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2.1 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Learning for an end, which, in the short run, is the annual examination results, and, in the long run, the social status through a job acquired on the basis of these results seems to have become a common understanding of the process of education. As education gets standardized to mass produce enormous outputs every year to fill the job market, interactive and transformative learning with pleasure is often ignored. In the modern world, as behavior becomes increasingly controlled by external contingencies, the intrinsic valuing of learning through schooling is undermined. The school/education system today seems to have deemphasized the intrinsic motivation for learning as opposed to the extrinsic motivation. As a result, extrinsic factors to sustain learning and academic efforts for activities have increased the stress levels of students. Further, educational stress is known to be affecting children's mental health and physical stress.

The increasing number of cases of childhood illness and suicide due to educational achievement-related distress has drawn the attention of psychologists worldwide and in India. The system of education in India is under pressure for accommodating large number of students with different backgrounds. The curriculum overloads the students because of its job oriented focus. The students are made to study greater number of subjects and for longer hours. The emphasis is on extra-curricular activities and multiple career options. As noted in my earlier study, Shukla (2004), while children are burdened with greater curriculum load in schools, parental load in the form
of expectations, extra-curricular and hobby related activities have also increased. The load becomes such that the child has problems in handling it, ultimately resulting in high stress and anxiety. It seems, that the adolescent groups of students are most prone to such stress which is not only from struggling to know themselves as individuals but also from coping with academic pressures like grades/marks, career orientation, parental and teacher expectations. The education related stress among adolescents is reflected in ever increasing number of suicide cases in the age group and also several other related health problems.

Though there are theoretical approaches to adolescence problems, very few actually look at the school pressures and the resultant stress arising from them in the lives of the young boys and girls. One framework for understanding the dynamics of such stress is the Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which offers an analysis of motivational dynamics of progressive internalization of extrinsic goals. This framework seeks to explain the conditions under which individuals internalize external contingencies. With movement of the states of motivation towards intrinsic or internalized motivation, individuals are enabled to assume greater self-control over their efforts and outcomes. The Self-Determination Theory suggests that with the satisfaction of the three needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, an individual can experience well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Physiological and psychological needs are energizing state which when satisfied, produced good health and a general state of well-being Hull (1943). Such well-being when sustained, satisfied over a life span lead to a sense of personal integrity and satisfaction or "eudaimonia" (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Waterman, 1993).
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On the basis of the review of literature in the previous chapter and the issues raised, it can be said that a number of questions remain unanswered in respect of the nature and dynamics of stress among the school going adolescents; Does the school system (Public and Private schools) contribute to the problem?; Do the grade/board examination make stress worse? Does gender make a difference in the perception of and coping with stressful events? What are the motivational dynamics of students? Further, in the Indian situation there are different factors affecting curricular, co-curricular burdens such as private and public schooling which are different not only in their syllabus and teaching practices but also in the socioeconomic background of the students enrolling in these schools. Gender is also seen as influencing the experienced stress. The roles of all these factors need to be examined in order to understand the dynamics of school stress. The present study aims at understanding the complexities of stress among students particularly in Grades X to XII. This section of the population was selected for the study as adolescence happens to be the time when students are not only under pressure from home and school to perform well in examinations but also realize that to a large extent their performance which is linked to the marks secured in the two board examinations (one at the end of Grade X and the other at the end of Grade XII) are critical for their future success and failure. Their marks determine the nature of their higher education and their entry into specific Institutions and areas of study that would decide their future and also whether they are able to meet their future career aspirations. The system offers little choice and self-control to the student in matters of their career option. Their aspirations and interests have little scope to be reflected or realized in the system. As pointed out in the review of literature, particularly as the SDT suggests, this absence of choice or autonomy in students' life is a major factor of stress. Further, uncertainties over career choice leads to stress, depression and mental health problems among youth. The high
levels of stress affect students’ perceived self-efficacy, sense of general well-being and academic performance.

