

Stress management strategies and academic performance of students in North Central Nigeria universities

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Abstract : Stress among university students is a pervasive challenge in higher education across Nigeria, with weighty implications for both academic outcomes and psychological well-being. Hence, this study examined the effects of stress management strategies on academic performance of undergraduates in Nigeria Universities: The specific objectives are to: (i) examine the effect of time management on study hours per week and;(ii) determine the influence of relaxation techniques on students' concentration during study. A quantitative design was adopted for the study. Structured questionnaire was used to acquire needed data from a sample of 399 students, of which 370 valid responses were used for analysis. Obtained data were analysed with the use of PLS-SEM analytical tools through the use of SmartPLS 4. Findings from the study indicate that time management has a significant effect on study hours per week with ($R^2 = 0.801$, $p < .001$) and relaxation techniques with ($R^2 = 0.781$, $p < .001$) has significant effect on students' concentration. The study concludes that structured time management and consistent use of relaxation practices significantly enhance students' academic engagement and concentration. The study implies that targeted institutional interventions such as time management workshops, mindfulness training, campus fitness programmes, and peer-support initiatives can improve students' resilience and academic success.

Keywords: Stress management strategies, Academic performance, Time management, Study hours per week, Relaxation techniques, Students' concentration.

Résumé : Le stress chez les étudiants universitaires constitue un défi majeur dans l'enseignement supérieur au Nigeria, avec des répercussions importantes tant sur les résultats scolaires que sur le bien-être psychologique. Cette étude a examiné l'impact des stratégies de gestion du stress sur la performance académique des étudiants de premier cycle dans les universités nigérianes. Les objectifs spécifiques étaient de : (i) examiner l'effet de la gestion du temps sur le nombre d'heures d'étude hebdomadaires ; et (ii) déterminer l'influence des techniques de relaxation sur la concentration des étudiants pendant l'étude. Une approche quantitative a été adoptée pour cette recherche. Des données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'un questionnaire structuré administré à un échantillon de 399 étudiants, dont 370 réponses valides ont été analysées. Les données ont été examinées au moyen d'une analyse PLS-SEM (modélisation par équations structurelles des moindres carrés partiels) réalisée avec le logiciel SmartPLS 4. La gestion du temps a un effet significatif sur le nombre d'heures d'étude hebdomadaires ($R^2 = 0,801$, $p < 0,001$), et les techniques de relaxation ont un effet significatif sur

la concentration des étudiants ($R^2 = 0,781$, $p < 0,001$). L'étude conclut qu'une gestion structurée du temps et une pratique régulière de techniques de relaxation améliorent considérablement l'engagement académique et la concentration des étudiants. Ces résultats suggèrent que des interventions institutionnelles ciblées - telles que des ateliers de gestion du temps, des formations à la pleine conscience, des programmes de remise en forme sur le campus et des initiatives de soutien par les pairs - peuvent renforcer la résilience et la réussite académique des étudiants.

Mots-clés : Stratégies de gestion du stress, Performance académique, Gestion du temps, Heures d'étude hebdomadaires, Techniques de relaxation, Concentration des étudiants.

Introduction

Globally, stress is noted as one of the major issues relating to mental health in higher education. Other contributing factors such as competitive academic environments, financial demands, and transitions to independent living also contribute to elevated stress levels. While mild stress can serve as a motivator, excessive and sustained stress degrades academic performance, raises dropout chances, and significantly impacts students' general well-being. In response, colleges worldwide have introduced stress management strategies such as counselling services, mindfulness training, and structured peer-support programmes to promote student resilience and performance (Ansari, 2024).

In Africa, socioeconomic difficulties, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to official mental health services exacerbate the burden of academic stress among students. Despite the challenging academic environment, students still cope with poor learning facilities, huge class sizes, irregular electrical supply, and in some circumstances, political instability (Adeyemi & Balogun, 2024). Also, research across sub-Saharan Africa reveals that high stress levels are a major driver to academic underperformance and attrition rates. Consequently, many African students depend heavily on self-devised coping mechanisms, including informal peer mentoring, religious engagement, and family support, to negotiate the academic journey (Kuk, 2023).

In Nigeria, the higher education system has its own stressful obstacles. For instance, access to student support services is restricted, academic calendars are frequently disrupted by industrial actions, and universities are frequently overcrowded. Heavy course loads, family demands, financial strains, and occasionally part-time work must be balanced by students. Therefore, effective stress management is crucial for maintaining students' performance and wellbeing since these facts exacerbate academic stress.

The issues raised above notwithstanding, high performance is anticipated and desired at the local level across Nigerian universities which put students under a lot of academic strain because of the institution's emphasis on discipline and ongoing evaluation. Although this encourages achievement, but where coping strategies are insufficient, it also puts students at risk of stress-related burnout. Therefore, examining how the adoption of stress management techniques affect students' academic performance is critical going by the university's challenging academic culture and diverse students' response to it. Consequently, the creation of focused therapies that correspond with students' actual academic experiences, such as time management issues, relaxation training, and peer-support programs, can be guided by the insights gained from this context (Frontiers, 2021).

In addition, effective stress management measures such as time management, relaxation techniques, regular physical activity, and social support can be actively supported and institutionalised, helping students to keep focus, achieve high academic standards, and enjoy a good learning experience. However, this ideal is far from the

reality that exists in many Nigerian universities today where the academic environment is marked by challenging curricula, large class numbers, poor learning facilities, and restricted access to mental health and counselling services. Also, financial limitations, high expectations from parents and society, and seldomly juggling part-time employment and education exacerbate these situations (Adah, 2019).

In addition, declining academic performance, decreased focus, higher absenteeism, and in extreme situations, mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and burnout are all clear effects of this circumstance. Poorly handled stress can impair cognitive performance, diminish academic motivation, and hamper students' ability to meet the demands of their academic courses, reduced grade point averages, reduced retention rates, and in severe situations, study withdrawal, can result from this over time. These difficulties if left unattended to, could jeopardize the goal of many Nigerian universities, which take pride in being hubs of academic achievement and produce well-rounded graduates who can make significant contributions to the country's growth and development (Ansari, 2024).

Aside that, the dearth of empirical data on Nigerian undergraduates' successful management of academic stress is a serious issue. While some earlier research has looked at the connection between stress and academic performance, many of these studies are out of date, as they failed to critically identify coping mechanisms specifically, or connect specific stress management techniques to quantifiable academic results. Furthermore, little research has been done on how these tactics function in the changing socio-academic environment that has been influenced by recent national and international events. In order to create evidence-based interventions that improve student performance and advance mental health, this thus examined undergraduates' academic performance at Nigerian institutions by focusing on two fundamental stress management strategies which are time management and relaxation techniques.

