

Academic Stress of Public Secondary Learners in the Philippines

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Abstract: *The study determined the levels of academic stress of secondary learners at Don Casimero Andrada National High School (DCANHS) in Carles, Iloilo, Philippines. Using a descriptive quantitative research design, 415 students were surveyed through validated Likert-scale instruments. The participants were classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. Stratified random sampling ensured a representative sample. Key findings revealed that learners generally experienced moderate academic stress, with the highest stress reported in Grade 11 students. The areas with the highest levels of stress were workload and grade-related concerns. Learners at transition grade levels and those in the upper years of high school exhibited higher levels of stress due to the increased academic responsibilities and future-oriented concerns. The study highlights the need for schools to implement structured mental health programs, peer support systems, and academic counselling to foster a healthier learning environment. The present study is based on the hypothesis*

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of academic stress among public secondary learners when classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status

Keywords: Academic Stress, Public Secondary Learners, Academic Performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic stress can cause emotional exhaustion, reduce academic performance, and lead to more serious conditions such as anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation. It is not just a temporary emotional burden; it has real and measurable effects. Students are at a greater risk of pressure from academic workload, performance expectations, and limited support systems (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). Although the enactment of Republic Act No. 11036, also known as the Philippine Mental Health Act, and the more recent RA 12080 or the Basic Education Mental Health Act (2024) has been established for mental health programs in education, there are still many challenges in their implementation (Department of Health [DOH], 2022).

At the local level, Don Casimero Andrada National High School (DCANHS) in Carles, Iloilo, serves as a beacon of education in the Municipality. Considering its reputation for fostering personal and academic achievement among Carleseños, the school is not immune to the greater challenges affecting public secondary learners' academic stress.

This study determined the academic stress of public secondary learners at DCANHS. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on adolescent academic stress and proposes actionable strategies to improve academic stress management. The theoretical framework is grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which both emphasize the role of environment and psychological needs in the development and well-being of learners. This theory supports the study by explaining how the academic stress of learners is affected when those basic psychological needs, such as safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, are unmet (Newport Academy, 2023). These unmet needs can hinder academic performance and overall growth of the learners. For instance, peer and school expectations represent the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's theory, while stress due to workload and grades can be connected to the self-esteem and self-actualization of Maslow's hierarchy. According to this research, the academic stress of the learners depends on their school environment in fulfillment of their basic needs, such as safety and emotional support.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Academic Stress [1]

Academic stress is a growing concern among students worldwide. It refers to the psychological and physiological reactions students experience due to academic demands, pressure to excel, and the challenges associated with school life (Pascoe et al., 2020). Recent research highlights that academic stress is influenced by external pressures, including parental expectations, peer competition, and the increasing difficulty of coursework (Schwartz et al., 2021). According to Sun et al. (2022), prolonged exposure to academic stress leads to cognitive fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and negative academic outcomes.

Factors Influencing Academic Stress and Mental Health [2]

Academic stress and mental health are closely interlinked, with various factors influencing students' well-being. According to the study by Reddy, Menon, and Thattil (2018), the main factors contributing to academic stress in university students are burdensome academic workloads, competition, time constraints, and elevated expectations. These stressors adversely affect students' mental health, frequently resulting in anxiety, depression, and burnout. Individual aspects like low self-esteem, inadequate time management, and the absence of coping strategies exacerbate psychological distress. It was also revealed in the study that students who are about to graduate and female students tend to have higher stress levels. The authors suggest that universities should offer mental health support services to assist students in managing stress effectively and sustaining their overall well-being. These pressures can lead to adverse mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and burnout (Newport Institute Staff, 2023).

Impact of Academic Stress on Mental Health and Well-Being [3]

Studies from the past five years demonstrate a strong correlation between academic stress and students' overall well-being. High levels of stress and anxiety negatively impact cognitive function, motivation, and academic performance (Sahu et al., 2024). Poor mental health conditions, such as burnout, depression, and anxiety, lead to lower life satisfaction, decreased school engagement, and higher dropout rates (Aronson et al., 2021). Higher depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) levels correlate with decreased academic involvement and increased dropout intentions, DAS did not have a direct effect on Grade Point Average (GPA). DAS had an indirect effect on GPA and dropout intentions through its impact on academic engagement. This suggests that tackling DAS could boost engagement and lead to better academic outcomes (Sinval et al., 2024).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research method to determine the academic stress of public secondary learners. Descriptive research is an approach aimed at systematically observing, describing, and documenting the population, situation, or phenomenon's characteristics as they naturally occur without changing any variables (Singh, 2024). It examined the academic stressors experienced by the learners.

The respondents were drawn from the total population of 1,416 learners officially enrolled at Don Casimero Andrada National High School (DCANHS) in Carles, Iloilo, Philippines, for the Academic Year 2024–2025. A sample of 415 was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across variables such as age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. Slovin's formula was used with a 5% margin of error. Data were collected using validated, adapted, and standardized questionnaires. Part I covered the demographic data, and Part II assessed academic stress using the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA).

