

ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: THE CASE OF EDUCATION FACULTY AT KING SAUD UNIVERSITY

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Abstract- *This study investigated the academic stressors experienced by the students at university. A total sample of 232 subjects participated in this study were obtained from faculty of education at KSU. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaire which was randomly distributed to the students during lecture time. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The result showed that academic overloads, course awkward, inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams awkward, low motivation, and high family expectations were drive moderately stress among students. It was also found that fear of failure is the major source of stress among undergraduate students. Moreover, the study found that there were positive correlation between religiosity sources and academic stress ($r = .300^{**}$, $p = .00$). Lastly, the study found that there were no significant differences in academic stress among students with different, level of study and specializations.*

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Religiosity Sources, Undergraduate Students*

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress has become an important subject in academic contain as well as in our culture. Many researchers in the field of behavioral science have carried out extensive research on stress and its consequences and concluded that the subject needed more concentrations [1, 2, 3, 4]. Stress in academic institutions can have both positive and negative consequences if not well managed [5, 6, 7, 8, 9]. However, It is important to the society that students should learn and obtain the essential knowledge and skills in order to make them contribute positively to the development of the nation form different aspects.

Nonetheless, University students suffer from different kind of academic stressors during their education experiences. The idea of this research came by observing the researcher and its interaction with the students during the teaching learning process; also by the record unit in the college counseling; and the number of students who are looking for help; to draw the attention of officials to the university and help them control of the stress factors for students, Which also helps in developing the preferable methods to enable students to cope with this stressor during the period of their studies. University students are at a high risk for increased stress. Demanding academic pressure and limited social and personal time can add to the

normal stress of life and begin to have a negative effect on a person. Moreover, universities did not take clear steps to learn and face serious psychological stress for students during the period they spend of their studies.

Stress is a common element in the lives of every individual, regardless of race or cultural background [10]. Over the past few decades, there has been significant investigation on the issues of stress and management of stress [11]. In addition, college students have been shown to possess a unique set of stressors which can affect their daily experiences [10]. Researcher Campbell [12] defines stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them. Stress occurs when an individual is confronted by a situation that they perceive as overwhelming and cannot cope up with. Academic stress among students have long been researched on, and researchers have identified stressors as too many assignments, competition with other students, failures, lack of pocket money [13], poor relationships with other students or lecturers, family or problems at home. Institutional (university) level stressors are overcrowded lecture halls [14,15] semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work.

Moreover, college students have a unique cluster of stressful experiences or stressors [10]. According to Ross, Neibling and Heckert [16] there are several explanations for increased stress levels in college students. First, students have to make significant adjustments to college life. Second, because of the pressure of studies, there is strain placed on interpersonal relationships. Third, housing arrangements and changes in lifestyle contribute to stress experienced by college students. In addition, students in college experience stress related to academic requirements, support systems, and ineffective coping skills. Whereas these factors have been found to be responsible for stress, it is worth noting that in order to minimize the stress among students; the University administrators must develop appropriate strategies that will enable them to detect in advance the symptoms and causes of the stress.

Moreover, institutions worldwide have not taken serious steps to find out the health of students, this could be attributed

to the fact that students who stay at the university is based on short period, and therefore their stress have little direct impact on the activities or operations of the institution. Another reason why little have been done on students stress could be due to the fact that students' presence in the institution have no direct relationship to the quality of education they get. [17,18,19] reported that, unless the university puts appropriate measures that take care of well-being of the students, the student's health may compromise the quality of education they are supposed to get. Gibbons and Gibbons [20] and McCarty et al. [21] have carried out extensive research on stress and found out that, stress is associated with how an individual appraises situations and the coping strategies adopted.

1.1 Religiosity orientations and stress

Since the present study investigates the sources of religious orientation in direct academic stress among students, the focus will be that individuals may use religion as a defense process to reduce the level of academic stress. According to Pargament [22] religion has three roles in the coping process. Religion can serve (i) as a part of the elements of coping, (ii) as a contributor to coping, and (iii) as a product of coping.

Islamic view point sees religion as faith "*Iman*", action "*Amal*", and worship "*Ibadah*" triple mandate.

Adjustment to difficult circumstances appeared to be better predicted by religious coping than by general religious orientation [23]. Moreover, religious coping strategies showed differential relationships to the outcomes of various stressful situations [24]. More specifically, religious coping was helpful or harmful depending on the particular type of religious coping strategy employed. Thus, religious coping would appear to be an ambivalent phenomenon which does not automatically entail beneficial outcomes.

