

Factors of Stress Affecting the Academic Performance among the University Students

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Abstract

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to the demands of the environment and it can be negative or positive one (Votta & Benau, 2014). Those in working environment and university environment face stress in their daily life regardless of age and gender and it could either improve their performance or vice versa. An acceptable amount of stress can improve the students' performance while an excessive amount of stress will decreased the student academic performance (Anne & Sarah, n.d.). For university students, stress can affect the students' academic performance badly if students failed to control their level of stress. According to Hirsch & Ellis, 1996; Morgan, 1997, as cited in Messarra, 2005, high level of stress can turn to depression which in several cases may lead to high numbers of suicide attempts. Many researches regarding stress among students had been conducted all around the world but with the current economic condition and high technology advancement in Malaysia, this study will prove whether all the findings by the previous researchers are still relevant. Hence, this study aims to identify the factor of stress faced by university students. Among the factors of stress are academic stress, social stress, financial stress and other minor stressors (Messarra, 2005). Therefore, the objectives of this study are to identify the relationship between academic stress, social stress and financial stress with academic performance, to compare the most dominant factor of stress between genders and to identify the stress relievers taken by students in coping with their stress.

Keywords: stress; academic performance; academic stress; social stress; financial stress

1. Introduction

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to the demands of the environment and it can be negative (distress) and can be positive (eustress) (Votta & Benau, 2014). High number of students feels that their student life in university or college is the most stressful one (Schafer, 2000; Swick, 1987 as cited in Messarra, 2005). Stress is good for motivation and is helpful. However, if the level of stress is too high, it can bring negative effects to the body and mental of individuals such as lead to depression and some illnesses such as high blood pressure, headache, sleeping problems and many more. In addition, stress can affect the students in term of their societal aspect, increase in suicide rate, alcoholism and drug addiction as the effects failure to cope with their stress (Blonna, 2004; Messarra, 2005). According to Messarra (2005), social, academic and microstressor are among of the factors. Social factors include culture shock, relationship among students, campus environment and homesickness. Under academic stress, it includes stress for the main course of study, grades, faculty or staff interactions with students as well as students' current status. As for the minor factors, it includes support services, family support, financial support, peers support, organizational support and others (Messarra, 2005). According to Elliot et al., 2005; Choi, Abbott, Arthur & Hill, 2007, as cited in Habibah, Ping & Maria, 2011, it is found that stress do affect the academic performance of undergraduate students based on past researches. Academic performance here is referring to the academic achievement of the students and is measured using the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) obtained by the students. Therefore, factors that contribute to stress must be identified and should be taken seriously since stress is risky for those who cannot deal or cope with their stress effectively.

2. Literature Review and Concept

As mentioned before, stress among the university students as stated by Messarra (2005) are due to academic stress, social stress and several other minors concerned. However, for the purpose of this study, the factors that will be emphasized are on academic stress, social stress and financial stress. In a study conducted by Kosheleva, Amarnor and Chernobilsky (2015), students facing high level of stress due to high work load and they are least bothered by the social stress. Meanwhile, financial stress is not being mentioned as the major factor of stress in the previous research by Messarra but we believed that students do face stress due to financial problems. In 2014, research by Votta and Benau considered financial stress as the major factor of stress. According to Mouza (2014), those students with low family income facing higher levels of stress in related to college or non-college activities.

2.1 Academic Performance

Academic performance has been a huge aspect that being used to measure students' achievements. Most of the university use Cumulative Grade Points Average (CGPA) or Grade Points Average (GPA) to measure students' academic performance. Academic stress, social stress and financial stress are believed to have effects on students' academic performance (Messarra, 2005). Students believe that academic performance is important as it will affect their long-term future especially when it comes to job opportunity (Mohd Remali et al., 2013). Students need to compete in order to secure for their job as the organization require highly talented candidates to be recruited (Mohd Remali et al., 2013). Thus, it is important to determine the factors of stress affecting the academic performance among the university students. Academic performance is defined as examination performance (Admin.cam.ac.uk, 2003). In this study academic performance was characterized by the overall performance in each year which culminates in a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). The CGPA score would take into account students' performance in tests, course work and examinations. Examination scores or grade clearly differentiate one's performance with others that includes their level of knowledge as well. Students pay extra attention to their academic performance as it act as their individual reflection how good they have done in their academic where it can be represented by a CGPA or GPA (Mohd Remali et al., 2013).

