

Relationship between Academic Stress and Students' Progress at University Level

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Abstract: This research aimed to determine the relationship between academic stress and students' progress. A cross-sectional survey was conducted for this study. The population of the study was 5000 students. The researchers used simple random sampling technique for selecting sample. Three Hundred (300) students from the University of Kotli were selected as a sample. Self-managed questionnaire was used for data collection. The study used mean, standard deviation and Pearson's correlation tests for analysis of data. The research results showed that the relationship between academic stress and student's progress was weak. This means that deviation in academic stress did not results in meaningful way in students' progress. Based on findings, it is recommended that the university authorities may provide academic support to students and arrange seminars and workshops on stress management. This may help students to improve academic performance.

Keywords: Stress, Academic Stress, Students' Progress

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Introduction

Educationists and professional associations are becoming more interested in the problem of stress and its detrimental effects on university students. Stress has been found to be an issue in many workplaces, which contributes to students' poor academic performance, low morale, and absenteeism. Stress is a tense condition brought on by pressures and demands that make it difficult for a person to adapt. Higher education can be extremely stressful, despite the perception that it is a time of fun and minimal responsibilities. The difficulty of adapting to transactions in change causes stress in students (Hayble, 2002).

The different difficulties that students at different educational levels encounter are all included in academic stress. This stress is caused by the demanding nature of academic education that puts pressure on students to constantly meet high standards, to excel academically and manage a heavy workload. Moreover, this stress is aggravated by other factors such as, long hours of studying, writing tedious papers, test anxiety, and getting bored during lectures (Heffernan & Allen, 2024).

Bora et al. (2021) has found that academic stress not only harms students' psychological health but also causes anxiety and depression, which in turn make the kids plus the schoolwork even more difficult. Students' stress related issues are further exacerbated when they develop stress symptoms such as headaches, tiredness, and sleeplessness. Academic stress affects school performance negatively because it leads to decreased motivation, increased absenteeism, and poor academic results.

One of the key factors that slowly but surely drives the progress of a university student is his/her academic performance. In addition to their intellectual and skill growth, it reflects how well students are capable of fitting in with

the academic, social, and emotional demands of higher education (York et al., 2015). University students experience a wide range of problems that can jeopardize their educational progress and general advancement (Misra & Castillo, 2004). Some of the issues are heavy coursework, pressure to perform, time management problems, and concerns about future careers.

Students' academic success and psychological well-being depend on the good management of academic stress. Universities have a great impact on students by offering workshops on time and stress management, counseling agents, and mentoring programs. Social interaction, mindfulness practices, and healthy competition could be used to reduce stress and increase the learning results. Students will have more success surmounting academic challenges and making progress in their studies if educational institutions offer a supportive environment (Lee & Larson, 2000).

This research seeks to determine the relationship between academic stress and students' academic success by exploring the obstacles students face and the coping methods they use.

Additionally, it looks into how students' psychological health, social interactions, and general academic performance are impacted by varying degrees of academic stress.

Statement of Problem

Due to pressure to perform well, time constraints, competition, and high academic demands, university students frequently endure high levels of academic stress. Students at the university level experience a great deal of stress because they must finish the assignments given to them by their instructors in a short amount of time. Checking their performance level was therefore imperative. Therefore, the analysis of academic stress and university students' progress was the main goal of this study.

Objectives

1. To measure the academic stress among University Students.
2. To assess the students' progress at university level.
3. To examine relationship between Academic stress and student's progress.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of academic stress among University Students?
2. What indicators best reflect students' academic progress at the university level?
3. What is the relationship between Academic stress and student's progress?

Literature Review

Academic Stress

The strain that academic demands place on students is known as academic stress, and it can have a detrimental effect on both their academic performance and mental and physical health. It is brought on by things like tests, assignments, competition, and feelings of inadequacy. Symptoms like anxiety, depression, and tiredness appear as result of the stress. Walking around with exams, homework, and the fear of failing are the biggest stressors by far (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

In the research performed by Modi (2023), the greatest stressors listed by the students were preparation for tests, writing papers, and continuous studying. Factors such as perfectionism, a fear of failure, and a desire to get good grades all contribute significantly. It feels like an avalanche coming down when one tries to handle several deadlines, and at the same time, mix up a few other obligations, because too many academic demands. If you feel unworthy or have personal problems in the academic setting, your stress will be higher. Stress levels can be worsened by the lack of family support, financial problems, and living conditions.

