

Academic Stress Management in E – Learning Era’: How self aware are tertiary students in Kerala

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DOI: 10.51201/JUSST/21/05200

<http://doi.org/10.51201/JUSST/21/05200>

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to find out the effects ‘E – learning platforms’ on the mental state of undergraduate students in Kerala. The subjects chosen for the study were 100 University undergraduate students (male-50, female-50) from various colleges studying in Kerala. A questionnaire was employed to elicit the response from students. For the purpose, ‘Self Awareness Inventory – 30’, a 30 item self awareness questionnaire was distributed among the participants. The students were expected to rate themselves on coping with academic stress during the covid pandemic times. The result of the study revealed that there is a significant number of students experienced high academic stress in the pandemic learning environment.

Key words:

Metacognition, academic stress, self awareness, undergraduate students

Introduction:

Several studies in the past have shown that disease outbreaks wedge the individual mental state of the people. Even though the trauma leaves behind lasting marks on everyone in the society, there exist even bigger threats for young adults. It had been found that youngsters aged between sixteen and twenty years exhibited a sizeable risk of developing prolonged psychological distress. Recent studies have suggested that during the Covid pandemic, youngsters were more prone to being depressed, or developing showing emotion disturbances. Population-based surveys conducted during the past several respiratory disorder outbreaks, underlines the importance of paying attention to post-crisis mental distress. However, despite the importance of this issue, not many studies have delved deep into this issue. This study is aimed to explore the perceived stress level among undergraduate students, and how they cope with their academic affairs amidst stressful conditions.

Objectives:

1. To examine the level of meat awareness which undergraduate students have regarding their stress management system

Literature Review:

- i. Stress

While the advantages of e-learning are many, this long shift from offline to on-line study has definitely had an effect on students’ learning. Lack of engagement with academic output leaves students demotivated. Though faculties provide a structured learning environment, this might not have been achieved by many students, who are confined to their homes. This disrupts their usual leaning patterns, often going them weary and confused. Several studies have additionally shown that students

don't feel driven to complete their tasks when not circled by their peers. The situation is extremely challenging for undergraduate students, and the sudden transition have impede their progress, not just academically, but demotivated them from pursuing their careers as well. Another major challenge that the transition to virtual learning has bestowed is keeping students stimulated. The comfort of home brings down productivity and many of them find themselves indulging in unproductive activities and thereby procrastinating their academic progress.

A major drawback of E – learning platforms, which scholars point out, is that they fail to deliver individual feedback – a striking feature of offline classes. It is true to a certain extend that the fault is not entirely due to the platforms. Several other reasons are there, such as lack of knowledge of both students and faculty members in dealing with digital platforms. If both these groups managed to address the challenges of meeting this gap, digital learning platforms would open up a plethora of opportunities.

ii. Metacognitive Awareness:

Jankowski and Holas (2014) have created some in depth analysis over the prevailing literature on metacognition. Going in line with their words, a conscious state of Meta – level will have metacognitive, which will be engaged with the process of constructing information. It would then be followed by further levels of metacognition. In a nutshell, it can be said that one meta-level would become the object of an immediately following higher meta-level. There exist 3 main elements of metacognition, namely metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, and metacognitive skills. These elements work together dynamically and turn on a state of mindfulness. Now, mindfulness is the basic cognitive process, which then would lead onto a sustained and enhanced state of alertness, with the intrinsic alertness being intentionally regulated by self-reliant instructions. The immediate next step within the method, would be sustaining attention for a protracted period.

Meta – skills corresponding to inhibition and task – switch could quickly be concerned in consciousness. On the other hand, different meta-levels of knowledge may occur implicitly, and the mindful meta-level continuously seems consciously. As more focus gets into observing the mindful state, the dissociation between meta and object-level gets decreased. During the course of progress, once this mindfulness gets engaged in data processing, emotions would come and start playing a major role. They exert significant impact on memory, attention, drawback determination and perception (Bower 1981). Brown in 1987 maintained that the 2 constituent parts of metacognition – information concerning knowledge and psychological feature regulation – have totally different characteristics, although they are connected with each other. Several empirical studies back this notion and underlines that each of these elements of metacognition is associated to every other activities pertaining the facilitation of cognitive regulation by the cognitive knowledge (Schraw, 1994; Schraw, 1998; Schraw & Dennison, 1994; Sperling, Howard, Miller, & Murphy, 2002; Sperling, Howard, Staley, & DuBois, 2004).

Method and Procedure:

1. Subjects

The study was conducted among 100 undergraduate students (50 boys and 50 girls) in Kerala. The data was collected from a random group of students, who willingly participated in the study.

2. Self Awareness Inventory – 30

The primary tool used for data collection was a questionnaire, ‘Self Awareness Inventory – 30’.) The awareness inventory is a 30-item, five-point Likert-type scale to measure perceptions, academic stress and its sources in students. This scale was standardized on students pursuing undergraduation. The responses ranged from (1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree).