2.2 Academic Stress

Education has become a vital element and aspect in today's life. Nowadays, people having the mind-set believing, without education an individual may not be successful (Yoko and Susan, 2010). Apart from that, students tend to be stress due to their family pressure especially parents. It is every parent's dream to see their children' success and perform very well in their studies (Yoko and Susan, 2010). Some parents tends to become too obsessed and start to give too much pressure towards their children causing high level of stress due to high expectations from their parents.. As university students, parents' expectations and hopes somehow give them motivation to study hard but for ones that unable to manage it properly it may cause them stress and somehow are unable to perform their studies well (Yoko and Susan, 2010). Besides, academic stress also majorly contributed by the academic work assessments such as test, quiz, assignment, presentation and other types of courses assessments that basically give effects to the students' academic performance (Messarra, 2005). University students tend to receive excessive amount of academic work assessments at the same time. For instance, the students may have to seat for 3 tests for a different subjects plus with their assignments date line submission (Brown, Johnson and McPherson, 2016). Some survive and perform well but some might not being able to handle their level of stress and started to freak out and in the end instead of being able to perform better, their performance got even worse (Brown, Johnson and McPherson, 2016).

On top of that, academic stress may also be related to the students' status as part-time students or full-time students. Research had shown that full-time students faced less level of stress as compared to part-time students due to their amount of commitment that they have (Messarra, 2005). In reality, part-time students have more commitments in their life such as working commitment and family commitment. As compared to full-time students, the intensity and level of stress are higher towards part-time students. It

would be much higher when they are actually studying while working and at the same having children to be taken care of (Messarra, 2005).

2.3 Social Stress

According to Greenberg (2004), as cited in Messarra (2005), one of the most stressful factors faced by university students are having a problem in their friendship such as losing friend or to find new one. Students will have the problem to find ones that shared the same interest and who will able to understand them and at the same time feel comfort to be with them (Greenberg (2004), as cited in Messarra (2005)). Pistole (1995), as cited in Messarra (2005) said that main source of upset for most of the students are the process of making and breaking of close relationship among the students. This statement is supported by Habibah et. al (2011) findings where one of the main stressors is when the students are in the process of making new friends and get along with their friend. Students' focus on academic will be dragged away due to too much stress on the failed relationship. Some students might lose motivation to study and this would affect their grades on certain or even all the subjects. The students emotional life, study habits and their academic performance will also be affected (Schafer (2000), as cited in Messarra (2005)).

Apart from that, homesickness is also one of the factors under social stress. Guinagh (1992), as cited in Messarra (2005) define homesickness as a negative emotional reaction to leaving home. Students who studied away from their home may lose their important support which is their family (Kosheleva, Amarnor & Chernobilsky, 2015). Students might not focus on class which leads to low academic achievement and might even cause them to fail in many subjects. Messarra (2005) indicate that some students are able to cope with their homesickness throughout their academic years but some are not. Woulff (1975), as cited in Messarra (2005) said that the homesickness felt by the female and male students are different where his finding is female students possess greater homesickness rather than male students. In contrast, Fisher (1989), as cited in Messarra (2005) did not agree that there are differences in gender among the students regarding their homesickness

On top of that, according to Wintre & Yaffe (2000) as cited in Habibah et al (2011), a situation that leads to stress is when the students have to adapt to new environment. Students become most stressful during the transition adjustment to college because from there, they will face a loss of control over the new environment (Fisher, 1994, as cited in Messarra, 2005). Besides, Students Mental Health Manual (2000-2002), as cited in Messarra (2005) state that one of the major sources of stress for college residents are their feeling of dissatisfaction towards the facilities provided and also the housing problems. According to Pace (1970), as cited in Messarra (2005), students who had problems with their roommate tend to achieve lower academic performance. In addition, university acquire too many bureaucratic processes and procedures that students have to obey and Chaskes (1996), as cited in Messarra,(2005) also mentioned that the level of stress among the first year students increases when the students usually not familiar with some process before they actually do it.

