Differences In Academic Stress And Academic Adjustment Between Public And Private Secondary School Students Post Covid-19 Pandemic In Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract: The public and private schools globally have been known to differ in curriculum delivery, funding and policy. The current study investigated differences in academic stress and academic adjustment among form three students in private and secondary schools as they adjusted to learning challenges in post Covid-19 pandemic period. The 394 students were randomly sampled from 31 secondary schools. The students had a mean age of 17 years. Mixed-method explanatory research design was used to collect data and was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) through Statistical Package of Social Sciences software. The Academic Stress Scale for Adolescents (ASSA), and Academic Adjustment Scale for Adolescents in High School (AASA) questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. Focus groups were used to obtain the qualitative data. ANOVA tests showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the academic adjustment of the form three students in public and private secondary schools post Covid-19 pandemic. Conversely, the mean differences in academic stress between the form three students in public and private secondary schools were not statistically significant. The levels of stress in the two types of schools were relatively the same.

Keywords: Academic stress, Academic adjustment, Public schools, Private schools

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Academic stress has raised concern among the education stakeholders over the years where its causes and coping mechanisms have been widely studied (Steare et al., 2023; Pascoe et al., 2020). It has been defined as the way in which the body responds to academic responsibilities and demands that is beyond students' capability to adapt from the students' perspective (Francisco et al., 2022). Academic stress has evolved due to socio-economic and socio-emotional changes happening in the education sector, the recent one being the effects of Covid-19 pandemic (Versteeg & Kappe, 2021). Little has been done on the academic outcomes due to academic stress and how the outcomes interact in different setups. As a result, it was necessary to find out how the differences in public and private secondary schools contribute towards the differences in academic stress and academic adjustment among the form three students preparing for their final national examinations in high school.

In Kenya, entry into competitive careers involving fields such as accounting options, engineering options, medical training and all science-oriented courses require high qualifications. Therefore, parental and teacher academic expectations on the high school students were high. In addition, the students under investigation were just recovering from the effects of a long school closure due to Covid-19 that

disrupted learning worldwide (Giannopoulou et al., 2020). After Covid-19, schools in Kenya adopted a shorter school calendar than normal to recover the lost time. In addition, in the academic years 2021, 2022 and 2023 in Kenya, learners had shorter school holidays than the usual, as short as at times one week (Ministry of Education School Calendar, 2022/2023; Mabeya, 2020). School's Boards of Management together with teachers made various adjustments to accommodate the changes that came with Covid-19 pandemic in the education sector (Malenya, 2021). Most of the public-school students lagged behind in syllabus coverage more than the private school students did. Depending on the socio-economic class of each type of school, the schools embraced technology use in learning and engaged students during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the private schools were privileged to afford the facilities for digital learning since they were parent sponsored.

Positive adjustment to academic demands needs to be cultivated among the adolescent students. In many instances, government schools and privately-owned schools were run differently in terms of mode of management, teaching workforce, available resources and learning environment. Haktanir et al. (2021) defined academic adjustment as the ability of a student to adapt to the prevailing learning conditions. It constituted; academic motivation, academic activities performance, perception of instructional environment and student's study discipline. Students who were able to cope with difficult school circumstances excelled in their academic achievement as an indicator of positive adjustment (Khan, 2023). Following the changes in the education sector after the Covid-19 pandemic, it was expected that there were differences between public and private students' learning behavior especially in academic stress and academic adjustment.

Covid-19 pandemic affected academic adjustment among students in all levels of education globally. The severity of the situation depended on readiness of a country's learning and teaching online systems. Most of the learning institutions in African countries suffered poor connectivity and technological uptake in the background of socioeconomic and political challenges. As a result, there was weak online teaching methods which slowed down learning in most of the institutions. The situation caused anxiety and academic amotivation in most of the students during and after Covid-19 period (Patrick et al., 2021). The challenges brought in by the pandemic which included social distancing and restrictions of physical movement persisted even long after lockdown was lifted. The impact of Covid-19 added a burden on the students' academic responsibilities and especially those who had no internet access (Tau et al., 2024). Students from low-income and lower middle -income households were left out in the newly adopted digital learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Studies done among African university and college students indicated that interactive learning technically stalled and the students had to individually bear academic challenges. Studies reported prevalence of mental health complications among students during and after Covid-19 pandemic. Najjuka et al. (2021) found that majority of the older students recorded high levels of anxiety, depression and stress. A situation that was related to the overwhelming academic responsibilities in difficult circumstances occasioned by limitations caused by

