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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COPING STRATEGIES AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN KWARA, NIGERIA

Abstract*: this study investigated the relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience among pupils with special needs in Kwara Central, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population was all children with special needs in primary and secondary schools of the State. The sample comprised 400 pupils with special needs purposely selected from 20 schools, both special and regular schools. Two data collection instruments used included the Coping Strategies Rating Scale (CSRS) and Pupils' Academic Resilience Rating Scale (PARRS), validated for face and content validity and tested for reliability with coefficients of 0.82 and 0.85, respectively. Descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the two questions raised while inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse the only hypothesis formulated at the 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed moderate levels of coping strategies (weighted mean = 2.40) and academic resilience (weighted mean = 2.44). The result also showed a strong a positive correlation between coping techniques and academic resilience (r-value is*

0.713). These findings indicate the need to focus on building appropriate coping mechanisms to promote resilience in children with exceptional needs. Based on the findings, the study recommended teacher training, appropriate learning methodologies, and supporting school policies to increase children' adaptive capacities and boost academic resilience among children with exceptional needs.

Keywords: *coping strategies, academic resilience, children with special needs.*

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ВЗАИМОСВЯЗЬ МЕЖДУ СТРАТЕГИЯМИ ПРЕОДОЛЕНИЯ ТРУДНОСТЕЙ И АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ УСТОЙЧИВОСТЬЮ УЧАЩИХСЯ С ОСОБЫМИ ПОТРЕБНОСТЯМИ В КВАРЕ, НИГЕРИЯ

Аннотация: *в статье исследуется взаимосвязь между стратегиями преодоления и академической устойчивости среди учащихся с особыми потребностями в Центральной Каваре, Нигерия. Была принята схема исследования с описанием. Все учащиеся начальных и средних школ штата были детьми с особыми потребностями. В выборку вошли 400 учеников с особыми потребностями, отобранных из 20 школ, как специальных, так и обычных. Использовались два инструмента сбора данных, в том числе шкала оценки стратегий преодоления трудностей (CSRS) и*

шкала оценки академической устойчивости учащихся (PARRS), которые были проверены на достоверность по внешнему виду и содержанию и протестированы на надежность с коэффициентами 0,82 и 0,85 соответственно. Для анализа двух поставленных вопросов использовалась описательная статистика частоты, процентного содержания, среднего значения и стандартного отклонения, в то время как для анализа единственной гипотезы, сформулированной на уровне значимости 0,05, использовалась логическая статистика корреляции момента продукта Пирсона (PPMC). Результаты показали умеренный уровень стратегий совладания (средневзвешенное значение = 2,40) и академической устойчивости (средневзвешенное значение = 2,44), сильную положительную корреляцию между методами совладания и академической устойчивостью (r-значение равно 0,713). Это указывает на необходимость сосредоточения внимания на создании соответствующих механизмов преодоления трудностей для повышения жизнестойкости детей с особыми потребностями. Основываясь на полученных результатах, в работе были рекомендованы подготовка учителей, соответствующие методики обучения и поддержка школьной политики для повышения адаптационных возможностей детей и повышения академической устойчивости детей с особыми потребностями.

Ключевые слова: копинг-стратегии, академическая устойчивость, дети с особыми потребностями.

Introduction

Children with special needs sometimes go through a number of challenges that greatly impact their academic experiences. These problems may include cognitive, physical, or emotional impairments that limit their capacity to connect with and prosper in typical educational environments. Also, individuals often feel inadequate and uncomfortable with their peers, suffering difficulty in social interactions and enduring societal rejection. In Nigeria, while inclusive education policies are changing, many children with special needs remain excluded due to insufficient access to suitable resources and supportive school environments (Ajuwon et al., 2022). Despite these hurdles, some children display academic resilience, described as the ability to adapt and

achieve achievement in the face of adversity (Masten, 2021). This resilience is crucial for their scholastic and social development, particularly in resource-constrained environments like Kwara State.

Coping strategies play a critical role in helping individuals to manage stressors, enhance resilience, and adapt to their circumstances (Anderson, 2014; Hricova, 2018; Jarwan, et.al, 2023). These strategies include cognitive and behavioural, social confidence, time and stress management efforts to manage stressors and challenges, ranging from problem-solving and seeking social support (Wu et al., 2021; Alos et.al, 2022; Desalegn, 2023). Coping involves accepting limitations, managing dependency, and dealing with frustrations in communication and tasks. Among children with special needs, coping strategies include problem-solving, seeking support, emotional regulation, acceptance of disability, forming close relationships, and sharing feelings.