3. Procedure:

While a total of 300 invitations were sent, only 121 subjects took part in the study. However, 21 candidates didn’t finish the survey and omitted several items in the questionnaire.

Statistical Procedure:

a. Cronbach’s Alpha for Testing Reliability of Questionnaire:

The questionnaire was tested among a group of 20 students before the main study. The result was then tested for ‘Cronbach’s Alpha’ by IBM SPSS. Cronbach’s alpha is a measure used to assess the reliability, or internal consistency, of a set of scale or test items. The results have shown that the ‘Self Awareness Inventory’ was having a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.82, indicating a very good reliability.

Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability of Questionnaire’s (N = 20)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.82	.809	30

b. Mean:

The mean score students’ response were taken into consideration for the purpose of demarcating themselves into various groups. Total mean score of ‘0 – 10’ are considered to be low stress, ‘11 – 20’ indicate moderate stress, and 21 – 30 indicate high stress. A qualitative directional statement was also pinned, along with the questionnaire. It asked students to ‘rate their mental state while participating the ‘E – learning platforms’ during the covid pandemic’.

c. The Chi-square test:

The Chi-square test was used to compare between perceived stress scales (low, moderate, and high perceived stress). When p-values were less than 0.05, the differences were considered statistically significant.

Results:

As mentioned earlier, a total of 100 students responded to the survey. The demographic characteristics of the surveyed population are presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Survey results of participants (N = 100).

	Low Academic stress	Moderate Academic stress	High Academic stress	Total	P- value^a
	12 (12%)	26 (26%)	62 (62%)	100 (100%)	0.006 ^b
Gender					
Female	7 (14%)	18 (36%)	25 (50%)	50 (100%)	0.022 ^b
Male	5 (10%)	8 (16%)	37 (74%)	50 (100%)	
^b Chi-square test ^b Significant p value <0.05					

Table 3. Total scores of the Self Awareness Inventory (N = 100).

Perceived stress scale	Frequency (%)
Low Academic stress (0–10)	12 (12%)
Moderate Academic stress (11–20)	26 (26%)
High Academic stress (21–30)	62 (62%)

Discussion:

From the data, it became evident that, a large number of students underwent ‘high stress’ while engaging in digital learning platforms. A total of 62 percentage (N = 62) of students were recorded to be having experienced high academic stress during pandemic times. Amongst the students who experienced high stress, male students outnumbered the female counterparts. That said, amongst the total number of female participants, 50 percentage (N = 25) of them remarked that they had undergone ‘high academic stress’. Into the case of male participants, this figure stands at a staggering 74 percentage (N = 37).

Compared to the ‘high academic stress’ category, the ‘moderate academic stress’ category is much small. A total of 26 percentage (N = 26) of students marked themselves as having experienced moderate academic stress during pandemic times. Amongst the students who experienced moderate stress, female students outnumbered their male counterparts. Amongst the total number of female

participants, 36 percentage (N = 18) of them have undergone 'moderate academic stress'. On the other hand, amongst the male participants, this figure stands at 16 percentage (N = 8).

The 'low academic stress' category happened to be the leanest category. A total of 12 (N = 12) percentage of students marked themselves as having experienced low academic stress during pandemic times. Amongst the students who experienced low stress, female students again outnumbered their male counterparts. Amongst the total number of female participants, 14 (N = 7) percentage of them have undergone 'low academic stress'. On the other hand, amongst the male participants, this figure stands at 10 percentage (N = 5).

Conclusion:

While the act of learning has migrated to technology mediated platforms, students all over the world have experienced tremendous stress – both in terms of academic as well as non-academic aspects. The sudden change in the learning environment has impeded the psychological and socio – cultural factors that contribute to the growth of students. Various aspects of stress arises among students –peer pressure, expectations of parents and teachers, anxiety over academic grades, careers – all having detrimental effect on student's state of mental health. Students, when they reach tertiary level of education, face all these challenging situations, and end up not meeting the required amount of cognitive development, which extend into the early twenties.

Call it the necessity of current times, using digital platforms for learning activities has become a new normal. Despite the digital tools having several advantages over the regular classes, the platforms are yet to make a lasting impact on students in terms of addressing psychological issues. While the proper usage of online platforms would definitely enhance the learning experiences, both faculty members as well as students are required to evolve more, in order to capitalize the various nuances of the technology mediated platforms. Trademark features of 'E – learning' platforms such as simulated discussions and experiences can enhance enhanced the self-confidence of the learners, once the platforms start addressing the emotional needs of students.

By giving stress on research and development in the field of information technology, a better learning environment can be developed. It was observed that respondents were able to "reduce negative and unexpected emotional outbursts" (Uzzaman and Karim, 2017) and were able to divert it into different activities knowingly or unknowingly, which is one of the coping strategies adopted by students.

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