The instruments' validity was ensured through expert review and construct validation. A pilot test was conducted, and reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha. Data gathering procedures included securing permissions, informed consent, and confidential survey administration. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) among demographic variables.



IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Level of Academic Stress among Public Secondary Learners in terms of Pressure from Study.

PRESSURE FROM STUDY		SD	Mean	Description
AGE	Entire Group	0.71	3.26	Moderate
	12 to 14 years old	0.68	3.32	Moderate
	15 to 16 years old	0.74	3.23	Moderate
	17 years old and above	0.70	3.25	Moderate
SEX	Male	0.71	3.34	Moderate
	Female	0.70	3.21	Moderate
GRADE LEVEL	Grade 7	0.76	3.32	Moderate
	Grade 8	0.62	3.42	Moderate
	Grade 9	0.65	3.21	Moderate
	Grade 10	0.74	3.12	Moderate
	Grade 11	0.69	3.51	Moderate
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Grade 12	0.69	3.14	Moderate
	Poor	0.71	3.20	Moderate
	Low	0.72	3.30	Moderate
	Low Middle	0.67	3.29	Moderate
	Middle-Middle and above	0.76	3.34	Moderate

Note: Very Low (1.00-1.50), Low (1.51-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), High (3.51-4.50), Very High (4.51-5.00)

The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of academic stress among public secondary learners in terms of pressure from study when taken as an entire group and classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. This result implied that learners in DCANHS, viewed academic stress in terms of pressure from studying were moderate, as they experienced a noticeable but manageable amount of stress related to their academic responsibilities. This conforms to the study of Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker (2020), which indicated that learners often encounter stress due to performance expectations and workload, but their mental and emotional development is significantly affected by how they perceive and manage this stress.

Table 2: Level of Academic Stress among Public Secondary Learners in terms of Workload.

WORK LOAD		SD	Mean	Description
AGE	Entire Group	0.74	3.54	High
	12 to 14 years old	0.72	3.51	High
	15 to 16 years old	0.77	3.64	High
	17 years old and above	0.73	3.47	Moderate
SEX	Male	0.74	3.55	High
	Female	0.74	3.53	High
GRADE LEVEL	Grade 7	0.75	3.48	Moderate
	Grade 8	0.69	3.75	High
	Grade 9	0.79	3.38	Moderate
	Grade 10	0.74	3.64	High
	Grade 11	0.76	3.60	High
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Grade 12	0.70	3.41	Moderate
	Poor	0.75	3.50	Moderate



ECONOMIC STATUS	Low	0.71	3.59	High
	Low Middle	0.81	3.44	Moderate
	Middle-Middle and above	0.69	3.69	High

Note: Very Low (1.00-1.50), Low (1.51-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), High (3.51-4.50), Very High (4.51-5.00)

The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of academic stress among public secondary learners in terms of workload when taken as an entire group and classified according to age, sex, grade level and socio-economic status. This result implied that learners in DCANHS, viewed academic stress in terms of workload were moderate but mostly high as they experienced a significant amount of pressure because of volume and difficulty of their academic tasks. This conforms to the study of Putwain and Daly (2020) which indicated that high academic workload among secondary students is a major source of stress usually resulting in negative emotions and reduced academic skills.

Table 3: Level of Academic Stress among Public Secondary Learners in terms of Worry About Grades.

WORRY ABOUT GRADES		SD	Mean	Description
AGE	Entire Group	0.73	3.70	High
	12 to 14 years old	0.79	3.76	High
	15 to 16 years old	0.71	3.76	High
	17 years old and above	0.71	3.61	High
SEX	Male	0.73	3.69	High
	Female	0.74	3.71	High
GRADE LEVEL	Grade 7	0.77	3.72	High
	Grade 8	0.76	3.84	High
	Grade 9	0.74	3.58	High
	Grade 10	0.69	3.76	High
	Grade 11	0.74	3.75	High
	Grade 12	0.71	3.57	High
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Poor	0.77	3.62	High
	Low	0.62	3.79	High
	Low Middle	0.70	3.61	High
	Middle-Middle and above	0.77	3.89	High

Note: Very Low (1.00-1.50), Low (1.51-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), High (3.51-4.50), Very High (4.51-5.00)

The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of academic stress among public secondary learners in terms of worry about grades when taken as an entire group and classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. This result implied that learners in DCANHS viewed academic stress in terms of worry about grades were high as they are often nervous or worried about their grades and test results. This conforms to the study of Frazier et al. (2019), which indicated that learners who worry too much about grades often experience emotional distress, which negatively on their mental health and school involvement.



Table 4: Level of Academic Stress among Public Secondary Learners in terms of Self-Expectation.

