



Coping Strategies Among First Year Students and its Influence on their Education: A Study of Universities in Arusha Region, Tanzania

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Abstract: *This study investigated the coping strategies among first year students and its influence on their university education in Arusha Region, Tanzania. Objectives were to assess the challenges facing first year students and their influence on their university education and examine the coping strategies to the challenges facing first year students in universities in Arusha Region. Coping Theory guided the study. Convergent mixed methods design was adopted. Sample size consisted of 150 (100 students, 35 lecturers, 10 Non-Academic Staff - NAS and 05 deans of students) in 5 universities. Students and lecturers were obtained through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. NAS and deans of students were purposively sampled. Questionnaires and interviews were employed to collect data. Validity was established through expert input. Reliability was determined using Guttman split half method and reliability index, $SQ; r=0.760$, $LQ; r=0.738$ and $NASQ; r=0.676$, was reported. Credibility of qualitative instrument was established through detailed reporting of the research process. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data in the SPSS version 23 and results were presented in tables. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis and was presented in narrative forms. Results show that first-year students arrive in university unprepared to handle many challenging and stressful conditions such as homesickness, financial management and unsafe hostels that await them. In conclusion, the transition from secondary school and home environment to university life requires psychological adjustment. Recommendations were made for parents/guardians and university management to guide and counsel first year students to adapt coping strategies in the university.*

Keywords: *Strategies, Students, Education, Universities, Tanzania*

How to cite this work (APA):

Mkumbo, D. R., Otieno, K. O. & Rufyiriza, C. G. (2023). Coping Strategies Among First Year Students and its Influence on their Education: A Study of Universities in Arusha Region, Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 7(4), 480 – 492. <https://doi.org/10.59765/qhrv2759>.

1. Introduction

Coping strategies typically involve a conscious and direct approach to problems, in contrast to defense mechanisms. Takács et al. (2021) view coping strategies as efforts to regulate emotions, behaviours, and environmental aspects in response to the stress of everyday events. Similarly, Gustems et al. (2019) reported coping strategies as an action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one's reaction to such a situation. Coping strategies are behavioural and cognitive tactics used to manage crises, conditions, and demands that are appraised as distressing.

Different literatures have shown the coping strategies among first year students, including in universities worldwide. Coping strategies on challenges facing students have been used in both developed and developing countries. For instance, according to Freire et al. (2020), in the developed countries like America, coping strategies among first year students are adopted in different scenarios. For example, a study of Iranian university students found that individuals who considered their problems to be uncontrollable used many more avoidance strategies, such as cognitive avoidance and seeking alternative rewards, and made fewer positive reappraisals than their peers, who perceived the situation as controllable (Garrido, 2019).

In Spain, Deasy et al. (2016) observe that students experience higher stress levels in their first year of study. Prior research on proactive strategies suggested the use of both self- and co-regulative strategies in reducing the problem. One among the things that shakes the learning process among first year students in today's university's life is the challenges and because they lack effective coping strategies some of them employ unhealthy methods such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse. Kibanduna (2021) recommended that, incorporation of programs that strengthen and encourage peer support, mentorship, social support and the appropriate utilization of adaptive stress-coping strategies as part of medical residency training may help to mitigate stress at universities.

Tanzania is not exempted from the challenges facing first year students in universities. In recent years, a series of problems were observed in Arusha region, Dodoma region, Iringa region, Dar es Salaam region, Mwanza region, Morogoro region. In Arusha region, there have been a number of reported incidences about the University's students. For instance, Millard Ayo TV (2022) reported the incident of conflicts between a first-year student and watchmen in one of the public University in Arusha district due to inappropriate dress and lack of student's identity card. Despite the fact that educational stakeholders such as

the government and universities have made a number of reforms to adopt coping strategies on challenges facing first year students, a number of students continues to face a number of challenges and lack coping strategies hence negatively affecting their learning at Universities (Schönfeld et al., 2019). Therefore, stress and coping strategies among first year undergraduate students deserves more attention. Consequently, it was necessary to carry out a study to assess the coping strategies among first year students and its influence on their learning.

