

A Study to Assess English Language Related Academic Stress among Students Who Have Moved To English Medium from Vernacular Medium

Cynthia Milton, M.A. (Eng.), M. Phil. (Eng.), B.Ed.

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Abstract

The present highly competitive world throws many new academic challenges to the current generation. Crossing these barriers to acquire the expected academic performance is a highly stressful scenario. These academic stressors have a destructive effect on the psychological and physical well being of the students. English, the lingua Franca, defines the success of their learning outcomes. English ability is an important factor that influences the academic performance. In India, with all the teaching – learning and assessment process being preferably done in English, attaining the expected standard to attain a hassle free communication both in the class rooms and in the examinations is essential. Many students who have had studied in regional language and have had little exposure to English learning are likely to suffer from academic stress due to lack of expected English ability when they are changed to English medium of learning. The present study is an assessment done to identify level of English language related academic stress.

The sample consists of students who have moved to English medium from vernacular medium and have verbalized stress on interaction. An assessment of their English Language related academic stress was done using a modified version of the Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS) constructed by Dr. Uday K. Sinha, et al., Department of Psychiatry & Mental Health, Institute of Medicine, Kathmandu, Nepal. The tool is a self report assessment for indicators of stress. On receiving the willingness from the participants, a vernacular translated copy of the tool was administered individually along with a proforma to collect the basic demographic details. The different aspects of language associated academic stress such as

performing examination in English, performing learning tasks in English, teacher – student relationship, peer relationship were identified.

The results of the study show that all participants, 28 had expressed language related academic stress, with most of them, 17 (61%) falling into the category of mild and 6 (24%) facing severe stress and 4(14%) with moderate stress while only 1(3%) had admitted of very severe stress.

Proper identification of English language related academic stress is important to combat further consequences such as anxiety, depression and to lead them to a better coping strategy.

Key words: English language related academic stress, students.

Introduction

Schooling and learning in yesteryears could have been a much more joyful and less stress creating experience. Students' learning was more for the sake of self enrichment and less for the sake of personal achievements. The present highly competitive world throws many new academic challenges to the current generation. Constant exposure to academic commitments, heavier homework load, financial pressures, assessments, competitions and challenges batter the students with new stressors that were unseen before. Also, worrying about entry into a good course and need for sufficient credits to qualify them pressurizes many students. Stressors are defined as a situation that disturbs the day to day functioning which needs adjustment (Auerbach and Grambling, 1998). Similarly, a study done by Krishan Lal on the academic stress among adolescent in relation to intelligence and demographic factors academic stress defines academic stress as “a mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even unawareness to the possibility of such failure.”(2014)

Academic stress can be recognized in the form of anxiety, sleep deprivation impairment of health tension, fear, depression and more, which disturbs their everyday life. These academic stressors have a destructive effect on the mental and physical health of the students. Language

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acquisition could be stressful experience. English, the lingua Franca, defines the success of their learning outcomes. English language ability is an important factor that influences the academic performance. In India, with all the teaching – learning and assessment process being preferably done in English, attaining the expected standard for a hassle free communication both in the class rooms and in the examinations is essential. Many students who have had studied in regional language and have had little exposure to English learning are likely to suffer from academic stress due to lack of expected English ability when they are changed to English medium of learning (Maria Clarisa Lucero-Ulrich, 2014).

In this transitional phase, there are various sources of English language related academic stress. The most common reason could be the change of environment. The new place with more number of speakers of the language English could mount on the stress when they may lack necessary communication skills. Freedom of expression is naturally curbed from within. The adjustment time of these children gets longer. Secondly, they may be led into strained relationship with their classmates and teachers. Friendship and peer support a wonderful strategy to break the burden of academic stress could be absent and act reversely in adding on the burden. The warmth and supportive help to overcome these environmental changes is devoid to them. Aloofness is commonly noted in such students. Adolescence and preadolescent period characterized by basked friendship turns out to be an agonized experience. Hatred in attending schools and bunking classes are commonly noted. (Brown H D, 1994)

Much affected could be their learning process. Studies point out that language difference creates mismatch in learning styles and also learning disability (Elizabeth Scott, M.S, 2014). Grasping a new language is a slow process, acquiring the necessary language proficiency takes a long period but as for these students move on the English medium the entire learning is channelized through English which could cause a language shock (Si Fa, 2010). Mostly they could be a minority group who sparingly or may never admit their need for bilingual teaching or additional support. There are chances of their need being overlooked by teachers when they may mistake them to be slow learners (Sarah Mariah Fisher, 2009).

