

RESOLUTION OF ACADEMIC STRESS BY MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

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In the modern time, students are living in a world where nothing is guaranteed to them but where everyone expects from him to achieve excellence in every field, the main being the academics. The life of a student can be subjected to different kinds of stressful situations, such as the pressure from academics driven with an obligation to success, uncertain future about his life and career and the resultant difficulties which he faced for integrating himself into the existing system. To manage this stressful situation among the students scholars have identified various techniques. Against this background the present study made an attempt to find out the effect of mindfulness meditation on the academic stress of students. To identify the stress level of the student a Standardized Stress Scale was applied and they were exposed to mindfulness meditation for a period of one month for one hour daily. Again, their level was measured to find the difference of stress at pre and post test. The study reveals that mindfulness meditation is a way to reduce academic stress to a great extent and therefore it should be an integral part of the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is an important stimulus of human growth and creativity. It is also as an inevitable part of human life. The life of a student can be subjected to different kinds of stressful situations, such as the pressure from academics driven with an obligation to success, uncertain future about his life and career and the resultant difficulties which he faced for integrating himself into the existing system. Stressful situations, whether short term or long term, can lead to a series of emotional disturbances such as a feeling of personality disintegration, anxiety attacks, phobia, failure to focus attention or distractions from the required thing, exaggerated emotional responses to a situation. It may cause psychological discomposure such as depression, confusion and never forgetting the consequences that may destroy self confidence of a person and slow down his motivation to live life in a meaningful way.

Today, students are living in a world where nothing is guaranteed to them but where everyone expects from him to achieve excellence in every field, the main being the academics. Gupta and Khan (1987) have defined academic stress as a state of mind with respect to some anticipated frustration that is very much associated with failure in academics. They also reveal that even an awareness of possibility of such a failure can also cause stress. It includes a number of demands like: course requirements; the issue of time management: the burdens of; finance; interaction with the faculty; achievement of personal goals; participation in social activities;

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adjustment to the environment; and lack of support from the society (Von Ah, Ebert, Nganvitroj, Park, & Hang, 2004; Kariv and Heiman, 2005; Misra, 2000). The four domains of academic stress identified by Bisht (1987) are academic frustration, academic pressure, academic conflict and academic anxiety.

Mindfulness meditation is a universal scientific method towards purifying the mind. It is a rational method which is used for purifying the mind or factors of the mind that creates distress and pain. It is the essence of Vipassana Meditation propounded by Gautam Buddha 2600 years ago. Buddhism starts with the concept that the mind is the primary source of joy and misery of an individual, and it is central to the understanding of the natural world as a whole. Thus, the mind as well as the consciousness is the primary subject of introspective investigation (Wallace, 1999). Mindfulness meditation is a technique which aims at giving attention to the reality of the present. Therefore, it is antithetical to the dazed state of human mind which is characterized by various impediments. There lies a mental mechanism which is deeply buried in the mind and accepts what is perceived as beautiful and pleasant by the mind. At the same time, it experiences and rejects such things which are conceived as painful and ugly.

Contemplatives of Buddhism have envisaged very sophisticated theories about the origin and nature of consciousness and so also its active role in nature. However, their enquiries do not produce anything which is akin to any empirical study of the theory of human brain. They however, developed some rigorous techniques for the purpose of examining and probing the mind. They started this endeavour with an attempt to focus the attention so that it could be a more reliable and precise to observe. The most important type of attention- training devised by the Buddhists is known as Samatha (Wallace, 1999). According to him Samatha is a serene state of attention in which there is the calming down of the hindrances of laxity and excitation. It includes the practices of breathing meditation and mindful yoga.

Mindfulness meditation programme primarily includes an introduction to a breathing meditation. Its main objective is to find out and reduce the suffering of the practitioners' physical as well as emotional pain, developing a detached observation in him and at the same time developing an awareness of the contents which exist in his consciousness. It also has the ways and means in which we respond to life situations (Goldin, 2001). It requires the practitioner to become aware of all of his senses. He is also required to acknowledge any negative feelings, pain, or blockages so that equanimity of mind can be achieved. It is defined by Young (1994), as a state of not interfering with the flow of the senses at any level, including the processing level of the preconscious.

Mindfulness meditation interventions are becoming increasingly popular within adult populations. Researchers suggest that adults suffering from severe and chronic conditions can bring lasting improvements in their self awareness and emotional stability by practicing mindfulness meditation (Thompson, 2008). Various

researches are done earlier to find out the effect of yoga and meditation in managing stress. Pajwani and Gupta, et. al (1995) have studied the effect of Sahaja yoga in the management of stress. In a similar way, Brown (2005) has investigated the effect of Sudarsana Kriya in the treatment of stress. Rajhans (1999) Richard (2005), Garanth (2006), have also studied on Yoga as a technique for stress management. Meditation as a relaxation technique was studied by Benson (2009).

