



A Study Of Reducing Student Stress In Classroom In India

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ABSTRACT

This work investigates the academic stress and mental health of Indian high school students and the associations between various psychosocial factors and academic stress. A total of 190 students from grades 11 and 12 (mean age: 16.72 years) from three government-aided and three private schools in Kolkata India were surveyed in the study. Data collection involved using a specially designed structured questionnaire as well as the General Health Questionnaire. Nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of the students reported stress due to academic pressure – with no significant differences across gender, age, grade, and several other personal factors. About two-thirds (66%) of the students reported feeling pressure from their parents for better academic performance. The degree of parental pressure experienced differed significantly across the educational levels of the parents, mother's occupation, number of private tutors, and academic performance. In particular, children of fathers possessing a lower education level (non-graduates) were found to be more likely to perceive pressure for better academic performance. About one-thirds (32.6%) of the students were symptomatic of psychiatric caseness and 81.6% reported examination-related anxiety. Academic stress was positively correlated with parental pressure and psychiatric problems, while examination-related anxiety also was positively related to psychiatric problems. Academic stress is a serious issue which affects nearly two thirds of senior high school students in Kolkata. Potential methods for combating the challenges of academic pressure are suggested.

KEYWORDS: India, Secondary School, Academic Stress

INTRODUCTION

Educated individuals can be considered as the driving force in the development of societies. The skills that individuals gain in the process of education secure both individual and social development. It can be said that the educational efficacies of teachers will promote the effectiveness of the educational process. Students' continual interactions with teachers in their life of education also prioritize teachers' roles. Teachers' competence in their area of expertise and in pedagogy will also influence students' levels of learning. Teachers' educational approaches employed in the classroom can facilitate students' integration with school, teachers and classes.

Classroom management has been regarded as one of the most important factors influencing learning by many educators and researchers for a long time, and its correlations with several variables such as discipline, self-control, responsibility and psychological well-being affecting educational outcomes have been investigated. Teachers' understanding of students' behaviours and their considering students' thoughts important, their support, respect and affection for students will lead to mutual trust in teacher-student relations and thus will increase devotion to school. Brewster and Bowen (2004) also state that students' commitment to school will be influenced in positive ways if they are supported by their teachers. Teachers' management efficacies in the classroom can affect students' attitudes towards classes in positive ways and can cause academic and behavioural development. Students who have gained teachers' trust, who take part in learning activities and who have set up good relations with their friends can be thought to be more positive in well-being in the classroom. This situation will make inculcate students a sense of self-confidence and make them feel better. According to Cothran and Ennis (1997), teachers' reassuring behaviours affect students' behaviours as well as the classroom atmosphere in positive ways. In support of this, Stelter (2013) points out that learning is built upon relations of mutual trust. The opposite situation can result in teachers with low efficacy in classroom management, teachers' failure to go down to the level of students and to appeal to them, teachers' failure to engage students in lessons, failure to generate fast and effective solutions to behavioural problems and thus can make students get away from school. It is probable that students who cannot become integrated with school and with teachers will have decrease in their interest in school and that their academic achievement will fall. Failure and unmet expectations can cause students to have stress. Sun, Hou and Xu (2013) also found that low academic achievement and conflicts with teachers caused increase in educational stress. From the students' point of view, analysing the relationships between teachers' classroom management skills, confidence in teachers, and educational stress can provide multiple benefits. Namely, it has been pointed out in various studies that teachers' professional development is not at the desired level. Classroom management skill is a competence that needs to be reviewed and developed frequently in a rapidly changing world. Determining teachers' classroom management competencies through the eyes of students can enable new policies and practices to be developed both in-service and pre-service training. In addition, it can be thought that students who are just at the beginning of adolescence can meet their physical, social and psychological changes in a healthy way, which will affect academic success and educational stress. Particularly human and behaviour management competencies, which are among the classroom management skills of teachers, enable students to interact positively with the students and cause them to meet the adolescence changes more effectively. It can also be predicted that the trust felt in the school environment in this process will affect the psychology of students positively and reduce the stress of education.

Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even an awareness of the possibility of academic failure [1]. During the school years, academic stressors may show in any aspect of the child's environment: home, school, neighbourhood, or friendship [2, 3]. Kouzma and Kennedy reported that school-related situations – such as tests,

grades, studying, self-imposed need to succeed, as well as that induced by others – are the main sources of stress for high school students [4]. The impact of academic stress is also far-reaching: high levels of academic stress have led to poor outcomes in the areas of exercise, nutrition, substance use, and self-care [5]. Furthermore academic stress is a risk factor for psychopathology. For example, fourth, fifth and sixth-grade girls who have higher levels of academic stress are more likely to experience feelings of depression [6].

The Indian Education System

The Indian school education system is textbook-oriented that focuses on rote memorization of lessons and demands long hours of systematic study every day. The elaborate study routines that are expected by high school students span from the morning till late evening hours, leaving little time for socialisation and recreation. In India, the school education system is governed by two major categories of educational boards recognised by the government of India. The first category includes the All-India Boards, like the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), the CICSE (Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations) and the National Open School. The second category includes the State Level Boards that are authorised to carry on their activities within the states where they are registered. The education system in India is highly competitive because of a lack of an adequate number of good institutions to accommodate the ever-expanding population of children. Hence children face competition at the entry level of pre-primary education, and thereafter at the end of every year, in the form of examinations that determine their promotion to the next grade. In classrooms teachers attempt to cover all aspects of a vast syllabus, often disregarding the comprehension level of students [7]. Tenth grade terminates with first board examination – in which the competition with other students expands from the school-level to the state and even the national level. Performance on the 10th grade board examination is important for a number of reasons. It determines, to a very large extent, whether a student will get to specialize in his/her preferred stream of education, and whether or not they will be admitted into the institution of his/her choice. Since the job prospects for students from the science stream is somewhat better than that for students of humanities and commerce, the popular choice for most of the students and their guardians is the science stream in Grade 11. The choice made regarding stream of study is often irrevocable. Unlike the situation in many Western industrialised countries, in India, it is difficult for a student to switch stream of education after leaving school. This is particularly the case for students specialising in commerce and humanities. These structural factors exacerbate the academic stress experienced by senior high school students. The 12th grade, and high school life, ends with the second board examination. The performance in the 12th grade final examination is crucial for getting admission into one's preferred choice of college or university. The poor ratio of number of available institutions to the aspirants for college education ensures that the students face tremendous competition in getting admission to tertiary education. In addition, the majority of senior high school students who specialise in science undergo further stress as they tend to also sit for entrance examinations for admission in engineering, medical and other specialized professional courses. The pressure of preparation for examinations creates a high

degree of anxiety in many students, especially in those who are unable to perform at a level that matches the potential they have shown in less stressful situations [7].

Classroom Management

Classroom management indicates teachers' roles in creating a classroom environment helping to learn effectively by establishing the discipline in the classroom and by maintaining it. Besides, the process of classroom management also includes the principles and strategies teachers use in establishing a classroom environment of good quality. According to another definition, classroom management is the system of educating which regulates the physical environment of the classroom and which affects students' behaviours so as to facilitate learning. Fareh (2018) argues that effective classroom management creates an environment appropriate for learning and thus plays an indispensable role in encouraging learning. There are studies supporting the idea that students display disruptive and maladaptive behaviours in circumstances where classroom management is weak. According to Walker, Ramsey and Gresham (2004), such problematic behaviours hinder the teaching process, they result in ineffective learning environments and give harm to students' ability to continue learning. They state, on the other hand, that qualified teachers are actualized when management skills and strategies are used in classrooms. It can be thought that teachers can prevent the destructive behaviours influencing the teaching-learning process in negative ways through such skills and strategies.

