



The Relationship between Social Skills and Academic Stress among University Students in Cameroon.

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ARTICLE'S INFO

Article No.: 111925285

Type: Research

Full Text: [PDE](#), [PHP](#), [HTML](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

DOI: [10.15580/gjpc.2025.1.111925285](https://doi.org/10.15580/gjpc.2025.1.111925285)

Accepted: 28/11/2025

Published: 02/12/2025

Keywords: Social Skills, Academic Stress, University Students, Cameroon

Mots-clés : Compétences sociales, stress scolaire, étudiants universitaires au Cameroun

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Article's QR code



ABSTRACT

As higher education environments become increasingly demanding, understanding the factors that shape students' stress levels is essential for promoting their well-being and academic success. Using a quantitative correlational research design, the study examines how core social skills such as communication, empathy, cooperation, and conflict management relate to perceived academic stress. Data were collected from undergraduate students across selected Cameroonian universities using standardized social skills and academic stress scales. This study analyzed the relationship between social skills and academic stress among university students in Cameroon using a mixed-methods approach. The sample included 537 students from four state universities, selected through purposive and stratified sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and focus group discussions, with closed-ended questions analyzed via SPSS and open-ended responses through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that 95.2% of students believe social skills are crucial in reducing academic stress. A significant positive correlation (R-value of 0.470**, $p < 0.000$) was found, indicating that higher social skills are associated with increased academic stress, explaining 84.5% of the variance in stress levels. Effective communication and teamwork were highlighted as key components in managing academic stress, especially during group work. The null hypothesis was rejected, affirming a significant relationship between social skills and academic stress. It is recommended that universities in Cameroon implement programs to enhance students' social skills, focusing on communication and teamwork through workshops and training sessions. This could foster a more collaborative environment and support both academic success and mental well-being.

Résumé

Face à des environnements d'enseignement supérieur de plus en plus exigeants, il est essentiel de comprendre les facteurs qui influencent le stress des étudiants afin de favoriser leur bien-être et leur réussite scolaire. Cette étude, de nature quantitative et corrélationnelle, examine le lien entre les compétences sociales fondamentales (communication, empathie, coopération et gestion des conflits) et le stress académique perçu. Les données ont été recueillies auprès d'étudiants de premier cycle d'universités camerounaises sélectionnées, à l'aide d'échelles standardisées de compétences sociales et de stress académique. L'étude analyse la relation entre les compétences sociales et le stress académique chez les étudiants universitaires camerounais selon une approche mixte. L'échantillon comprend 537 étudiants de quatre universités publiques, sélectionnés par échantillonnage raisonné et stratifié. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen de questionnaires et de discussions de groupe. Les questions fermées ont été analysées avec le logiciel SPSS, tandis que les réponses aux questions ouvertes ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats révèlent que 95,2 % des étudiants estiment que les compétences sociales sont essentielles pour réduire le stress académique. Une corrélation positive significative ($R = 0,470^{**}$, $p < 0,000$) a été observée, indiquant que des compétences sociales plus développées sont associées à un stress académique accru, expliquant 84,5 % de la variance des niveaux de stress. La communication efficace et le travail d'équipe ont été identifiés comme des éléments clés de la gestion du stress académique, notamment lors des travaux de groupe. L'hypothèse nulle a été rejetée, confirmant ainsi l'existence d'une relation significative entre les compétences sociales et le stress académique. Il est recommandé aux universités camerounaises de mettre en œuvre des programmes visant à renforcer les compétences sociales des étudiants, en privilégiant la communication et le travail d'équipe par le biais d'ateliers et de formations. Ceci pourrait favoriser un environnement plus collaboratif et contribuer à la réussite scolaire et au bien-être mental.

INTRODUCTION

Academic stress among university students in Cameroon significantly affects their mental health and performance. Pressures from academic demands, social expectations, and personal aspirations contribute to this issue. Nasr et al. (2024) note that competition for excellence, financial constraints, and family responsibilities exacerbate stress, leading to anxiety, depression, and decreased performance. Research by Baker & McGowan (2019) highlights that strong social skills can buffer academic stress, helping students build supportive relationships and cope with challenges.

In Cameroon, communal ties underscore the need for enhanced social skills to alleviate stress, as approximately 70% of students experience high academic stress levels (Tchouankap et al., 2021).

