

# ACADEMIC STRESS, ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE AND ACADEMIC EFFORT

Dr. Janet Fernandes e de Souza  
Associate Professor & Head,  
Department of Psychology,  
St Xavier's College, Mapusa – Goa, India

**Abstract:** The present study is an attempt to assess and analyze interactions among academic stress, academic confidence and academic effort. Gender differences were also assessed. The participants for the study consists of 135 students, 72 boys and 63 girls, in the age range of 14 – 16 years, presently studying in Std. IX, selected by simple random sampling from schools in Goa. Survey method using Educational stress scale, Subscales of academic confidence and academic effort of the Academic self-concept questionnaire were employed to collect relevant data. The results revealed that academic stress shows a significant moderate negative correlation with academic confidence ( $r=-0.455$ ,  $p< 0.01$ ). Similarly, academic stress shows a significant moderate negative correlation with academic effort ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Academic confidence and academic effort shows a significant high positive correlation ( $r = 0.64$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). A regression analysis model showed that academic confidence and academic efforts significantly accounts for 41 % of the variance in levels of academic stress, with academic confidence showing a higher predictive value compared to academic effort. Significant gender differences were found on academic stress, academic confidence and academic effort. The results highlight the importance of interventions to raise academic confidence and school curriculum exercises that will raise confidence to achieve and involve students in meaningful academic efforts. Positive exercises that help boost self esteem like positive self talk, teacher-student relationship synergy, achievement tokens and peer support groups may help students to minimize levels of academic stress and maximize well being.

**Key words:** Stress, Confidence, Effort, Gender.

Academic learning is among the most important source of stress among young students worldwide and appears to be quite severe in Asian countries ( Brown, Teufel, Birch,& Kancherla, 2006; Huan, See, Ang, & Har,2008; Tang & Westwood,2007). Asian students usually have higher academic burden ( Lee & Larson,2000), and may suffer more academic stress( Ang & Huan,2006; Ang, Huan, & Braman,2007) than their counterparts in English speaking countries. A national survey conducted in China (Youth Social Service Center, 2008) found that most children and adolescents (66.7%) considered academic pressure as the biggest stress in their lives. Academic stress is a significant contributor to a variety of mental and behavioral disorders, such as depression, anxiety and suicidal behavior ( Ang, Huan, 2006; Bjorkman,2007). Study done in Kerala, India (Dinesh & Syamakumari, 2010), revealed that in every age more than 90% of school children of the state are facing above normal levels of stress and tension, with severe stress seen in both genders between the ages of 12 – 16 years. Rebellow & Asir (2015) conducted a study on school going adolescents in the Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil -Nadu, India, and found that 80% of the students experienced stress due to examinations and failure in examinations. A recent study conducted by Watode, Kishore, Kholi (2015) revealed that school related work-studies and exams, were identified as the major stressors in school going adolescents in the capital city of India,

Delhi. Girls were found to have more stress as compared to boys. The literature is supportive of the fact that stress places demands on an individual, and in response to the stress, the body attempts to adapt to the stressful experience to maintain a sense of normalcy (Selye, 1974). Academic stressors include the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required and the perception of an inadequate time to develop it ((Carveth et al, 1996). Students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester with the greatest sources of academic stress resulting from taking and studying for exams, grade competition, and the large amount of content to master in a small amount of time (Abouserie, 1994).

The process of learning is described as "studying extensively, enquiring carefully, pondering thoroughly, sifting clearly and practicing earnestly" ( Lee, 1996).The Indian culture encourages hard work and effort in the pursuit of learning. 'No pain, no gain' is a motto that students should work by. The importance of education and diligence is stressed by parents and therefore the willingness to work hard especially in the academic area is extremely important to students. Students need to view academic achievement as a route which prepares them to establish an outstanding career. The work ethics of our Indian culture often make us believe that effort and perseverance will reap rewards and that hard work can overcome personal shortcomings. This study explores two resources potentially under the student's control, namely, academic effort and academic confidence and attempts to study their relationship with academic stress. Academic confidence refers to students' feelings and perceptions about their academic competence. Example items included 'I am good in most of my school subjects' and 'Most of my classmates are smarter than I am' (negatively worded). Academic effort refers to students' commitment to and involvement and interest in schoolwork. An example of an item would be 'I am interested in my school work' and 'I study hard for my tests'. Many research studies focus on sources of academic stress but the present study focuses on ways to reduce academic stress through regulation of academic efforts and academic self perception within the control of the student.

**Aim:** To assess and analyze interactions among academic stress, academic confidence and academic effort.

**Objectives:**

- To assess levels of academic stress among school students of IX grade.
- To assess the relationship between academic stress and academic confidence
- To assess the relationship between academic stress and academic effort
- To determine the influence of academic confidence and academic effort as predictors to academic stress.
- To assess gender differences on academic stress, academic confidence and academic effort.

