Analysis of factors of students' stress of the English Language Department

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Abstract

The study is aimed at further describing psychological factors inducing academic stresses of the students of the English Education Department, Yogyakarta State University (EED-YSU). The study is a continuation of a previous study that identifies sources of academic stress of students of EED-YSU. Data collection is conducted by an on-line survey technique. Confirmatory factor analysis is used for the data analyses. The results show six factors that become sources of students' academic stresses, namely academic demands, parent-child relationship, traumatic experiences during childhood, peer pressures, financial matters, and self-expectancy. It is expected that other studies involving other factors of students' academic stress be conducted to give further information on the topic.

Keywords: *psychological factors, academic stress, student's productivity*

Introduction

Evidence suggests that academic stress is among the most important factors that affect university students' success. Demanding academic assignments, practicums, or theories alike, are often alleged as the causes for the elevation of students' stresses. A large number of classes that the students take in one semester also often causes students to not be able to adequately focus in classes so that they are not able to achieve the expected instructional objectives. The level of students' academic is doubly worsened by the present-day advancement of technology (Gabre & Kumar, 2012). The high level of students' academic stresses unconsciously affects the students' physical and mental health as often seen from their complaints of common tiredness. In fact, the phenomenon is like the tip of the ice burgh: students bear a huge haunting burden, unconsciously.

A study by the National College Health Assessment in 2014 shows that 55.5 percent of the students participating in the survey experience depression above the average level of the other students; in the category of high concern (American College Health Association - National College Health Assessment, 2016). Students have difficulty focusing in class and doing instructional tasks since they are too worried about small things that happen in their daily life, causing an increase in their stress level in their academic life. A similar study conducted in 2015 draws a similar conclusion that 20 percent of students seek psychological consultation and treatment for problems related to their academic stresses (Henriques, 2014).

Academic stress is experienced alike in students of the English majors. Differences in the cultures of the native and target languages, learning difficulties, and anxiety of losing self-identities are among the heavy burdens for the students of English as a foreign language (Hashemi, 2011; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). These problems have been identified as triggers of English students' feeling stresses.

The level of academic stress of university students has long been studied (Yeh & Inose, 2003). The study emphasizes that most international students experienced anxieties, and English fluency is among the predictors of university students' academic stress. It is these anxieties that contribute to the factors that elevate academic stresses (Leyva, 2003; Mezzacappa & Katkin, 2002). These anxieties have caused students' self-confidence to decrease to a low level. Consequently, their performance is not maximal.

On one other side, worries of not being able to teach English in front of the class also contribute to the stress level of these English teacher candidates (McNeil, 2016), in as much as they are demanded to master the instructional materials and manage the classroom. Such anxieties can elevate to a level so high that they are often exaggerated. This anxiety does not give a good condition to students since such over-felt worries raise students' academic stress that, subsequently, give negative influences on their physical and mental health. Possible worse impacts are the high threats of a high drop-out and, in few cases, students' thoughts and intentions to end their life (Ang & Huan, 2006; Robotham & Julian, 2006).

Although extensive research has been carried out on students' academic stress, few writers have been able to draw on any systematic research into the factors affecting the academic stress of students majoring in English Education Department. Thus, this study is aimed at identifying factors causing academic stresses to elevate in students of the English Department of YSU. Levels of academic stresses will also be stress long relevant variables such as gender, Grade Point Average (GPA), years of entrance, parents' education backgrounds, degrees students tend to obtain, and socio-economic status.

Definition of Stress

From the field of educational psychology, a number of definitions of stress are found. As a first definition, Butt, Weinberg, and Horn (2003) define stress as an imbalance or gap between one's demands, physically and psychologically, for achievement and one's abilities to achieve it. The demands can either be internal or external. Failure in the fulfillment of the demands will cause physical or psychological impacts. In the same line of thoughts, Sarafino (2008) states that stress is in an individual's condition wherein there is a perceived gap between demands that come from the inside of the individual, psychologically, biologically, or socially, as a result of his interaction with the environment. Stress is a condition that influences one's physical or psychological states because of pressure from either the inside or outside of the individual.