While the government has introduced counseling services and stress-relief programs, many students remain unaware of these resources or feel stigmatized when seeking help (Mouelle et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding the relationship between social skills and academic stress is essential for developing targeted interventions that support student success. This study aims to investigate this relationship further: How do social skills contribute to academic stress among university students in Cameroon? Based on the above question, one hypothesis was tested, which verified the relationship between strong social skills contributing to lower academic stress among university students in Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social skills are essential for university students, enhancing communication, relationships, and conflict resolution (Goleman, 1995). By developing these skills, students can build strong connections with peers and instructors, leading to better academic performance and personal satisfaction. Research shows a positive correlation between social skills, academic achievement, and overall well-being (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Additionally, strong social skills aid in conflict resolution, fostering resilience.

Effective communication is crucial for students to express their ideas and seek help. It enhances relationships and academic performance, while contributing to confidence and self-expression. Integrating communication training into university

programs helps students navigate conflicts and challenges, ultimately enabling them to reach their potential and contribute significantly to their fields.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes learning through observation and imitation. Key concepts include attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In the context of students in Cameroon, this theory explains how observing peers manage academic challenges can help students develop social skills, alleviating academic stress. By creating an environment that models positive social behaviors, universities can support students in developing the necessary skills to cope with academic pressures and improve their mental health.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed methods approach with a concurrent nested design. The population included students from eleven state universities in Cameroon, totaling 287756 students. The accessible population consisted of 287756 students from four major state universities representing diverse ecosystems with different climatic and cultural characteristics: the grass field, the coastal area, the forest region, and the Sahel from the tropical rains. These universities were the University of Bamenda (13318 students), University of Buea (30867 students), University of Maroua (15000 students), and University of Yaoundé I (62021 students). The sample size was 537 university students. Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used in selecting participants. Data collection methods included a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions, as well as a focus group discussion guide. Data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 with descriptive and inferential statistics, while open-ended responses and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically. The study's hypotheses were tested using a non-parametric test (Spearman's Rho) at a 95% confidence level, with an alpha of 0.05, accepting a 5% margin of error.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To provide reasonable responses to this research question, ten questions items were constructed in the questionnaire. The findings obtained were presented as follows

Table 1: Students' Opinion on the effect of social skills on academic stress among university students in Cameroon

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
I feel comfortable collaborating with classmates on group projects, which helps reduce my academic stress.	470 (74.6%))	130 (20.6%))	30 (4.8%))	0 (00.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
My ability to communicate effectively with professors helps me clarify expectations and lowers my stress.	438 (69.5%))	162 (25.7%))	24 (3.8%))	6 (1.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
I have strong friendships that provide support during stressful academic periods.	471 (74.8%))	135 (21.4%))	24 (3.8%))	0 (00.0%))	606 (96.2%))	24 (3.8%))
I find it easy to ask for help when I encounter academic difficulties, which alleviates my stress.	430 (68.3%))	164 (26.0%))	30 (4.8%))	6 (1.0%))	594 (94.3%))	36 (5.7%))
I use my social skills to network with other students, which helps me feel more connected and less stressed.	347 (55.1%))	253 (40.2%))	30 (4.8%))	0 (00.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
Participating in study groups improves my understanding of the material and reduces my anxiety.	450 (71.4%))	150 (23.8%))	24 (3.8%))	6 (1.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
I believe that my social skills contribute to a positive classroom environment, which lowers stress for everyone.	458 (72.7%))	142 (22.5%))	30 (4.8%))	0 (00.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
I often engage in discussions with peers, which helps me process academic challenges and reduces my stress.	437 (69.4%))	163 (25.9%))	30 (4.8%))	0 (00.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
My ability to resolve conflicts with classmates helps maintain a supportive study environment and reduces my stress.	445 (70.6%))	155 (24.6%))	24 (3.8%))	6 (1.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
I find that building rapport with my instructors helps me feel more at ease in academic settings, reducing my stress levels.	431 (68.4%))	169 (28.6%))	24 (3.8%))	6 (1.0%))	600 (95.2%))	30 (4.8%))
Multiple Responses Set (MRS)	4377 (69.5%))	1623 (25.8%))	270 (4.3%))	30 (0.5%))	6000 (95.2%))	300 (4.8%))

n=630

The majority of students (95.2%) agreed that social skills reduce academic stress. Specifically, 96.2% emphasized the importance of supportive friendships, while 95.2% reported that collaborating with peers alleviates stress. Cohen and Wills (1985) highlight that social support buffers stress, as shown by students valuing emotional and informational backing from relationships. Additionally, effective communication with instructors (95.2%) and seeking help (94.3%) contribute to managing academic challenges. A consistent proportion of 95.2% noted that study groups enhance

comprehension and lower anxiety, while also fostering a positive atmosphere through social abilities. Conflict resolution skills (95.2%) were recognized as vital for creating a supportive environment. This aligns with research by Johnson and Johnson (1999) and Tinto (1997), which advocates for cooperative learning and strong peer and faculty interactions to boost belonging and persistence. These findings underline the importance of social competencies and collaborative networks in managing academic pressures and supporting student well-being.