The demanding situation that the students of today face for performing well has adverse effects on intrinsic motivation to learn. These questions gain greater importance today as the problem of students’ stress is increasing and in the long run their well-being has come under threat. All these troubles of the child and the family are existent because the child is never treated as a ‘child first and student next’, Vasudev, (2008). Thus, experienced stress of the child is a product of an interaction of several factors inherent to our education system. The schooling process is an accepted and valued aspect of human socialization. However, schools are losing a sense of personal touch. Institutional aspects of schooling and the achievement pressures along with a strong competitive orientation are predominant features of modern school experience of children. A child’s sense of relatedness is negatively affected by lack of personal touch in teaching, extremely formal/authoritarian teacher-student relationship, and high teacher-student ratio. At the home front parental stress due to the modern life style and achievement orientation, non-availability of positive and close interpersonal time between parents and children and several other factors in modern schooling and life style. According to the Self-Determination Theory, low relatedness happens to be a major factor in lack of intrinsic motivation. To add to the problem, the system does not allow much scope for autonomous self-determined learning for the child. Further, external control seems to be dominating the schooling and educational experience of children. Other factors affecting a sense of autonomy are: authoritarian system, structured teaching, one way teaching style (hardly any scope for interaction, discussions through which a student can express
his/her opinions or points of view) and little scope for questions, disagreements etc. Competence is affected by lack of positive feedback, snowball effects of poor performance and consequent increase in frequency of negative feedback, achievement related anxiety etc. The Self-Determination Theory terms these factors as Autonomy and Competence that have significant influence on students’ interest and intrinsic motivation in the learning process. These three factors, relatedness, autonomy and competence according to the Self-Determination Theory, are important and facilitate or impair the degree of internalization of the external motivating conditions and consequent intrinsic motivation of the students and their sense of self-efficacy and well-being. Efficacy belief, according to Bandura (1977), and the concept of competence in the Self-Determination Theory are close to each other in meaning and experience as both talk of the individual’s sense of self worth that contribute to his/her levels of motivation in several ways. Efficacy is derived from performance feedback from significant others and has a strong relation to the performance and competence belief. This correlation is far more prominent in adolescence than in children, the hypothesized relationship between self-efficacy and academic motivation has been proved by researcher (Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986). Studying different content domains (writing and reading) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between the two factors of self-efficacy and academic motivation (Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986) ; (Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991); (Pajares 1996) ; (Schunk, 1995) . Therefore it can be said that efficacy beliefs are central to students’ goals setting and the efforts they put in for goal achievement, the extent of perseverance in the face of difficulty, and the resilience showed in the face of failure. Students with a strong sense of efficacy or belief in their capabilities and competence will
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Maintain high levels of effort and experience lower levels of stress while those with low sense of efficacy are likely to slacken their efforts and feel more stressed due to the lack of self confidence. Self-esteem and efficacy beliefs can be seen as closely related to the emphasis on perceived competence in the Self-Determination Theory. Individuals have different speeds of internalization of environmental characteristics, usually referred to as the rate of adjustment, Self-Determination theory refers to it as the process of internalization or 'self-determined' and views the process of self-determination as affecting elements of motivation, regulation and locus of causality, all of which can be either internal or external in nature. In respect of stress, the literature clearly shows that it is closely related to the process of self-determination or the ability to control one’s thoughts, perceptions and orientation (Salkovskis & Harrison, 1984). As Kant and Gibbons (1987, p183) point out “it is not the sheer frequency of disturbing thoughts, but the perceived inability to turn them off that is the major cause of distress”. This view emphasizes a major factor in causation and outcome of stress; if the people are sufficiently intrinsically motivated, it gives them the strength or power to overcome the external difficulties that the environment poses for them and the coping process is much smoother. The stronger a person’s sense of efficacy, the bolder s/he is in tackling the problem that breeds stress and anxiety, and the greater is his/her success in shaping the environment to their liking (Bandura, 1997; Williams 1992, p183).

As suggested by Reeve (2002), two decades of research on factors of intrinsic motivation and educational performance shows that.

1. Autonomy motivated students thrive in education; and
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2. Students benefit when teachers support their autonomy

The sense of autonomy, in turn, is also found to be related to competence and relatedness. All three of these factors are important determinants of a child’s sense of self-control and intrinsic motivation.