1. Theoretical background

Stress is a multifaceted concept that is commonly defined as the emotional and physical reactions people have when faced with obstacles or dangers that exceed their capacity for adaptation. It is how the body reacts to any pressure or demand, whether it comes from the outside world, internal strife, or perceived expectations. Stress triggers physiological reactions that are necessary for immediate life but possibly harmful over time, such as elevated heart rate, tense muscles, and hormone release.

Stress management strategies are intentional behaviors and mental techniques people use to regulate their stress reactions and enhance their psychological well-being. Effective coping strategies fall into three primary categories, each of which addresses a distinct facet of academic stress: time management, support-seeking (Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz et al., 2021).

Time management is widely recognized as a crucial academic ability that enables people to prioritize assignments and effectively utilize their available time in order to meet learning objectives. Planning academic workloads, establishing specific objectives, and developing timetables that strike a balance between personal and academic obligations are all components of effective time management. It is also connected with self-regulation and goal-directed behaviour, which are necessary in high-pressure academic situations. Students that don't manage their time well frequently struggle academically, skip deadlines, and do poorly. Students that adopt regulated time-use patterns, on the other hand, frequently report improved wellbeing and academic adjustment. These results lend credence to the idea that effective time management is a critical factor in determining academic performance (Häfner et al., 2021).

With the approach of SMART goals approach, students can convert general academic

goals into specific assignments with deadlines. For example, instead of vowing to “study more,” a student may strive to “review two chapters of economics every Monday and Wednesday between 5 and 7 pm.”

This kind of goal clarity improves performance, dedication, and attention. It also lessens procrastination and offers a foundation for motivation to keep moving forward. Students are more likely to succeed academically when they approach time with this degree of intentionality (García-Ros et al., 2019).

Another time management technique is prioritization, which is deciding which tasks should be completed first based on their significance and urgency. Ranking assignments logically is crucial because students frequently have to deal with conflicting deadlines, exam schedules, and other projects. One helpful tool that helps students concentrate on what really matters is the Eisenhower Matrix, which divides work into four categories: crucial and vital, not crucial but vital, crucial but not vital, and neither.

Students reduce stress and avoid last-minute pressures by starting with high-priority assignments. Additionally, it increases productivity and fosters a sense of control over academic responsibilities. Appropriate task prioritization plays a major role in efficient utilization of academic time (Aeon & Aguinis, 2021).

2. Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques are deliberate practices and exercises designed to reduce physical and mental tension caused by job or academic related stress. This include both organized physical activity like running, swimming, dancing, or participating in sports, as well as unstructured mobility like walking between courses or performing housework. The incorporation of such exercises into everyday routines enhances cardiovascular health, muscle strength, and general physical fitness, which constitute the foundation for successful stress management. Significantly, regular exercise improves resilience and mental alertness, which helps students better handle the demands of their studies. Accordingly, exercise serves as a comprehensive instrument that promotes the mental and physical aspects of students' well-being (Smith, 2020).

In addition, consistent exercising often enhances the reactivation of the body as it controls cortisol which is the main stress hormone, and increases the production of endorphins which are naturally occurring mood boosters. After working out, students tend to feel happier and experience less psychological stress from time to time. Physical exercise has also been known to enhance sleep quality, which is important for academic performance and memory consolidation. Simple routines like yoga or night-time walks can greatly improve restfulness for students whose study schedules and stress levels frequently interfere with their ability to sleep. Improved focus, memory, and emotional stability during study sessions are the results of mood modulation and better sleep (González-Hernández et al., 2021).

Another relaxation tactic is physical activity, which improves neuroplasticity and increases blood flow to the brain, supporting information processing, learning, and attention. This is especially crucial in academic settings where complex tasks like problem-solving and critical thinking require good cognitive functioning. Students who participate in moderate physical exercise for at least 150 minutes per week frequently exhibit improved executive function and quicker response times. These impacts improve performance on high-stakes tests as well as in the classroom. As a result, exercise not only relieves stress but also improves cognitive function (Chen, 2022).

3. Academic Performance

Academic performance is the quantifiable accomplishments of students in their educational endeavors, usually evaluated by grades, task completion, exams, projects, and general success in curriculum-based activities. Grade Point Average (GPA), test

results, or other standardized evaluations that represent learning objectives and academic competency are frequently used to quantify it. Academic success is more than just grades; it also includes qualities like critical thinking, engagement, contentment, perseverance, and the acquisition of information and abilities related to future professional competencies (Dumford & Miller, 2020).

3.1 Students' Focus

Student focus encapsulate the cognitive capacity to focus attention on a subject while disregarding internal and external distractions otherwise known as concentration during study. To easily absorb, understand, and encode information that are essential for learning and academic success, the continuous employment of attentional resources is completely out of choice. The outcomes of strong focus ability, is active students' participation in class, solving difficult cognitive tasks, and successfully remember new information. On the other hand, fragmented attention, which is frequently brought on by multitasking or digital distractions, can worsen understanding, raise cognitive load, and needlessly prolong study time. Therefore, cultivating focus and critical attention is vital for increasing the efficiency and positive return on time invested in academic activities (Özcan & Yaldez, 2020).

Furthermore, stress and learning outcomes are meaningfully facilitated by concentration. High levels of stress, particularly from impending deadlines or test anxiety, might interfere with students' ability to concentrate by causing concern thoughts and physiological arousal, which interfere with cognitive processing. Improving focus using methods like mindfulness, metacognitive tactics, or study break cycles can mitigate the detrimental effects of stress, enabling students to stay focused and take in information. As a result, concentration-focused treatments promote both short-term academic success and long-term retention (Wang, Mei, & Mo, 2021).

Concentration during study is significantly influenced by behavioral and environmental variables. While clutter, noise, and digital notifications may rapidly impair attention, a distraction-free environment, like a peaceful library or well-organized study room, promotes persistent focus. Sharper attention is also facilitated by behavioral patterns including planning brief breaks, switching up study materials to avoid weariness, and giving up multitasking. The Pomodoro Technique, which involves 25 minutes of intense concentration interspersed with a brief break, has proven successful in sustaining attention and preventing fatigue during study sessions. This emphasizes how crucial internal and external structures are to maintaining cognitive concentration (Fernandez & Gosling, 2022).

