

“Academic Stress Among Students: A Class Activity for Awareness and Reflection" A Teacher's Initiative”

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Abstract:

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand. Stress is a universal phenomenon. Stress is a situation where a person feels threatened and challenged. Stress is also associated with depression, anxiety, hopelessness, maladjustment. Stress can be caused by many factors like emotional, family, social, work, decision, communication, phobia, physical, disease, environmental. These all are stressors that can be caused stress in an individual. Many people believe that stress is a psychological condition and it discomforts a person physically, mentally, and socially. Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain. Education has become a source of income in the eyes of common people, where each student as well as their parents wants their child to be best in academic performances keeping all of the other capabilities aside.

Nowadays increased level of competition is a well-known case in the country among the students. Mostly students keep a lot of expectation from own and do compare themselves with the whole better lot in all types of academic performances keeping their own capabilities aside and wants to best them out too. But when they are not able to get desired results, mental or a physical stress starts gaining momentum among them.

Keywords:-Academic, Stress, Awareness, Reflection, Initiative.

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Introduction

Academic stress is a common and growing concern among students across all educational levels. In today's competitive world, students are under immense pressure to perform well academically. This pressure often stems from various sources, including high parental expectations, peer competition, examination anxiety, heavy workloads, and the pursuit of perfection. Prolonged exposure to such stress without adequate support or coping mechanisms can lead to serious consequences, such as mental health disorders, physical illnesses, and academic burnout.

While policymakers and educationists recognize the gravity of academic stress, the day-to-day reality of its impact is most visible in classrooms. Teachers often observe changes in student behavior, performance, and emotional stability, but may lack the tools or training to address these issues effectively. This theme paper focuses on the role of teachers in creating a supportive classroom environment through a structured class activity that aims to build awareness and encourage reflection on academic stress.

This initiative is grounded in the belief that early intervention and emotional awareness can significantly reduce the adverse effects of academic stress. By facilitating a classroom-based activity, teachers can provide a safe space for students to explore their feelings, understand their stress triggers, and learn basic coping strategies.

Rationale

Academic stress is often invisible, internalized by students who fear judgment or feel that admitting to stress is a sign of weakness. In the absence of open dialogue, stress continues to build, sometimes resulting in severe emotional distress or disengagement from learning. Therefore, it becomes essential to bring this issue into the classroom in a manner that is both sensitive and constructive.

A class activity dedicated to understanding academic stress can serve multiple purposes:

Awareness: Many students are unaware of the signs of stress or misinterpret them as personal failure.

Empathy: Sharing experiences helps students realize that they are not alone in their struggles.

Reflection: Structured activities allow students to identify their personal stressors and how they react to them.

Support: A classroom that acknowledges emotional well-being fosters a supportive learning environment.

Intervention: Teachers can use such activities to identify students who may need additional support or counseling.

The role of teachers in addressing student stress is increasingly recognized. Studies suggest that when teachers are empathetic and approachable, students are more likely to seek help and perform better. Classroom interventions, therefore, can have a significant positive impact on student well-being.

Meaning of stress:

There are many definitions of stress each give us different meaning of stress but we know that Stress is a common problem that affects everyone at one point of life or the another, and can be influenced by our lifestyles too. Stress is a normal reaction the body has when changes occur, resulting in physical, emotional and intellectual responses.

Students are facing many types of stresses such as exam anxiety, timely submission of assignments, performance in exams, boring classrooms, excessive

homework, incorrect answers reply in class, poor attendance, noisy classroom, arriving late in the class, lack of free time, fear of making mistake, and lack of good teachers. Stress directly affects student's achievement and create imbalance in their normal healthy daily life. Thus, sometimes leading those to take unnatural actions like suicide, abduction from home, creating an indiscipline in classroom, not getting regular classes, delinquent behaviour, abnormal behaviour, misbehavior, involvement in bad peer group etc. In these situation students' needs a social support to overcome this academic stress

What is stress?

Stress is a normal human reaction that happens to everyone. In fact, the human body is designed to experience stress and react to it. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces physical and mental responses. That's stress. Stress responses help your body adjust to new situations. Stress can be positive, keeping us alert, motivated and ready to avoid danger. For example, if you have an important test coming up, a stress response might help your body work harder and stay awake longer. But stress becomes a problem when stressors continue without relief or periods of relaxation.

The body's autonomic nervous system controls your heart rate, breathing, vision changes and more. Its built-in stress response, the "fight-or-flight response," helps the body face stressful situations. When a person has long-term (chronic) stress, continued activation of the stress response causes wear and tear on the body. Physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms develop.