Examination is a stressful period for all (Prema Prasad, 2013) When students lack proficiency in English, they may even find it more pressurizing to write the exam in English. Even in writing exams of other subjects, not only content specific knowledge is assessed but the skill to project information is judged. Clarity, coherence of idea, substantiation of point is established only when they are able to free use a language. Inability to reproduce in exam would mount stress expressed in the form of sleep deprivation physical sickness and frustration.(Liza Frenett, 2015)

Objectives

- To assess various levels of English language related academic stress.
- To understand the various dimensions of English language related academic stress.

Methodology

A convenient sampling technique was used to select the samples. The sample consists of 28 students from standard 6th to 10th who have moved to English medium from vernacular medium of learning. Since it was perceived to be difficult to locate samples as many matriculation schools may not have students entry from other medium, all samples were taken from the Government Hr. Secondary School, Moovarasampet, Chennai - 91 as the school has a separate English section introduced at 6th std level. The school authority was approached in person by the investigator and consent was received to conduct the study.

On the day of assessment, the investigator went to each of the English medium classes from 6th to 10th and collected the eligible students outside the classroom. The students were seated comfortably; a rapport was built with them and then the purpose of the study was explained.

An assessment of their English language related academic stress was done using a modified version of the Scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS) constructed by Dr. Uday K. Sinha et al., Department of Psychiatry & Mental Health, Institute of Medicine, Kathmandu, Nepal (2001). The tool is a self assessment on their perceived level of academic stress. The tool

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consists of statements on academic stress related to learning in English, writing examination in English, influence of English language in relationship with peers, teacher. The tool had a five point rating scale with a maximum score of 5 for an answer of strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for not sure, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly agree. The entire tool had 16 statements with a total score of 80 denoting severe stress. The tool was translated into Tamil for better understanding. A basic profile comprising their age, gender, class, duration of study in English medium, reason for change of medium was received before the assessment.

Discussion

TABLE:1 - PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES OF THE PARTICIPANTS:

S.N O	VARIABLE	TOTAL NO. (28)	PERCENTAGE
1	AGE (YEARS)		
	11 -13	15	53%
	14 -15	8	29%
	16 -17	5	18%
2	SEX		
	BOYS	12	43%
	GIRLS	16	57%
3	CLASS (STANDARD)		
	6 -8 MIDDLE SCHOOL	12	43%
	9 – 10 HIGH SCHOOL	12	43%
	11 -12 HIGHER SECONDARY	4	14%
4	DURATION OF STUDY IN ENGLISH MEDIUM		

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A Study to Assess English Language Related Academic Stress among Students Who Have Moved To English Medium from Vernacular Medium

	1 -2 (YEARS)	4	14%
	3 – 4 (YEARS)	15	54 %
	5 – ABOVE (YEARS)	9	32%
5	REASON FOR CHANGE OF MEDIUM		
	PARENTS' CHOICE	8	29%
	PERSONAL INTEREST	20	71%

The above table shows the analysis of demographic details. Considering the age of the participants, most of them, 15 (53%) were in the age group of 11 -13 while 8 (29%) were in the age group of 14 – 15 and a minimum of 5 (18%) were in the age group of 16 -17. Majority of the participants were girls, 16 (57%). Analyses on the class standard of the participants shows that an equal number of 12 (43%) were from both middle school and high school levels and a least of 4 (14%) were from higher secondary level.

With regard to the duration of study in English medium, a maximum of 15 (54%) have had 3-4 years of exposure to English medium of learning, 9 (32%) have had an exposure of more than 5 years and 4 (14%) have had 1-2 years of exposure. Most of the participants, 20 (71%) had opted to move to English medium on their personal interest while 8 (29%) had moved on parents' choice.