In addition to cognitive learning outcomes like test scores and study habits, the conceptualization of academic success has expanded to encompass metacognitive and emotional aspects. High academic self-efficacy learnings are more likely to use productive study techniques, persevere in the face of difficulties, and perform better academically. According to Robinson and Hullinger (2020), this perspective moves the emphasis from results alone to the internal processes that result in success, especially when they interact with outside assistance and stress-reduction techniques.

3.2 Study Hours

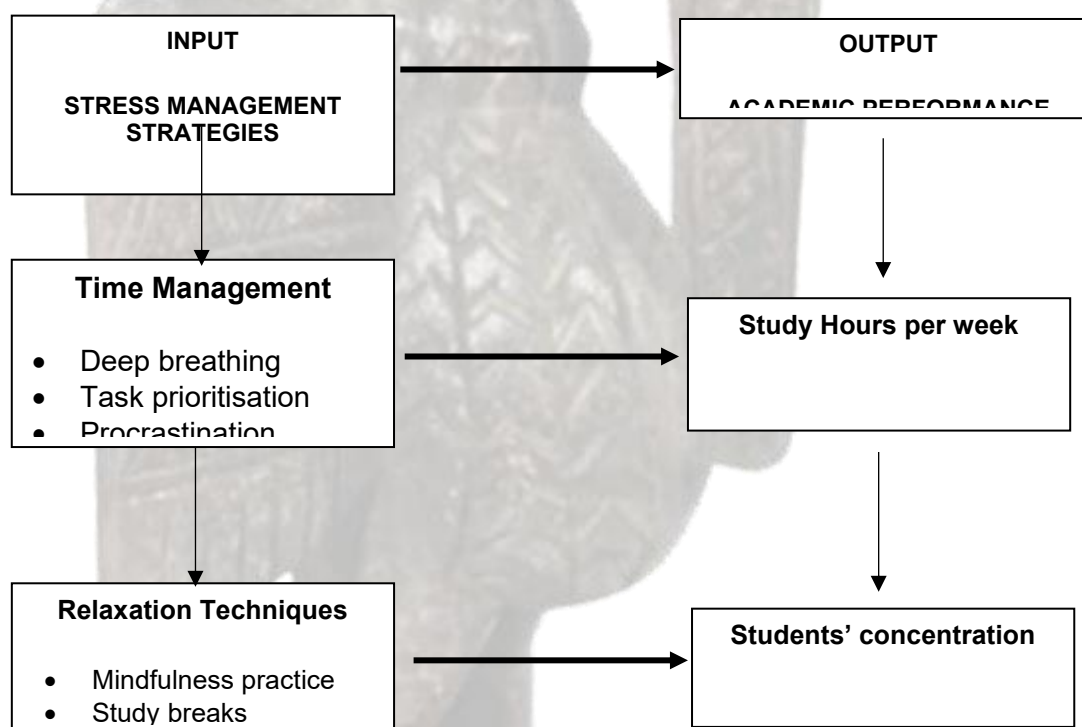
The amount of time students spends on academic pursuits outside of regular classroom settings is referred to as study hours. This idea includes regular study practices, such as planning revision sessions, preparing assignments, and reading on your own. The quality of study, which is characterized by intense concentration, deliberate pauses, and well-thought-out preparation, is more important than just clock time in converting study hours into learning gains. Creating consistent study habits promotes discipline and

accountability while offering structure in the face of a variety of academic pressures. According to Jensen and McDaniel (2019), substantial correlation exists among increased comprehension, retention, and academic success when longer study sessions are paired with excellent involvement.

Researchers make a distinction between the amount and quality of study time. The mere amount of time spent studying is referred to as quantity, however the intensity, concentration, and effectiveness of those hours are reflected in quality. Even if a student studies for six hours, their learning outcomes may be subpar due to frequent interruptions. On the other hand, a concentrated three-hour session utilizing active learning techniques could be more successful. As a result, the ratio of in-depth, continuous study to passive or distracted reviewing must be taken into account when evaluating study hours (Robinson & Hullinger, 2020).

H0: Stress management strategies and academic performance of students in North Central Nigeria Universities

Figure 1 : Conceptual Model



Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026

3.3 Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory

Transactional Model is an important framework for comprehending how people react to stress and coping, which was created by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. According to the idea, stress results from interactions between an individual and their surroundings rather than directly from outside events. The fundamental tenet of this theory is the development of stress while coping mechanisms are insufficient to meet the demands of a certain circumstance. As a result, the model emphasizes that stress is a constant process of assessment and adaptation rather than a fixed occurrence, making it both cognitive and dynamic (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Primary and secondary appraisal are the two main phases of cognitive assessment described in the concept. During primary appraisal, a person determines if an incident is

stressful, benign-positive, or unimportant. Stressful situations are further classified as challenges, threats, or harm/loss. Secondary evaluation is assessing the alternatives and resources available for handling or reacting to the circumstance. According to Biggs et al. (2017), this dual evaluation process impacts not only the level of stress experienced but also the coping techniques chosen, whether they are emotion-focused (controlling emotional reactions) or problem-focused (addressing the source of stress).

The Transactional Model is particularly pertinent from an academic perspective since students often face challenging circumstances that call for quick decision-making and flexible coping. During test times, for example, students use primary evaluation to determine how important the exam is to their achievement and secondary appraisal to evaluate their readiness, time management abilities, and support networks. According to the hypothesis, students' evaluation of the demands of their studies affects the coping strategies they use, including time management, relaxation methods, physical exercise, and social support. These techniques, in turn, impact academic engagement, focus, exam performance, and overall pleasure with learning. By placing this study inside the framework, the research emphasizes how strengthening students' coping mechanisms might improve their capacity to view academic expectations as doable obstacles rather than overpowering dangers, ultimately leading to improved academic results in Nigerian institutions.

3.4. Empirical Review

Evaluating the effects of resilience-based treatments on university students' mental health and academic performance, Dommett (2023) conducted a systematic review. The main goal was to determine if cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness, and organized resilience training might reduce academic stress and enhance academic performance. Using strict inclusion criteria, the process involved examining experimental and quasiexperimental research from several nations. Although SEM was not the primary analytical instrument, findings were synthesized using metaanalytic techniques. The results demonstrated that while resilience therapies regularly lowered stress and anxiety, there was mixed evidence of their direct impact on quantifiable academic outcomes like GPA. The author concluded that while resilience training is beneficial for mental well-being, further research is needed to establish stronger causal links to academic success, recommending longitudinal designs and more rigorous performance metrics.