Misra and McKean (2000) discovered that a major source is the pressure from parents, educators, and society to perform well academically and be accepted at prestigious universities. The competitive academic environment among students, as well as the scarcity of spots in higher education programs, can increase stress levels. Students can



become cynical and burnt out when overloaded with homework and challenging courses like Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The feeling of stress can be amplified by the doubt of future career paths or unclear academic progress.

According to the authors, students consider time management as a major problem that leads to anxiety and fear (Yanik et al., 2016). They state that students who manage their time effectively tend to achieve more academically; they also experience less anxiety. Time management disorder is indicated, however, as a problem that causes difficulty to students as they try to balance their academic and personal schedules (Adams & Blair, 2019). Pupils with strong time management abilities can maximize their time and complete more tasks in less time.

A network of people, including family, friends, and the community, provide social support to the students (Awang et al., 2014). Lack of social support is regarded as a well-known contributing factor to mental health issues. According to Alsubaie et al. (2019), support from friends, family, and loved ones is crucial for improving psychological well-being and lowering depressive symptoms in stressed students. Stress, anxiety, and depression are among the mental health symptoms that are found to be adversely associated with students who have little social support.

Students during their educational journey at some point go through a phase of "study tenure" when they end up prioritizing their classmates over their parents, and their friends start to provide them with social support more than their family. As per Camara et al. (2014), students who get support from others are thus better capable of handling their stress levels and resisting psychological problems of various kinds. Social support not only helps students to overcome mental fatigue but also it elevates their self-esteem that ultimately leads to improved academic performance (Li et al., 2018).

A person's state of health and overall quality of life may be significantly enhanced by adopting a lifestyle that features good mental and physical health. Adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors such as eating a balanced diet, getting involved in physical activities regularly, sleeping sufficiently, and avoiding abusing substances are very effective ways of coping with academic stress among students. Besides helping students to perform better academically and reducing their stress levels, such habits promote their current and future physical and mental health (Sánchez Hernando, et al., 2021).

Students can not only enhance learning, understanding, and memory but also reduce academic stress by the proper use of study methods. Study strategies are a significant tool in the management of academic stress as they improve learning efficiency and facilitate the memorization of the material. According to one research report, highlighting and summarizing are the least effective ones among different strategies used for enhancing student learning, while distributed practice and testing are the two most effective ones (Donoghue & Hattie, 2021). Even though learning strategies are an easy and affordable method of academic performance improvement, they still do not solve all the problems of student stress (Dunlosky & Rawson, 2015).

Students' Progress

Student progress is a broad ranging concept at the university level and is reflected through academic performance (grades, GPA), skill acquisition (critical thinking, research skills), persistence (course completion, retention), and degree completion (graduation on time). Besides these, space for progress in students is measured by both formative and summative indicators such as participation in class, quality of assignments, punctual submission of work, and semester wise progress. Rather than basing the assessment solely on examination grades, which is a narrow view, a comprehensive evaluation of progress should consider three areas cognitive, behavioral, and affective to reflect academic growth (Robotham & Julian, 2006).

Influence of Academic Stress on Students' Progress

Empirical studies indicate that very high academic stress is generally associated with decreased measurable performance results such as GPA, test scores, and course completion rates. Stress disrupts the normal functioning of the brain (especially executive functioning and working memory) which leads to a decline in test scores and learning efficiency. Several cross sectional and longitudinal studies have found a statistically significant negative association



between perceived academic stress and grade averages for the semester, thereby suggesting that the accumulation of academic deficiencies can be the consequence of continuous stress (Misra & McKean, 2000).

Indirect Pathways: Motivation, Engagement, and Study Behavior

Besides its direct impact on cognition, academic stress also changes one's motivation and study habits that regulate the level of progress. Students who have a lot of stress are less motivated from the inside and they use ineffective ways (avoidance, procrastination, and surface learning), which lead to lower engagement and thus their academic work becomes less than up to the mark. On the other hand, when students have sufficient coping mechanisms, moderate, manageable stress can occasionally improve effort and time management. Therefore, whether stress causes adaptive (like concentrated study) or maladaptive (like withdrawal) reactions determines the overall impact of stress on advancement (Sinha et al., 2021).