Numerous studies have been carried out in relation to coping mechanisms and their effects on well-being and quality of life. Several studies have explored the coping strategies employed by caregivers, and families of children with special needs, shedding light on various challenges and adaptive mechanisms. For example, Gull et al. (2024), conducted a systematized review of coping strategies among caregivers of children with disabilities while Alós et al. (2022), in a case-control study investigated on coping strategies in parents of children with disabilities.

Some researchers have also explored the coping strategies employed by students with special needs. Abraham (2018) studied coping strategies among physically challenged children and discovered that children with physical disabilities in Mangalore exhibited positive coping methods for mental and physical problems but poor coping mechanisms for social challenges. Lone et al. (2024), in examining the impact of coping strategies on the quality of life in children with various disabilities, highlighted that children with disabilities employ different coping strategies based on the type of disability, with strategies like emotional support and positive reframing significantly predicting better quality of life outcomes. Similarly, Esere et al. (2016) studied coping strategies among students with visual impairments in South-Eastern Nigeria and sub-

mitted that these students adopted coping strategies such as using tape-recorded materials and ignoring societal attitudes. Gyasi and Yeboah (2020) explored stress and coping mechanisms among students with disabilities in Ghana, noting stressors like discrimination and incompatible infrastructure. Rao (2015) emphasized how students in Andhra Pradesh, India, managed social and educational challenges through tailored coping strategies, advocating for inclusive higher education environments.

In Gombe State, Nigeria, Umar (2022) investigated the coping mechanisms of special education children. The study identified techniques include avoiding negative thinking, accepting handicap as divine will, and fixing problems on one's own. In order to promote emotional stability and academic achievement for these students, the study suggested parental support, social assistance, and counselling.

With the increasing emphasis on inclusive education globally and in Nigeria, it is critical to understand the factors that enable children with special needs to thrive academically. This research aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. By identifying effective coping strategies that enhance resilience, the study can inform educators, parents, and policymakers in developing targeted interventions. Such interventions can create supportive learning environments that empower children with special needs to overcome academic and social barriers. Enhancing the academic resilience of children with special needs contributes not only to their personal success but also to broader societal inclusion and productivity, fostering a more equitable future for all.

Literature has also revealed the efforts that have been taken by researchers to investigate resilience among children. Deborah (2009) linked resilience to academic achievement among at-risk students in Georgia's Upward Bound Program, showing a positive correlation with GPA, emphasizing the importance of resilience-building interventions. Fallon (2010) in his study found that academic optimism in schools significantly influenced resilience among low SES Latino students, while Schelble et al. (2010) emphasized the role of emotion regulation in improving academic outcomes for

maltreated children. Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) highlighted the importance of supportive educational environments in fostering academic resilience, focusing on tailored instructional strategies and teacher-student relationships.

While existing literature has explored coping strategies and resilience separately, limited research examines their relationship, particularly in African contexts. This study fills a significant study vacuum by looking at coping strategies and how they are related to academic resilience of children with special needs in Kwara State, Nigeria. The results are intended to educate parents, educators, and legislators on how to create supportive environments that enable children to overcome challenges in the classroom. Improving academic resilience among children with exceptional needs will not only impact their educational success but also their capacity to thrive socially which promotes greater societal inclusion and a future where every learner can realise their full potential.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive research of the survey type, which is suitable for examining the relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience among pupils with special needs. Descriptive research incorporates procedures such as surveys, observation, and interviews to acquire data from participants systematically (Creswell, 2014). This design enabled the researchers to utilize structured rating scales to elicit respondents' thoughts on coping strategies adopted and their impact on academic resilience. This approach allowed for comprehensive data collection that aligns with the study's objectives.

The population of this study consisted of pupils attending special needs and regular schools in Kwara State, Nigeria. A total sample size of 400 pupils was selected from 20 schools, both primary and secondary schools using purposive sampling in order to focus the population of children with exceptional needs.