A narrative and systematic review was conducted by Pascoe & Hetrick (2021) to examine the complex relationship between academic, economical, and social pressures and university students' performance. The goals were to assess coping strategies and compile data on the kinds of stresses that are most harmful to academic achievement. The evaluation includes papers that used SEM and other sophisticated modeling approaches, despite not being empirical main research. The results showed that academic stress had a detrimental effect on motivation, emotional stability, and cognitive performance, especially when it came to severe workloads and assessment demands. Strong social support networks served as buffers, while financial stress exacerbated academic challenges. To increase resilience, the authors suggested providing targeted financial help, strengthening peer support networks, and including coping skills instruction into university curriculum.

4. Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was espoused. This approach is justified by its ability to gather, compile, and analyze quantitative data from a sizable sample of respondents in an unaltered natural environment. When the goal is to investigate current conditions, attitudes, or practices and their interrelationships as is the case with stress management techniques and academic achievement among college students a descriptive survey is

especially suitable. The approach allows the researcher to investigate the frequency and trends of particular stress-reduction strategies; time management and relaxation techniques with their impact on academic achievement, including study hours and students' focus.

There are 472,844 undergraduate students at North-Central Universities in Nigeria (NUC, 2026), hence it would be unfeasible and superfluous to study every student. In order to calculate an acceptable sample size, a representative sample was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula (1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (472,844)

e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting into the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{472,844}{1+472,844(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{472,844}{1+1,182.11} \\ &= \frac{472,844}{1,183.11} \approx 399 \end{aligned}$$

Thus, the sample size used for this study is 400 respondents.

Table 1: Population size of North-Central Universities in Nigeria.

S/ N	UNIVERSITY	STATE	TYPE	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Benue State University, Makurdi	Makurdi	State	29,005	25	6
2	University of Mkar	Makurdi	State	1,747	1	1
3	Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi	Makurdi	State	33,779	29	7
4	Kogi State University, Anyigba	Kogi	State	27,601	23	6
5	Federal University, Lokoja	Kogi	Federal	24,200	20	5
6	Kwara State University, Malete	KWara	State	41,201	35	9

7	University of Ilorin	Kwara	Federal	53,041	45	11
8	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	Kwara	Private	12,986	11	3
9	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	Nasarawa	State	37,306	32	8
10	Federal University, Lafia	Nasarawa	Federal	22,805	19	5
11	Federal University of Technology, Minna	Niger	Federal	27,207	23	6
12	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai	Niger	State	20,621	17	4
13	University of Jos	Plateau	Federal	51,872	44	11
14	Plateau State University, Boko	Plateau	State	9,823	8	2
15	University of Abuja	Federal Capital Territory (Abuja)	Federal	55,364	47	12
16	Baze University	Federal Capital Territory (Abuja)	Private	14,130	12	3
17	Nile University	Federal Capital Territory (Abuja)	Private	6,340	5	1
18	Veritas University	Federal Capital Territory (Abuja)	Private	3,816	3	1
TOTAL				472,844	399	100

Source: National Universities Commission, 2026

A structured, online, self-administered questionnaire created with Google Forms was used to gather data for this study. The efficiency, affordability, and broader reach of the online data gathering approach among the student body of Nigeria's North-Central Universities all played a role in the choice. The questionnaire was divided into three components and was created using ideas from the literature review: Section B dealt with

the independent variables stress management strategies, such as time management and relaxation techniques; Section C concentrated on the dependent variable academic performance, measured by study hours per week and students' concentration; and Section A collected respondents' demographic data, including faculty, level, and gender. This study's main tool for gathering data was a structured online survey created and distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on the two primary constructs of the study: academic performance (dependent variable) and stress management strategies (independent variable). It was carefully developed based on the conceptual and empirical foundations established in the reviewed literature.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered for this investigation. Partial Least Square (PLS) was used in the inferential statistics approach, whilst mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were used in the descriptive analysis using Smart PLS. Partial Least Square Path Modeling (PLS-PM) and Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) were employed to test the hypotheses and ascertain the cause and effect of the variables. SmartPLS version 3.2.2 was used to analyze this.

In order to retain the uniqueness of the variables being studied, multicollinearity was evaluated in this study to make sure that no two constructs measured the same underlying result. In order to avoid distorting the regression estimates and undermining the credibility of the results, it is crucial to validate that there are no strong correlations between the independent variables employed in the model. The assessment of multicollinearity was undertaken using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which measures the amount to which the variance of a regression coefficient is inflated owing to collinearity among the predictors. According to Hair et al. (2010), a VIF score of 10 or above is thought to suggest a significant multicollinearity issue, whereas a value of more than 3 indicated a possible danger of multicollinearity. The purpose of this test was to verify the structural model's integrity and resilience.

Several techniques were used to guarantee the validity of the research tool. By going over the questionnaire with coworkers and the supervisor and making the required changes to make it more in line with the goals of the research, face validity was evaluated. By ensuring that the questionnaire includes expert feedback on all pertinent parts of the research, such as cyber vulnerabilities and consumer experience, content validity was verified.

By matching each item with theoretical ideas, construct validity was attained, guaranteeing precision and clarity in the measurement of important variables. Criterion validity was tested by comparing the instrument to industry standards and previous studies. These validation techniques ensured the instrument is reliable, relevant, and accurately captures the intended constructs, strengthening the overall quality and credibility of the research. A reliability test for the SERVQUAL reliability dimension was performed using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability analysis showing a value of 0.6 and above indicating an acceptable value.

4.1. Model Specification

H0₁: Time management has no positive and significant effect on study hours per week among students of North-Central Universities in Nigeria.

Equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Study hours per week

β_0 = Intercept of the regression

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ = Regression coefficients for Task Prioritisation, Study Scheduling, and Procrastination Avoidance respectively

X_1 = Task Prioritisation (TP)

X_2 = Study Scheduling (SS)

X_3 = Procrastination Avoidance (PA)

ε = Random error term

H0₂: Relaxation techniques has no positive and significant influence on students' concentration during study at the North-Central Universities in Nigeria.

Equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Students' concentration during study

β_0 = Intercept of the regression

$\beta_4, \beta_5, \beta_6$ = Regression coefficients for Mindfulness Practice, Deep Breathing, and Study Breaks respectively

X_1 = Mindfulness Practice (MP)

X_2 = Deep Breathing (DB)

X_3 = Study Breaks (SB)

ε = Random error term

Dependent Variable(Y): Test and Examination Scores.