Furthermore, according to Whitman et al., (1987), as cited in Messarra (2005), good relationship between teacher and students will motivate students and make them feel satisfied with their educational goals. He also mentioned that increasing level of stress might due to extreme demands from the others, inappropriate feedback from teachers, feelings of not belonging and lack or personal relationships with teachers. In short, positive relationship will make students feel accepted by the lecturers and by university as well.

Last but not least, living in a problematic family condition also increases the students' level of stress. Omoruyi (2014) state that living with a divorce parent or broken home can be stressful for both the child and parent. Meanwhile, Rochlkepartain (2003), as cited in Omoruyi (2014), said that family and its structure play vital role in children's academic performance. Students who have incomplete family might lose their happiness and it make them stress to see their friends are so lucky to have both mother and father around.

2.4 Financial Stress

According to Votta and Benau (2014), financial were one of the most common stressor among the pharmacy students. Students become stress due to the increase in the cost of education which is affected much by the inflation. Guo et al., (2011), as cited in Mouza (2015) said that stress level of senior students found to be higher caused by the economic recession, the employment situation and also financial burdens.

In addition, it is hard for students to settle down as they have limited free time to have a part time job to help them cover up their expenses (Votta & Benau, 2014). Students will become overwhelmed to complete their job while working on tight schedule (Macan et al., (1990), as cited in Messarra (2005)). As a result, it affects their academic performance and grades. Astin (1997), as cited in Messarra (2005) stipulated that having a job during study period give big impacts towards students' performance because the time that they used to work should be used for academic work and this lead to higher level of stress. While trying to handle the problems of personal finances, the students were burdened with the need to have good grades at the same time.

Besides, students get stressed as they need to spend a lot to pay for their education fees, purchasing books and also buying foods, drinks and other necessary things. According to Chen (1999), as cited in Kosheleva et al., (2015), the tuition fees and living expenses which are increasing are among the concern of the students. Financial problem might cause them to less focus on their study and goals to perform well in their academic. Majority of university students failed to meet their financial commitment (Roberts, Golding, Towell and Weinreib,(1999), as cited in Kosheleva et al., 2015) and students get stressed due to their financial management (Tyrell (1992) , as cited in Kosheleva et al., 2015). According to Mouza (2015), in 2013, students who lived at town and away from their families suffer high levels of stress.

There is close relationship between students' bad financial status and high level of stress due to similar results obtained in previous studies (Demirbatir, 2012; Stallman, 2010; Andrews and Wildin, 2004, as cited in Mouza (2015)). According to Bennett (2003), as cited in Mouza (2015), when financial hardship hit the student especially those with low grades, they tend to quit their studies.. Elias et al., (2011) & Bennet, (2003), as cited in Mouza (2005) stated that it is hard for students to focus on their academic duties if they study under stress.

3. Conclusion

Academic stress, social stress and financial stress are among the factors that contribute to stress among the students. Throughout this study, stress having huge impacts on students' academic performance. Students' academic performance gives a long term effects on their life especially when it comes to applying for job. It portrays their level of knowledge, skills and ability that most employer are seeking for a potential and good candidates. Apart from that, by identifying the factors that lead to stress among the students will help us to find the perfect cure or way to overcome stress among the students. Stress is the earlier stage that might lead to depression if it is unable to be handled which might also lead to suicide attempts or cases. Huge increase in suicide attempt by the university students due to their stress and depression has been in alarming situation that require more focus and efforts to tackle the problem.

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