Long-term academic stress is closely associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout, all of which significantly impair students' ability to learn and advance. Mental health issues impede academic progress and increase the likelihood of dropping out by increasing absenteeism, decreasing participation in academic activities, and impairing focus during lectures. According to a number of reviews, mental health interventions are therefore essential for preserving and regaining academic advancement (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Social support, institutional resources, and socioeconomic status all mitigate the negative effects of academic stress on advancement. Students who have access to counseling, strong peer and family support, and flexible academic policies are more resilient and continue to make steady progress in the face of adversity. On the other hand, individuals who are struggling financially or receive inadequate institutional support report that stress has a greater detrimental impact on their academic paths. Therefore, when relating stress to advancement, context-sensitive measures are crucial (Elias et al., 2011).

Research Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between academic stress and students' progress at university level. All undergraduate students at the University of Kotli AJ&K were the population of the study. Three hundred students were randomly selected as a sample for the study. A self-developed questionnaire, constructed on a five-point Likert scale was used as research instrument. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: academic stress and students' progress. The instrument was distributed among students. Collected data were analyzed using SPSS, applying Mean, standard deviation and Pearson's correlation. Pearson correlation was applied to examine the relationship between academic stress and students' progress.

Results

Table 1

Academic Stress

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Students feel stress to get good grades	300	4.33	.714
Competition among students causes stress	300	4.04	.955
Students worry about their academic performance	300	3.90	1.194
Students feel anxious before performing a task	300	3.95	1.117
The burden of workload students receive is too much to handle	300	3.76	1.144
Balancing study and personal life make students feel stress	300	3.65	1.276
Students have reduced sleep because of academic workload	300	3.73	1.101
The negative attitude of teachers increases students' stress	300	3.56	1.221
The poor grading system in university adds stress	300	3.81	1.039
The academic environment in the university puts a lot of pressure on students	300	3.91	1.053
Overall mean score		3.864	



Table 1 shows that students generally agreed with all the statements related to academic stress. The statement "Students feel stress to get good grades" showed the highest mean score ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.7140$). The overall mean score of 3.864 shows that the students agreed on having academic stress.

Table 2*Students' Progress*

Statements	N	Mean	SD
Students show motivation towards learning new concepts	300	4.36	.857
Active participation in classroom activities is recorded	300	3.68	1.140
Students set academic goals and strive to achieve them	300	3.79	1.274
Students manage study time efficiently	300	3.83	1.110
Regular revision helps students with better understanding	300	4.07	3.151
University education enhances students' academic performance	300	3.95	1.098
Knowledge gained through classroom instruction is implemented in real world problem solving	300	3.69	1.183
Continuous learning contributes to students' progress	300	3.88	1.119
Students identify their academic strengths and weaknesses	300	4.07	1.027
University education prepares students for future progress	300	4.36	.747
Overall mean score		3.965	

Table 2 indicates an overall agreement that students responded positively to the statements. The statements "Students show motivation towards learning new concepts" and "University education prepares students for future progress" obtained the highest mean score ($M=4.36$). The overall mean score of 3.965 shows that the academic progress was evident.

Table 3*Relationship between Academic Stress and Students' Progress*

Variables	Mean	SD	N	r	p
Academic stress	3.86	.29	300	.095	.099
Students' progress	3.96	.45	300		

Table 3 indicates that academic stress has mean (3.86) and SD (.29) and students' progress has mean (3.96) and SD (.45). The correlation coefficient (r) between academic stress and students' progress was 0.095, which shows a very weak and positive relationship. The p-value is 0.09, which indicates that the relationship was not statistically significant.

Conclusions

From results of the study, it is concluded that the academic stress is the common experience among university students as to balance their study and personal life is difficult for them, but the findings showed that it does not significantly correlate with academic performance. It indicates that the students were facing academic stress but they were able to manage their stress without it influencing academic performance. The reason may lie in the fact that, students' progress may be influenced by many factors such as learning environment, motivation, regular revision, study habits rather than academic stress. These factors play an important role in determining academic progress of students at university level.

Recommendations

Based on findings of the study, it is recommended that the university authorities may strengthen academic support and arrange seminars and workshops on stress management. These programs may reduce unnecessary academic pressure and help students in improving academic performance. These things are crucial for students' personal development and academic success.



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