5. Results

5.1. Objective One

To investigate the effect of time management on study hours per week among North-Central Universities in Nigeria.

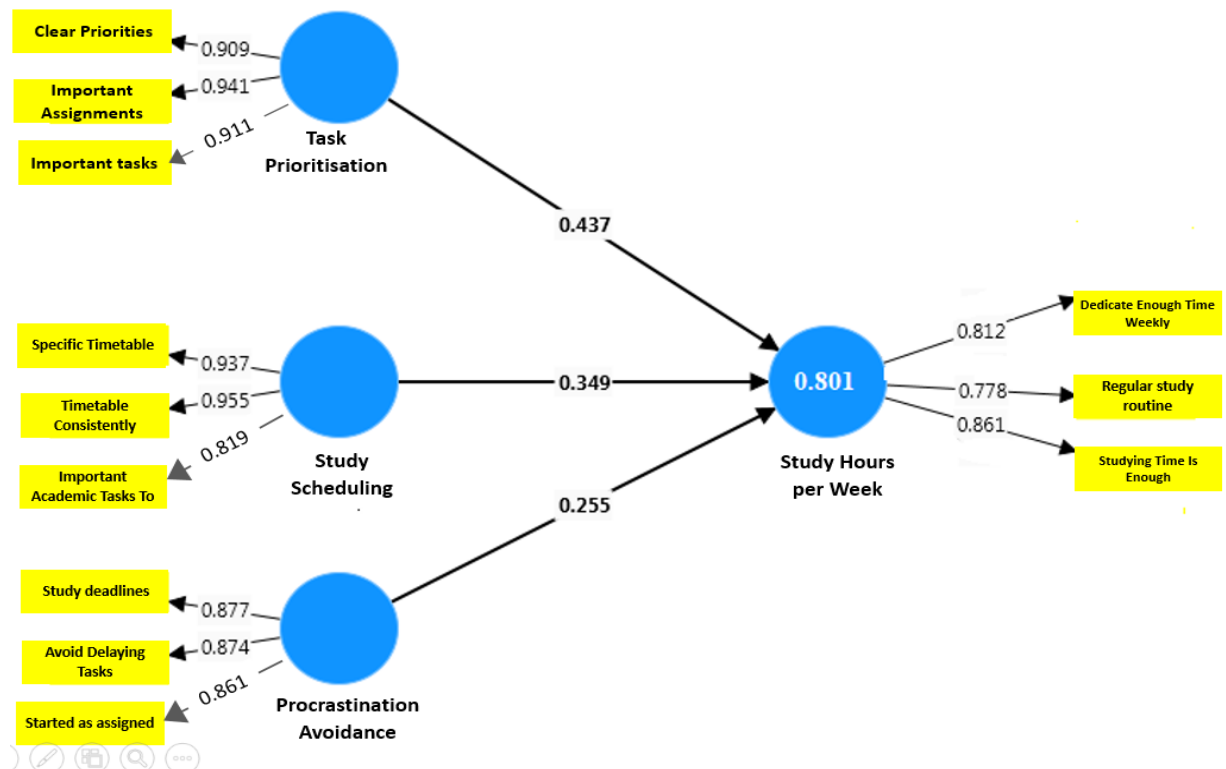


Figure1: A path model of time management on study hours per week

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Figure 1 shows the path model illustrating the effect of time management on students' study hours per week among North-Central Universities in Nigeria. Three factors are used to quantify time management: procrastination avoidance, study scheduling, and task prioritizing which are above 0.50 factor loadings, having concentrative effects on the study hours per week. These factors are used to evaluate how well students manage their time for academic pursuits. By looking at factor loadings, composite reliability, and extracted average variance, the measurement model evaluation guarantees the validity and reliability of these constructs. Prior to verifying the structural linkages, this stage is crucial since it validates the reliability of the indicators and offers a precise context for interpreting the model's output.

Table2: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Study Hours per Week	0.899	0.907	0.923	0.668
Task Prioritisation	0.884	0.903	0.945	0.895
Study Scheduling	0.696	0.696	0.868	0.767
Procrastination Avoidance	0.833	0.859	0.922	0.856

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 2 presents the reliability and validity results for the constructs in the measurement model. With the exception of Study Scheduling, which is somewhat below but still within an acceptable range for exploratory research, Cronbach's alpha values vary from 0.696 to 0.899, suggesting acceptable to high internal consistency. Values above 0.70 are often regarded as reliable. Strong construct reliability is confirmed by composite reliability (rho_c) values for all constructs exceeding the 0.70 criterion (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity is confirmed by the Average variation Extracted (AVE) values, which range from 0.668 to 0.895 and are all over the 0.50 benchmark, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variation of its indicators (Hair et al., 2010). The findings show that the constructs measuring weekly study hours and time management have strong effects both collectively as indicated in the CA results and individually as indicated by the composite reliability values thereby paving way for the use of the research instruments for further analysis in the structural model.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	Study Hours per Week	Task Prioritisation	Study Scheduling	Procrastination Avoidance
Study Hours per Week	0.817			
Task Prioritisation	0.773	0.946		
Study Scheduling	0.884	0.770	0.876	
Procrastination Avoidance	0.829	0.522	0.825	0.925

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 3 presents the results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct are represented by the diagonal values in this approach, whilst the correlations between constructs are displayed by the off-diagonal values. When a construct's square root of the AVE is higher than its correlations with every other construct, it is said to have discriminant validity. This indicates that the construct has a stronger relationship with its own indicators than with any other construct. The diagonal values from the table are compared with their corresponding inter-construct correlations for Study Hours per Week (0.817), Task Prioritization (0.946), Study Scheduling (0.876), and Procrastination Avoidance (0.925). The Study Hours per Week (0.817) somewhat surpasses the AVE value for Study Hours per Week (0.668), indicating considerable overlap between these two constructs, even though the majority of constructs meet this criterion. The strong association between Study Hours per Week and Study Scheduling should be taken into consideration when evaluating structural model findings, but overall, the results show that the constructs are different and may be used for additional study.

Multicollinearity

This evaluates the independent variable's correlation. It is to determine whether two independent variables are uncorrelated and yielding same results. In this study, the expected association between the independent variables is evaluated using the variance inflation factor (VIF).