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Aches and pains.
- Chest pain or a feeling like your heart is racing.
- Exhaustion or trouble sleeping.
- Headaches, dizziness or shaking.
- High blood pressure.
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching.
- Stomach or digestive problems.
- Trouble having sex.
- Weak immune system.
- Stress can lead to emotional and mental symptoms like:
 - Anxiety or irritability.
 - Depression
 - Panic attacks
 - Sadness.

Academic-related stress and physical health

Stress and depression, on the other hand, may be managed with good therapy, teacher

direction, and family support. The outcomes of this study provide an opportunity for academic institutions to address students' psychological well-being and requirements. Emotional well-being support services for students at Pakistan's higher education institutions are lacking in many of these institutions, which place a low priority on the psychological requirements of these students. As a result, initiatives that consistently monitor and enhance kids' mental health are critical. Furthermore, stress-reduction treatments such as biofeedback, yoga, life-skills training, mindfulness meditation, and psychotherapy have been demonstrated to be useful among students. Professionals in the sector would be able to adapt interventions for pupils by understanding the sources from many spheres.

The experience of high levels of academic-related stress increases the risk of young people developing preventable physical health problems later in life. A systematic review of prospective studies found that people who were stressed, such as during examination periods, were less likely to be physically active, the impact of which is associated with a plethora of potentially inter-related poor physical health outcomes. Therefore, academic-related stress can

contribute to the development of health issues, including chronic non-communicable diseases, due to decreases in physical activity and increases in unhealthy lifestyle habits.

Causes of stress

There are many things that could be causing students stress at school. There are many things of academic year will make students while the study. internal and external causes are making them disappointed.

Participating in class

For many children, the thought of getting called on in class and speaking in front of their classmates can be terrifying. This can be particularly true if your child struggles to keep up in a subject or area (common examples are math and reading).

Changes to routine

A routine including dedicated homework time and a consistent sleep schedule helps guide students through their day. When changes to the usual routine start to happen, your child may find it more difficult to manage his or her time, leading to more stress.

Lack of support

A lack of support from parents or teachers, even if it's only perceived, can add a lot of stress to students. They may feel that a lot is expected of them, but that they don't have a

strong enough support system (whether emotional or practical) to achieve their goals. This is another cause of stress can affect high-achieving students in particular.

Too little “down time”

Students with busy schedules can quickly become overwhelmed because they are left with no free time to relax. As your child progresses from elementary school to high school, the amount and difficulty level of schoolwork increases—and students without good time management skills can experience even more stress.

A heavy workload

Whether it's advanced-level classes or the amount of studying required, a heavy workload can be a major source of stress for students. This is especially common for older high school students as they start making their post-secondary plans.

Too much homework

When your child is overwhelmed or frustrated by homework, it makes it harder for him or her to complete assignments. This can cause a stressful cycle where homework piles up and your child doesn't have the time or energy to complete it all—leading to even more stress.

Upcoming tests

Many students worry about getting a good grade or simply making time to study if

there is more than one upcoming test. Test stress doesn't just affect struggling students, either—high-achievers usually experience a lot of stress about doing well on tests.

Poor sleep schedule

Not getting enough sleep makes it difficult for students to concentrate and learn effectively. This can lead to feelings of stress for your child when he or she isn't able to perform well in class or on assignments. In fact, studies have shown that students who don't get the required 8-10 hours of sleep each night are more likely to feel stressed than students who do.

Transitioning to a new environment

Making a major move can be a stressful time for many students, whether it's starting at a new school or making the transition from elementary school to high school. New classes, new teachers, and new routines can all be stressful for students, and take time to adjust to.

Changes to routine

A routine including dedicated homework time and a consistent sleep schedule helps guide students through their day. When changes to the usual routine start to happen, your child may find it more difficult to manage his or her time, leading to more stress.

Many students feel a sense of needing to relieve, but with all of the activities and responsibilities that fill a student's schedule, it's sometimes difficult to find the time to try new stress relievers to help dissipate that stress. These options are relatively easy, quick, and relevant to a student's life and types of stress. Students, with their packed schedules, are notorious for missing sleep. Unfortunately, operating in a sleep-deprived state puts you at a distinct disadvantage. You're less productive, you may find it more difficult to learn, and you may even be a hazard behind the wheel.

Ways to manage stress

❖ Exercise Regularly

One of the healthiest ways to blow off steam is to get regular exercise. Students can work exercise into their schedules by doing yoga in the morning, walking or biking to campus, or reviewing for tests with a friend while walking on a treadmill at the gym. Starting now and keeping a regular exercise practice throughout your lifetime can help you live longer and enjoy your life more.

❖ Take Calming Breaths

When your body is experiencing a stress response, you're often not thinking as clearly as you could be. A quick way to calm down is to practice breathing exercises. These can be done virtually anywhere to

relieve stress in minutes, and are especially effective for reducing anxiety before or even during tests, as well as during other times when stress feels overwhelming.