Higher order factor analyses have revealed that particular religious coping methods can be classified into two broad overarching patterns: positive and negative religious coping [25]. In general, positive religious coping strategies, which reflect a confident and constructive turning to religion for support, tend to be beneficial for people undergoing stressful life events [26]. In contrast, negative religious coping strategies, those which reflect an engaging in religious struggle and doubt are generally more maladaptive [26].

Based on the review of the existing stress literature, the researcher addressed the following specific questions, which will guide this study;

- 1-What is the academic stressor of faculty of education' students?
- 2-What are the major sources of stressors among the students?
- 3- Is there any relationship between religiosity sources and academic stress for the students?

- 4-Is there any significant differences in academic stress among students that can be attributed to (level of study and specializations)?

2. RESEARCH PURPOSES

Overall, the purposes of the study reported in this research were as follows:

- 1- To identify the academic stressor among faculty of education students.
- 2- To identify the major sources of stressors among education students.
- 3- To examine the relationship between religiosity sources and academic stress of education students.
- 4- To examine the differences in academic stress among students that can be attributed to (level of study and specializations).

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this section is to clarify the methodology of this research. This gives an account of the research sample, research design and the instrument that were used for data collection. The reliability, validity and the procedures for data analysis were also discussed in details.

3.1 SAMPLE

This study adopted simple random sampling. The population of the study included 300 students from four departments namely: Psychology, Special Education, Physical education and Islamic Studies from King Saud University, College of Education. The sample of the study included 232 students. Moreover, the researcher translated the questionnaire from English to Arabic then from Arabic to English. The questionnaires were given to eight specialists, two professors in Translation and six professors in Educational Psychology. They were asked to evaluate the translated questionnaire. The items of the questionnaire were modified according to the comments received. The Questionnaire was further modified. The Questionnaire was distributed to the sample study group to collect the students' responses.

The participants were drawn from undergraduate faculty of education students at King Saud University (N = 300); formerly self-administered questionnaires were given to a population of 300 undergraduate students, out of this, 232 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, giving 77% return rate. The questionnaire was divided into 5-parts; demographic, stress symptoms, sources of academic stressors, major source of academic stress, and religiosity sources. Demographic examined (study level and specializations); Symptoms consisted of 11 items Academic stress sources consisted of 14 items Major source of academic stress consisted of 9 items The last part of the questionnaire (religiosity sources) consisted of 8 items. All items measured on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5(Strongly agree) to 1 (Strongly disagree).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was non-experimental in nature and employs a cross-sectional design. In this study, survey research design was used [27]. Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people in order to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors or characteristics of the population. In this procedure, survey researchers collect quantitative, numbered data using questionnaire (mailed questionnaire) and statistically analyze the data to describe trends about responses to questions and to test research questions. They also interpret the meaning of the data by relating results of the statistical test back to past research studies. It was nonetheless appropriate in a study that aims at investigating different kind of academic stress among undergraduate education students at KSU.

3.3 INSTRUMENTS

Table 1
Reliability Values for stress scale

Category	N of Items	Alpha Values
Domains		
Academic Stress	14	0.78
Stress Symptoms	11	0.81
Main Stressors	9	0.75
Religiosity Sources	8	0.91
Total Instrument	42	0.9

3.5 VALIDITY

To ensure the validity of the instrument; the content validity for the instrument were determined through the help of experts in the relevant field. However, the items of the questionnaire were adjusted and evaluated according to the judge's comments.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data collected through the survey questionnaire were analyzed statistically using statistical

Self-administered measure was developed. The questionnaire was divided into 5-parts; demographic, stress symptoms, sources of academic stressors, major source of academic stress, and religiosity sources. Demographic examined (study level and specializations); Symptoms consisted of 11 items, academic stress sources consisted of 14 items, major source of academic stress consisted of 9 items. The last part of the questionnaire (religiosity sources) consisted of 8 items. All items measured on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5(Strongly agree) to 1 (Strongly disagree). The instrument was used based on the one earlier used by [21] and [4]. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, the reliability test was carried out and measured 0.90 Cronbach alpha for all the 42 items.

3.4 RELIABILITY

The Cronbach alpha analysis for reliability was conducted and it was found that all the reliability values for the instrument and reliability for the domains as below in table 1: package for social science (SPSS) version 17. In relation to the interval data collected, relevant measures of descriptive statistic, correlation and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were engaged. This process of deriving statistical results would lead to the interpretation and drawing of conclusions.