Table 4: Inner VIF Values

	VIF
Task Prioritisation → Study Hours per Week	2.723
Study Scheduling → Study Hours per Week	6.201
Procrastination Avoidance → Study Hours per Week	3.473

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 4 presents the results of the multicollinearity assessment using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to determine whether the independent variables are highly correlated, which could distort the estimation of their effects on the dependent variable. Multicollinearity is not a major worry when the VIF value is below the widely recognized threshold of 5 (or, in more stringent situations, 3.3 (Hair, et. al., 2019), but values over the threshold indicate possible duplication among variables. The VIF scores for Task Prioritization (2.723) and Procrastination Avoidance (3.473) in this study falls within the established thresholds thereby allaying any fear of multicollinearity issues. Study Scheduling, on the other hand, has a VIF of 6.201, which is higher than the cutoff of 5, indicating a high degree of correlation with other variables. This suggests that, as previously noted in the discriminant validity results, Study Scheduling may have shared significant variance with other time management parameters, especially with Study Hours per Week. This degree of multicollinearity should be taken into account when

making judgments on the distinct impact of study scheduling on weekly study hours, even though the overall model is still interpretable.

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Time management has no positive and significant effect on study hours per week among students of North-Central Universities in Nigeria.

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination Score

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Study Hours per Week	0.801	0.797

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 5 presents the coefficient of determination (R-square) and the adjusted R-square values for the relationship between time management and study hours per week among students of North-Central Universities in Nigeria. The time management variables task prioritization, study scheduling, and procrastination avoidance utilized in the model account for 80.1% of the variation in study hours per week, according to the R-square value of 0.801. The robustness of the model is confirmed by the adjusted R-square of 0.797, which takes into consideration the number of predictors in the model and only slightly declines. These findings provide significant statistical support for rejecting the null hypothesis by indicating that time management techniques have a substantial explanatory power in predicting students' study hours per week. This indicates that time management does, in fact, significantly and favorably affect the respondents' weekly study hours.

Table 6: Assessment of the Effect Size (f²)

	f-square
Task Prioritisation → Study Hours per Week	0.312
Study Scheduling → Study Hours per Week	0.073
Procrastination Avoidance → Study Hours per Week	0.385

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 6 presents the effect size (f²) for the independent variables task prioritisation, study scheduling, and procrastination avoidance on study hours per week. Each predictor's contribution to the dependent variable's R-square value is measured by effect size. Cohen's (1988) recommendations state that minor, medium, and large effects are represented by f² values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively. According to the findings, task prioritization has a medium-to-large impact on the number of study hours per week (f² = 0.312). The minor influence of study schedule (f² = 0.073) indicates a limited contribution to the explanation of study hours. Among the three variables, procrastination avoidance (f² = 0.385) had the greatest impact on predicting study hours per week. In general, procrastination avoidance and task prioritization are the main factors influencing students' study time, with study schedule having a less significant impact.

Table 7: Bootstrapping Results Showing Path Coefficient for Structural Model

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Task Prioritisation → Study Hours per Week	0.437	0.436	0.048	9.176	0.000
Study Scheduling → Study Hours per Week	0.349	0.345	0.052	6.754	0.000
Procrastination Avoidance → Study Hours per Week	0.255	0.259	0.073	3.492	0.000

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 7 provides an in-depth look at how different dimensions of time management; task prioritisation, study scheduling, and procrastination avoidance contribute to the number of study hours per week among North-Central Universities in Nigeria. The beta value for task prioritizing is 0.437, suggesting that for every one-unit improvement in prioritising activities, there is a predicted 0.437 unit increase in study hours per week, given other factors stay constant. This influence is very reliable and statistically significant, as demonstrated by its strong t-statistic of 9.176 and p-value of 0.000. This suggests that if students are able to correctly select and prioritize pertinent academic assignments, they are more likely to study for longer periods of time. Also, with a beta value of 0.349, a t-statistic of 6.754, and a p-value of 0.000, the impact of study scheduling is strong and significant. This suggests that students' weekly study time is positively impacted by keeping an organized study schedule and following it. It nevertheless has a significant impact on increasing study dedication, even if its impact is somewhat less than that of task prioritization. With a p-value of 0.000, a t-statistic of 3.492, and a beta value of 0.255, procrastination avoidance shows a significant but rather moderate impact. This might imply that while conquering procrastination is crucial, its advantages are maximized when paired with effective prioritization and planning techniques. Therefore, the results showed that all the three-time management techniques have a considerable beneficial effect on study hours per week, with task prioritisation appearing as the most potent driver, followed by study scheduling and procrastination avoidance.

5.2 Objective Two

Examine the influence of relaxation techniques on students' concentration during study.