Indian schools are of divergent nature, varying widely across context and locations such as urban and rural, catering to different socio-economic strata and also following different norms and standards. The socio-economic status differences in the background of the students from the two school types are seen to be of great influence to the educational achievement. D. Sinha and Mishra (1988), through their study, found greater dis-embedding among Christian and superior school children as compared to ordinary schools. Research has shown that the deprivation of the poor has impact not only on their physical health but also cognitive capacities. The ecology of the children brought up in conditions of poverty is characterized by lack of physical facilities, inadequate stimulation and lack of models. D. Sinha (1982), Vagrecha, and Bapna (1993), Saraswathi and Dutta (1990), through their study, reported the strengths and weaknesses of poverty conditions. Weaknesses, as reported by this study, are, limited scope for social mobility and non-competitive coping style, and the strengths were noted as availability of informal support system, provision of a family climate and realistic and practical orientation to life. Gender disparities are also seen to be prominent in the government school students coming from the lower socio-economic strata. Chisholm and Bois-Raymond (1993) in their study noted the prevalence of traditional values regarding marriage and academic achievement. In India, children belonging to different economic strata and also to different school types are subjected to different expectations and
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different levels of achievement pressure, which apparently are related to the levels of intrinsic motivation.

The government schools in India provide subsidized education and greater accessibility, geographically and economically; this difference leads to stark differences in the population characteristics of the schools. While the government-school students come from families where there is little intellectual support for their studies which is further aggravated by the economic disadvantage (no tuitions), the private school children have all the support one can possibly think of which either comes from the institution or the family or in some cases, both. The two school types have been seen to become an important factor in determining educational achievement. Though the findings are sometimes contradictory, there is strong indication of general impairment in cognitive functioning due to poverty conditions. Most of the cognitive processes that are affected are highly relevant to school performance and any deficit caused in them proved impediments to the students (Sinha, 1990). The effect of this deprivation is not limited to the cognitive functioning of the student but also his/her level of motivation. The disadvantaged tend to have a low and stagnant level of aspiration, display low goal-discrepancy index, greater fear of failure and absence of risk taking. They display low need of achievement, autonomy and lack of initiative and aggression. The level of motivation thus is low, it can also be said that these students have a low senses of self and self-efficacy Mohanty and Misra, (2000).

Another important variation between the two SES groups is the Achievement Related Cognition. Kelley (1971) suggested that attribution is one of the basic cognitive functions; attribution is the cognitive process whereby the individual tries to locate causes
to behavior and its outcomes. Individuals tend to attribute the outcome of their behavior or efforts to either internal or external causes. In the case of the deprived sections, the poor and those belonging to low SES, the causality for failure has generally been viewed as lying inside the person while the causality of success is seen as resulting from luck factors (Jain & Misra, 1986). Hence, students that come from deprived backgrounds not only suffer the negative consequences of the “Pygmalion Effect” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) or low expectations but also by self-defeating cognitions where the person is unable to perceive himself as the master of his life, taking the blame for failures. Thus, the students from low SES are less likely to experience autonomy, relatedness and competence in educational setting. This leads to lack of or poor intrinsic motivation in these students. Sometimes, however, students of the deprived section of the society experience less stress as the parental and societal pressures to perform are lesser in their case. Some children from backgrounds of poverty show resilience/invulnerability, and emerge as ‘lotus in the mud’ (Mohanty & Misra, 2000).

Gender is an important influence on the life of an individual in India. As far as gender differences are concerned, the government schools seem to be more influenced by the factor as they have students coming from that section of the population which is more influenced by societal norms than individual concerns. Ninety percent of the girl students in these schools have family responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, taking care of younger siblings and other household chores that influences their educational activities and commitments. However, in private schools girl students come from a small section of the privileged population where gender discrimination is at its minimal and they therefore enjoy the support of at least their first family in their education and ambitions.
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The present study seeks to see if the Self-Determination Theory and its concept of competency, autonomy and relatedness, which lead to intrinsic motivation, can be utilized in studying the problem of stress among students from grades IX to XII, and if their gender and school type play a role in the levels of experienced stress among these group of students. It should also be pointed out that majority of students cope very well with the system or are able to built resilience and hence survive in the system. How are these students under heavy stress different from those that are able to cope? How is it that some students are able to maintain their intrinsic motivation to learn or to internalize the external motivators whereas other fails to do so? How are students’ self-efficacy beliefs, their sense of relatedness and autonomy related to the way they cope with stress or fail to do so? Even among non-clinical groups of students who seem to have a moderate range of stress and related variables, it can be expected that there will be different problems of student based on their scores on stress and related factors.

