

Comparative Analysis of Academic Stress, Emotional Strength, and Institutional Support Across Academic Disciplines: A Psychodynamic Perspective on Freshmen Adjustment

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Abstract

The authors examine the variations in coping, support and stress in the first-year students ($n = 200$) across psychology, engineering, business, humanities and science courses. Results indicate that the academic stress of students is most influenced on engineering and science students with the humanities students being more emotionally susceptible. Resilience and successful academic performance are more prevalent in business students but psychology students need to employ emotional intuition and help-seeking conduct to cope. Strong positive relationships were found between institutional support systems especially peer mentoring and academic advising and GPA and wellbeing. The findings indicate the importance of the discipline-sensitive support models that involve the integration of emotional resiliency training and academic counselling to enhance adaptation rates in the first year.

Keywords: Academic stress, Emotional strength, institutional support, Freshmen adjustment, Psychodynamic perspective, Student wellbeing.

Introduction

Higher education is also another important developmental activity that may be succeeded by a row of academic, emotional as well as social difficulties. The young students in the university are exposed to new conditions of learning both academic demands and social life that does not only subject them to test of psychological adaptation and coping mechanisms. Psychodynamic approach offers a valuable paradigm of explaining such adjustment processes since it gives prominence to unconscious emotional struggles, ego defence, and resilience process that determine student adaptation [1]. Thus the academic pressure and emotional abilities in the context of both people and the academic programs imply that there exist gaps between the curriculum, work load, competitiveness and school culture. Science and engineering students tend to have a lot of work to do, handle knotty technical issues and they are generally in locations where performance is a priority and this aspect may increase their mental and emotional load. Conversely, students who study psychology and humanities might be required to take emotionally straining courses which make them think about themselves, yet leave them feeling vulnerable and anxious about being judged [2]. Competitive, performance-based academic settings often subject business students to incentives of achievement and adaptability, and often humanities students tend to be more emotionally expressive but perceive less institutional support [3].

These are discipline-specific stressors thus the need to explore academic stress and resilience through a psychodynamic perspective that gives a comprehensive understanding of both environmental forces and the internalized coping styles. In reducing the impact of academic stress and improving psychological well-being, institutional support systems such as counselling service, academic advising, peer mentorship, and wellness activities are necessary. Studies show that the more the adolescents have access to organised support systems, the more resilient they are, the more they are able to manage their emotions and achieve better academic results [4]. However, such systems can be effective depending on the disciplinary environment of the students and the personal coping strategies. It is also important to understand how students with different academic backgrounds take advantage of emotional strengths, as well as institutional support, to develop discipline sensitive therapies that do not only help them to develop mental health but also academic success. This study utilises a comparative psychodynamic framework to examine academic stress, emotional resilience, and institutional support among first-year students across psychology, engineering, business, humanities, and scientific fields.

Results

The study compared the stressors, emotional strengths, and resilience patterns of first-year students from psychology, engineering, business, humanities, and science disciplines.

Table 1. Academic Stressors Across Academic Disciplines (N = 200)

Academic Discipline	High Workload / Assignments (%)	Difficulty Understanding Material (%)	Exam Stress (%)
Psychology	42.5	35.0	45.0
Engineering	55.0	40.0	50.0
Business	35.0	25.0	40.0
Humanities	30.0	28.0	35.0
Science	50.0	45.0	55.0

Table 1 shows that engineering and science students had the most schoolwork and stress from exams, whereas psychology students had moderate stress from schoolwork that was related to concern about tests and adjusting to new courses.

Table 3. Emotional Strengths across Academic Disciplines (N = 200)

Emotional Strength	Psychology (%)	Engineering (%)	Business (%)	Humanities (%)	Science (%)
Resilience to Setbacks	35.0	40.0	45.0	32.5	42.5
Positive Reframing	37.5	30.0	35.0	40.0	33.0
Emotional Regulation	30.0	35.0	32.5	27.5	38.0
Self-Motivation	45.0	50.0	48.0	35.0	52.5

Table 3 shows that students in science and engineering had more self-motivation and emotional control, whereas students in psychology and the humanities had more emotional awareness and positive reframing. This shows that they were more focused on their studies.