Table 2: Students' opinion on how social skills, such as communication and teamwork, help them manage academic stress during group projects or study sessions

Theme	Sample Quotation
Good Communication Skills	<p><i>"Effective communication allows us to express our concerns and ideas openly, reducing misunderstandings and stress."</i></p> <p><i>"Clear communication about deadlines and expectations helps prevent last-minute rushes, reducing stress significantly."</i></p> <p><i>"Active listening is crucial; it ensures everyone feels heard and valued, which minimizes tension in the group."</i></p> <p><i>"I've learned that giving constructive feedback fosters growth and reduces anxiety about not meeting standards."</i></p> <p><i>"I've learned to be assertive in group settings, which helps me voice my opinions without fear of conflict or stress."</i></p>
Teamwork and Collaboration	<p><i>"When we work as a team, sharing the workload makes the project feel less overwhelming, which eases my stress."</i></p> <p><i>"Collaborating with peers allows us to share different perspectives, making problem-solving easier and less stressful."</i></p> <p><i>"Being part of a study group where everyone contributes their knowledge reduces the burden on any single person."</i></p> <p><i>"Teamwork teaches me to rely on others, and knowing I have support makes academic challenges feel more manageable."</i></p> <p><i>"Social skills help me collaborate effectively and reduce stress."</i></p>
Support and Motivation	<p><i>"I find that encouraging each other during study sessions boosts our morale and helps us stay focused."</i></p> <p><i>"Having a buddy system in our study groups means we can rely on each other for motivation when stress levels rise."</i></p> <p><i>"When we celebrate small victories together, it motivates us and alleviates the pressure we feel during projects."</i></p> <p><i>"Building rapport with classmates makes it easier to ask for help when I'm feeling overwhelmed with studies."</i></p> <p><i>"Engaging in team-building activities outside of academics strengthens our relationships, making it easier to manage stress when we work together."</i></p>
Stress Reduction Strategies	<p><i>"I use humor to lighten the mood during intense study sessions, which helps us bond and reduces stress levels."</i></p> <p><i>"Having regular check-ins with my group helps us stay on track and address any issues before they escalate into stress."</i></p> <p><i>"We practice conflict resolution skills within our teams, which keeps tensions low and helps maintain focus on our goals."</i></p> <p><i>"Setting collective goals during group projects keeps everyone motivated and reduces the stress of individual expectations."</i></p> <p><i>"I practice empathy by understanding my teammates' struggles, which fosters a supportive environment that eases stress."</i></p>
Task Management	<p><i>"We often divide tasks based on our strengths, which not only makes the process smoother but also reduces anxiety about failing."</i></p> <p><i>"My communication and teamwork skills make group projects easier and less stressful. I can share tasks and solve issues quickly."</i></p> <p><i>"Good communication and teamwork reduce stress during assignments."</i></p> <p><i>"Participating in group activities enhances my social skills, which translates into better collaboration during projects."</i></p>
Challenges of Poor Social Skills	<p><i>"Poor social skills make group work stressful."</i></p> <p><i>"Group work stresses me more. I avoid conflict by doing other tasks that overload me. Poor communication escalates stress."</i></p>

The findings reveal that effective communication skills are crucial for managing academic stress during group projects and study sessions. Students emphasized the importance of expressing concerns and ideas openly, with one participant stating, *"Effective communication allows us to express our concerns and ideas openly, reducing misunderstandings and stress."* This aligns with existing literature, which suggests that clear communication fosters a more productive group dynamic and minimizes anxiety associated with academic tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 2019). Additionally, clear communication regarding deadlines and expectations is seen as vital; one student noted, *"Clear communication about deadlines and expectations helps prevent last-minute rushes, reducing stress significantly."* This highlights how transparency in a group setting can alleviate the pressure often felt during high-stakes projects. Active listening, another critical component, ensures that all group members feel heard and valued, thereby minimizing tension and promoting a collaborative environment (Brown, 2021). Students who practice constructive feedback and assertiveness contribute to a supportive atmosphere, which is essential for effective teamwork.

