



AN INVESTIGATION INTO CAUSES OF STRESS AND SOLUTIONS TO STRESS AMONG ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate causes of stress among English majored students and their proposed solutions to stress. The participants include 40 English majored students who have been studying at a public university in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam. The research used only a questionnaire as an instrument to collect data. However, an interview of randomly selected participants was also conducted to test their responses to the survey. The questions concentrate on causes of stress and solutions proposed to these causes. The study demonstrates that fear of failing exams and fear of writing assignments are the most likelihood to contribute to causes of stress. In terms of the solutions to stress, the finding indicated that the majority of the participants have found their solutions to overcome stress by having positive thinking and enjoying recreational activities.

Keywords: causes of stress, English-majored students, solutions, stress

1. Introduction

Stress is one of the main features of our modern life, resulted from the hasty changes in human life. People can be tense in either academic or non-academic settings or in both, such as in sociocultural contexts and educational setting or even they are stressed due to their psychological factor (Brand & Schoonheim-Klein, 2009, as cited in Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015). Students are found to suffer from academic stress resulted from testing, home works and other school requirements which may exceed their abilities (Hussien and Hussien, 2006). Moreover, Schaefer (2007) said that stress has affected the put-off and the drop-out among university students. It also influences considerably students who are going to take a test (as cited in Bedewy and Gabriel, 2015). Academic factors were the predominant factors that produce heavy stress in most students namely by physical, social, and emotional factors.

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Up to now, many students have become stress victims when they do not know how to manage their study, their living expenses and their social life. It often takes students plenty of time and effort to cope with their campus life along with social life during their studies. Many of these students fall into a poor financial situation, low academic achievements and weak social relationships. Therefore, in this study, the researcher would like to investigate causes of stress and their proposed solutions to stress on a group of English -majored students and then would like to make some suggestions to help them overcome their problems. Remarkably, the results of this research will contribute to the success of many students as well as to the institutions. Therefore, this current study attempts to address the following issues: (1) What makes English - majored students stressed? and (2). How can a student overcome stress?

2. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of stress

A variety of different definitions of stress have been given in the field of psychological study. According to George (2017), stress is defined as any psychological, mental, emotional or physical disturbance brought on by an unhealthy environment starting from childhood and onward.

Rajasekar (2013) stated that stress is the body's non-specific coping mechanism to any demand made on it, relating to the "fight-or-flight" response in his definition. This definition takes into account the physiological aspects of stress and how it relates to bodily function.

"Stress is a person's physical and psychological reaction to a perceived or actual demand for change. The demand itself is called a stressor and the steps people take to resolve or avoid the stressor are referred." (Long, 1998 as cited in Lyrakos, 2012, p.143)

All of these definitions look at stress as tension or hindrance on the normal physical, emotional or mental state. They said that stress is a phenomenon that can affect an individual negatively.

2.2. Related studies

Rajasekar, (2013) conducted a study on "Impact of academic stress among the management students of University - an Analysis." The objective of the study was to find out the current stress level, the source roots of stress, and stress management. The participants were 100 students of AMET Business School, AMET University in Chennai. Findings suggest that stress is a difficult situation that is out of control. Besides, any problem in life can cause stress to students. Some of the main reasons for this will be seen as burden of coursework, debt, exam pressure, financial worries, and relationship problems. Moreover, Suresh, (2015) conducted a study on "A study on academic stress among higher secondary students". The purpose of the study was to find out the level of