4. RESULT

Research question 1: What is the academic stressor of faculty of education students?

Table 2 shows clear differences in academic stress of the students, and this result is very clear through the mean and standard deviation, this finding reflects that, most of the students are experiencing stress in their daily academic activities differently. However, Table 2 indicates that item 14 (academic overloads) were moderately effect of causing stress with mean= 3.86 and std. deviation = 1.24, and the second item 12 (Course awkward) were moderately effect of causing stress with mean = 3.50 and std. deviation = 1.12. On the other hand, item 4 (lateness) indicate low effect which cause the academic stress with mean = 2.04 and std. deviation = .995.

Table 2
Mean and Standard Deviation of academic stress

Items	N	Items No.	Items Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic overloads	232	14	1	3.86	1.24
Course awkward	232	12	2	3.50	1.12
Items Name	232	10	3	3.46	1.21
Workload every semester	232	1	4	3.40	1.23
exams awkward	232	9	5	3.34	1.22
Low motivation	232	13	6	3.33	1.13
High family expectations	232	7	7	3.27	1.05
Inadequate financial resources	232	8	8	2.97	1.31
teacher weakness	232	11	9	2.84	1.12

Table 2 (Continued)

Overcrowded lecture halls	232	5	10	2.82	1.09
Lateness to do assignments	232	6	11	2.78	1.25
Competition with fellow students	232	2	12	2.63	1.09
Absences	232	3	13	2.32	1.14
Lateness	232	4	14	2.04	.995
Total	232			3.04	.590

Research question 2: What are the major sources of stressors among the students?

Table 3 indicates that item 1 (fear of failure) was the main major sources of students stress with mean = 3.90 and std. deviation = 1.277, then item 9 (academic punishments) with

mean = 3.41 and std. deviation = 1.272. Nonetheless, the lowest sources of stress among the students was item 3 (Inadequate resources e.g. Computers, Books, Lecturers), with mean = 2.76 and std. deviation = 1.04.

Table 3**Mean and Standard Deviation of major sources of stressors**

Items	Std. Deviation	Mean	N
Fear of failure	1.27	3.9	232
Academic Punishments	1.27	3.41	232
University policy of Accumulative average	1.25	3.4	232
Teachers fairness	1.35	3.3	232
Overload hours every semester	1.25	3.21	232
Quizzes and exams	1.26	3,0	232
Family stressor	1.28	2.98	232
Financial problems	1.31	2.97	232
Inadequate resources e.g. Computers, Books, Lecturers	1.04	2.76	232

Research question 3: Is there any relationship between religiosity sources and academic stress for the students?

The relationship between Religiosity Sources (M=4.48 and Std. 0.69) and academic stress (M=3.04 and Std. 0.59) were

Table 4: Correlation between Religiosity Sources and academic stress

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Religiosity Sources	.300**	.000
Academic Stress		

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

conducted for the total sample (N=232), this finding shows in table 4 which indicated that there is positively highly correlated between Religiosity Sources and academic stress ($r=.300$, $p=.000$).

Research question 4: Is there any significant differences in academic stress among students that can be attributed to (level of study and specializations)?

Table 5 indicates that there is no significant differences (F(0.995), $p=0.490>0.05$) of academic stress among the students due to specializations, and there is no significant differences (F(0.866), $p=0.679>0.05$) of academic stress due to level of study.

Table 5: ANOVA for academic stress among students according to level of study and specializations

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	46.872	85	1.339	0.995	0.49
Specializations	Within Groups	129.212	146	1.346	
Total		231			
Between Groups	20.625	85	0.589	0.866	0.679
Level of the Study	Within Groups	65.345	146	0.681	
Total		231			

5. Discussions

Regarding academic stressor that effect the students in research question 1, academic overloads, course awkward,

inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams awkward, low motivation, and high family expectations were moderately causing academic stress for the students, and this

finding is in close agreement with Ongori and Agolla [3], who reported that (81%) of the students agreed with the statement that academic workload is stressful. Moreover, this finding is consistent with earlier findings by [13,7]. One more study by Elizabeth [28] who agreed and reported that, the workload of college is significantly more involved than the high school workload, and it comes with less hand-holding from parents and teachers. With challenging classes, scheduling issues to coordinate, difficult tests and other academic obstacles, coupled with the more independent nature of the college learning structure, many new and returning students find themselves studying long, hard hours.

