagree with the findings of **Calaguas (2011)** who found that a non-significant difference in perceived stress between male and female students because female students have also learned the time management and stress coping strategies like male students. They enjoy their studies by adopting effective and efficient study skills. Moreover, they are much devoted, concerned and consistent in their studies.

The present study results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between stress level and the academic year. Stress levels of third year students were high when compared to other classes. These results are in line with **Azila–Gbettor, et al. (2015)** who mentioned that third year students were found to exhibit higher levels of stress than any other year group. Also, these results agree with **Kumar and Nancy (2011)** who found that the stress level of first year and third year B.Sc. Nursing students was found to be significantly higher than other classes. Also the findings are inconsistent with the findings of an Iranian study conducted by **Seyedfatemi, et al. (2007**) who revealed that first year students experience more stress than continuing students.

The results of the present study indicated that three quarters of the studied students who had moderate stress levels were living in private housing. This can be explained by living of students in an unfamiliar environment, separation from the parents and the demand of making new social groups apart from academic pressures and clinical training.

The results illustrated that there was a negative correlation between students' stress and their study skills. These results agree with **Aluja and Blanch (2004; cited in Nakalema and Ssenyonga, 2013)** who emphasized that students with good study skills usually show a more socially balanced behavior and a higher sense of responsibility and therefore find it easier to alleviate academic stress.

The current study revealed that there was a statistically significant relation between students' stress level and their academic performance. The results are in agreement with **Safree, et al. (2010)** who found that depression, anxiety, and stress are negatively correlated with academic achievement. The higher the stress, the lower the academic achievement of students. This study results also disagree with **Azila-Gbettor, et al. (2015)** who stated that there is no significant correlation between the level of stress and academic performance.

The present study found a statistically significant relation between students' academic performance and their study skills. These results agree with **Motevalli, et al. (2013)** who stated that students who experience academic problems do not use any study skills to perform their learning activities; therefore, they face difficulty in understanding the academic texts. Furthermore, academic performance is positively

affected by study skills. So there is a need to provide regular study skill interventions for the students in general and freshmen in particular. In this way self-regulation in learning can be boosted.

Conclusion:

The results of the present study showed that students were good as regards all study skills items except for time management& procrastination, and writing. Academic stress is higher in older students than younger students. There was a negative correlation between students' stress and their study skills. Also there were statistically significant relations between academic performance, study skills and stress level of studied students.

Recommendations:

1- A study skills training intervention could be a reliable intervention to combat students' academic stress.

2- Study skills and study habits courses should be included in the students' curriculum formally or implemented as workshops for students, especially the students in the first academic year.

3- The nurse educator should find out the sources of stress and coping strategies used by the students so that they can be helped to cope well with upcoming problems and situations.

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