1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do the challenges facing first year students influence their education in universities in Arusha Region?
2. What are the coping strategies to the challenges facing first year students in universities in Arusha Region?

2. Literature Review

The theoretical and empirical literature was reviewed with reference to research objectives. The study was anchored on Coping Theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

2.1 Coping Theory

The theory postulate that successful coping mechanisms depend on the emotional functions related to the problem. The theory's thought of stress as an interactive process between the person and their surroundings, in which the influence of stressful events on physical and psychological well-being is determined by coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). From this widely accepted transactional approach, coping would come to be defined by cognitive and behavioral efforts employed in response to external or internal demands that the individual deems to be threats to their well-being. According to the theory, there are three groups or sub-divisions of coping mechanisms, namely: physiological coping - including art, naturopathy, breathing exercise, and muscle relaxation. Cognitive coping- including mindfulness, through restructuring, and meditation as well as environment coping- that include nature walks and bonding with pets (Madhuleena, 2019).

2.1.1 Strengths of Coping Theory

The coping theory outlines reality-bound aspects of coping, including negotiation, emotional awareness, hope, self-mastery, optimism, and careful attempts to shift focus from

problems to solutions. Also, it offers some great ways to meet daily challenges and resilient in everyday life. The theory is valuable asset for self-improvement and useful for students and mental health researchers.

2.1.2 Application of the Theory to the Current Study

The theory is a vital requisite for overcoming stress and anxiety in life. It takes mental strength and effort to control the urge of difficult times or having a bite to odd times of the day. Maladaptive coping to life stressors may lead to more disorders and in turn, increase the chances of self-harm. Studies show that individuals who have successfully recovered from stress and depression rely on positive coping strategies. They resort to cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation, which minimize stress and ensure better diagnosis.

2.2 Empirical Review

The researcher reviewed empirical studies under the following study objectives: to assess the challenges facing first year students and their influence on their university education and examine the coping strategies to the challenges facing first year students in universities in Arusha Region.

2.2.1 The Challenges Facing First Year Students and their Influence on their University Education

A study by Khanal (2019) on challenges international students face from pre-departure to post-study at Morgan State University, USA revealed that, the challenges are categorized into pre-departure, post-departure, and post-study. The findings revealed pre-departure challenges, such as obtaining accurate information, understanding the admission procedure, and preparing documents for visa acquisition. Post-departure, international students face language barriers, financial issues, and cultural adjustment when they are in the host countries. Kavilanz (2018) argued that depending on how students handle these challenges, they may positively or negatively affect their study.

The findings by Freire et al. (2020) when tracing the Spanish universities on many of the general problems confronting university students, revealed that, understanding the English used in textbooks, understanding their academic work, expressing themselves clearly, making friends and taking notes in class were the notable challenges identified by the students regarding their university education. Kavilanz (2018) reported that common challenges for Indian first year students include

obtaining a visa, financial problems and getting the appropriate vaccinations. The issue of finances which is a common theme among Indian students affects their standard of living and the quality of research in the university.

Engelbrecht et al. (2020) on coping processes of South African first-year university students revealed that, challenges first-year students face include: academic performance, adapting to campus life, being more independent, financial concerns, time-management, and managing interpersonal relationships. Garido (2020) weighed in by observing that the perceptions of excessive academic demands and workload from student schedules, examinations, assignments, and practical work if not well managed could cause further stress. According to a study conducted by Freire et al. (2020), stress can bring with it significant harm to the student's academic performance (as reduced ability to pay attention or to memorize, less dedication to study, and more absences from class), as well as to the student's physical and psychological health. According to McInnis (2017) in South Africa, the first year of college is often a fresh start for students. Transition into college is often accompanied by many challenges, including, homesickness, depression, inability to fit in, and financial instability.

A study done by Segbenya and Anokye (2022) in Ghana on challenges and coping strategies among distance education learners and their implications for human resources managers, found that instructional, psychological, socio-religious and institutional challenges had a statistically significant relationship with coping strategies and educational output among distance learners. Research by Kianduma (2021) pointed out that medical training is considered very stressful and more so during residency which come with high expectations and multiple responsibilities.