Two researchers-made instruments titled «Coping Strategies Rating Scale (CSRS) and Pupils' Academic Resilience Rating Scale (PARRS) were used for data collection. Coping Strategies Rating Scale categorization measured self-advocacy, social confidence, support systems, time management and stress management. Categorization of items under Pupils' Academic Resilience Rating Scale highlighted emotional

resilience, behavioural resilience, motivational resilience, support and goal-oriented resilience which was used to assess academic resilience of the pupils, capturing their capacity to adapt and succeed despite challenges. Both CSRS and PARRS were a three-point Likert scale with response options: Always (A), Sometimes (S), and Never (N).

Copies of each item were made given to three lecturers in the Department of Special Education, Kwara State University to evaluate their applicability. The instruments obtained validation for both face and content validity. Feedback and recommendations from the instructors were included to strengthen the instruments. This validation process ensured that the instruments adequately captured the intended constructs and were appropriate for the study population (Robson, 2011).

The reliability of the instruments was determined using the test-retest method, which involved administering the instruments to a different group of students who are not respondents in the actual data collection. The administration was done at two different times under similar conditions. The reliability coefficient was calculated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The reliability coefficients of CSRS and PARRS were 0.82 and 0.85 respectively. This provided evidence that the instruments would consistently produce stable results over time.

Ethical approval to carry out the research was collected from the Department of Adult and Primary Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Permission was sought for from the school heads and the teachers of various schools used in the study. To ensure voluntary participation, consent form was used to seek the consent of the children and permission from their parents. The researchers also assured the participants that confidentiality will be maintained and the data collected will be used for research only while the participants were also given freedom to withdraw their participation anytime they feel to do.

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were employed to answer the two research questions raised while inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse the only hypothesis formulated to

measure the relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience of children with special needs. The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What is the level of coping strategies among pupils with special need?

Table 1

Mean and Standard deviation showing the level of coping strategies employed by pupils with special need

Category	Items	Always	Sometimes	Never	Mean	SD
Self Advocacy (2.51)	I feel confident in my ability to communicate my needs to teachers and peers.	290 72.5%	90 22.5%	20 5.0%	2.68	0.57
	I am comfortable asking for help when I need it.	221 55.3%	142 35.5%	37 9.3%	2.46	0.66
	I am able to advocate for accommodations that help me succeed academically.	216 54.0%	142 35.5%	42 10.5%	2.44	0.68
	I am confident in my ability to advocate for myself in academic settings.	216 54.0%	150 37.5%	34 8.5%	2.46	0.65
	I have developed effective study habits that work for me.	237 59.3%	120 30.0%	43 10.8%	2.49	0.68
Social Confidence (2.42)	I am confident in my ability to navigate social situations at school.	202 50.5%	155 38.8%	43 10.8%	2.40	0.68
	I feel included and accepted by my peers in school activities.	225 56.3%	133 33.3%	42 10.5%	2.46	0.68
	I feel empowered to express my opinions and preferences regarding my education.	213 53.3%	139 34.8%	48 12.0%	2.41	0.70

	I feel understood and respected by my teachers.	207 51.7%	154 38.5%	39 9.8%	2.42	0.66
Support Systems (*2.47*)	I feel supported by my teachers in adjusting classroom activities to meet my needs.	225 56.3%	134 33.5%	41 10.3%	2.46	0.67
	I have access to resources that support my learning and development.	212 53.0%	158 39.5%	30 7.5%	2.46	0.63
	I feel supported by my family in managing my special needs at school.	239 59.8%	122 30.5%	39 9.8%	2.50	0.67
	I am able to access appropriate accommodations during exams and assessments.	226 56.5%	136 34.0%	38 9.5%	2.47	0.66
	I have access to support services that address my specific needs.	51.7%	150 37.5%	43 10.8%	2.41	
Stress Management (*2.27*)	I have strategies in place to manage my stress and anxiety during school.	192 48.0%	150 37.5%	58 14.5%	2.34	0.72
	I have strategies to manage sensory overload in the classroom.	184 46.0%	170 42.5%	46 11.5%	2.35	0.68
	I am able to focus on tasks even in noisy or distracting environments.	145 36.3%	162 40.5%	23.3%	2.13	0.76
	I have relaxation techniques that help me calm down during stressful moments.	163 40.8%	179 44.8%	58 14.5%	2.26	0.73
Time Management(2.32)	I am able to manage my time effectively to complete tasks and assignments.	199 49.8%	156 39.0%	45 11.3%	2.39	0.68
	I am able to adapt to changes in routine or schedule	158 39.5%	182 45.5%	60 15.0%	2.25	0.70

	without feeling overwhelmed. Weighted Mean 2.40				

Table 1 above reveals the mean and standard deviation showing the level of coping strategies employed by pupils with special need. The weighted mean is at 2.40, indicating a moderate adoption of coping strategies. This suggests that students generally use effective coping strategies, but there is room for further development in certain areas such as time management, stress management, and social confidence. Self-Advocacy is a key area where children are most confident, with items like advocating for accommodations and expressing their needs generally having higher means, signaling that they feel empowered in their educational journey.