SELF-EXPECTATION		SD	Mean	Description
AGE	Entire Group	0.48	2.85	Moderate
	12 to 14 years old	0.51	2.86	Moderate
	15 to 16 years old	0.48	2.82	Moderate
	17 years old and above	0.47	2.87	Moderate
SEX	Male	0.48	2.86	Moderate
	Female	0.48	2.85	Moderate
GRADE LEVEL	Grade 7	0.50	2.92	Moderate
	Grade 8	0.43	2.69	Moderate
	Grade 9	0.49	2.87	Moderate
	Grade 10	0.48	2.86	Moderate
SOCIO- ECONOMIC STATUS	Grade 11	0.51	2.90	Moderate
	Grade 12	0.47	2.86	Moderate
	Poor	0.44	2.90	Moderate
	Low	0.50	2.84	Moderate
	Low Middle	0.52	2.81	Moderate
	Middle-Middle and above	0.52	2.79	Moderate

Note: Very Low (1.00-1.50), Low (1.51-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), High (3.51-4.50), Very High (4.51-5.00)

The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of academic stress among public secondary learners in terms of self-expectation when taken as an entire group and classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. This result implied that learners in DCANHS viewed academic stress in terms of self-expectation were moderate, as they place a reasonable amount of pressure on themselves to succeed, but not to the extent that it negatively impacts their mental health or their everyday performance.

This conforms to the study of Shengyao et al. (2024), which indicated that learners tend to be more adaptable and resilient as they observe their own goals as a source of motivation instead of a source of intense pressure.

Table 5: Level of Academic Stress among Public Secondary Learners in terms of Despondency.

DESPONDENCY		SD	Mean	Description
AGE	Entire Group	0.74	3.33	Moderate
	12 to 14 years old	0.71	3.30	Moderate
	15 to 16 years old	0.75	3.42	Moderate
	17 years old and above	0.75	3.26	Moderate
SEX	Male	0.70	3.34	Moderate
	Female	0.77	3.32	Moderate
GRADE LEVEL	Grade 7	0.76	3.27	Moderate
	Grade 8	0.70	3.52	Moderate
	Grade 9	0.74	3.26	Moderate
	Grade 10	0.73	3.28	Moderate
SOCIO- ECONOMIC STATUS	Grade 11	0.73	3.53	High
	Grade 12	0.75	3.20	Moderate
	Poor	0.76	3.28	Moderate



ECONOMIC STATUS	Low	0.73	3.43	Moderate
	Low Middle	0.74	3.28	Moderate
	Middle-Middle and above	0.70	3.37	Moderate

Note: Very Low (1.00-1.50), Low (1.51-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), High (3.51-4.50), Very High (4.51-5.00)

The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of academic stress among public secondary learners in terms of despondency when taken as an entire group and classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. This result implied that learners in DCANHS, viewed academic stress in terms of despondency were moderate as they feel sometimes discouraged, unmotivated, or emotionally drained. This conforms to the study of Pascoe et al. (2020) which indicated that learners often recover with support and coping strategies when they encounter academic pressure and feel uncertain of their abilities or results.

Table 6: Total Level of Academic Stress among Public Secondary Learners.

	TOTAL LEVEL	SD	Mean	Description
AGE	Entire Group	0.39	3.34	Moderate
	12 to 14 years old	0.40	3.35	Moderate
	15 to 16 years old	0.40	3.38	Moderate
	17 years old and above	0.37	3.29	Moderate
SEX	Male	0.39	3.36	Moderate
	Female	0.39	3.33	Moderate
GRADE LEVEL	Grade 7	0.46	3.34	Moderate
	Grade 8	0.35	3.45	Moderate
	Grade 9	0.40	3.26	Moderate
	Grade 10	0.37	3.33	Moderate
	Grade 11	0.35	3.48	Moderate
	Grade 12	0.35	3.24	Moderate
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	Poor	0.37	3.31	Moderate
	Low	0.38	3.39	Moderate
	Low Middle	0.42	3.29	Moderate
	Middle-Middle and above	0.40	3.42	Moderate

Note: Very Low (1.00-1.50), Low (1.51-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), High (3.51-4.50), Very High (4.51-5.00)

The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the total level of academic stress among public secondary learners when taken as an entire group and classified according to age, sex, grade level, and socio-economic status. This result implied that learners in DCANHS, viewed academic stress were moderate, as they feel pressured by school tasks, deadlines, and expectations, but not to the extent that it negatively impacts their mental health, school performance, or daily life. This conforms to the study of Gao, (2023), which indicated that moderate academic stress can serve as a motivator but should be closely monitored, particularly in adolescents, as it can continually result in burnout or mental health issues.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that the public secondary learners at Don Casimero Andrada National High School (DCANHS) experienced moderate levels of academic stress. This is caused by a number of things, including the workload at school, the pressure to perform well, the dread of receiving bad grades, and self-



imposed standards. Even though the stress level is not serious, it is ongoing and could get worse if appropriate action is not taken. While academic stress was moderate overall, learners in transitional academic phases experienced higher stress levels.

In order to create an atmosphere where students feel emotionally supported and mentally resilient, a complete support structure comprising educators, parents, counsellors, and administrators is essential. Without this kind of support, even mild stress levels can hurt learners' academic performance.

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