Moreover, the study by Pagano et al. (2015) revealed that first-year students comprise a large proportion of students who struggle because of specific psychological problems to cope with their academic burden. Most students are underprepared for university life and do not know how to cope with it. The students become disturbed psychologically and socially, leading to poor performance. A related study by Calvete, and Connor-Smith (2016) observed that most of the first year students who were outstanding in their high school might suddenly start to perform poorly during their first year of study. Some may drop out while others change courses for example from sciences to art based if coping strategies are not well acclimatized. Furthermore, Magembe (2018) in research to explore the difficulties facing first year students at the institute of adult education in Tanzania found that first year

students encounter great difficulties in writing, computer use, referencing, transition and workload. Joo (2018) highlights the negative implications of these findings on designing, planning and delivering appropriate teaching strategies in education programs and learning of students.

2.2.2 Coping Strategies to the Challenges Facing First Year Students in Universities

Väisänen et al. (2018) opined that when stress levels are excessively high, this can have negative academic and emotional repercussions, which may be an underlying cause of the adoption of multiple unhealthy behaviours such as use of problem-focused coping or avoidance coping strategies focusing on emotions leading to higher levels of substance abuse (cannabis, tobacco), health-damaging behaviours and increased suicidal ideation. In the views of Mason (2017), within the university context of South Africa, student affairs practitioners are required to assist students in developing the strategies required to cope with stressors and establish academic-personal life balance, mindfulness, meditation, cognitive behavioural strategies and healthy living through exercise, nutrition and sleep as relevant coping strategies. Research done by Simuyemba (2019) to examine burnout amongst Doctors at University teaching hospital in Lusaka Zambia revealed that most of them used exercise, consulting others, engaging in enjoyable activities and maintaining optimism as coping strategies with very few employing unhealthy methods such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse.

Engelbrecht et al. (2020) demonstrated that, there are some emerging strategies reported such as learning from past experiences to find a previously identified effective solution, forming study groups, journaling emotions to gain new perspectives and living a balanced lifestyle through eating healthy, exercising, and sleeping enough, to alleviate stress. Research by Segbenya and Anokye (2022) found four main effective coping strategies identified among distance learners namely; problem-focused, emotion-focused, preventive and proactive coping strategies.

Donkoh and Yelkpereri (2019) enumerated the coping strategies to students by recommending that counselling unit of universities should strengthen its services by having social support groups that consist of lecturers and students, so that supportive skills, such as talking and sharing, can be developed and students may then become very comfortable to let out their feelings. Another study by Kianduma (2021) suggested incorporation of programs such as sport and academic tours that strengthen and encourage peer support, mentorship, social support and the appropriate utilization of adaptive stress-coping strategies

as part of medical residency training may help to mitigate stress at universities.

3. Methodology

The study adopted convergent mixed methods design whereby the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative set of data at the same time, analyzed them separately, and then the quantitative and qualitative results were later integrated (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The study targeted a population of 1,195 that is, 1000 students, 180 lecturers, 10 Non-academic staffs (NAS) that is, higher education students' loan officer and bursars from 5 universities recognized by Tanzania Commission for University (TCU, 2022). Vasileiou (2018) stated that, a sample of 10% to 30% of the target population is representative enough for a research study. The study involved a total of 150 respondents from 05 universities in Arusha Region. That being the case, 05 deans of students, 35 lecturers which is 19.5% of 180, 10 Non-Teaching Staff (NAS) and 100 first year undergraduate students out of 1,000 which is 10%, were selected using both probability and non-probability techniques. Therefore, sample size consisted of 150 (100 students, 35 lecturers, 10 NAS and 05 deans of students). Twenty students and seven lecturers from each university were selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques while 10 NAS and deans of students were purposively sampled. Gender formed the strata in the study. Data collection was done through questionnaires and interview guides. Validity was established through judgment by two experts from guidance and counseling department whereas reliability was determined using Guttman Split-Half Method and reliability index, SQ: $r=0.760$, LQ: $r=0.738$ and NASQ: $r=0.676$, was obtained and according to George & Malley (2003), the instruments were found to be reliable for the study. Credibility and dependability of qualitative data was established through detailed reporting of the research process. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data in the SPSS version 23 and results were presented in tables, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically based on research questions and presented in narrative forms. The quantitative and qualitative results were later integrated (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