academic stress of high school students. A total of 250 standard XI students who participated in this study were obtained from secondary schools in Namakkal District of Tamil Nadu, India. Research results show that high school students are stressed in studying, exposed to daily work is the right thing to do. To overcome stress, one should take a short nap while working or study which assists one to unwind and concentrate for longer. Furthermore, let's never have a negative on thinking in life and got an insight into one's mind. For instance, taking a seat and keeping calm can make a person less nervous. Furthermore, George (2017) conducted a study on "A study on the impact of academic stress among college students in India". The present study attempts to find out the stress of university students in different fields of arts and sciences. The participants are 200 students from various educational institutions in and around the Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. The results show that stress among students might be addressed by many different methods. For example, they need to concentrate on their well-being, have right balance of sleep, take up a sport, or participate in recreational activities. In addition, Bhargava & Trivedi, (2018) conducted a study on "A study of causes of stress and stress management among youth". The questionnaire was distributed to 300 young people and received 225 responses. It consists of three inclusive sections, one highlighting the symptoms of stress, the second highlighting the stressor, and the third highlighting the coping strategies young people use. From the findings, the results clearly show that young people are experiencing high levels of stress. Symptoms identified as anorexia and headaches were more common among students. It has been determined that of all the factors, the main cause of stress in young people is relationship stress, financial stress and psychological stress.

Michaela, Sarah & Alexandra (2019) stated that to reduce stress in the educational setting, recreational activities should be considered carefully and a must for students to participate along with their study load. AlAteeq, et al. (2020) made an investigation on the perceived stress level among students during the coronavirus disease outbreak and suspension of in- person teaching in Saudi Arabia. The research sample included 367 students living in Saudi Arabia assessed socio-demographic characteristics, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and their emotions and concerns during the outbreak. They found that the most participants were female (74.7%) and secondary school (79.8%) students. Females and university students showed a significant association with stress level (p -value $\frac{1}{4}$ 0.003 and 0.049, respectively). This study found a significant correlation between a high level of stress and female university students. The integration of online counseling and stress management programs would help mitigate the stress of students during distance learning. Moreover, Karing, (2021) conducted research on the prevalence of anxiety, depression and stress among university students during the period of the first lockdown in Germany. This study made a questionnaire to deliver to a total of 2.548 university students. Multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to explore the role of demographic variables, personality traits, psychological capital variables, mindfulness, COVID-19 related variables, and coping strategies on anxiety, depression, and stress. The pandemic has negatively affected the mental health of students. The

results emphasize the importance of both professional help for students with mental health problems and effective prevention programs on university campuses that promote coping skills and mental health during the current pandemic. Also, Rajendran, Jayalalitha & Adalarasu, (2021) did study on an EEG based evaluation of examination stress and test anxiety among college students. The participants of this study were fourteen young students (8 males, 6 females) who were voluntarily involved in this study work. The voluntaries' age range between 17 and 21 years with an average age was 20 years (SD = 1.5 years) and average body weight was 57 kg (SD = 9 kg). It concludes that male students were highly stressed (before examination) than female students. Overall, our results suggest that after examination male students with lower heart rate index than female.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The main purpose of the study is to seek the causes of stress among English majored students and their proposed solutions to these problems. Therefore, this research was conducted with the mixed approach including a quantitative method and a qualitative method. For the quantitative data, a five-point Likert-scale structured questionnaire for students was employed to look for opinions on causes of stress and solutions to stress. The students were expected to rate questions based on these five scales by rating from 1 to 5 (1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree). A semi-structured interview conducted with some random students from the sampling group to gain insightful ideas.

3.2. Participants

The research participants were 40 students who were taking English as their major at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They come from the same School of the institution but from two different classes. The sampling participants were chosen by convenience technique. They are from 19 to 20 years all and have been learning English more than ten years. They are all willing to engage in the study to have an experience in finding solutions to stress.

3.3. Instruments

The first instrument conducted to collect the data is the questionnaire which consists of 2 sections. Section 1 mentions factors causing English-majored students stressed. 10 statements are used for each category. Furthermore, Section 2 also has 10 solution statements but focusing on stress in the educational setting. All the statements were designed using a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree for the participants to rate.

A semi-structured interview was also conducted to interview five randomly chosen participants to insist on more opinions which they could not expose in their responses in the questionnaire.