TABLE. 2 - PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGE RELATED ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG STUDENTS CHANGED TO ENGLISH MEDIUM OF LEARNING:

S. No	LEVEL	TOTAL NO. (28)	PERCENTAGE
1	MILD (16 -32)	17	61 %
2	MODERATE(33 -48)	4	14%
3	SEVERE (49 -64)	6	21%

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4	VERY SEVERE (65 – 80)	1	4%
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Mean Value: 35

The above table shows the analysis on the level of stress, it is inferred that a total of 11 participants had scored higher than the mean score of 34.8. All participants, 28 had expressed language related academic stress, with most of them, 17 (61%) falling into the category of mild and 6 (24%) facing severe stress and 4(14%) with moderate stress while only 1(3%) had admitted of very severe stress.

TABLE: 3 - GENDER WISE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGE RELATED ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG STUDENTS CHANGED TO ENGLISH MEDIUM OF LEARNING:

S. No	LEVEL	BOYS (n13)	PERCENTAGE	GIRLS (n 15)	PERCENTAGE
1	MILD (16 -32)	10	77%	7	46%
2	MODERATE(33 -48)	0	0%	4	27%
3	SEVERE (49 -64)	2	15%	4	27%
4	VERY SEVERE (65 – 80)	1	8%	0	0%

Gender wise distribution shows that the female student participants were slightly higher 15 (54%) than the male students, 13(46%). Of those in the mild category, majority 10 (77%) were boys whereas girls were predominant in moderate and severe levels of stress with an equal number of 4 (27%) in each category. Among boys none had a moderate level of stress, whereas among girls none had a severe level of stress and one of the boys (8%) had a very severe level of stress.

TABLE :4 – PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF LANGUAGE RELATED ACADEMIC STRESS.

S. NO	DIMENSION	MILD		MODERATE		SEVERE		VERY SEVERE	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	PERFORMING EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH	10	36%	2	7%	9	32%	7	25%
2	PERFORMING LEARNING TASKS IN ENGLISH	7	25%	10	36%	10	36%	1	3%
3	TEACHER – STUDENT RELATIONSHIP	9	32%	11	39%	5	18%	3	11%
4	PEER RELATIONSHIP	15	54%	3	11%	9	32%	1	3%

Altogether four dimensions were identified in English language related academic stress such as performing examination in English, performing learning tasks in English, teacher – student relationship, peer relationship. Item 2, 4, 5,6,10,12,15,16 were on learning task difficulties in English language such as lack of understanding, lack of clarity heavy work load, loss of interest, loss of confidence etc. An equal number of 10 (36%) students had expressed moderate and severe stress while one had very severe stress. Statement items 8, 11 were related to performing examination in English surfacing worrying about grades, difficulty in writing. The scores show that 9 (32%) had severe stress and 7 (25%) had very severe stress. Similarly, item 1, 3, 9 and 14 were related to stress caused due to inability to communicate to teachers in English reflecting higher expectation of teachers, lack of attention, penalizing attitude. With regard to it, a maximum of 11 (39%) students had moderate stress while 5 (18%) had severe and 3 (11%) had very severe stress. Likewise, item 7, 13 were related to stress caused due to inability to communicate to class mates in English to take their support. 9(32%) of them had severe stress related to it.

Conclusion

Identification of language related academic stressors will help to imply appropriate strategies to allow students to cope with academic stress. Provision of language bridge programme, remedial learning sessions can be ideal strategies for classroom. Similarly concern words of teachers, moderation on corrections, sufficient motivation, confidence building task, practice of bilingual teaching can help the students psychologically (Sarah Spromberg, 2011). Also knowing the various levels of stress will help the teachers to discretely decide whether the students need additional guidance, or help from counselors

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Cynthia Milton, M.A. (Eng.), M. Phil. (Eng.), B.Ed.
 Senior Lecturer in English
 Department of AHS
 Sri Ramachandra University
 Chennai – 600116
 Tamilnadu
 India
mcm2@rediffmail.com

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