Another definition is given by Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski, and Shaffer (2009) who state that stress is an individual's feeling of pressure in responding to demands that come from the inside of the individual or from the environment. This state can be identified from the levels of blood pressures, heart pulses, or neurotransmitter hormones as an individual's physiological response against stress.

Emphasizing on the individual's emotions, Folkman (2013) defines stress as an individual's condition in which the individual experiences an over-sized emotional demand so that he/she finds difficulties in effectively functioning all his competences. This condition may give rise to psychological symptoms like chronic tiredness, depression, anxieties, and anger. Stress can also be defined as an adaptive response to differences in an individual's characteristics from external pressures and demands, leading to his physical and psychological conditions (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1998).

From the foregoing discussion, it can be summarized that stress can be defined as an individual's mental or psychological disturbances as a result of pressures. These pressures come from the individual's failures in satisfying his demands or desires, internal or external.

Academic Stress

Academic stress can be defined as a student's perception of his over-loaded knowledge, concepts, and skills that he must master against the lack of time that he has to achieve them (Misra & Castillo, 2004). A student's academic stress is mostly related to academic tensions the student faces. This condition causes the emergence of distortion in the student's thoughts that influences his physical, emotional, and behavioral pattern of actions. This distortion can come from the student's own demands or those of the environment. Instances of these demands are daily or weekly assignments, final examinations, and competitions among students in obtaining achievements. A student's academic stress can trigger distress that is manifested in various negative psychological behaviors.

The discrepancies between what needs to be achieved in knowledge, concepts, and skills and the abilities to achieve them (Misra & McKean, 2000) cause the student to feel inadequate or uncomfortable in his interactive activities. Another definition is related to the student's misperception on his academic loads he needs to finish resulting in physical and psychological problems.

In relation to the types of academic stress, Suldo et al. (2009) mention several sources. These sources are, among others, academic requirements, parent-child relations, childhood traumatic experiences, peer pressures, extra-curricular activities, and struggles to achieve high academic standards. Each of them is elaborated as follows.

Academic Requirements

This source of academic stress can be of many forms. These can be (1) fulfillment of academic assignments such as daily quizzes, weekly tasks, and mid- and semester tests; (2) individual time management of individual academic assignments; and (3) over-expectation by self, peer, and lecturers for higher academic achievement.

Relation between Parents and Students

Causes of academic stress are often related to the relationship between parents and students concerning academic matters. This often arises from a variety of conflicts between parents and students, such as time management related to the student's responsibilities in the household.

Unpleasant Early Adulthood Experience

The next source of students' academic stress is related to changes in the lifestyle of the students during young adulthood. Such causes can be in the form of the need for safety, the transition from school life to university life, loss of a family member, awareness of more global environmental problems such as drug abuse, and the community environment which itself experience stress.

Peer Relationship

Often, the source of academic stress comes from matters related to peer relationships. This can be in the form of problems with close friends or partners, uncomfortable atmosphere in peer relation, and pressures or threats from friends.

Domestic or Family Problems

Households are abounding that they have an impact that leads to academic stress. Examples of these are conflicts between parents, parents' divorces, and others. Such problems cause students to feel unable to concentrate well on academic matters.

Extra-curricular Activities

Students' activities outside the classroom can also turn out to cause students' academic stress. These may be in the forms of students' anxieties in their lack of sport or art skills, poor time management concerning curricular and extracurricular commitments, and personal needs such as eating and sleeping patterns.

Academic Endeavours

One source of academic stress is related to students' strains in fulfilling their academic commitments (Suldo et al., 2009). These include low students' proficiency and skills, missing classes and other instructional activities, and students' health problems. Further, McPherson (2009) relates this type of academic stress into the following.

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Siwi Karmadi Kurniasih, Nur Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro, & Sudiyono

Underachievers and Overachievers

Underachievers are those students who are not yet able to achieve the expected minimal competencies in order to pass classes. In fact, these students are expected to work hard, by their own interest and motivation, and supported by families and friends. It is this demand that gives these underachievers academic stress. On the other hand, the overachievers are those students who make it to the above level of students' average. Often, they need to sacrifice their sleep and fun times to do that. For some of them, the lack of time for having recreative activities can cause academic stress.