3.4. Procedures

Firstly, the researcher reviewed some related studies in the field and design the questionnaire based on the literature. Then, the questionnaire was delivered to five other English majored students as a piloting test to check whether there are any items need to be checked. The pilot showed that the questionnaire was strongly approved and could deliver to the participants of the study. each of the participants and they had about 10 minutes to provide their answers to the question. Then, the researcher delivered the questionnaire to all participants at one day in the week during their break time. Then, after the survey, the researcher randomly chose five students to have informal talks with so that they could feel free to share during the interviews. The researcher took notes their responses for later use in the study. The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed for the results using the SPSS software version 22 (Statistic Package for the Social Sciences).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Findings

4.1.1. Causes of stress

a. Data from the questionnaire

First, the paper is presenting the data on causes of stress, which are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the “Causes of stress”

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Financial worries	40	1.00	5.00	3.68	0.859
2	Fear of writing assignments	40	2.00	5.00	3.83	0.931
3	Worrying about communicating in English	40	1.00	5.00	3.28	1.198
4	Lacking of time to study	40	1.00	5.00	3.40	1.081
5	Getting part-time jobs	40	1.00	5.00	3.15	0.921
6	Relationship problems (with family members and friends)	40	1.00	5.00	2.90	0.955
7	Fear of sitting in exams	40	2.00	5.00	3.75	0.707
8	Fear of failing exams	40	2.00	5.00	3.98	0.862
9	Fear of being unemployed after graduation	40	1.00	5.00	3.33	0.997
10	Getting low scores	40	2.00	5.00	3.38	0.807
	Overall mean				3.47	0.139

As can be seen from Table 1, the overall mean score of ten items related to causes of stress were found 3.47 which is at agreement point in the five-point scale. It can be confirmed that the participants agreed that they had stresses during their studying time at the university. Among the ten items related to causes, it was found that item 8 “fear of failing exams” received the highest mean score which is $M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.862$). Item 2 “fear of

writing assignments” and item 7 “fear of sitting in exams” which relating to academic causes are the two next variables which also had higher mean scores than the others (M = 3.83 and M = 3.75 respectively). However, item 6 “relationship problems (with family members and friends)” accounted for M = 2.90, SD = .95 was the variable with lowest mean score compared to the other nine items. This also means that the participants admitted they did not have much stress relating their personal relations. Therefore, it can be concluded that “fear of failing exams” is the most likelihood cause making the students stressed.

b. Interview data

The semi-structured interviews were carried out in a style of informal talks. The results of the interviews unveiled that most of causes of stress are related to the student participants’ academic issues which were found in the questionnaire. For instance, most of them admitted that they usually felt stressful whenever they had writing assignments. Student 2 said, *“In one week, I have two assignments which are really a nightmare.”* She continued that sometimes she could not meet all the deadlines and it also made her worry about her final score. Student 5 stated, *“I am usually tense before my final exams as I am afraid retaking the course if I fail.”*. For this cause, the researcher could understand the causes of stress that the students have more thoughtfully. Another cause of stress which was indicated in the interviews by two students was the registration of courses at the beginning of each semester. Student 1 stated she had to stay up late to complete her registration but sometimes it was unsuccessful, and she felt very stressful to jump to another course that she did not like.

4.1.2. Solutions to stress

a. Questionnaire data

The second part of the questionnaire asked the respondents about how they tackled the stress. The findings are illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the solutions to stress

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Taking time to relax	40	3.00	5.00	3.95	0.552
Enjoying active recreational activities	40	2.00	5.00	3.90	0.744
Finding reasons to laugh	40	2.00	5.00	3.53	0.877
Going shopping	40	1.00	5.00	3.45	1.011
Having positive thoughts	40	2.00	5.00	3.98	0.800
Going to sleep	40	1.00	5.00	3.63	1.102
Using alcohol or drugs	40	1.00	5.00	2.38	1.234
Being alone in a private place/ room	40	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.145
Playing games	40	1.00	5.00	3.35	1.075
Doing exercises	40	1.00	5.00	3.58	0.984