Covid-19 pandemic. Dey et al. (2022) found that in the presence of academic stress, the effects of Covid-19 predicted psychological distress among the University students. It was anticipated that since the adolescents who were already navigating developmental milestones and intense preparations for the examinations, they could have easily been overwhelmed by the situation.

It is estimated that only 47% of Kenyan learners accessed Digital learning programs during Covid-19 pandemic, majority of whom live in urban and semi-urban areas. The disadvantaged students came from low to lower- middle income households who could not afford virtual learning gadgets such as smart phones, digital television and internet access. The type of school a student attended was largely determined by the socio-economic class of their parents. Most of the Students from high and upper middle-income households could afford private school while majority of those from lower middle-income and low-income households attended public schools. The undermining effects of Covid-19 pandemic on global and national economies affected various aspects in lives of students, especially those from low income homes. These included inadequate home spaces for learning, lack of internet, food insecurity and health care (Ngwacho, 2020). Therefore, the findings elicited the need to investigate the impact of the differences due to the type of school in semi-urban and urban environment. The study was done in public schools and private schools to establish if there were differences in academic stress and academic adjustment.

A. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Academic demands have been reported to cause many students to drop out of school, post low academic achievement, develop suicidal ideations and express other forms of poor mental health. The students in the current study were in adolescence stage and as a result, they experienced developmental changes which demanded psychological, physical, biological, emotional and social adjustment. Most of the adolescents found it a hurdle to deal with both developmental challenges and academic demands successfully. Academic adjustment was recorded as a vital component in student's academic progress and success. Research has pointed out that poorly adjusted students in school exhibited low self-esteem, low academic efficacy, unstable relationships with peers, low school grades and low interest in school activities.

Government sponsored schools known as public schools and privately-run schools were found to have differences in learner management, learning facilities, funding procedures and learner family backgrounds. These differences elicited the need to investigate differences in the academic stress and academic adjustment among students from the two types of schools. Few studies have examined the impact of the type of school in both academic stress and academic adjustment. The response of many academic institutions post Covid-19 was found to be remarkable especially in dealing with the consequences of the changes that were implemented at the time in learning institutions. Covid-19 pandemic was a new challenge in the 21st century and it affected all spheres of

human life. Education sector was not spared and many learning institutions continue to adapt to the new normal.

In Kenyan high schools, there are mixed sex day schools, mixed sex boarding schools, single sex boarding schools all accommodated in the two categories, either in a public school or a private school. Post Covid-19 period, the Kenyan school calendar was condensed to fit in a duration of less than a normal calendar year. This measure was taken in order to ensure the students who did not benefit from digital literacy during the Covid-19 pandemic were not disadvantaged but rather, they were able to catch up with the rest of the learners in content coverage. It was found that most of the students suffered from academic stress and poor academic adjustment during this period. The nature of public and private schools in Kenya were significantly different in terms of their formation, management and also the social class of the parents. The current study intended to find the differences in academic stress and academic adjustment between the form three students in public and private secondary schools.

B. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To find out the mean differences in academic stress and academic adjustment between public schools and private schools among Form Three students in Nairobi City County.

C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study would benefit the following stakeholders in the education sector. First, the Ministry of Education based on the study findings might prioritize upgrading learning facilities in public secondary schools. In addition, the MOE would need to increase funding in public secondary schools. The private secondary school owners would need to monitor and regulate learning environment to allow learners develop positive academic adjustment.

D. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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

a. COGNITIVE ACTIVATION THEORY OF STRESS (CATS)

The theory explained how the mental evaluation of a life events or a situation is subjective to an individual. When an individual view a situation as either unmanageable or life threatening, it may have physical and psychological impact on mental health. The form three students sampled in the research were preparing for their national Kenya certificate of Secondary Education post Covid-19 pandemic and had numerous challenges. Among them was dealing with syllabus coverage which was condensed within a shorter calendar year, and meeting the expectations of the significant others in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. Therefore, how the students cognitively appraised the stressors in their particular academic environment had a significant impact on their academic stress and academic adjustment.

b. TRANSACTIONAL THEORY OF STRESS

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

For instance, if an academic task was interpreted as difficult or unmanageable, stress feelings were aroused towards the task. Effective coping strategies led to positive academic adjustment while negative coping strategies or lack of coping strategies led to negative academic adjustment. As a result, the type of school a student learned from formed the learning environment of a student. Different schools had varied academic cultures and structures which depended on socio-economic factors, based on whether a school was government sponsored, faith-based or privately owned by a proprietor. These variations in the schools presented different learning environments. However, each individual student interacted with the environment in a unique way depending on their cognitive appraisal of the environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Regarding differences between secondary public and private schools on the academic stress and academic adjustment, research findings were not conclusive. Hosseinkhani et al. (2020) studied academic stress among Iranian adolescents aged 12-18 years aiming to find sources of stress in both private and public schools. The qualitative data revealed that academic stress levels in private schools were significantly different from those in public schools. Chen et al. (2021) investigated how school types affected adolescent's subsequent mental health and well-being among primary and secondary school students of mean age 14.56 years. After correlations were carried out, private school students had higher levels of adjustment and higher stress levels while public school students had lower levels of adjustment and lower stress.

Ribeiro et al. (2021) found a significant difference between Portuguese school going children in private and public schools. The research was based on need for parental support during Covid-19 lock down period. The parents were reached through an online platform to respond on how much time they spend supervising their children to engage on online learning. The children from public schools were more overwhelmed in terms of completing their school assignments than the children from private schools. It was noted that children from public schools were less exposed to digital practice and use of technology in learning. The children from private schools

were from a higher socio-economic background compared to the children from public schools which were government run. It also emerged that online learning was overwhelming for the students in public schools. An evidence-based research was necessary to investigate differences between private and public secondary school students in academic outcomes in the context of post Covid-19 challenges.

Another study was done by AlAzzam et al. (2021) on the predictors of depression and anxiety among senior high school students in Jordan during Covid-19 pandemic. The findings showed that there were no significant differences in both anxiety and depression between the government schools, also known as the public schools and the private schools. Shehzadi et al. (2022) did a survey among senior secondary students in the ninth grade at Lahore, India where they compared the public and the private school students' academic achievement in Mathematics. The results showed that there was no significant difference in Mathematics achievement. High achievement could represent positive adjustment and low achievement negative adjustment in comparison to the current research. According to Azubuike et al. (2021), during the Covid-19 pandemic students from private schools easily accessed online learning than the students in public schools. In addition, more students from the public schools reported facing difficulties in remote learning than the students in private schools. The findings were established in a survey carried out among adolescents with mean age of 17years across thirty-one states in Nigeria. There were few studies done on differences between public and private school students in academic stress and academic adjustment, and hence the need for the current study.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

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

B. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLE SIZE

a. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Nairobi City County was purposefully sampled out of the 47 counties with a view to bring out the differences in academic stress and academic adjustment among students public and private secondary schools. The secondary schools and the students were randomly sampled from the population. This method of sampling was necessary since the researcher intended to sample based on the original population distribution (Rahman et al., 2022) and ensure a representative sample.

b. SAMPLE SIZE

Yamane formula was used by the researcher to determine the sample size of the study (Asenahabi & Ikoha, 2023; Yamane, 1967). In addition, the sample size of schools was selected using Mugenda and Mugenda (2018) principle of 10% and above on the population (Mchopa, 2021). The students, and schools from each category were proportionately selected. Table 3.1 shows the targeted population and the selected sample.