Table 4. Academic Performance (GPA Range) Across Disciplines (N = 200)

Academic Discipline	2.0–2.9 GPA (%)	3.0–3.4 GPA (%)	3.5–4.0 GPA (%)
Psychology	30.0	40.0	30.0
Engineering	25.0	45.0	30.0
Business	20.0	35.0	45.0
Humanities	35.0	40.0	25.0
Science	28.0	42.5	29.5

Table 4 shows that business students had the best grades (45% GPA 3.5–4.0), whereas humanities students had lower grades (25%), which is in line with their higher scores for emotional stress and homesickness.

Table 5. Correlation Between Support Systems, Academic Performance, and Well-Being

Support System	Correlation with GPA (r)	Correlation with Well-Being (r)
Academic Advising	+0.50	+0.45
Peer Support Programs	+0.45	+0.55
Counseling Services	+0.35	+0.40
Time Management Workshops	+0.30	+0.35
Mental Health Awareness Programs	+0.40	+0.50

Table 5 demonstrates that all institutional support systems exhibited a positive correlation with both GPA and well-being, notably peer support programs (r = +0.45 GPA; +0.55 well-being) and academic advising (r = +0.50 GPA), thereby affirming that relational and developmental supports improve adjustment outcomes.

Discussion

This study findings show that there are significant discipline-specific differences in academic stress and emotional strength and institutional support among first-year students, which is in line with earlier studies that reveal that academic settings do have effects on adaptation [5]. Students of engineering and science were under the greatest academic pressure due to the pressure of their workload and tests. This agrees with [6] who discovered that technical discipline students were cognitively overloaded and burned out. Psychology students had moderate academic stress that was associated to evaluative anxiety, which is similar to [7] who determined that emotional regulation and self-efficacy were the main stress mediators among students of psychology.

Table 2. Personal Stressors Across Disciplines (N = 200)

Academic Discipline	Homesickness (%)	Financial Worries (%)	Emotional Overwhelm (%)
Psychology	47.5	42.5	35.0
Engineering	40.0	35.0	30.0
Business	30.0	32.0	25.0
Humanities	50.0	38.0	40.0
Science	45.0	40.0	42.5

Table 2 shows that humanities students were the most homesick, while science students were the most emotionally overwhelmed (42.5%). This suggests that stress is distinct to each profession and comes from the demands of academic work and emotional adjustment.

Humanities students were the most homesick and emotional. This is in line with research done by [5] who discovered that students in less organised fields tend to be disadvantaged in terms of emotional sensitivity and being detached to institute. Similarly, students of science also reported increased emotional overwhelm (42.5%), which was also supported by [9] who found that continuous assessment stress leads to increased emotional fatigue among scientific students. Students of engineering and science were more self-motivated and more able to handle their emotions implying that they relied on goal-oriented coping mechanisms. The resilience of business students was also significant and highest academic performance was also achieved in line with the results of [8] that linked emotional intelligence and goal-setting to academic performance. On the other hand, the students of psychology and humanities demonstrated better emotional awareness and positive reframing, which is expected by psychodynamic theories which emphasize introspection as an adaptation mechanism. The support systems in the institutions, especially the peer mentoring and the academic advising, had significant positive relations with GPA and general well-being. This supports the results that counselling and peer engagement programs are very important in reducing stress and enhancing academic performance. By and large, the findings reveal that support systems involving discipline sensitive and integrating academic mentoring to mental and emotional health services are needed to enable first year students to feel better and get used to the surrounding environment.

Conclusion

The study finding demonstrate that academic stress and coping styles differ greatly based on the discipline, workload, emotional regulation and the institution. Students of engineering and science are more structured in their coping and motivation, whereas psychology and Humanities students are more emotionally insightful and reflectively resilient. The achievement-driven adaptation of business students helps them to achieve well academically.

Institutional supports, especially peer mentoring and counseling, are important in improving the well-being and academic achievements of students. The results highlight the necessity of discipline-specific psychodynamically-informed support programs to enhance resilience and adjustment among first-year students.

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