Moreover, statements, inadequate financial resources, teacher weakness, overcrowded lecture halls, lateness to do assignments, competition with fellow students, absence and lateness were causing academic stress for students lower than the other items mentioned above.

In summary, the majority of the students experience moderate level of stress. This indicates that academic stress is not acute; it is just reasonable and moderate. However, being student, it is common to have normal level of stress that drive the student doing their work and duties at university. as being mentioned by Smith et al [29]. He submits that stress encourage us to do things. It gets us out of our chair, think about things differently, and seek solutions to problems. Sometimes it makes us sensitive to what others may think of us and our actions.

Regarding the major source of students stress in question 2, the result reveals that the major sources of students' stressors are fear of failure and academic punishments. This result is in close agreement with findings by [15], who reported that students' stressors are fear of failing, academic workload, and academic performance.

On the other hand students also indicated financial problems, inadequate resources (e.g. Computers, Books, Lecturers, and overload hours every semester) as stressors sources. This finding is in close agreement with study by [13] who reported that inadequate resources such as computers, overcrowded lecture halls, lecturers, and text books were mentioned since their availability or in availability leads to success or failure in academic pursuits.

This study concluded in question 3, that religiosity sources skills (religiosity values, praying, and reading Quran) were significantly related to the academic stress for students. Students with these skills were able to control their academic stressor during their study times at university. This result is clear when prophet once said in prayer; he would find rest and relief. Hence, verily Allah does not change men's conditions unless they change their inner selves" (Quran 13:11). One more things prayer and patience provide us with critical tools that can ease our worries and pain (Quran 2:45), and it is not

just that. It includes self-control, perseverance, endurance, and a focused struggle to achieve one's goal. Nonetheless, being patient gives us control in situations where we feel have little or no control. 'We cannot control what happens to us but we can control our reaction to our circumstances'. This finding is in close agreements with studies regularly found that belief in God is high among students. Seventy-nine percent of students surveyed by HERI claim to believe in God [32], a finding that smaller surveys examining only one or two institutions appear to confirm [30,31]. Belief in God varies considerably by race: 95 percent of African-American freshmen believe in God, compared to 84 percent of Latinos, 78 percent of whites, and 65 percent of Asian Americans [33]. But while a majority may believe in God, only about two in five students say religion is "very important" in their everyday lives [32], and only about one in five students claims to discuss religion "frequently" [34].

However, question 4 intends to look at the differences in academic stress among education students with different demographic variables; level of study and specializations. The result indicated that there were no statistically significant differences among education students differ level of study and specializations that can be attributed to academic stress. However, the result could be attributed to that first year students do not included in this study which is transition period from high school to university is a particularly stressful situation for most students. On the other hand, it could be attributed that the students participated in this study from the same faculty who having the same teaching approaches (independent study and self-directed learning) which allow them to study through group discussions and use the cooperative learning style with other students. Thus, the teaching approached used in this system where the students are asked to do assignments or report instead of stressful exams will certainly be reflected to the student's academic stress according to level of study and specializations.

In summary, university should consider offering services such time management to help students manage their time wisely and coping strategies through counseling programs for students during their studies. These strategies to empower university students to manage stress may prove to be beneficial. According to Dziegielewski et al [11] programs that identify stressors and provide information on stress reduction and burnout prevention can help students learn to better cope with stressful experiences. Subsequently, better coping skills are associated with decreased anxiety levels and decreased risk for academic failure. The literature suggests that stress is a common theme among college students, and when stressful experiences are greater than the coping resources, multiple problems often arise [10]. Hence, programs which assist in the identification of stressors, and focus on prevention of burnout,

and counseling regarding coping strategies should enhance student success [10]. However, this study adds to the body of knowledge concerning students' academic stressors and reactions to stressors.

5.1. Limitations of the study

One important limitation of this study was used a small sample of students, drawn from just one university in Riyadh. This finding cannot be generalized for students in other university degree programs. Repeat of this study with a larger, stratified random sample would expand knowledge of stress among education students. Another limitation is the sample consisted of male undergraduates; however, female undergraduates were not included.

5.2. Recommendations for future research

Interventions for these students are needed and repeating this study in other universities is recommended. Therefore, the researcher recommends that further research would develop the understanding of stress among undergraduates with different gender. Specifically, future research should use larger sample size from other institutions to support these findings which help university officials to control the stress factors for students. Lastly, religious orientation seems to be adopted as coping methods by majority of students who experience level of stress and tension due to academic quarrel.

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