❖ **Listen to Music**

A convenient stress reliever that has also shown many cognitive benefits, music can help you to relieve stress and either calm yourself down or stimulate your mind as your situation warrants. Students can harness the benefits of music by playing classical music while studying, playing upbeat music to "wake up" mentally, or relaxing with the help of their favourite slow melodies.

❖ **Eat a Healthy Diet**

You may not realize it, but your diet can either boost your brainpower or sap you of mental energy. A healthy diet can function as both a stress management technique and a study aid. Improving your diet can keep you from experiencing diet-related mood swings, light-headedness, and more.

❖ **Use Positive Thinking and Affirmations**

Did you know that optimists actually experience better circumstances, in part, because their way of thinking helps to create better circumstances in their lives? It's true! The habit of optimism and positive thinking

can bring better health, better relationships, and, yes, better grades.

Learn how to train your brain for more positive self-talk and a brighter future with affirmations and other tools for optimism. You can also learn the limitations to affirmations and the caveats of positive thinking so you aren't working against yourself.

Classroom Activities to Reduce Stress

❖ **Silent catch**

This activity requires complete silence, so children should be instructed that there is no talking at all. Use a lightweight ball such as a nerf ball to ensure nobody gets hurt. Tell the children to throw the ball to each other but that they can't throw it to the same person who threw it to them. If they miss, they must sit down. This activity can relieve stress and calm down an anxious classroom.

❖ **Learning to stretch**

Teach older children how to stretch correctly to relieve tension and help their bodies relax. It can be done at any time of day for a quick break.

❖ **Neck**

Put your hands behind your back, grasping your right wrist with your left hand. Use your left hand to gently straighten your right arm, pulling it slightly. Lower your left ear toward your shoulder and hold for 30

seconds. Switch to the other side. Repeat with your left wrist and right hand.

❖ **Back**

Lie on the floor stretching your arms above your head and pointing your toes. Bend your right leg to your chest with your hands behind your knee and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat with the left leg.

❖ **Role of the Teacher**

Teachers are central to the success of this initiative. Their role includes:

- Planning and organizing the activity
- Creating a safe and non-judgmental space for sharing
- Facilitating discussions with sensitivity and empathy
- Observing student participation and responses for follow-up
- Introducing coping tools that students can use in their daily routine

Teachers must also reflect on their own biases and emotional preparedness to facilitate such conversations. Professional development sessions or peer discussions can help teachers become more effective mental health allies.

Integration into Curriculum

While this activity may appear to fall outside the academic curriculum, it aligns with the broader goals of holistic education, as advocated by the National Education Policy

(NEP) 2020. NEP emphasizes the importance of social-emotional learning, mental health awareness, and student well-being as key components of school education. Integrating such activities periodically can reinforce life skills, character development, and emotional resilience, which are critical for academic and personal success.

The activity can be incorporated into subjects like:

- Life Skills or Value Education classes
- English (as part of reflective writing or creative expression)
- Social Science (discussions on youth and mental health)
- School Assemblies or Special Days (like Mental Health Day)

Challenges and Limitations

Student Reluctance: Some students may be hesitant to share openly due to fear of judgment.

Time Constraints: Curriculum pressure may limit the time available for such activities.

Lack of Training: Not all teachers may feel equipped to handle emotional conversations.

Sustainability: One-time activities may not have long-lasting effects unless reinforced regularly.

From a historical perspective, economic shifts and trends have resulted in educational structures that are subjected to more competitive and pluralized post-secondary admissions processes with work opportunities for young people appearing to decline. The past 20 years have also witnessed an increasing focus on accountability in public education, with a desire to demonstrate that current educational policies and practices are helping children develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to be productive members of rapidly changing societies.

Conclusion

As per all information which we have seen in this paper we are sure about that letting go of emotional burden reduces stress. Therefore, education settings can work to improve student academic related stress through the provision of programmes shown to decrease stress and increase stress management and coping. This step ensures that students can relieve their stress and depression levels. This narrative review highlights that academic-related stress is a major concern for secondary and tertiary students. The

ongoing stress relating to education has demonstrated negative impact on students' learning capacity, academic performance, education and employment attainment, sleep quality and quantity, physical health, mental health and substance use outcomes. Increasing students' stress-management skills and abilities is an important target for change.

Academic stress is a silent challenge faced by many students. Ignoring it not only hampers learning outcomes but also puts students at risk of emotional breakdown. Teachers, as daily observers and influencers in the lives of students, are uniquely positioned to initiate meaningful change.

Such initiatives, if embedded consistently within the school culture, can transform classrooms into safe spaces where learning thrives and students flourish. As education systems evolve, emotional well-being must be placed at the heart of pedagogy, and teachers must be empowered to lead the way.

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