The findings were discussed according to the research objectives:

4.1 Challenges Facing First Year Students and their Influence on University Education

Objective one of the current study was set to examine how the challenges facing first year students influence their

education in universities in Arusha Region. The sampled university students, lecturers and non-academic staff were required to indicate their level of agreement to the statements on how the challenges facing first year students influence their university education. On the other hand, dean of students responded to interview guide. Table 1 shows the summary of quantitative results.

Table 1: Respondents' Responses on How the Challenges Facing First Year Students Influence their Education in Universities Arusha Region

SN		Students (=100) f(%)	Lecturers (=36) f(%)	NAS (=10) f(%)	Total (=146) f(%)
1	Homesickness reduce ability to be attentive in class	94(94%)	35(97%)	10(100%)	139(95%)
2.	Inability to adapt to university life may be source of stress hence dropout from university.	100(100%)	36(100%)	10(100%)	146(100%)
3	Peer pressure causes depression hence poor performance.	88(88%)	31(86%)	8(80%)	127(87%)
4	Health related challenges causes continuous absence from class to seek medication hence poor academic performance.	100(100%)	36(100%)	10(100%)	146(100%)
5	Difficulty in understanding academic work causes lack of interest in education.	86(86%)	29(81%)	8(80%)	123(84%)
6	Financial challenges results in inability to meet basic requirement hence dropout from university.	81(81%)	28(78%)	7(70%)	116(79%)
7	Too much freedom may result in irrational decision making/poor priorities hence dismal academic performance	96(96%)	33(92%)	9(90%)	138(95%)
8	Poor choice of friends may distract their education hence inability to balance schooling	100(100%)	36(100%)	10(100%)	146(100%)
9	Poor time management result in inability to meet deadlines, late reporting in class hence dismal performance.	100(100%)	36(100%)	10(100%)	146(100%)
10	Sexual harassments result in being uncomfortable in school	100(100%)	36(100%)	10(100%)	146(100%)
11	Workload issues leads to physical exhaustion hence reduced interest in education	90(90%)	32(89%)	9(90%)	131(90%)
12	Relationships require a lot of commitment hence distract students' attention from studies	86(86%)	29(81%)	8(80%)	123(84%)
13	Bad roommates influence students negatively in education	90(90%)	32(89%)	9(90%)	131(90%)
14	Poor studying strategies results in burnout hence poor academic performance	100(100%)	36(100%)	10(100%)	146(100%)

f=Frequency, %=Percentages, n=Number of respondents, values in brackets are percentage of students, lecturers and Non-Academic staffs (NAS) who agreed with the statement. Hence those with contrary opinion to the statement are implied.

Source: field data (2023)

From table 1, the statement on homesickness reduce ability to be attentive in class was supported by 94% students, 97% lecturers and 100% non-academic staff. The respondents noted that homesickness due to missing parental care for some students has negatively affected their concentration in class. Students from some families

are normally enticed in order to undertake various domestic chores. Without the enticement, such students encounter stress and homesickness as soon as they join university. The finding shows a relationship with that of Freire et al. (2020), in Spanish universities. According to the findings, stress can bring with it significant harm to the student's

academic performance (as reduced ability to pay attention or to memorize, less dedication to study, and more absences from class), as well as to the student's physical and psychological health (that is, substance abuse, insomnia, anxiety, and physical and emotional exhaustion).