Research Question Two: What is the level of pupils' academic resilience?

Table 2

Mean and Standard deviation showing the level of pupils academic resilience.

Category	Items	Always	Sometimes	Never	Mean	SD
Emotional Resilience	I remain calm and composed during exams or other high-pressure academic situations.	211 (52.8%)	147 (36.%)	42 (10.%)	2.42	0.67
	am able to effectively manage my emotions, even when faced with academic challenges.	183 (45.8%)	162 (40.5%)	55 (13.8%)	2.32	0.70
	I am resilient in the face of criticism or negative feedback about my academic performance.	199 (49.8%)	162 (40.5%)	39 (9.8%)	2.40	0.66
	I believe that setbacks in my academic journey are temporary and can be overcome.	227 (56.8%)	130 (32.5%)	43 (10.8%)	2.46	0.68
2.40	am able to effectively manage my emotions, even when faced with academic challenges.	183 (45.8%)	162 (40.5%)	55 (13.8%)	2.32	0.70
Motivational Resilience	I believe that my efforts will eventually lead to academic success.	266 (66.5%)	114 (28.%)	20 (5.0%)	2.62	0.58

	I recognize the value of perseverance in achieving long-term academic goals.	213 (53.3%)	136 (34.%)	51 (12.8%)	2.41	0.71
	I am able to maintain a positive attitude towards learning, even when things get tough.	193 (48.3%)	165 (41.3%)	42 (10.5%)	2.38	0.67
	I am able to stay motivated and engaged in my studies, even during periods of low motivation.	191 (47.8%)	172 (43.0%)	37 (9.3%)	2.39	0.65
2.46	I believe that I have the ability to excel academically, regardless of external circumstances.	242 (60.5%)	122 (30.5%)	36 (9.0%)	2.52	0.66
Behavioural Resilience	I am able to stay focused and on tasks, even when distractions arise.	205 (51.2%)	135 (33.8%)	60 (15.%)	2.36	0.73
	I am willing to try new study strategies or approaches to improve my academic performance.	232 (58.0%)	133 (33.3%)	35 (8.8%)	2.49	0.65
	I have developed effective study habits that support my academic success.	221 (55.3%)	130 (32.5%)	49 (12.%)	2.43	0.70
	I am proactive in seeking out resources or assistance when I encounter academic difficulties.	220 (55.0%)	142 (35.5%)	38 (9.5%)	2.46	0.66
2.43	I am able to prioritize my academic responsibilities alongside other commitments.	196 (49.1%)	162 (40.5%)	42 (10.%)	2.41	0.82
Support and Goal-Oriented Resilience	I have a support network of friends, family, or mentors who encourage my academic efforts.	230 (57.5%)	132 (33.0%)	38 (9.5%)	2.48	0.66
	I take breaks and practice self-care to maintain my academic well-being.	200 (50.0%)	154 (38.5%)	46 (11.%)	2.39	0.68

	I seek out opportunities for additional learning outside of the classroom.	196 (49.0%)	153 (38.3%)	51 (12.%)	2.36	0.70
	I have a clear vision of my academic goals and a plan for achieving them.	244 (61.0%)	131 (32.8%)	25 (6.3%)	2.55	0.61
2.45	I am able to maintain a healthy work-life balance while pursuing my academic goals.	233 (58.3%)	126 (31.5%)	41 (10.%)	2.48	0.68
Weighted Mean: 2.44						

Table 2 above reveals mean and standard deviation showing the level of pupils' resilience The overall weighted mean of 2.44 indicates a moderate level of academic resilience among the participants. They demonstrate an ability to manage emotions and remain composed under academic pressure, although there is room for growth in emotional coping mechanisms.

The only research hypothesis formulated was analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), tested at 0.05 level of significance.