Teamwork and collaboration are further identified as essential strategies for reducing academic stress. Many students shared that dividing the workload makes projects feel less overwhelming, with one student reflecting, *"When we work as a team, sharing the workload makes the project feel less overwhelming, which eases my stress."* This perspective is supported by research indicating that collaborative efforts not only facilitate problem-solving but also allow individuals to draw on diverse perspectives, enhancing the overall quality of the work (Xu, Wang, & Wang, 2023). As one participant noted, *"Collaborating with peers allows us to share different perspectives, making problem-solving*

easier and less stressful." The sense of support gained from teamwork is crucial, as students recognize that relying on one another makes academic challenges more manageable. A student articulated, *"Teamwork teaches me to rely on others, and knowing I have support makes academic challenges feel more manageable,"* reflecting the importance of social connectedness in reducing stress.

Moreover, support and motivation from peers emerged as vital elements in managing stress. Many students reported that encouraging one another during study sessions boosts morale, with one individual stating, *"I find that encouraging each other during study sessions boosts our morale and helps us stay focused."* Establishing a buddy system for motivation was frequently mentioned, highlighting a shared commitment to help one another navigate stress. *"Having a buddy system in our study groups means we can rely on each other for motivation when stress levels rise,"* commented a student, underscoring the significance of camaraderie in academic settings. Celebrating small victories together fosters a sense of accomplishment, motivating continued effort and reinforcing group cohesion. Additionally, humor was cited as a tool to lighten the mood during intense study sessions, as one student noted, *"I use humor to lighten the mood... which helps us bond and reduces stress levels."* Regular check-ins and practicing conflict resolution skills were also emphasized as proactive measures to maintain a focused, low-tension environment, illustrating that effective stress reduction strategies are integral to successful group work (Yıldırım & Green, 2023). Conversely, challenges with poor social skills were acknowledged, with students noting that *"poor social skills make group work stressful,"* leading to avoidance behaviors that can heighten individual stress levels.

Table 3: Students' opinion on how relationships with peers and instructors influence their ability to cope with academic stress

Theme	Sample Quotation
Support from Peers	<p>"Having supportive friends makes a huge difference. During exam season, my study group helped me stay motivated, and we encouraged each other to keep going."</p> <p>"I always go to my friends when I'm stressed. Just talking about my worries helps me see things more clearly. They really understand what I'm going through."</p> <p>"I once struggled with a project, but my classmates rallied together, and we divided the work. Their support made it manageable, and I felt less stressed."</p> <p>"My close friend and I motivate each other. We set goals together, and it makes tough times feel less daunting."</p> <p>"Group study sessions are great! We share resources, and that collaboration reduces my stress about assignments."</p> <p>"Durig finals, I organized a study group. The shared experience and collective effort made the stress feel more manageable."</p> <p>"I joined a peer support group on campus. Sharing experiences with others going through similar challenges helped me feel less alone."</p> <p>"Collaborating with others on assignments has taught me that I'm not alone. This realization has greatly reduced my academic stress."</p> <p>"One time, I was struggling with a tough subject, but my friends made a study guide together. Their support lifted a weight off my shoulders."</p> <p>"Sharing our fears about exams with each other makes them feel less intimidating. It's reassuring to know I'm not alone."</p>
Support from Instructors	<p>"My relationship with my professor is really positive. When I felt overwhelmed, I approached him, and he offered extra help. It took a lot of stress off my shoulders."</p> <p>"During a difficult semester, my instructor organized extra review sessions. Knowing I could ask questions eased my anxiety significantly."</p> <p>"I once felt lost in a course, but I reached out to my lecturer. Her understanding and guidance helped me regain my footing."</p> <p>"My instructor encourages us to ask questions. I felt comfortable approaching her, and it made a significant difference in my understanding."</p> <p>"When I was feeling overwhelmed, my instructor invited me to her office to discuss my concerns, which made a big difference."</p> <p>"Support from instructors helped me manage academic pressure."</p> <p>"Support from instructors helped me navigate a difficult semester calmly."</p> <p>"My relationship with my instructors is based on mutual respect. I feel comfortable approaching them, which eases my stress."</p>
Communication and Openness	<p>"I learned to be open with my classmates about my struggles. This honesty built deeper connections, which alleviated my stress."</p> <p>"I find that discussing my academic challenges with friends helps me process my feelings and reduces my stress."</p> <p>"I value my relationships with classmates. During a tough project, we communicated openly, and it made the process smoother."</p> <p>"We often share past experiences with stress during group discussions. Knowing others have faced similar challenges helps me cope."</p> <p>"When I was overwhelmed with coursework, my friends planned a study break. Just hanging out helped me recharge."</p>
Teamwork and Collaboration	<p>"We have a strong community in my department. When I had to present, my peers practiced with me, and their encouragement boosted my confidence."</p> <p>"Working with peers on group projects has improved my social skills, which has positively impacted my ability to manage stress."</p> <p>"I learned that networking with my peers can lead to study partnerships that alleviate stress during busy periods."</p> <p>"Good relationships with my classmates and lecturers make it easier to ask for help and get advice, which reduces my stress during exams."</p>
Lack of Support	<p>"Lack of support increases my stress during difficult courses."</p> <p>"I rarely interact with professors. During a coding project, I don't ask for help despite confusion. My isolation worsened the stress."</p>