In addition, inability to adapt to university life as a source of stress was approved by all (100%) respondents. The respondents felt that first year students should adjust and acclimatize with university life. Any delay in adjustment would affect them negatively hence a likely dropout from university as shown in overwhelming support given to the statement. When students enter university life for the first time, they are expected to adjust their academic habits and lifestyle different from what they were used to while in high school. The time given for this adjustment is usually very short and thus lead to some students operating under crisis most of the time. Students are not sure about their abilities to meet the new challenges of new environment of the university where they must learn to think independently and not to rely on their teachers or parents for their academic work (Aloka and Mukuna, 2023). They need to form new social relations to meet the increased academic demands. According to Round (2015), first year students are faced with challenge of hard work with lengthy class duration, different teaching techniques and weighty assignments and at the same time managing their own social lives. This type of adjustment becomes a challenge and most students either fail to cope up and usually lag in academic work or may end up being victims of university drop out.

A total of 87% respondents that is, 88% students, 86% academic staff and 80% non-academic staff noted that peer pressure causes depression hence poor performance. The choice of peer group among first year students requires a second thought and thorough vetting in order to weed out uncultured students. The researcher established that most students do not make wise decision in the choice of peer groups. They hardly consult their seniors and as such face regrets the moment they realize that their friends have misled them.

When asked about how the challenges facing first year students influence their education in universities in Arusha Region, dean of students from one university observed that:

...it is true that most first year students have been misled by their colleagues due to peer pressure. For instance, a case was reported in my office where one student influenced others to use their university fees for betting. After betting and winning for the first time, the subsequent betting resulted into massive loss and the students

couldn't pay university fees, thus they missed end semester examination. Peer influence has also resulted into unwanted pregnancies (personal interview, 16th, May 2023).

The response from the interview excerpt suggests that peer influence is a challenge facing first year student as it results into negative influence and unwanted pregnancies. This finding corroborates that of quantitative where it was reported that relationships require a lot of commitment hence distract students' attention from studies. In this regard, Otieno (2023) submitted that students joining university today are the most diverse population in terms of their gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnic composition, family background, native languages and level of academic preparation. Life transitions, including new experiences are major life transition for young adults. Therefore, careful selection of peer group should be considered.

Table 1 also confirms a general agreement among the respondents that health related challenges facing first year students cause continuous absence from class as they seek medication hence poor academic performance. All (100%) respondents were concerned that health challenges because of new environment, stress or physical illness could easily influence university education of first year students in Arusha region. For instance, students who are continuously ill will sit for special (belated) examinations and occasionally postpone their study and this may lead to drop out from university. Correspondingly, Yikealo et al. (2018) reported that in a situation where students fail to cope under stressful circumstances, stress may lead to many other health-related problems such as anxiety, depression, the feeling of loneliness and despair. This call has an implication for both parents and university counselors to guide and empower students with resilient skills to help them cope in any situation they find themselves in if they are to succeed in university life that is full of adversities.

Similarly, this study noted difficulty first year students face in understanding academic work which causes lack of interest in education. The academic staff (81%) observed that some students were selected to pursue courses which are either difficult or they have little interest in. Consequently, they have had trouble in understanding academic work. In this regard, 86% of students confirmed that indeed they face difficulty in understanding academic work for reasons such as lack of interest in the programme, poor selection of university, moonlighting activities during their studies and lack of proper guidance. Generally, the researcher established that students prefer universities located in cities and urban centres where they get involved in other moonlighting activities to make ends meet as opposed to rural areas where opportunities are limited. However, to their surprise, some find life expensive in

cities as a result they face uncertainty on how to manage their university education. The conflict of interest in rural areas and expensive life in cities complicates their understanding of academic work. This finding is contrary to the requirement according to TCU (2020) which stipulates that students should be given freedom to select university and courses of choice without any due influence. This will enable them to adjust easily to their respective programmes in the university. Moreover, Segbenya et al. (2019) revealed that coping strategies significantly influenced educational output. The results suggest that learners in Ghana are active agents who can marshal coping strategies to confront challenges they face in pursuit of their academic goals. Thus, coping strategies used by distance undergraduate learners have the potential to influence their ability to obtain good grades and complete their academic programmes on time.