Mindfulness Meditation also helps in lessening stress and anxiety and improving academic performance of adolescents (Beauchemin, 2008; Benson, 2000). This paper aims at providing an overview of academic stress of class XI students and the impact of mindfulness meditation program on it.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the extent of academic stress of higher secondary school students.
2. To find out the effect of Mindfulness meditation on the stress level of students.

HYPOTHESIS

1. Higher secondary level students experience academic stress.
2. No significant difference exists in the mean score of academic stress of students i.e. experimental and control group at pre test level.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of academic stress of experiential and control group at post test level.
4. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of students' (experimental group) academic stress due to the intervention of mindfulness meditation program.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

It was an experimental study which is based on a pre-test, post-test study design. Mindfulness meditation was the independent variable & academic stress was the dependent variable. Mindfulness meditation program was given to a particular group i.e. experimental group for a period of one month for one hour in the morning regularly. No intervention was given to the control group.

SAMPLE

A sample of 120 students from a CBSE school of Aligarh district in Uttar Pradesh, India was taken as sample of the study. The sample was further categorized into control group and experimental group with 60 students each.

TOOLS

Bisht Battery of Stress by Abha Rani Bisht is used to measure the academic stress of students. This is a standardized stress test consisting of 80 questions and

comprising 4 different dimensions of stress constituted the tools of the study. The dimensions are as follows:

1. Frustration
2. Pressure
3. Conflict
4. Anxiety

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data collected were analyzed using statistical techniques which include percentage analysis and t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following result is found from the analysis of data:

Academic Stress of Higher Secondary Students

The data obtained from the test were categorized into three levels. It indicates that 22.58% of students studying at higher secondary level experienced low level of academic stress where as 29.35 suffer from moderate and 48.7% students suffer from high level of academic stress. Hence the hypothesis i.e. higher secondary level students experience academic stress is accepted.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC STRESS OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP AT PRE TEST

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Experimental	60	124.9	12.35	0.211	NS
Control	60	124.23	12.15		

The data obtained from the above table indicates that there is no significant difference in between the experimental and control group with regard to the existence of academic stress because the calculated *t* is smaller than table value at 0.05 level. Thus the hypothesis H1 viz., "There is no significant difference in the mean scores of academic stress of students i.e. experimental and control group" was accepted because at the pre-test level, no meditation intervention was employed on the students.

TABLE 2: ACADEMIC STRESS OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP AT POST TEST

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Experimental	60	115.8	11.22	2.792	S
Control	60	124.23	12.15		

From the mean value of the above table, it is evident that the experimental group has successfully controlled their academic stress to a considerable extent. The obtained t value is significant at 0.05 levels. Thus, the null hypothesis “there is no significant difference between the academic stress of students i.e. experimental and control group at the post test level” has been rejected. Intervention of Mindfulness meditation may help in reducing the academic stress and fear of the experimental group as compared to the control group.

TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC STRESS OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AT PRE AND POST TEST

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Pre test	60	124.9	12.35	2.154	S
Post test	60	115.8	11.25		

The above table shows that the experimental group at the pre-test and post-test level differ significantly with respect to academic stress scores at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis framed in this relation that “there is no significant difference in the academic stress of the experimental group at pre-test and post-test level”, has been rejected. Mindfulness meditation has the potential to transform the ways through which we respond to events of life. It enhances self-regulatory capacity leading to the reduction of anxiety and stress.

The results of the present study corresponds to the findings of Gopal (2011), Flinton (1995), Kornfield (1983), Roth (1997), Kalpan (1993) which states that yoga and mindfulness meditation practice helps in reducing academic stress and life stress as well.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the collected data it can be concluded that higher secondary level students suffer from academic stress. Though their level of stress differs, it is evident from the study that most of the students suffer from high level of stress. This may be attributed to a number of reasons like the ineffective teaching-learning system, faulty examination pattern, lack of relevancy of classroom teaching to real life situations, lack of life skills education and so on.

The study also reveals that the level of academic stress of the control group and experimental group at pre-test is not significant. However, the finding of the study indicates a significant difference between the experimental and control group in their academic stress at post-test level. Academic stress of the experimental group reduced to a great extent after the intervention of Mindfulness Meditation.

Thus, the study confirms that Mindfulness Meditation Intervention Program has positive influence on the academic stress of adolescents. The practice of mindfulness meditation can enhance the positive state of mind to contribute towards

a scene of serenity, tranquility and happiness. Since the high school students are experiencing high academic stress, yoga and meditation program should form an integral part of the school curriculum.

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