Confidence in Teachers

Confidence is described as reciprocation in the context of perception of physical and emotional confidence in interaction between individuals. Cunningham and Gresso (1993), on the other hand, refer to it as "the basis for school effectiveness". Bryk and Schneider (1996) state that confidence is composed of mutual respect, understanding and expectations. The studies mentioned stress that the trust relationship between teachers and students is on the basis of learning. It is argued that trust relationships are the sources of motivation for students in coping with the problems they encounter at school. It is also emphasised that such relations influence their psychological perceptions about themselves in positive ways. Additionally, the students who set up relations of confidence with their teachers were observed to display more positive and constructive behaviours and to suffer from stress and anxiety less. In support of this, Gregory and Ripski (2008) found that teachers who had positive relations with their students encountered less student resistance and opposition. This situation was attributed to students' confidence in their teachers. Ennis and McCauley (2002) say that in the opposite case, when there is no confidence in teacher student relations, students' level of involvement will be lower. It is possible to achieve the educational objectives through confidence underlying interaction. Teachers have important roles in creating a classroom having an atmosphere of confidence. According to Hughes and Kwok (2006), confidence-based interaction in teacher-student relations is dependent on the presence of such elements as interest, respect, communication and cooperation. They will facilitate the formation of the environment of confidence. Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder (2004) claim that creating a strong

tie between generations is one of the important elements increasing students' social integration. They also point out that teachers' positive interpersonal behaviours influence students' commitment to school and their well-being. According to Ingersoll (2005), teachers' social relations with other staff in school as well as with students are an important part of teaching profession. Apart from that, some studies emphasise that relations based on confidence have also positive effects students' academic achievement.

School Disciplinary Measures

Although disciplinary measures in schools vary from institution to institution in India, corporal punishment is practiced in most of the schools in India. Corporal punishment is often used for violation of school rules, for not being able to answer questions in the class, not completing homework, and for coming to school late. In the recent past there has been lot of discussion and debate about positive and negative aspects of corporal punishment. To date there is no specific law for prevention of corporal punishment in schools in India.

Anxiety and Stress in School Children

Anxiety as a disorder is seen in about 8% of children and adolescents worldwide [8, 9]. There is a still larger percentage of children and adolescents in whom anxiety goes undiagnosed owing to the internalized nature of the symptoms [10]. Anxiety has substantial negative effects on children's social, emotional and academic success [11]. Depression is becoming the most common mental health problem suffering college students these days [12] – caused by poor social problem-solving, cognitive distortions and family conflict [13], as well as with alienation from parents and peers, helpless attribution style, gender, and perceived criticism from teachers [14]. Mental health problems among children and adolescents are frequent in India as well [15, 16]. Psychiatrists have expressed concern at the emergence of education as a serious source of stress for school-going children - causing high incidence of deaths by suicide. Many adolescents in India are referred to hospital psychiatric units for school-related distress – exhibiting symptoms of depression, high anxiety, frequent school refusal, phobia, physical complaints, irritability, weeping spells, and decreased interest in school work. Fear of school failure is reinforced by both the teachers and the parents, causing children to lose interest in studies. This is similar to the scenario in the East Asian countries where psychiatrists use the terms 'high school senior symptoms' or 'entrance examination symptoms' to indicate mental health problems among students. The self-worth of students in the Indian society is mostly determined by good academic performance, and not by vocational and/or other individual qualities. Indian parents report removing their TV cable connections and vastly cutting down on their own social lives in order to monitor their children's homework. Because of academic stress and failure in examination, every day 6.23 Indian students commit suicide – raising questions regarding the effects of the school system on the wellbeing of young people. Ganesh and Magdalin found that Indian children from non-disrupted families have higher academic stress than children from disrupted families. It is likely that the children from disrupted families get less attention and guidance from their parents regarding academic matters

than do their counterparts in non-disrupted families. This, paradoxically, reduces their academic stress – thus highlighting the negative impact of the parental vigilance and persuasion on the academic lives of their children. Given the said background, our purpose was to find out degree of academic stress of 11th and 12th grade Indian students experiences, as well its association with various psycho-social factors and its effect on mental health.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion this study examined the level of academic stress in school students in India. Nearly two-thirds of the students reported stress due to academic pressure – with no significant differences across gender, age, grade, and several other personal factors. Furthermore about two-thirds of the students reported feeling pressure from their parents for better academic performance. About one-thirds of the students were symptomatic of psychiatric caseness and 81.6% reported examination related anxiety. Academic stress was positively correlated with parental pressure and psychiatric problems, while examination-related anxiety also was positively related to psychiatric problems. Given the high levels of academic stress and psychiatric caseness in this sample of high school students, there is an urgent need to develop suitable interventions to reduce this level of stress and psychiatric morbidity.

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