A total of 79% of the respondents in the current study reported that first year students face financial challenges which results in their inability to meet basic requirement hence dropout from university. The respondents informed the researcher that students from low socio-economic origins are much more likely to drop out than those from high socio-economic ones. This is so because less fortunate students are less likely to be aware of the true costs associated with post-secondary education. The university loan allocated to students is inadequate to cater for their rent, meals, stationery services, academic field trips and bus fare. Due to low socio-economic family background, some students are circumstantially compelled to financially support their siblings and parents using university loan. Out of misinformation, some parents believe that the loan is adequate and therefore they don't give financial supplement to their sons and daughters. To corroborate this finding, Wangenge-Ouma (2018) asserts that students in South Africa who do not receive funding or other subsidies choose to take out students' loans, and the majority drop out to find employment to pay off the loans. Low socio-economic level among students influences their likelihood of dropping out.

While collecting qualitative data during the interviews, dean of student from university B while responding to the same theme on challenges noted that:

Too much freedom students enjoy at the university is normally abused. It is through freedom that they enter into unhealthy relationship which results into unwanted pregnancies. Previously, a student almost lost her life when she attempted to carry out abortion. She was rushed to the hospital where her life was saved, thanks to quick medical intervention by the doctors in charge. Similarly, abuse of freedom has been cited by students themselves as the major cause for dismal

performance in academics. Some cases of physical fights involving love issues have been reported among girls and boys (personal interview, 17th, May 2023).

The finding implies that the journey from high school to university for many students is accompanied by infinite freedom. This freedom should be utilised responsibly. According to Sibanyoni and Pillay (2014), first year students have more adjustment problems than students in other academic years, including more hunger disorders, feelings, lack of concentration, despair, and suicidal impulses. Relationship changes brought on by moving away from home are linked to freedom, mood and substance use disorders (Stallman et al., 2018)

During the interviews, dean of students from one university in Arusha region also remarked that:

It is not bad for students to socialize with others. In fact, belonging to a group builds sense of identity which in turn improves their confidence to excel in academics. Their friends give them a sense of belonging and this makes them feel loved, hence improves their academic performance. However, it is imperative that students make right choices in selecting their friends. Otherwise, they will leave to regret (personal interview, 23rd, May 2023).

The response means that the academic performance of first year students is significantly affected by relation factors. Therefore, wise judgment should be exercised in selecting individuals or groups to associate with. To buttress this finding, a study by Muthuri et al. (2021) on factors that influence the academic performance of first-year students in Kenyatta University, Nairobi County reported that, uncontrolled freedom affects their expenditure and time management skills. This affects their studies at the highest level. This was followed by difficulty in accepting support from lecturers and others which affect their academic work. However, the study noted that the security they get from relation groups in the University may contribute to the improvement of their academic performance.

Poor time management results in inability to meet deadlines, late reporting in class and hence dismal performance as reported by 100% of respondents. The study found out that proper time management plays a critical part in increasing students' academic adjustments, performance and achievements. According to Adams and Blair (2019), each and every student should have the ability to manage their time effectively, which includes defining objectives and priorities, using time management tools, and being organized with their time.

In addition, table 1 confirms that sexual harassments result in students being uncomfortable in the university. Some students report sexual harassment cases to their friends, lecturers and non-academic staff. According to the respondents, students who do not entertain harassment feel embarrassed and uncomfortable to continue with university education. They develop a sense of fear and insecurity. Consequently, they may hate certain lecturers, students and non-academic staff. In this regard, Siyez et al. (2021) reported that sexual harassments lower the possibility of female victims to return to university or colleges for further study because they feel humiliated, ashamed and escape the chances of being sexually harassed again. Landin et al., (2020) mentioned that the incidents cause discomfort to the victim, depression, anxiety and fear. Moreover, sexual harassments actions negatively affect victim's participation in academic and other activities leading to lose of interest in studying (Ceccato, 2022). In some cases, sexual harassments incidents results into death of the victims (Kavishe, 2021). As long as females are the most victimized group, their drop out from university or death affects the number of professional females needed to foster personal and national development.