Appreciation or Reward

Conferring awards to some students or groups of students may oftentimes induce academic stress, both for the achieving and non-achieving students. Formerly, the award-winning has drained from them too much effort and energy that they do not have time to do other things such as recreation and extracurricular activities. For the latter, over-expectation to gain such achievement is not backed up by their abilities and efforts to do so.

Loss of Rest and Recreation

Loss of time for rest and recreation consequently causes academic stress. Rest and recreation are needed to loosen their thoughts and muscles and recharge their energy for optimum concentration and work.

Expectancy

This is closely related to the reward matter. High demands from self or family to achieve well can become a quick cause of academic stress. For a high proportion of students, a high GPA is a fixed price, mandatory over everything else. Many students stake all their time and energy for high GPAs resulting in burn-outs that trigger academic stress.

Class Assignment or Project

This derives from two possibilities: unclear criteria and over-sized amounts for the assignment or project, and either one can cause academic stress. This condition is often contra-productive as students will feel burdened and frightened when they are not yet able to complete their assignments.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the framework of the study can be proposed. It is presented in Figure 1.
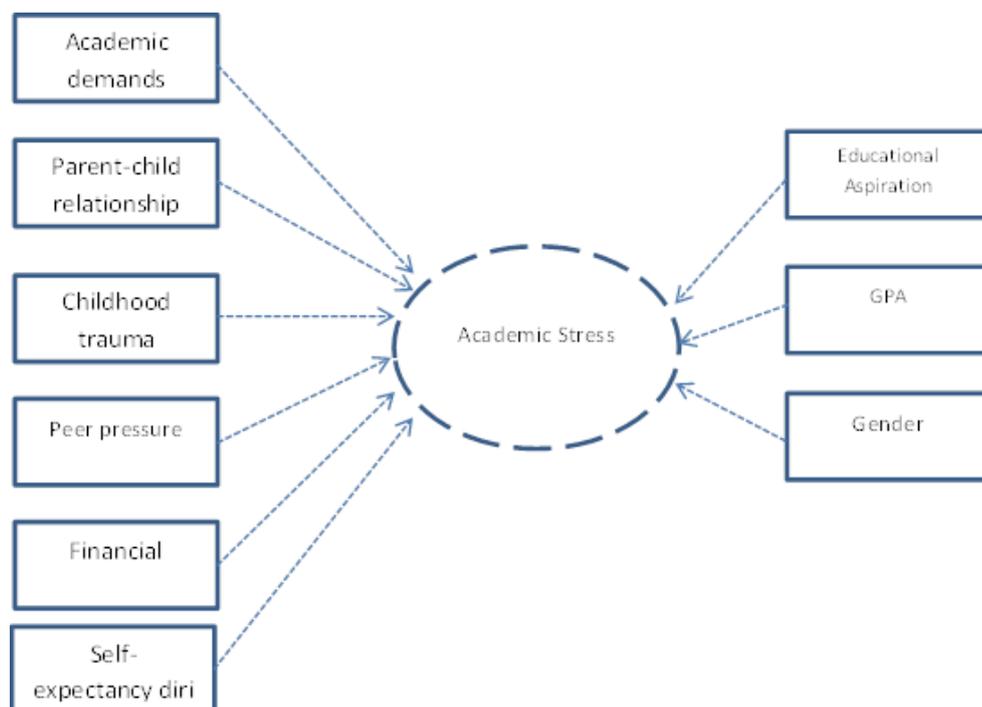
Figure 1. Research Framework

Method

The study was a correlational survey aimed at revealing the factors that lead to academic stress within students of the English Education Department at Yogyakarta State University (EED YSU). The research design was of the quantitative method based on survey data. The research subjects were students of EED YSU of the fourth semester and above. The choice of these students was based on the assumption that the students had taken all the knowledge and skill classes and some of the content classes. The total number of research participants amounted to 135 students coming from semester 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. They completed the survey instrument online during April and May 2019 using computer sets, cellphones, or other gadgets.