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

Table 3. 1: Sampling Frame

C. INSTRUMENTS

The Quantitative data was obtained using adopted standard questionnaires while the qualitative data was collected using interview schedules.

a. QUESTIONNAIRES

The two rating scales were administered to all the 394 sampled students in form three class in secondary schools. The participants consisted of students from public boys, public girls, private boys, private girls, co-educational public and co-educational private secondary schools.

b. INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

The research participants were put in focus groups where they responded to open ended questions through interviews.

D. DATA COLLECTION

Research authorization was granted by Kenyatta University graduate school after which a permit was obtained from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Further, research authorization was granted by Regional Education Office, Nairobi, and State department for internal security and national administration. An agreeable arrangement was done with the schools' administration of the sampled schools.

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

qualitative data was analyzed NVIVO software by coding the unstructured data into themes.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. QUANTITATIVE DATA

Hypothesis: The study sought to find if there were mean differences in both the academic stress and academic adjustment between private and public secondary schools' form three students. The descriptive statistics obtained included means and standard deviations of the academic stress and academic adjustment for each school category and were presented in Table 4.1.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Academic Stress	Between Groups	1580.48	5	316.10	1.16	.33
	Within Groups	105595.83	386	273.56		
	Total	107176.32	391			
Academic Adjustment	Between Groups	2230.02	5	446.00	5.71	.00
	Within Groups	30168.27	386	78.16		
	Total	32398.28	391			

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Academic Stress and academic adjustment by school Category

Private Boys had the highest stress levels ($M = 85.00$), followed by Public Co-educational ($M = 84.44$) and Public Boys ($M = 83.49$). Private Girls reported the lowest level of academic stress ($M = 74.81$). Overall mean for academic adjustment was $M = 83.11$, $SD = 9.10$. Public Boys reported the highest mean of adjustment ($M = 87.60$), while Private Girls reported the lowest ($M = 77.00$). Data was collected across six school types: Public Boys, Public Girls, Private Boys, Private Girls, Public Co-educational, and Private Co-educational. The mean academic stress score was $M = 83.40$, $SD = 16.56$.

Table 4.2 shows the results on mean differences in academic stress and academic adjustment in the different categories of schools.

Type of School		Academic Stress	Academic Adjustment
Public Boys	Mean	83.49	87.60
	N	63	63
	Std. Deviation	13.33	8.07
Public Girls	Mean	82.07	82.23
	N	82	82
	Std. Deviation	17.55	7.61
Private Boys	Mean	85.00	82.78
	N	9	9
	Std. Deviation	14.14	16.46
Private Girls	Mean	74.81	77.00
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	17.66	9.02
Public Co-educational	Mean	84.44	81.86
	N	148	148
	Std. Deviation	18.32	8.64
Private Coeducational	Mean	84.39	84.08
	N	74	74
	Std. Deviation	13.84	9.84
Total	Mean	83.40	83.11
	N	392	392
	Std. Deviation	16.56	9.10

Table 4.2: ANOVA on Mean Differences in Academic Stress and Academic Adjustment in Type of School

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there were significant differences in academic stress and academic adjustment by school category. For academic stress, the results were not statistically significant, $F (5, 386) = 1.16$, $p = .33$, indicating that there were no statistically significant differences in reported levels of stress between students in the various school categories. Therefore, the supplementary null hypothesis was retained. For academic adjustment, the difference was statistically significant, $F (5, 386) = 5.71$, $p <. .05$. Based on the results, the supplementary null hypothesis was not accepted. This meant that students' academic adjustment varied significantly across the school categories. The results demonstrated that academic stress hits students more or less equally either way whether they attended a public school or a private school or if they attended either a single-sex or a co-educational school. Academic adjustment, however, differed exceedingly based on what type of school a student attended.

Most significantly, public boys' schools had the highest mean academic adjustment score ($M = 87.60$) and therefore appeared to have more successful coping methods or official systems of support. Private girls' schools had the lowest mean adjustment score ($M = 77.00$) and therefore might have faced difficulties in handling academic stress or social integration within school. These findings indicated that while academic stress was a common experience, students' ability to cope and manage such pressures might to a great extent have been shaped by institutional culture, peer environment, availability of support services, and gender dynamics.

B. QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data were obtained through student interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis showed three primary themes that best explained the variations observed in academic adjustment. The themes included the school environment and teacher support, peer influence and competition and access to guidance and counselling services. The themes were compiled from the students' responses during the focus groups interview.

Male students from public schools appreciated availability of their teachers, although they instilled very strict discipline on the students. The students could accommodate the academic routine workload. One boy remaked, *"In our school, we have morning prep, evening prep, and teachers are always there to assist. It's difficult, but you get used to it."* Another response from a boy in public school was recorded emphasizing adjustment and he said, *"We have a counselor who addresses us once a week. It helps us to calm down even if exams are impending."* The boys from private schools felt they were bombarded with a lot of academic work with little time for relaxation. Students from co-educational schools, where boys and girls learned together described positive peer interactions being supportive of academic adjustment. However, others described distraction or competition in school as sources of stress. Some remarks from a boy in a co-educational school were, *"Sometimes it's okay because you get*

to work with girls or boys, but sometimes people don't pay attention, and that affects the way we learn".

The private girls' school students described social isolation and priority on outcomes over students' welfare. One girl from a private girls' school said, "*The teachers care about results, not how we feel. If you're struggling, you have to figure it out on your own."* This perspective was consistent with the lowest adjustment scores in the private girls' category, showing that there were inadequate support systems. Students in certain private schools, however, complained of fewer or non-existent counseling services that might cause worse adjustment, particularly for girls from private schools. A girl from private school complained, "*We don't have a regular counselor, only sometimes. So, you just talk to your friends or keep quiet.* This qualitative evidence corroborates the quantitative result that academic adjustment varied substantially by type of school, and these differences were generally founded on structural and emotional support systems within the school setting.

The quantitative results indicated that there was no significant variation in academic stress levels by school type. Academic adjustment was found to vary significantly, with public boys' schools having the highest levels of adjustment and private girls' schools having the lowest. Qualitative data revealed that this difference was directly related to school organization, teacher engagement, peer pressure, and access to counseling.

C. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Among the past studies done on academic stress and academic adjustment, there were limited studies done on type of school as the basis for comparison. A study done by Mathew et al. (2021) pointed that floods disaster, in Kerala state in India left adolescents with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Majority of the affected adolescents were from private schools in comparison to adolescents from the public schools. The study had Chi-Square value of 4.43 with p < .05, hence there was a significant difference in PTSD of the adolescents between the students in the two types of schools. The difference was attributed to different socio-economic status where students from private schools were unfamiliar with difficult situations when compared with students from public schools. The current study results were conflicting these past researches in terms of the differences in academic adjustment and academic stress of students the two types of schools. The student sample in the current study was recovering from global disaster caused by Covid-19 pandemic which exposed students to difficult and unfamiliar learning experiences.

Regarding type of school differences, the current study revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in academic stress across the different types of schools, $F_{(5, 386)} = 1.155$, $p = .331$. This meant that regardless of the nature of the school public boys', public girls', private, or co-educational, the stress levels were quite similar for the students. This findings differed from the previous qualitative results of Hosseinkhani et al. (2020) and Chen et al. (2021) who reported differences in academic stress by school types. The difference might have been due to variations in context like country, age group, methodology or the nature of the

pandemic. Interestingly, the present study used face-to-face administration of standardized questionnaires to randomly sampled Form Three students. It was expected that the current study sample would give more structured and uniform responses than those obtained with online or convenience sampling employed in some earlier studies.

However, a statistically significant difference in academic adjustment between school types ($F_{(5, 386)} = 5.707$, $p < .05$) was present. This indicated that students' ability to adapt to school demands varied depending on the type of school they attended. Specifically, public boys' schools recorded the highest mean academic adjustment ($M = 87.60$, $SD = 8.07$), followed by lower mean scores in public girls' schools and private girls' schools ($M = 82.27$ and $M = 77.00$ respectively). These results were in line with those of Chen et al. (2021), who indicated that students from private schools experienced higher stress and lower adjustment due to possibly more demanding academic environments. Public schools, especially boys' schools, might have more known adjustment frameworks, peer support networks, or fewer pressures to hinder succeed, allowing more adjustment.