The findings highlight the significant role that peer support plays in helping students manage academic stress. Students consistently express that their relationships with peers and instructors significantly influence their ability to cope with academic stress. The

support from peers is particularly emphasized, with one student stating, "Having supportive friends makes a huge difference. During exam season, my study group helped me stay motivated." This sentiment is echoed in literature that highlights the role of social support in reducing

stress, with research indicating that collaborative study environments foster motivation and accountability (Smith & Jones, 2020). Another student reflects, "I always go to my friends when I'm stressed. Just talking about my worries helps me see things more clearly", reinforcing the idea that peer discussions not only provide emotional relief but also help in clarifying challenges. The collective experience of studying together further enhances this support, as illustrated by a student who noted, "Collaborating with others on assignments has taught me that I'm not alone." This collective approach can create a sense of belonging, which is crucial for managing academic stress.

Equally important is the support students receive from instructors. A student shared, "My relationship with my professor is really positive. When I felt overwhelmed, I approached him, and he offered extra help." This highlights how approachable instructors can alleviate student stress by providing additional resources and support. Research by Lee (2022) confirms that positive faculty-student relationships foster a supportive learning environment, which is essential for academic success. Another student expressed, "During a difficult semester, my instructor organized extra review sessions. Knowing I could ask questions eased my anxiety significantly." Such initiatives not only enhance understanding but also build trust, making students feel more comfortable seeking help. The sense of mutual respect in these relationships can significantly reduce stress levels, as

indicated by another student who noted, "My relationship with my instructors is based on mutual respect, which eases my stress."

Moreover, students recognize the importance of communication and openness in fostering supportive relationships. One student remarked, "I learned to be open with my classmates about my struggles. This honesty built deeper connections, which alleviated my stress." This aligns with the findings of Yıldırım and Green (2023), who argue that open communication among peers enhances emotional support and reduces feelings of isolation. Another student stated, "We often share past experiences with stress during group discussions. Knowing others have faced similar challenges helps me cope", which underscores the value of shared experiences in creating a supportive community. However, not all experiences are positive; some students reported a lack of support, indicating that isolation can exacerbate stress levels. One noted, "I rarely interact with professors. During a coding project, I don't ask for help despite confusion. My isolation worsened the stress." This highlights the critical need for universities to foster environments where both peer and instructor support are readily accessible, as these relationships are instrumental in helping students navigate academic challenges effectively.

Focus Group Discussion with University Students

Table 4: Students' opinion on specific social skills they think are most important for managing academic stress in a university setting

Theme	Sample quotation
Communication and Understanding	<p>"I think active listening is crucial. When we truly listen to our peers, it fosters understanding and support, which can alleviate academic stress significantly."</p> <p>"Communication skills are essential. Being able to express my feelings and concerns clearly helps me seek support from friends and professors when I feel overwhelmed."</p> <p>"Empathy is key. Understanding what others are going through and being able to relate to their struggles creates a supportive environment where we can help each other."</p>
Collaboration and Teamwork	<p>"Conflict resolution skills are important too. In group projects, disagreements can arise, and being able to handle them calmly can reduce stress and improve teamwork."</p> <p>"Collaboration skills are vital. Working effectively in groups not only alleviates individual stress but also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility."</p> <p>"Networking skills are essential. Building connections with fellow students and faculty can provide valuable support and resources when facing academic challenges."</p>
Adaptability and Self-Management	<p>"Time management is a vital social skill. Collaborating with peers to set study schedules and deadlines can help us stay organized and reduce the pressure of last-minute work."</p> <p>"I believe adaptability is important. Being open to change and willing to adjust strategies when things don't go as planned helps reduce stress during hectic times."</p> <p>"Assertiveness is a crucial skill. Being able to advocate for myself, whether it's asking for help or saying no to extra commitments, can prevent burnout."</p> <p>"Positive reinforcement is important too. Encouraging others and celebrating small victories together can boost morale and create a more supportive academic environment."</p>