Data collection used the close-type survey technique adapted from Calaguas (2012). The instrument was designed to obtain in-depth information on students' perceptions of the factors causing academic stress during their study in EED YSU. Raw data were subjected to an SPSS software program for statistical analyses. Data were subsequently analyzed using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) technique. An ANOVA procedure was used to compare differences in academic stresses in view of the demographic variables of Educational Aspiration, GPA, and Gender. The study was conducted in the vicinity of EED YSU.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic information supplied by the research participants consists of Gender, Educational Aspiration, and GPA. Frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents were students of the English Language Education Study Program. The data shows that most of the students of the English Language Education Study Program were female (77.8%). Almost half of the respondents (48.1%) show an educational aspiration of the S2 level (Master or Graduate). Over half of the participants (53.3%) have a current GPA of higher than 3.51.

Results of the CFA

The CFA on MPlus 7.2 software program is to determine the fit of the four criteria of Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and the *chi-square* (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Tabachnick, Fidell, & Osterlind, 2007). A CFI < 0.90 indicates that there is not enough fit, while a CFI ≥ 0.90 indicates there is enough or almost perfect fit for the model (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Wang & Wang, 2012). The Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) is to know whether the model is less or more than estimated. The same value is used, i.e., a CFI ≥ 0.90 indicates that the model has enough or almost perfect fit (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Wang & Wang, 2012). Meanwhile, the RMSEA and SRMR is also used to identify whether the model is fit as viewed from the initial EFA model. An RMSEA and SRMR index of <.05 is regarded as evidence that the model is enough or almost perfect (Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Wang & Wang, 2012).

Table 1. Research Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	105	77.8
	Male	30	22.2
Educational Aspiration	Undergraduate	19	14.1
	Graduate	65	48.1
	Post graduate	51	37.8
GPA	2.51-3.00	2	1.5
	3.01-3.50	60	44.4
	3.51-4.00	72	53.3

Siwi Karmadi Kurniasih, Nur Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro, & Sudiyono

Table 2. Results of the CFA on Mplus 7.2

Item	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
V 32	0.469					
V 33	0.688					
V 34	0.55					
V 35	0.524					
V 36		0.784				
V 37		0.883				
V 39		0.732				
V 40			0.804			
V 41			0.614			
V 42			0.751			
V 43			0.664			
V 45				0.8		
V 47				0.873		
V 48				0.753		
V 49					0.468	
V 51					0.63	
V 52					0.829	
V 53						0.767
V 54						0.929
V 55						0.753
Alpha	0.751	0.732	0.744	0.850	0.787	0.720

Notes: Factor 1: academic demands; Factor 2: parent-child relationship; Factor 3: childhood trauma; Factor 4: peer pressure; Factor 5: financial; and Factor 6: self-expectancy
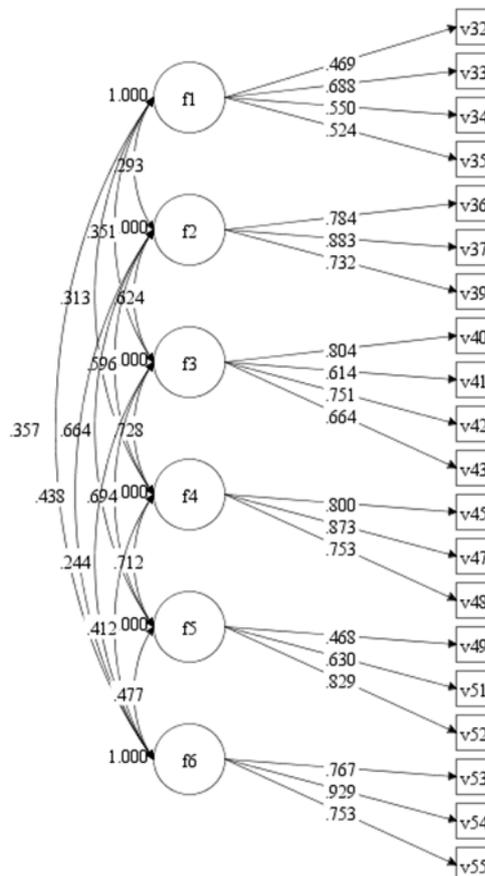
Figure 2. Results of CFA