2.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to understand the motivational dynamics of stress among students in different types of schools in India within the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the role of autonomy, relatedness and competence as major factors contributing to intrinsic motivation and its internalization. Level of stress among students are also sought to be related to school, grade (education level) and gender.
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Specifically, the study is designed with the following broad objectives:

1. To assess the level of stress among students from classes IX to XII from the two school types (Private and Government) which generally cater to students from different SES.

2. Using the theoretical framework of SDT, the study seeks to assess the extent to which students' attribution of academic effort is self-determined or intrinsically motivated.

3. To assess the relationship between the role of perceived autonomy, self-competence relatedness and stress.

4. To examine differences across different types of schools, levels of education (grades) and gender groups in the extent of stress and other factors of intrinsic motivation.

5. To group the sample into distinctive groups on the basis of their scores on the study measures.

2.3 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Hypothesis 1:

Students are reported to have higher stress prior to their major examinations. So Grade X and XII students can be expected to have higher levels of stress compared to their counterparts in Grades IX & XI. This difference is expected since grade X and XII students are to take board exams, which are major stress inducing events. Grade XII students are also likely to report higher stress due to their anxiety towards their future because at this level of education, students usually face choices for future profession
which depends on their performance in the board examination and on their perceived chances of success in different professional entrance tests such as for engineering and medicine.

Further, the levels of stress are also likely to be affected by the school type and gender differences. The government school children are mostly from lower economic strata compared to their private school counterparts. As such while perceiving competence and likelihood of success in career options may be higher for private schools students compared to those in government schools, the former also are more likely to experience gender expectations and parental pressure. Thus, the two school types also differ on their levels of achievement orientation which is influenced by stereotypes (Jain, 1987). Indian studies (e.g. Shukla, 2004) also show the two school types differ on aspects of parental expectation and teacher expectation which are higher in case of private schools as compared to government schools and hence the stress levels are also high among private school students.

The two school groups (private and government school students) are characterized by different levels self-esteem, because of differences in parental education, aspiration and socio-economic background. The government school students who are most of the time first generation learners coming from families with little exposure to education are less likely to perceive education as an exercise in self growth or path to success and socio-economic mobility. Even when some students from government schools may be conscious of their school performance, absence of parental and teacher expectation is likely to affect the dynamics of their performance related motivation (Mohanty & Misra, 2000). Keeping these factors in view, the following was hypothesized:
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Level of education, type of school and gender would have significant main as well as interactive effects on students' stress, autonomy, intrinsic motivation, self-regulation or regulation style and self-esteem scores.

Hypothesis 2:

The Self-Determination Theory shows that autonomy is a major basis for self-determination, progressive internalization of motivational contingencies among students. It is the autonomy driven students who do well in the educational settings. Teachers who support this autonomy and encourage autonomous functioning of students are perceived more positively and students enjoy the educational process better under such settings.

The Self-Determination Theory clearly shows that student-teacher relationship is also a determinant of the quality of student’s motivation (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). The support of ones autonomy, and the provision for a rationale and constructive feedback have all been proved to be related to increased self-determination (Deci, Eghari, Patrick & Leone, 1994). People’s perception of competency and agency are direct influences of their motivation and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1991)

There will be significant relationship between different factors of intrinsic motivation, namely perceived autonomy, self-competence, self-esteem and relatedness. Further, the factors of intrinsic motivation will also be related to stress.

Hypothesis 3:

Intrinsically, motivated students are clearly less likely to experience high levels of stress. Intrinsic motivation, according to SDT, is a function of the degree of internalization of the causation of academic efforts, which, in turn, are related to the three
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psychological need factors, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These variables, taken together, will show different profiles of student levels of stress. In other words, profile of scores on intrinsic motivation related variables could be used to group or cluster students into different levels or degree of experienced stress. Thus, cluster analysis is likely to show that such groups can be generated on the basis of students’ pattern of scores or profiles in respect of different intrinsic motivation related variables. Therefore, the following was hypothesized:

Students can be grouped into three different clusters based on their profile of stress and intrinsic motivational factors (such as autonomy, intrinsic motivation, self-regulation and self-esteem).

The present study sought to test the above hypothesis and the methodology for the study is described in the following chapter.