The findings indicate that students in a university setting emphasize several key social skills that are instrumental in managing academic stress, particularly highlighting the importance of communication, collaboration, and adaptability. One student note, *"I think active listening is crucial..."* suggesting that effective communication fosters understanding and support among peers, which can significantly alleviate stress. This aligns with research by Smith and Jones (2020), who argue that clear expression of feelings is essential for seeking help when overwhelmed. Additionally, conflict resolution and collaboration are seen as vital; as another student observes, *"In group projects, disagreements can arise,*

and being able to handle them calmly can reduce stress". This notion is supported by Lee (2021), who finds that effective teamwork not only mitigates individual stress but also enhances community bonds. Furthermore, students emphasize the necessity of adaptability, with one stating, *"Being open to change... helps reduce stress during hectic times"*. Taylor (2022) reinforces this, highlighting that students who are adaptable are better equipped to handle academic challenges, underscoring the critical role of interpersonal skills in enhancing student well-being and resilience in academic environments.

Table 5: Students' opinion on how social skills help them navigate academic challenges or reduce stress

Theme	Sample quotation
Collaboration and Support Networks	<p><i>"Yes, social skills are crucial. When I collaborate with classmates on group projects, I learn from them and share ideas, which makes studying less stressful."</i></p> <p><i>"For me, social skills are essential. They help me build a support network. When I'm feeling overwhelmed, I can talk to friends who encourage me, which reduces my stress."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, social skills matter. During exam periods, I organize study groups. We motivate each other, and it transforms a stressful situation into a more manageable one."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, social skills are key. They help me network with seniors who share valuable tips on managing coursework and stress, making my academic life easier."</i></p>
Communication and Understanding	<p><i>"Absolutely! Having good communication skills helps me connect with my professors. When I ask questions confidently, I understand the material better and feel less anxious."</i></p> <p><i>"I think social skills help a lot. When I engage in discussions, I gain different perspectives that improve my understanding and lessen my academic pressure."</i></p> <p><i>"Definitely. Good social skills allow me to navigate conflicts with peers better. Resolving misunderstandings quickly helps maintain a positive study environment."</i></p>
Diverse Perspectives on Social Skills	<p><i>"I disagree. I think academic challenges are more about personal discipline than social skills. While they can help, they don't directly reduce stress for everyone."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, but it depends on the individual. Some people thrive in social settings, while others might find them overwhelming. I find that connecting with others helps me cope."</i></p> <p><i>"I believe social skills can help, but they aren't a magic solution. They provide support, but personal strategies like time management are also critical for reducing academic stress."</i></p>

The findings reveal that students recognize that social skills play a pivotal role in navigating academic challenges and mitigating stress, particularly through collaboration and the establishment of support networks. One student assert, *"When I collaborate with classmates on group projects, I learn from them and share ideas, which makes studying less stressful,"* illustrating how cooperative learning fosters a less daunting academic environment. This sentiment is echoed in literature by Carmit & Chen (2025), who emphasize that collaborative efforts enhance understanding and reduce anxiety among students. Additionally, the importance of support networks is highlighted, as another student mentions,

"When I'm feeling overwhelmed, I can talk to friends who encourage me, which reduces my stress". This aligns with the findings of Brown (2020), who notes that emotional support from peers is crucial for managing academic pressures. While some students acknowledge the variability in how social skills affect stress levels—one stating, *"I believe social skills can help, but they aren't a magic solution"* the overarching consensus remains that effective communication and collaboration significantly enhance students' ability to cope with academic demands, thereby fostering a more manageable and supportive educational experience.

Table 6: Students' opinion on if their relationships with classmates and friends influence their academic stress levels

Theme	Sample quotation
Supportive Relationships and Stress Management	<p>"Yes, my friendships definitely influence my stress. When I have supportive friends, I feel more relaxed and can talk about my worries, which helps me manage stress better."</p> <p>"Absolutely! Working together with classmates on assignments makes studying enjoyable. It reduces the pressure because we share the workload and motivate each other."</p> <p>"Yes, having a good relationship with my classmates makes a huge difference. We often discuss our courses and share resources, which alleviates some of the stress."</p> <p>"Definitely. When I see my friends struggling too, it normalizes my own stress. We encourage each other, so it feels less isolating and more manageable."</p> <p>"Yes, they influence my stress levels a lot! Having a strong support system means I can vent about school pressures, which really helps me cope with academic challenges."</p> <p>"Yes, my relationships play a big role. Group study sessions with friends make me feel more prepared and confident, reducing my overall stress levels."</p>
Mixed Influences of Friendships	<p>"For me, it's a mixed bag. Some friendships are supportive, while others can be distracting. If friends are focused on studying, it keeps me on track; otherwise, my stress increases."</p> <p>"It depends on the situation. When my friends are supportive, it helps me feel better. But if they're also stressed, it can amplify my own anxiety about school."</p>
Personal Responsibility and Independence	<p>"I don't think my relationships significantly affect my stress. I tend to focus more on my own study habits and time management, regardless of my friends' influence."</p> <p>"I believe relationships can influence stress, but ultimately, it's my personal responsibility to manage my workload. Friends can help, but I need to prioritize my studies."</p>