**Hypotheses:**

- Significant negative correlation exists between academic stress and academic confidence
- Significant negative correlation exists between academic stress and academic effort.
- Significant positive correlation exists between academic confidence and academic effort.
- Academic confidence & academic effort significantly predicts academic grades
- Significant gender differences exist on academic stress.
- Significant gender differences exist on academic confidence.
- Significant gender differences exist on academic effort.

**Participants of the study:** 135 School students presently studying in Std. IX, age range 14 – 16 years, 72 boys and 63 girls, selected using simple random sampling technique, from 4 schools in Goa. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

### **Study Tools:**

1. Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA) developed by Sunn et al.(2011) consists of 16 items measuring stress on five factors: pressure from study, workload of study, worry about grades, self expectations and despondency. The scale demonstrates adequate internal consistency (Cronbachs Alpha 0.70), Test- retest reliability (0.44 – 0.67 with an interval of two weeks, and satisfactory concurrent and predictive validity.
2. Academic Self-concept Questionnaire (ASCQ) developed by Liu & Wang (2005) consists of 20 items. The questionnaire measures two factors: academic confidence and academic effort. The academic confidence (AC) subscale measures students' feelings and perceptions about their academic competence. The academic effort (AE) subscale measures students' commitment to and involvement and interest in schoolwork. The odd items in the questionnaire measure academic confidence and the even items measure academic effort. The questionnaire is found to have adequate test-retest reliability (0.70) and construct validity (0.80).

**Design:** A survey design was used to collect data for the present study. The ESSA and ASCQ tools were administered to the participants in the classroom during study hours. A brief introduction was given by the researcher and any clarifications/ doubts were cleared. The data was collected within the time frame of September to November, 2017.

**Data analysis:** The data collected was analyzed using SPSS 20.0 for windows. Statistical tools of Pearson's correlation, t test & regression analysis was used to obtain results.

**Results & Discussion:** The study found that all participants of the study experienced academic stress with 47 % (n= 63) of the participants reporting moderate levels of academic stress and 53% (n =72) reporting high levels of stress. The findings show that school learning is a source of stress for students in Goa. Similar findings are also indicative in studies conducted on school children in the Indian states of Kerala (Dinesh & Syamakumari, 2010), Delhi (Watode, Kishore, Kholi ,2015) and Tamil-Nadu (Rebellow & Asir ,2015). Educational curriculum in Indian schools need to be restructured from a theoretical orientation to a practical pedagogy which will enhance learning through creativity, excite intrinsic learning and lay less emphasis on rote learning. Students also need to learn life skills which have the potential of self regulation and focused effort that has to be made mandatory in the school curriculum.

The Pearson's Product moment correlation coefficient computed between academic stress and academic confidence ( $r = - 0.45$ ,  $N = 135$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) indicates that there is a significant moderate negative correlation between academic stress and academic confidence. Hence the relationship between the two variables is inverse and significant. Higher the academic confidence lower the academic stress and vice-versa. This finding shows that belief in ones capacity to achieve the targets set for academic performance may help to reduce academic stress. Students' feelings and perceptions about their academic competence may act as a resource in academic achievement leading to reports of lower levels of stress. Hence the hypothesis that significant negative correlation exists between academic stress and academic confidence is supported.

The Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient computed between academic stress and academic effort ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $N = 135$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) indicates that there is a significant moderate negative correlation between academic stress and academic confidence. Hence the relationship between the two variables is inverse and significant. Higher the levels of academic effort lower the academic stress and vice-versa. Academic effort refers to students' commitment to and involvement and interest in schoolwork. Working hard to achieve good results and being interested and involved in school learning and curriculum related activities show an inverse relationship to academic stress. Hence, teaching students to avoid procrastination learn good study habits, seeking help from peers and teachers, increasing effort in challenging learning situations and a will to perform well can help students lower their stress levels in school. Hence the hypothesis that significant negative correlation exists between academic stress and academic effort is supported.

The Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient computed between academic confidence and academic effort ( $r = 0.64$ ,  $N = 135$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) indicates that there is a significant high positive correlation between academic effort and academic confidence. Academic confidence encourages academic effort and vice versa. Academic confidence is an important part of self concept for school going children and since academic achievement is an important need desired and acceptable in society, students need to believe in their abilities to perform with competence in their respective academic fields. Nothing is achieved without effort. One needs to put in extra hours of work and self study to achieve good results. Both academic confidence and academic efforts can help students achieve good academic results. Hence the hypothesis that significant positive correlation exists between academic confidence and academic effort is supported.

Regression analysis was performed with academic stress as the dependent variable and academic confidence and academic efforts as predictor variables. A total of 135 cases were analyzed and the model significantly predicted academic grades [ $r^2 = 0.41$ ,  $F = 17.46$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ]. The model summary indicated that academic confidence and academic efforts accounted for 41% of the variance in academic grades. The results showed that academic confidence and efforts have a large potential to reduce levels of academic stress and that academic confidence has a larger value in influencing levels of academic stress as compared to academic effort. Being academically competent and committed involvement in school learning can serve to be important resources to lower academic stress. Hence the hypothesis that Academic confidence & academic effort significantly predicts academic grades is supported.