Table 2 shows that most of the students reported that whenever they fell into stress situations, they “have positive thoughts” with $M = 3.97$, $SD = .744$. This mean score was higher than the other nine solutions. Moreover, the two other factors such as “Taking time to relax” ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .552$) and “Enjoying active recreational activities” ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .744$) were also frequent solutions for students to reduce their stress. Nevertheless, using alcohol or drugs was not supported by the respondents with the lowest mean score compared to the other nine items ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.234$) and was also lower than agreement scale. In a sum, it is clear that those students have found positive solutions to overcome stress by themselves.

b. Interview data

The results of the interviews exposed that the respondents mostly shared the same solutions which were explored in the questionnaire. Student 1 and student 3 reported that they usually take some time to relax whenever they are under the pressure due to the assignments or other reasons. This idea is also supported by most of the respondents in the questionnaire. Student 4 conveyed that she found that the campus is a good place for her to take a walk around. She said that staying alone and enjoying the peace sometimes help her get rid of stress. Through the interviews with the five respondents, the researcher could ensure that the data found from the questionnaire were reliable.

4.2 Discussion

Overall, the participants held the low agreement on causes of stress ($M = 47$). This could be either these participants did not experience much stress or they themselves could not define stress. The current study also found out that “fear of failing exams” ($M = 3.98$) was mostly chosen as the cause of stress. Standing behind this was “fear of writing assignments”, which constituted the mean score of 3.83, tight close to level 4.0. This result was different from the results of Michaela, Sarah & Alexandra (2019), who claimed that education pressure which was found to cause stress and it is seen as a negative factor such as learning capacity, sleep quality and quantity, physical health, and mental health. In addition, Bhargava & Trivedi (2018) also found the main cause of stress in young people is relationship stress, financial stress and psychological stress.

Overall, when thinking about solutions to stress, these participants also revealed uncertain mind to find best solutions for stress. They did not know much which method could be applied to reduce their real-life stress. This can be easily seen in their responses to factors causing stress. This continues to prove that they did not experience much stress, so they did not know much how to deal with it.

With regard to the result of solutions to stress, the result revealed that “having positive thinking” was selected as the best solution to stress. And the second solution can be seen is “enjoying active recreational activities”. These both solutions belong to solution groups discussed in the study carried out by George (2017), who brought psychological, mental emotional aspects into discussion of causes of stress. Through the analysis of the results, the researcher believes that causes of stress among students can be dealt with by

various methods. They need to put emphasis on their own well-being. The right balance of sleep, food, exercise, work, and recreational activities were seen to address the problems of stress.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

It can come to conclusion that this present study purposed to investigate 40 English majored student's causes of stress. They had to rate their opinions on 20 questions, 10 items for causes of stress and 10 for solutions to stress. Through this study, the finding indicated that the main cause of stress among students is "fear of falling exam" and fear of writing assignments to be the most influential factors for them. These can be best predicted that students think first and foremost about their study rather than other anything else. However, with regard to solutions to stress, most students have found the solutions to overcome stress, but they seemed to be uncertain about their responses. For example, they opted for solution "having positive thinking" to stress. But then, the second most selected solution was the way they should spend on relaxation to get away from stress while they are in university.

5.2. Recommendations

From what has been found in the present study, the researcher would propose some recommendations. First both teachers and students should not think much about the result of exam, but see the exam result as the one part to show students' progress. That means to fully evaluate a student, a teacher must gather many factors such as on-going progress and final exam result to name their students 'weak' or 'strong'. Next, to overcome stress, the classroom teacher and the policy should attempt to lessen students' worry about the results of study. They must try their best to see their learning as a progress not an end product.

5.3. Limitations

A study conducted in a short period of time cannot avoid any limitations. This study is regarded as an initial step for the researcher to further his study in stress from many more detail factors for each group factor. That means the topic should be given to campus life, but in this circumstance, it should think more about things separately, such as stress in classroom, stress in the accommodation, stress from classmates, stress from teachers, stress from knowledge, stress from family, stress from living expenses and stress from tuition fees, especially in the spread of the Coronavirus 19. Then, the researcher should delve in depth to find possible solution for each group stressor to see if the participants agree on those or not. Then some open-ended questions should be proposed in the survey as more minds produce more ideas.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

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