There is no significant relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience of pupils with special needs.

Table 3

Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing significant relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience of pupils with special needs

Variable	N	Mean	Std Deviation	r-value	Sig	Decision
Coping Strategies	400	48.26	5.5414			
				.713	.000	*Significant*
Academic Resilience	400	48.82	5.6547			

The table 3 above shows the summary of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing significant relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience of pupils with special needs. The r-value is 0.713, which represents a strong positive correlation between coping strategies and academic resilience. Hence the earlier stated hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between coping strategies and aca-

demic resilience of pupils with special needs, is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis there is significant relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience of pupils with special needs is accepted.

This implies that as pupils employ better coping strategies, their academic resilience tends to increase.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a moderate level of coping strategies and academic resilience among pupils with special needs, with weighted means of 2.42 and 2.44, respectively. These findings offer valuable insights into how pupils with special needs navigate academic challenges and manage their learning environments effectively, albeit with room for improvement.

The study revealed that pupils with special needs employ a range of coping strategies, although at a moderate level. These strategies include seeking support from teachers and families, advocating for accommodations, and managing stress through specific techniques. The moderate score indicates that while these pupils demonstrate some degree of adaptability, there are limitations in the consistency or effectiveness of these strategies. The finding is in agrement with Abraham (2018), Umar (2022) and Lone et.al. (2024) who discovered that diverse coping strategies were employed by children with special needs. This finding aligns with stress-coping theory, which posits that coping involves a dynamic process of managing stressors through cognitive and behavioural efforts. The moderate level of coping may reflect the limited availability or utilization of resources such as specialized support services, individualized learning plans, and effective communication strategies. Sharma (2024) emphasized the need for targeted interventions to enhance coping mechanisms, particularly for pupils with disabilities.

The findings also indicate that pupils with special needs exhibit a moderate level of academic resilience, characterized by their ability to adapt to challenges and persist in their learning. This resilience is not yet fully developed, suggesting potential barriers that hinder their ability to achieve positive outcomes in the face of adversity. This corroborates the findings of Deborah (2009) who shows a positive correlation with GPA, and resilience among at-risk students in Georgia's Upward Bound Program. It is also

in line with Fallon (2010) who found that academic optimism in schools significantly influenced resilience among low SES Latino students. However, the moderate level suggests that these supportive systems may not be fully accessible or utilized by all pupils. Martin and Marsh (2006) noted that motivation and the ability to recover from setbacks are key traits of resilient students, but these traits may be underdeveloped among some of the pupils studied.

The study identified a significant positive relationship between coping strategies and academic resilience among pupils with special needs. This finding supports the argument by Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) that effective coping mechanisms are crucial for developing resilience. Pupils who employ problem-focused strategies, such as planning and seeking help, are better equipped to navigate academic stressors, which, in turn, strengthens their resilience.

Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) also highlighted that successful coping efforts generate positive emotions, which build psychological resilience. This suggests that the ability of pupils with special needs to effectively manage their challenges not only mitigates immediate stress but also enhances their long-term capacity to handle adversities. The moderate resilience levels observed in this study may be attributed to the systematic use of adaptive coping strategies, as emphasized by Esere et.al (2016) and Lone et.al. (2024) who found that coping strategies correlate with greater academic success and emotional well-being among children with special needs.

Implications and Conclusion

The moderate levels of coping strategies and academic resilience among pupils with special needs highlight the need for targeted interventions to strengthen these areas. Enhancing access to specialized support services, fostering inclusive school environments, and providing training for teachers and families can significantly improve pupils' ability to cope and thrive academically. While the findings reveal a functional level of adaptability and resilience, concerted efforts are needed to ensure these pupils can fully navigate and succeed in their academic and social environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, schools should enhance support services such as counseling and therapy to help pupils with special needs develop stronger coping strategies and resilience. Teachers should receive training in inclusive practices, stress management, and social-emotional learning to create a supportive environment. In order to foster a sense of belonging and promote peer support network, family-school relationship should be encouraged. So also, life skills programmes that emphasise time management, problem-solving, and self-advocacy should be taught to improve pupils' ability to handle challenges. Additionally, policymakers must allocate resources and enact policies that prioritize inclusive education and specialized services to ensure sustained support for pupils with special needs. Resilient school environments should be created, prioritizing the well-being and academic success of all students.

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