The transactional theory of stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was an enlightening approach under which these results could be understood. According to this theory, stress arose from an interaction between someone and their surroundings, and the effect of stress depended on the person's judgment of the situation. Boys and girls in public schools may have perceived these academic demands as less threatening or had superior coping mechanisms and thus adjusted more easily. Private school students, however, might have perceived higher expectations and a more competitive environment, hence, influencing their adjustment ability despite the fact that there was no considerable difference in perceiving stress.

Qualitatively, students at public schools indicated struggling with scarce resources but benefiting from a more comprehensive peer support system, while private-school students reported feeling overloaded with intense school programs and overwhelming parental pressure. These quantitative results were also supported by the qualitative results, which confirmed that even though levels of stress might be equally high, the potential for adjustment varied as a function of school type. This might have been explained by the differing environmental pressures and support systems.

The results on academic stress differences between the public and private schools were consistent with those obtained by AlAzzam et al. (2021) on predictors of depression and academic anxiety. The online study found that there were no significant differences in anxiety and depression among the 12th grade students. The two variables, anxiety and depression were closely related to academic stress and hence the results were comparable. Majority of the students from private secondary schools came from families of higher socio-economic status with above average education. These parents expressed high expectations on their children with regards to academic achievement hence the children who were also preparing for their national exams perceived more academic pressure than their counterparts in public schools. The fact was confirmed by the significantly different academic

adjustment levels between the private and public secondary schools.

The current study results were also consistent with those obtained by Ribeiro et al. (2021) in the case of academic adjustment and on the other hand they contrasted in the case of academic stress. The study found that there were significant mean differences between the students from public schools and those from private schools in terms of parental support. The students from private schools were exposed to digital practice in learning and also enjoyed more parental support. On the other hand, the students from public schools had no access or limited access to digital devices for learning. In addition, they were overwhelmed by school assignments with less or no parental support at all. These findings were obtained in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. The students who participated in the current study had a similar situation for both the public and private school students whereby they were struggling with the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on education sector. Similar results were obtained by Azubuike et al. (2021) in a study done among Nigerian high school students who found that there were significant differences between the two school types in terms of digital access and ease in remote learning.

Implications of such results were two-fold with the need for interventions in private schools on one hand and interventions in public schools on the other hand. Teachers and policymakers must recognize that academic adjustment is a context-sensitive phenomenon and needs targeted interventions depending on school type. For private schools, implementing structured peer support systems and reducing academic overload could help make adjustment easier. For public schools, there needs to preserve favorable environments and also develop infrastructures which could include enhanced learning facilities. Ultimately, enhancing academic adjustment can serve as a stress buffer, improving students' educational achievement and welfare.

V. CONCLUSION

The study found no significant differences in academic stress levels among students from different school types, indicating that stress was experienced uniformly across public and private, single-sex and co-educational schools. However, academic adjustment significantly differed, with students from public boys' schools adjusting better compared to those from private girls' schools. This suggests that school type influences students' ability to cope, likely due to differences in support systems, peer environments, and institutional culture.

The findings revealed that academic stress was a widespread challenge among students across all school types, suggesting that institutional type has little influence on how much stress students experience. In contrast, academic adjustment significantly varied, with public boys' schools showing the most effective adaptation and private girls' schools the least. These results imply that school-based factors such as support systems, gender, environment, and institutional culture may play a crucial role in academic adjustment. This was evident in students' coping during

Covid-19 pandemic experienced in 2019 which affected education sector globally.

Based on the findings, there was need for specialized intervention to enhance academic adjustment, particularly in private schools and girls' schools. Employing robust support systems, providing student-teacher contact, and availing counseling services would bridge this adjustment gap and ensure equitable opportunities in education.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

✓ Similar studies should be conducted in different counties to help compare the differences in academic stress and academic adjustment in different environments.
✓ Since the current study focused on secondary school students, it is important to carry out similar research at tertiary level and at the primary school level to compare the findings.

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