4.2 The Coping Strategies to the Challenges Facing First Year Students in Universities in Arusha Region

The second objective of the current study was set to investigate the coping strategies to the challenges facing first year students in universities. Students, lecturers and NAS filled the questionnaires to indicate their level of agreement on the coping strategies to the challenges facing first year students in universities in Arusha Region. However, dean of students responded to interview guide. To address this question, students were provided with 14 coping strategies for challenges facing first year students in universities and they were requested to indicate whether they strongly agree with the strategies that are mostly applied or strongly disagree. Percentage responses for each statement were computed and their corresponding mean scores were also calculated. In calculating the mean scores, 1 score was given for strongly disagree (SD), 2 for disagree (D), 3 for undecided (U), 4 for agree (A) and 5 for strongly agree (SA). The percentages and mean scores from students have been summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Students' Responses on the Coping Strategies to the Challenges Facing First Year Students in Universities in Arusha Region (n=100)

Statements	SD		D		U		A		SA		Mean score
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
i. Avoid unnecessary peer groups.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100	5.00
ii. Participating in orientation courses in order to adapt to university life.	0	0	0	0	13	13	57	57	30	30	5.00
iii. Creating good friendship to avoid being homesick.	0	0	0	0	13	13	57	57	30	30	5.00
iv. Seek medication to address health related challenges.	0	0	0	0	9	9	61	61	30	30	4.90
v. Need for mentorships, consultations & guidance for better understanding of academic work	0	0	0	0	9	9	61	61	30	30	4.90
vi. Cut down on expenses and probably look for means of getting partial income to address financial challenges.	0	0	2	2	11	11	54	54	33	33	4.86
vii. Exercise freedom of responsibility & set your priorities right.	0	0	5	5	10	10	55	55	30	30	4.62
viii. Make right choice of friends that add value to your education.	2	2	3	3	10	10	54	54	31	31	4.57
ix. Observe proper time management and set your priorities right.	2	2	3	3	10	10	54	54	31	31	4.57
x. Be cautious and mindful of bad company in order to avoid sexual harassment.	3	3	5	5	11	11	53	53	33	33	4.50
xi. Balance your study to avoid physical exhaustion due to too much workload.	5	5	10	10	10	10	50	50	25	25	4.37
xii. Stay off relationship & concentrate in studies	5	5	15	15	8	8	45	45	27	27	4.29
xiii. Choose roommates wisely.	6	6	16	16	6	6	44	44	28	28	4.22
xiv. Adopt good studying strategies	8	8	20	20	0	0	45	45	27	27	4.17
Grand mean score											4.56

Source: field data (2023)

Table 2 shows that first year students should avoid unnecessary peer groups as a coping strategy in the university. In this regard, all (100%) students strongly agreed. This coping strategy had a mean score of 5.0 in a scale of 1 to 5 which was higher than the grand mean score of 4.56 (neutral point). The inference here is that respondents identified wise choice of peer groups as the leading coping strategy to the challenges facing first year students at the university. Respondents acknowledged that good peer group is compassionate and helpful for both their academic progress and social life in the university. However, weird groups could easily turn out to be source of stress. Similarly, first-year students who regard their peers and parents as more supportive showed decreased discomfort or less sadness and anxiety and greater adjustment, more well-being and happiness. In support of this finding, an investigation into parental roles in

children's education by Gianzero (2020) found out that families are important for children's success in school. For instance, parents help the improvement of learners' educational performance and increase learners' commitment, attitudes, achievements and attendance. Further analysis showed that those learners whose parents are fully engaged in their education are motivated to work hard and change learners' behaviour towards themselves.

Table 2 shows that participating in orientation courses in order to adapt to university scored a mean of 5.0 and was supported by 57% of the respondents who agreed while 30% strongly agreed. Only 13% were undecided. The researcher established that the period of orientation courses given to first year students varies from one university to another. Some universities dedicate one week for

orientation while others conduct it within a day. However, according to non-academic staff, orientation to newly admitted students should be conducted gradually so that the students learn their new environment gradually.

While collecting qualitative data, dean of students from one of the universities in Arusha region pointed out that:

It is normally good to carry out gradual orientation of first year students. The content of orientation should include introducing top management team and giving them time to talk to students. Head of departments, examination office, librarian and loan officer should also have their turn to speak to students. This should be followed by general orientation on university culture, students conduct, accommodation, medical issues, time management, university timetable, university grading system and students' union. All these cannot be addressed effectively in a day (personal interview, 16th, May 2023).