The results of the CFA by the Mplus 7.2 procedure show that the research data are congruent with the model that is assumed to be based on the theories related to academic stress (Suldo et al., 2009). There are six factors found to be causes of academic stress. The 6-factor/dimension model representing the academic-stress sources is regarded as a good model ($x2$ = 219.128, df = 155, RMSEA = .055, SRMR= .067, CFI = .932, and TLI = .916). Factor loadings for each of the survey items are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that all the 20 survey items have good loadings, ranging from 0.468 to 0.929. The reliability measurement on the SPSS 22 application also shows good scores, ranging from 0.720 to 0.850.

These analysis results show that the six factors represent the academic-stress sources factors, as suggested in the earlier study by Suldo et al. (2009). The six factors are elaborated as follows, and the details of these six factors are shown in Figure 2.

Factor 1: Academic Demands

To fulfill academic assignments, students face a number of difficulties. Some of these are related to finding materials and references for classes, finishing out final assignments or projects, preparing materials and media for class presentation, and studying for mid- and final examinations.

Factor 2: Parent-child Relationship

This factor can come in some forms. Among others, some parents or guardians do not give full support to their children's studies, those who lay excessive academic expectations of their children, and those who are not quite open in terms of family relationships.

Factor 3: Childhood Trauma

Some respondents express their traumatic experiences during their childhood. Most of these are related to being bullied by their peer, love affairs, accidents, and guilty feelings of their wrong-doings.

Factor 4: Peer Pressure

Problems with peer pressure can come in identical forms. Some of these are related to personal matters in a peer relationship, quarrel, bullying, being isolated by their close friends, and being ignored.

Factor 5: Financial

Problems in this matter are mostly related to financial management. The common problems are carelessness in spending, unexpected expenses, zero balance in the bank account, and debts to friends or neighbors.

Factor 6: Self Expectancy

This factor may not be seen on the surface; however, it gives most of the heaviest burdens to students. This problem is mainly derived from students' own self-expectation to be best in front of their parents, relatives, and neighbors.

The six factors of students' academic-stress sources analyzed in the study are found to surface as have been expected. However, it is undeniable that there are still many other factors that are possible. The CFA is followed up by analyses of each factor using recorded scores for testing of differences.

Results of *T-test* and *ANOVA*

Testing of differences is done to know whether there are differences in stress sources from the research variables: Gender, GPA, and Educational Aspiration. The GPA is divided into three categories: low (2.51-3.000, medium (3.01-3.50), and high (3.51-4.00). Educational aspiration is divided into three: undergraduate (S1), graduate (S2), and doctorate (S3). The results of the tests of the differences are presented in Table 3, Table 5, and Table 7.

Differences in Gender

Table 3 presents the results of the t-analysis for the equality of means of the six factors against Gender. The results of the t-analyses in Table 3 show significant differences among the five of the six factors of academic stress. Meanwhile, Table 4 shows that female students tend to report more problems than male students in the parent-child relationnship, childhood traumatic experiences, peer pressures, financial problems, and self-expectancy.