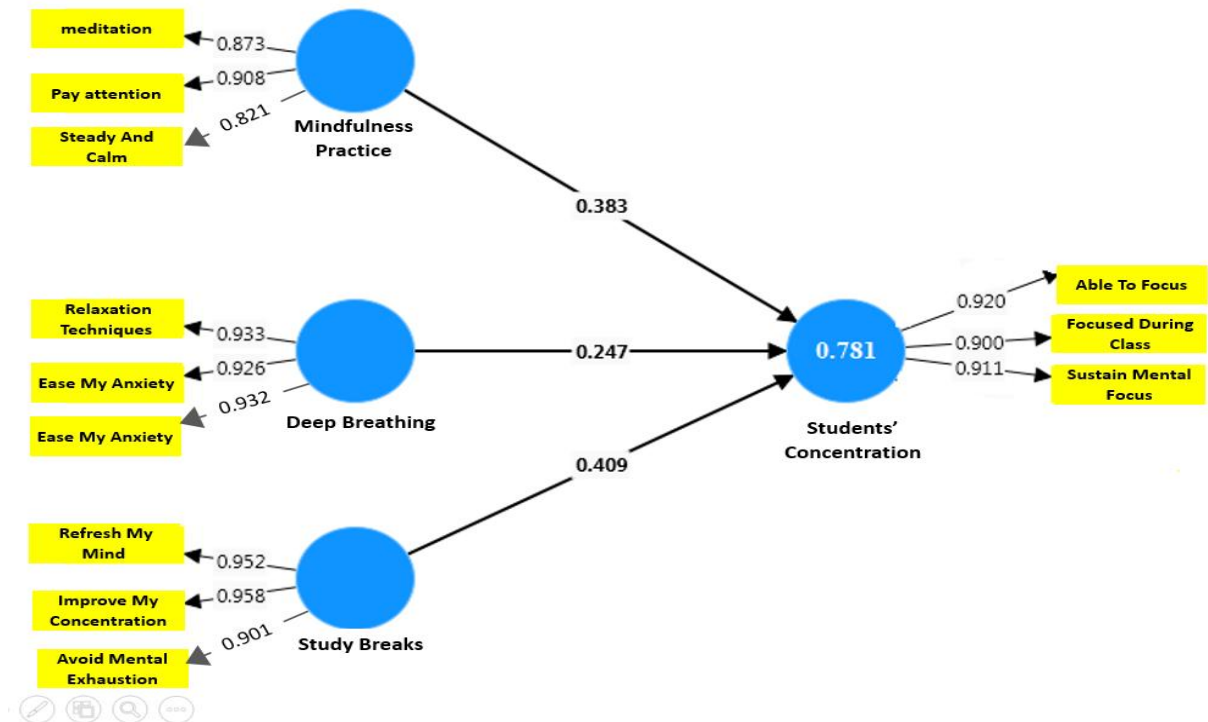


Figure 2: A path model of relaxation techniques on students' concentration

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Figure 2 presents the path model illustrating the influence of relaxation techniques on students' concentration during study. The three primary variables in the model are study breaks, deep breathing, and mindfulness exercises, all of which are thought to improve attention. Deep breathing helps reduce stress and preserve mental calm, mindfulness exercises help students stay present and minimize distractions, and study breaks allow for cognitive recuperation and avoid mental tiredness. The model, which serves as a foundation for empirical validation in this work, illustrates how the strategic application of relaxation methods may promote prolonged concentration, increase attention, and boost overall study effectiveness by graphically mapping these interactions.

Table 8: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Students' Concentration	0.931	0.954	0.961	0.873
Mindfulness Practice	0.849	0.844	0.927	0.881
Deep Breathing	0.741	0.752	0.885	0.889
Study Breaks	0.912	0.907	0.954	0.917

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 8 presents the construct reliability and validity results for the variables measuring the influence of relaxation techniques on students' concentration. Strong internal consistency is indicated by Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.741 to 0.931 for all

the constructs. Composite reliability values (ρ_c) exceed the required threshold of 0.70 for all constructs, showing measurement stability. Each construct explains a significant amount of the variance in its indicators, as seen by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which range from 0.833 to 0.917 and are all over 0.50 across the three relaxation strategies.

Table 9: Discriminant Validity

	Students' Concentration	Mindfulness Practice	Deep Breathing	Study Breaks
Students' Concentration	0.832			
Mindfulness Practice	0.814	0.877		
Deep Breathing	0.843	0.819	0.873	
Study Breaks	0.780	0.849	0.811	0.905

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

The results of the discriminant validity analysis, as shown in Table 9, provide clear evidence that the latent variables; students' concentration, Mindfulness practice, Deep breathing and Study breaks are distinct by ensuring that each variable is not excessively connected with the others, discriminant validity is utilized to verify that each variable evaluates distinct facets of the overarching idea. The diagonal numbers in the table, which stand for each variable's square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), are much higher than the correlations between various variables. In particular, students' concentration square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.873 is much higher than its diagonal value correlations (0.832), Mindfulness practice (0.814), Deep breathing (0.843) and Study breaks (0.780). This pattern is consistent for the other variables as well, with each showing a stronger correlation with itself compared to its correlations with the other constructs. More so, Mindfulness practice has a diagonal value of 0.881 which is higher than other variables of Deep breathing (0.819) and Study breaks (0.849). Also, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of Deep breathing (0.889) compared to its diagonal value of Students' concentration (0.843) and Mindfulness (0.819). Likewise, Study breaks (0.917) of the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) surpasses its diagonal value of (0.905), Students' concentration (0.780), Mindfulness practice (0.849) and Deep breathing. The results show that all constructs meet the necessary requirement in line with Fornell Larcker Criterion as the square root of AVE for all constructs are greater than their respective inter-construct correlations. This confirms that each construct is more strongly related to its own measure than to other construct. Thereby, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 10: Inner VIF Values

	VIF
Mindfulness Practice → Students' Concentration	4.958
Deep Breathing → Students' Concentration	5.495
Study Breaks → Students' Concentration	6.530

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 10 provides the results of the multicollinearity assessment for the independent variables used to examine the influence of relaxation techniques on students' concentration. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which gauges the level of correlation between the model's independent variables, was used for the study. The reported VIF values are 6.530 for study breaks, 5.495 for deep breathing, and 4.958 for mindfulness exercises. These values are rather high and show a substantial degree of interaction among the predictors, even though they are below the widely recognized maximum threshold of 10. This implies that there may be a reduction in the mind thinking mental attention. For example, deep breathing is frequently included into mindfulness practices, and both may be strengthened by taking study breaks, thus they are inherently linked. The VIF values are still within acceptable bounds despite this modest correlation, suggesting that multicollinearity is not severe enough to compromise the accuracy of the model's parameter estimations. As a result, the three relaxation methods may be kept in the model as they offer distinct but connected ways to help students focus better when studying.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H0₂: Relaxation techniques has no positive and significant influence on students' concentration during study at North-Central Universities in Nigeria.

Table 11: Coefficient of Determination Score

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Students' Concentration	0.781	0.778

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 11 presents the coefficient of determination (R-square) and the adjusted R-square values for the model assessing the influence of relaxation techniques on students' concentration. The R-square value of 0.781 indicates that 78.1 percent of the variation in students' concentration can be explained by the relaxation techniques included in the study, namely mindfulness practice, deep breathing, and study breaks. This represents a high explanatory power, suggesting that these techniques collectively play a substantial role in enhancing students' ability to focus during study sessions. The adjusted R-square value of 0.778, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, is only slightly lower than the R-square. This slight variation suggests that the explanatory variables are significant without needless overfitting and that the model is well-fitted. As a result, the findings offer compelling proof that pupils' ability to focus is significantly improved by relaxing practices. These results indicate that applying such strategies might be a very successful strategy for enhancing study focus and academic achievement among students at North-Central Universities in Nigeria, since they account for almost three-quarters of the variance in concentration.