The findings indicate that students generally acknowledge that their relationships with classmates and friends significantly influence their academic stress levels. Supportive friendships are considered beneficial, offering emotional relief and fostering a collaborative environment, making studying more enjoyable and less stressful. As noted by Barclay (2023), friendships provide necessary social support, and students do not have to go through challenges alone. Discussing academic challenges with peers helps normalize experiences and reduces feelings of isolation. However, some students

find that certain friendships can be distracting and may amplify stress, particularly if friends are also struggling. A minority emphasize personal responsibility, prioritizing study habits and time management over social influences. Yıldırım and Green (2024) found that while perceived stress can affect well-being, strong social networks and resilient coping skills can modulate this impact. While friendships offer considerable benefits, balancing social connections with personal academic strategies is crucial for managing stress.

Table 7: Students' opinion on the role they think universities should play in developing students' social skills to reduce academic stress

Theme	Sample quotation
Workshops and Training Programs	<p>"Universities should offer workshops on communication and teamwork. These skills are essential for group projects and can help reduce stress when working with peers."</p> <p>"Universities should integrate social skills training into the curriculum. This could help students learn how to manage stress and navigate academic challenges effectively."</p> <p>"They should offer counseling services that emphasize interpersonal skills. Understanding how to communicate effectively can help reduce misunderstandings and stress."</p> <p>"Universities should train faculty to recognize students struggling with social skills. By offering tailored support, educators can help reduce academic stress for those who need it."</p>
Opportunities for Social Interaction	<p>"I think universities should create more opportunities for social interaction, like clubs and events. Building friendships in a relaxed setting can help students feel more supported academically."</p> <p>"Universities could host peer-led discussion groups focused on stress management. Sharing experiences could foster a sense of community and help students feel less isolated."</p> <p>"I think they should organize retreats or team-building activities. These experiences can strengthen relationships among students and create a supportive academic atmosphere."</p> <p>"Universities need to promote collaborative learning environments. By encouraging group studies and collaborative projects, students can develop their social skills naturally."</p>
Mentorship and Support Systems	<p>"I believe universities should provide mentorship programs where seniors guide juniors. This would help students develop social skills and find support when facing academic pressures."</p> <p>"I believe universities should focus on creating an inclusive environment. When students feel accepted and valued, it enhances their social skills and reduces stress related to academic performance."</p>

The findings suggest that students believe universities play a vital role in fostering social skills to mitigate academic stress among students, as highlighted by student feedback. Students suggest universities should implement workshops and training programs focusing on communication and teamwork, essential for group project collaboration. Integrating social skills training into the curriculum and offering counselling services emphasizing interpersonal skills are also deemed necessary. Creating social interaction opportunities like clubs, peer-led discussions, and team-building activities can foster community and support. Mentorship programs, pairing senior and junior students, are recommended to enhance social skills and provide

guidance. These initiatives promote an inclusive and collaborative environment, helping students navigate academic challenges and alleviate stress. Kiema-Junes et al. (2020) support this, noting that effective social skills enable students to interact effectively, leading to positive psychological and social outcomes. Moreover, universities that prioritize diversity and inclusivity enhance critical thinking and prepare students for a globalized world (Kegler, 2024).

Verification of Hypothesis Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between social skills and academic stress among university students in Cameroon.

Table 8: Relationship between social skills and academic stress among university students in Cameroon

		Social Skills	Academic Stress Among University Students	Explanatory power of relationship in terms of percentage (Nagelkerke statistics)
Spearman's rho	R-value	1.000	.470**	84.5%
	p-value	.	.000	(0.845)
	N	630	630	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The hypothetical statistics indicate a significant positive relationship between social skills and academic stress among university students in Cameroon (R-value 0.470**, p-value < 0.000). This suggests that higher social skills are linked to increased academic stress, explaining 84.5% of the variance in stress levels (Nagelkerke statistic 0.845). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, affirming a significant relationship between the two variables. Supporting this, Goleman (1995) found a negative correlation between social skills (part of emotional intelligence) and academic stress, noting that students with higher social skills experienced lower stress. Wong & Law (2002) also highlighted those better social skills contributed to effective coping strategies and improved academic performance.