Siwi Karmadi Kurniasih, Nur Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro, & Sudiyono

Table 3. Results of the *t*-test on Gender

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
Factor 1	Equal variances assumed	1.892	133	.061
	Equal variances not assumed	1.608	38.612	.116
Factor 2	Equal variances assumed	2.790	133	.006
	Equal variances not assumed	3.070	54.637	.003
Factor 3	Equal variances assumed	2.274	133	.025
	Equal variances not assumed	2.521	55.370	.015
Factor 4	Equal variances assumed	3.275	133	.001
	Equal variances not assumed	3.692	57.088	.000
Factor 5	Equal variances assumed	2.294	133	.023
	Equal variances not assumed	2.421	50.872	.019
Factor 6	Equal variances assumed	2.671	133	.009
	Equal variances not assumed	2.677	47.020	.010

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Each Factor

	Gender	**N**	**Mean**
Factor 1	Female	105	.0262
	Male	30	-.0916
Factor 2	Female	105	.1156
	Male	30	-.4047
Factor 3	Female	105	.0863
	Male	30	-.3021
Factor 4	Female	105	.1096
	Male	30	-.3835
Factor 5	Female	105	.0421
	Male	30	-.1472
Factor 6	Female	105	.0804
	Male	30	-.2813

Table 5. Results of the *F*-test on GPA

ANOVA

		Sum of Square	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Factor 1	Between Groups	1.409	2	.704	8.446	.000
	Within Groups	10.923	131	.083		
	Total	12.332	133			
Factor 2	Between Groups	1.881	2	.941	1.097	.337
	Within Groups	112.364	131	.858		
	Total	114.245	133			
Factor 3	Between Groups	5.988	2	2.994	4.471	.013
	Within Groups	87.722	131	.670		
	Total	93.710	133			
Factor 4	Between Groups	2.445	2	1.223	2.183	.117
	Within Groups	73.386	131	.560		
	Total	75.832	133			
Factor 5	Between Groups	.181	2	.090	.544	.582
	Within Groups	21.763	131	.166		
	Total	21.944	133			
Factor 6	Between Groups	.629	2	.315	.698	.499
	Within Groups	59.017	131	.451		
	Total	59.646	133			

Results of the F. test on GPA

Table 5 presents the F test results for the six research variables of the students' aca-demic-stress factors against GPA. The results of the ANOVA as shown in Table 5 indicate that there are significant differences that are found in two of the factors, if viewed from

Siwi Karmadi Kurniasih, Nur Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro, & Sudiyono

the GPA, namely, the academic demands and childhood trauma.

Table 6 shows that students with a GPA of 3.51 and above tend to have higher academic demands and experience more severe childhood traumatic experiences than those with a GPA of 3.01- 3.50. There is no significant difference in the two factors between students with a GPA of 3.51-4.00 and those with a GPA of 3.01-3.50.

Results of the F. test on Educational Aspiration

Table 7 shows the results of the mean differences test among the six variable factors against educational aspirations. ANOVA test results in Table 7 show significant differences are found in two of the six variables: academic demands and parent-child relationship.

Table 8 shows that students who pursue an S3 education level report to have higher academic demands and heavier problems in parent-child relationship than those pursuing for an S2 level. No significant difference is found in these two-factor variables between students with an S1 level than either S2 or S3.

From the data analysis results, especially the CFA and tests of mean differences, the sources of students' academic stresses consist of six factors: academic demands, parent-child relationships, traumatic on childhood experiences, peer pressure, and self-expectancy. There are significant differences in some factors between male and female students, between students with high GPA and medium GPA, and between students who have an educational aspiration of the S2 and S3 levels.

Table 6. Results of the Post-hoc Analyses on Differences against GPA

Dependent Variable	(I) GPA	(J) GPA	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Factor 1	1.00	2.00	-.05878	.20756	.957
		3.00	.14825	.20700	.754
	2.00	1.00	.05878	.20756	.957
		3.00	.20703*	.05048	.000
	3.00	1.00	-.14825	.20700	.754
		2.00	-.20703*	.05048	.000
Factor 3	1.00	2.00	.92323	.58820	.262
		3.00	1.25432	.58662	.086
	2.00	1.00	-.92323	.58820	.262
		3.00	.33109	.14304	.047
	3.00	1.00	-1.25432	.58662	.086
		2.00	-.33109	.14304	.047