Table 12: Assessment of the Effect Size (f^2)

	f-square
Mindfulness Practice → Students' Concentration	2.089
Deep Breathing → Students' Concentration	4.523

Study Breaks → Students' Concentration	4.355
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Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

Table 12 presents the effect size (f^2) for the individual predictors of students' concentration. Effect size measures the contribution of each independent variable to the overall explanatory power of the model, with higher values indicating a stronger influence. The results show that mindfulness practice has an f^2 value of 2.089, indicating a large and meaningful effect on students' concentration. Deep breathing has an even greater effect, with an f^2 value of 4.523, suggesting it is the most influential relaxation technique in the model. Study breaks follow closely with an f^2 value of 4.355, also representing a very strong impact. According to Cohen's guidelines, values above 0.35 are considered large effects. All three variables here exceed this threshold substantially, implying that each technique independently plays a critical role in improving concentration during study sessions. These results demonstrate that while all of the relaxation methods tested greatly improve focus, deep breathing and study breaks had a somewhat greater impact than mindfulness exercises. This shows that students at North-Central Universities in Nigeria may find it especially beneficial to include breathing exercises and planned breaks into their study habits in order to improve their attention and academic efficiency.

Table 13: Bootstrapping Results Showing Path Coefficient for Structural Model

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Mindfulness Practice → Students' Concentration	0.383	0.383	0.012	32.942	0.000
Deep Breathing → Students' Concentration	0.247	0.247	0.015	16.604	0.000
Study Breaks → Students' Concentration	0.409	0.410	0.017	24.272	0.000

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2026

From Table 13, path coefficients show the strength and direction of relationships, while the t-statistics and p-values determine their statistical significance. Mindfulness practice shows a path coefficient of 0.383, with a t-statistic of 32.942 and a p-value of 0.000. This means it has a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on concentration. Deep breathing has a coefficient of 0.247, a t-statistic of 16.604, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a moderate but significant influence. Study breaks record the highest coefficient at 0.409, with a t-statistic of 24.272 and a p-value of 0.000, showing a strong and significant effect.

Due to the fact that each student's relaxation relaxation method, relaxing relaxation technique is a relaxation technique, each relaxation technique adds considerably significantly improves focus. Deep breathing had the least influence, whereas study breaks are the biggest predictor, closely followed by mindfulness exercises. These findings imply that mindfulness techniques and planned breaks are especially useful for improving students' attention, and implementing them into study regimens might significantly raise academic achievement at Nigeria's North-Central Universities.

6. Discussion of Findings

Based on the result of the first objective investigating the effect of time management on students' study hours per week. Collectively, all the constructs of time management have significant effect on study hours per week. However, procrastination avoidance has the least significant value which its attendance consequence of study hours of students. This outcome is in tandem with the findings of Dommett's (2023) which emphasized the importance of resilience-based treatments for enhancing academic performance and mental health. In addition, effective time management helps students better prioritize and organize their work, which lowers stress and increases academic output.

Secondly, the outcome of findings from objective two shows a positive and significant effect of relaxation techniques on students' concentration during study. That is, relaxation techniques such as mindfulness practice and study break improve students' concentration. This is in accordance with the findings of Pascoe and Hetrick's (2021) which emphasized the complex interplay of academic, financial, and social stressors on student performance. Relaxation techniques serve as important coping strategies that help mitigate these stressors, thereby supporting concentration and learning. However, deep breathing has the least significant effect compared to other constructs on students' concentration during study.

Conclusion

Effective time management significantly increases study hours per week. This confirms that students who plan, prioritize, and minimize procrastination are better positioned to dedicate sufficient time to their academic work, thereby enhancing their learning opportunities.

More so, relaxing strategies such as mindfulness, deep breathing, and regular study breaks were demonstrated to boost focus during study sessions. This shows that using these strategies can assist students in stress management and mental attention maintenance, both of which are critical for academic performance.

Based on the foregoing, the study concluded that effective stress management has the capacity to enhance student academic performance in North-Central Universities in particular and across the whole Nigeria.

Recommendations

Sequel to the conclusion drawn above, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Universities should provide and support organized time management programmes for their students. At such, students can boost their effective study hours by focusing on procrastination avoidance, study scheduling, and work prioritizing. Academic support services should incorporate workshops and digital resources designed to enhance these abilities.
- ii. Also, institutions should promote the frequent use of relaxation practices including mindfulness, deep breathing exercises, and planned study breaks to improve students' focus. Meanwhile, students might be given useful coping skills through stress management lectures during orientation programs and counseling services.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Instruction: please tick and fill in as appropriate

1. **Gender:** Male () female ()
2. **Age:** Below 20years () 21–25 years () 26-30years () 30- above ()
3. **Marital status:** Single () Married () Widowed () Divorced () Separated ()
4. **Current Level of Study:** 100 Level () 200 Level () 300 Level () 400 Level () 500 Level ()
5. **Faculty:** Arts () Science () Social Sciences () Education () Management Sciences () Law () Others ()

SECTION B

Note: Scale responses to each item are measures on seven-point scale with the anchors label as (SD) strongly disagree, (D) disagree, (U) undecided, (A) agree and (SA) Strongly Agree.

TIME MANAGEMENT						
S/N	Study Hours per Week	SA	A	U	D	SD
	Task Prioritisation					
1.	I usually set clear priorities to manage my academic workload effectively.					
2.	I focus on the most important assignments before working on less urgent ones.					
3.	I identify the most important academic assignment to complete first.					
	Study Scheduling					
4.	I create a specific timetable to allocate sufficient hours to my academic work.					
5.	I follow my timetable consistently throughout the semester.					
6.	I identify the most important academic tasks to complete first.					
	Procrastination Avoidance					
7.	I start assignments or studying well before the deadlines or examination period.					

8.	I avoid delaying tasks even when I do not feel motivated.					
9.	I get started on tasks as soon as they are assigned.					
Relaxation Techniques						
S/N	Mindfulness Practice	SA	A	U	D	SD
10.	I use calming methods like meditation to help me stay focused while studying.					
11.	These calming habits help me stay relaxed and pay attention in class.					
12.	They help me stay steady and calm when studying gets stressful.					
	Deep Breathing					
13.	I practice relaxation techniques to help me refocus when under pressure.					
14.	This technique helps ease my anxiety during schoolwork.					
15.	I use it as a way to stay calm and focused when studying feels stressful.					
	Study Breaks					
16.	I refresh my mind while reading to stay my focused.					
17.	Short intervals of rest between reading periods improve my concentration.					
18.	I pace myself to avoid mental exhaustion.					

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE						
S/N	Study Hours per Week	SA	A	U	D	SD
18.	I dedicate enough time weekly to cover my academic workload.					
19.	I stick to a regular study routine.					
20.	The time I spend studying is enough to prepare me for tests.					
	Students' Concentration	SA	A	U	D	SD
21.	I am able to focus on my academic work without frequent distractions.					
22.	I stay focused during both class and study time.					

23.	I am able to sustain mental focus when preparing for examinations.					
24.	I am satisfied with my academic results.					