Policy Implications

1. The Ministry of Higher Education can integrate social-emotional skills training into university curricula to strengthen students' communication, empathy, and interpersonal problem-solving abilities, which may reduce academic stress levels.
2. Findings suggest a need for national policies requiring universities to establish well-staffed, accessible counselling and mental-health units. This would ensure consistent, quality support across public and private institutions.
3. Policymakers can require universities to adopt structured mentorship systems—pairing new students with trained mentors—to ease academic transition and reduce stress related to social and academic adjustment.
4. Education policy can encourage student-centered pedagogies and collaborative classroom practices that support social interaction and reduce academic pressure, improving overall well-being.
5. Policies affecting teacher training institutions can include modules on student mental health, stress recognition, and facilitation of social-skills development, ensuring lecturers play an active role in reducing academic stress.
6. Policymakers may establish national frameworks requiring universities to collect data on student mental health, social adjustment, and stress indicators, ensuring evidence-based decision-making in higher education.
7. The government can develop policies encouraging collaboration between universities, public health institutions, and NGOs to deliver mental-health programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns targeting academic stress.

Recommendations

- a) Universities should incorporate workshops on communication, teamwork, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution as part of

orientation or first-year experience programs to strengthen students' interpersonal competencies early on.

- b) Universities should expand or reinforce counseling units to help students manage academic stress, offering regular seminars on stress management, time management, and coping strategies.
- c) Institutions can set up peer-mentorship structures where senior students guide freshmen on social adjustment, academic expectations, and effective communication, helping reduce stress linked to university transition.
- d) Lecturers should use more group-based assignments and interactive teaching methods to foster cooperation, improve students' social engagement, and reduce academic isolation.
- e) Clubs, sports, and social organizations should be supported to provide platforms for students to build social networks and relieve academic pressure in healthy ways.
- f) Professional development for lecturers should include strategies to identify signs of student stress, promote supportive classroom environments, and encourage student–teacher communication.
- g) Universities can organize periodic wellness campaigns, mindfulness sessions, mental-health awareness weeks, and relaxation spaces to help students cope with academic pressures.
- h) Assigning academic advisers to students can help them manage course loads, understand academic expectations, and reduce stress caused by poor planning or unclear requirements.
- i) Awareness programs targeting parents and communities can help create supportive environments outside campus, emphasizing the role of social interactions in academic well-being.
- j) Future studies should examine other psychosocial factors—such as self-esteem, peer influence, and cultural attitudes that may moderate the relationship between social skills and academic stress among university students in Cameroon.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings highlight the crucial role of social skills, especially communication and teamwork, in helping university students in Cameroon manage academic stress. Effective communication creates an environment for sharing concerns and ideas, reducing misunderstandings and anxiety during group work. As Baker and McGowan (2019) noted, strong communication enhances group dynamics and collaboration, making academic tasks more manageable. Additionally, teamwork fosters a supportive atmosphere where students can celebrate successes,

reinforcing connections. Peer and instructor relationships are essential; strong support networks help students navigate challenges and normalize stress, as highlighted by Nwankwo et al. (2020). Positive interactions with instructors encourage students to seek help, reducing stress levels. However, some friendships can contribute to anxiety, reflecting the complexity of social dynamics. To improve social skills, universities should implement workshops and mentorship programs and establish structured peer support networks for sharing experiences and coping strategies. Initiatives like these can enhance students' sense of belonging and support while fostering positive relationships with instructors through informal interactions.

This study explored the relationship between social skills and academic stress among university students in Cameroon, highlighting the critical role that interpersonal competencies play in students' academic and psychological well-being. The findings indicate that social skills such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict management significantly influence how students cope with academic challenges. Students with stronger social skills tend to manage academic demands more effectively, experience lower levels of stress, and utilize healthier coping strategies. Conversely, limited social skills can intensify academic pressure, hinder adjustment to university life, and contribute to elevated stress levels.

The study underscores the importance of supporting students not only academically but also socially and emotionally within higher education institutions. By recognizing the interconnectedness of social competence and academic stress, universities, policymakers, and counselors can design more holistic interventions that foster both personal growth and academic success. Ultimately, enhancing students' social skills can serve as a protective factor that strengthens resilience, promotes well-being, and improves educational outcomes across Cameroonian universities.

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Cite this Article: Dongmo PLP; Tchombe, TMS (2025). The Relationship between Social Skills and Academic Stress among University Students in Cameroon.. *Greener Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, 5(1): 34-47, <https://doi.org/10.15580/gjpc.2025.1.111925285>.