Table 7. Results of the *ANOVA* against Educational Aspiration

ANOVA

		Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Factor 1	Between Groups	.984	2	.492	5.706	.004
	Within Groups	11.383	132	.086		
	Total	12.367	134			
Factor 2	Between Groups	5.728	2	2.864	3.483	.034
	Within Groups	108.552	132	.822		
	Total	114.280	134			
Factor 3	Between Groups	1.768	2	.884	1.265	.286
	Within Groups	92.282	132	.699		
	Total	94.050	134			
Factor 4	Between Groups	1.692	2	.846	1.502	.226
	Within Groups	74.315	132	.563		
	Total	76.007	134			
Factor 5	Between Groups	.305	2	.152	.929	.398
	Within Groups	21.651	132	.164		
	Total	21.956	134			
Factor 6	Between Groups	1.850	2	.925	2.101	.126
	Within Groups	58.132	132	.440		
	Total	59.982	134			

Siwi Karmadi Kurniasih, Nur Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro, & Sudiyono

Table 8. Results of the Post-hoc Analyses against Educational Aspiration

Dependent Variable	Educational Aspiration		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Factor 1	1.00	2.00	.04737	.07658	.810
		3.00	.20977*	.07893	.024
	2.00	1.00	-.04737	.07658	.810
		3.00	.16241*	.05493	.010
	3.00	1.00	-.20977*	.07893	.024
		2.00	-.16241*	.05493	.010
Factor 2	1.00	2.00	-.38825	.23650	.232
		3.00	.03225	.24374	.990
	2.00	1.00	.38825	.23650	.232
		3.00	.42050*	.16964	.038
	3.00	1.00	-.03225	.24374	.990
		2.00	-.42050*	.16964	.038

Results of the study have an agreement with the results of previous studies, which show a high level of academic stress experienced by S1-level students (McPherson, 2009; Oon, 2007; Suldo et al., 2009). These studies find that students have high academic stress due to their over-expectation despite their low levels of skills and abilities, for not being too enthusiastic with their academic activities and assignments because of their lack of interest in the subject contents, and because of health problems. If such academic stresses are not given adequate anticipation and solution, they can cause adverse effects on students since academic stresses may induce fatal impacts. One such impact is the high level of student drop-outs. This is in line with the results of previous studies by Rayle and Chung (2007) and Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005). This is not intended to say that academic stresses cause drop-outs; this, however, shows that academic stresses make students have low levels of concentration that lead to a decline in their academic achievement. This decline in academic achievement eventually becomes the cause for students to repeat classes, but unable to complete, and, eventually, fail academic requirements and drop out.

Another problem that triggers students' academic stress is their inability to complete the minimal competencies set up in the curriculum. This problem is often doubled by the heavy assignments and expectations imposed by the curriculum either because it is not quite realistic or because it is not quite well-developed. In the same manner, the over-expectation of self and family becomes an acute source of academic stress. For most students, the achievement of a high GPA is a dead target, outweighing any other thing. As a result, students will do anything, including loosening their muscles and brain when they are actually tight, in order to obtain high GPAs bringing about burn-outs and academic stress. This is in agreement with the results of a previous study by McPherson (2009).

Other factors causing students' academic stress are parent-child relationships, traumatic childhood experiences, peer pressure, financial matters, and self-expectancy. This is in agreement with the results of previous studies such as one by Suldo et al. (2009). From observation in the field, it is true that these factors exert a heavy influence on the psychology of people, including that of students.

Another phenomenon to point out is that which suggests that female students, students with high GPAs, and students with high educational aspiration (such as of the S3 level), are found to have high academic demands, parent-child relationship, traumatic childhood experiences, peer pressure, financial problems, and self-expectancy. This is identical with the findings of other previous studies such as by Misra and McKean (2000) and Zajacova et al. (2005).

Conclusion

The study departed from the objective identifying and describing sources of academic stresses of students of the English Education Department, Yogyakarta State University

(EED YSU). A total of 135 English Education Department students participated in the study. Results of the CFA analyses found six factors that were identified as sources of students' academic stress. The six factors were academic demands, parent-child relationships, childhood traumatic experiences, peer pressure, financial matters, and self-expectancy. Further analyses showed that female students, students with high GPAs, and students with high academic aspirations reported higher measures of factors of academic stresses.

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