Table 1 indicates gender differences on the variables of the present study:

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t value
Academic stress	Male	72	30.88	5.55	t = 2.012*
	Female	63	34.86	5.88	
Academic confidence	Male	72	10.88	4.65	t = 2.372*
	Female	63	13.86	4.38	
Academic effort	Male	72	12.88	4.55	t = 2.372*
	Female	63	14.86	4.88	

\*  $P < 0.05$  significant

With respect to gender, there is a significant difference on academic stress reported by male and female students (t value = 2.012, df 133,  $p < 0.05$ ) with females reporting experience of more academic stress as

compared to male students. On the variable of academic confidence, male and female students differ significantly ( $t$  value= 2.372,  $df$  133,  $p < 0.05$ ), with females showing a higher level of academic confidence as compared to male students. Similarly, significant gender variance on academic effort was evident with female students scoring higher on academic effort as compared to the male students. Female students are more serious with academic work and will take the extra mile in academic pursuits. Good academic achievement is often their graceful venture and spending more time in academic learning to prepare oneself for higher level careers is often their nourished dream. Female students also tend to be more committed and focused to immerse themselves in academic effort. The expectation of parents and teachers may add to them experiencing higher stress. Hence the hypotheses stating that significant gender differences exist on academic stress, academic confidence and academic effort are supported by the results of the present study.

School is like a second home to young learners. School learning needs to be a talent provoking, creativity enricher which will help the students realize their potentials and choose the fields of their potential. The focus on rote learning and exam oriented educational learning relies heavily on memory rather than on cognitive tasks such as analysis, problem solving, judgment, evaluation, comparison etc. that makes learning drudgery. Academic learning curriculum needs to be designed to excite confidence and efforts for a purposeful learning. Workshops on good study habits, buddy interventions or peer group mentoring opportunities, yoga and meditation classes to promote concentration and relaxation, need based programs for parents and teachers aimed at helping wards achieve more could be potential ways to reduce academic stress.

#### **Limitations of the study:**

A larger sample size would help to make wider generalizations and understand in depth the variables of the study. The results of the present study can be used to draw conclusion only for standard IX school students.

**Suggestions for further research:** A cross- standard study of a similar kind as the present study could be undertaken to reveal differences on the three variables used in the present study.

**Conclusions:** Within the limitations of the present study, the following conclusions may be made:

- Significant negative correlation exists between academic stress and academic confidence
- Significant negative correlation exists between academic stress and academic effort.
- Significant positive correlation exists between academic confidence and academic effort.
- Academic confidence & academic effort significantly predicts academic grades
- Significant gender differences exist on academic stress, academic confidence and academic effort.

**Implications:** This study serves to be an eye-opener to policy makers, educationists, teachers, parents and students. The result of the study impels the importance of importance of interventions to reduce academic stress, implement exercises and workshops to nourish academic confidence and work towards designing a school curriculum based on choice and innovation that has the potential to excite creativity and hidden potentials towards holistic development of school students. This academic challenge is the need of the hour for policy makers, teachers and school counselors.

**Acknowledgement:** The author of the present study expresses gratitude to the school authorities and student participants and to colleagues who helped in statistical analysis.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author reports no conflict of interest.

**References:**

- Ang, R. P., & Huan, V. S. (2006). Relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation: Testing for depression as a mediator using multiple regressions. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 37, 133-143.
- Ang, R. P., Huan, V. S., & Braman, O. R. (2007). Factorial structure and invariance of the Academic Expectations Stress Inventory across Hispanic and Chinese adolescent samples. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 38, 73-87.
- Bjorkman, S. M. (2007). Relationships among academic stress, social support, and internalizing and externalizing behavior in adolescence. (Unpublished Ph.D's thesis). Northern Illinois University, Illinois, United States.
- Brown, S. L., Teufel, J. A., Birch, D. A., & Kancherla, V. (2006). Gender, age, and behavior differences in early adolescent worry. *Journal of School Health*, 76, 430-437.
- China Youth Social Service Center. (2008).. Retrieved from <http://news.qq.com/a/20081020/001953.htm>.
- Dinesh S, Syamakumari S. (2010). Prevalence of stress among school children in Kerala. Available from: <http://www.articlesbase.com/mental-healtharticles/prevalence-of-stress-among-school-children-in-kerala-1868702.html>.
- Lee, M., & Larson, R. (2000). Academic pressure and impact on students' development in China. *McGill Journal of Education*, 30, 149-168.
- Rebellow. M.R., & Asir S.D. (2015) Stress among school going adolescents, *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, pp 77 – 79, retrieved from [www.iosrjournals.org](http://www.iosrjournals.org).
- Watode, B.K., Kishore, J., & Kholi, C. (2015) Prevalence of stress among school adolescents in Delhi. *Indian Journal of Youth and Adolescent Health*, 2(4).