Indeed, this study establishes the importance of orientation of first year students as the first measure to their well-being. Therefore, universities should give adequate attention to orientation of first year students. The researcher was also informed by respondents that university coping strategies for first year students include seeking medication to address health related challenges, need for mentorships, consultations and guidance for better understanding of academic work and cutting down on expenses and probably looking for means of getting extra income to address financial challenges. Other coping strategies identified were exercising freedom of responsibility and making right choice of friends that add value to education of first year students and observing proper time management by setting priorities right.

Similarly, non-academic staff reminded student to be cautious and mindful of dressing code in order to avoid sexual harassment. They reported that some students address in provocative attires that attract sexual harassment from male students and university staff. The researcher established that as parents and guardians, they regret seeing their children losing manners at the university. For this reason, the respondents suggested that university management should give guidance on dressing code accepted and those prohibited in order to help university first year students achieve their academic goals.

The researcher also observed that there was address code in one of the visited universities. The intention of the management is to help in dealing with provocative attires that would result in sexual harassments around university campuses. The dean from the institution commented that:

Well, our university has a dress code which guides students of both genders on how they are supposed to dress around the campus including in classes. However, there are those female students who pretend to properly dress while at the gate, once inside the campus, they change to indecent dresses carried in their bags (Personal interview on May 26th, 2023).

The findings in this study ascertain that students' freedom needs some regulation particularly in their dressing style. This is necessary to prevent certain vices such as sexual harassment that occur in higher learning institutions. In this regard, Obiozor and Osuala (2018) noted that dress code was a well thought strategy to enhance peer support and adjustment among first year students at the universities. The study revealed presence of dress code policy in Makerere University, which banned mini dresses and indecent attire by female learners since they had been blamed for everything such as AIDs, rape and sexual harassment. The compatibility of the two studies implies that dress code is an effective strategy against negative peer influence in the universities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the current study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The result of the study on the first objective revealed that many times, first-year students arrive in higher education institution unprepared to handle the many challenging and stressful conditions that await them. Thus, they are faced with the challenge of homesickness, time management, financial management, little knowledge about the new university environment, unsafe hostels, selecting roommates and responsible friends. Also, female university students are at high risk of being sexually abused due to factors such as provocative attires, being unfamiliar with university life, peer influence, hostile hostels and desires to live better life. First-year students living away from their parents present a significant challenge to manage their expenses, which result in their financial instability. Consequently, they need to employ mechanisms that will enable them to make personal choice to adapt to new university life and do things right as expected by the society.

On coping strategies to the challenges facing first year students in universities, the study found that there is need for a wise choice of peer groups, participating in orientation courses in order to adapt to university life, need for mentorships, consultations and guidance for better understanding academic work, stay off relationship and

concentrate in studies, choose roommates wisely and prudent use of finances. The study concludes that the transition from secondary school and home environment to university life was pointed out as an area that requires psychological adjustment. In actual sense, students need to realize that they are now at another level of their education that is full of freedom with limited supervision.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities should carry out orientation of first year students gradually within one week or two. The content of orientation should include introducing top management team and giving them time to talk to students. Head of departments, examination office, librarian and loan officer should also have their turn to speak to students. This should be followed by general orientation on university culture, students conduct, accommodation, medical issues, time management, university time-table, university grading system and students' union.
2. Students should make right choices in selecting their friends. Wise choice of peer groups was noted as the leading coping strategy to the challenges facing first year students at the university. Good friendship is necessary in encouraging one another when faced by challenges such as inability to cope with university life.
3. Counseling Unit of universities should strengthen its services by having social support groups that consist of lecturers and students, so that supportive skills, such as talking and sharing, can be developed and students may then become very comfortable to let out their feelings. Similarly, the study recommends that parents/guardians and university management should assist first year students to learn how to manage challenges as this will enhance their coping strategies in the university.

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