Abstract

Increasing burden of education and the resultant stress among students in India is a well known phenomenon which has aroused concern in all quarters (Shukla, 2004). There have been several attempts to understand the dynamics of educational stress and to deal with the related mental health problems from a number of different perspectives. The present study attempts to examine the motivational dynamics of stress among students from an intrinsic motivation perspective using Ryan and Deci's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

Self-determination theory when applied to education is about fostering in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education and a confidence in personal capabilities (Deci et al., 1991.). According to this theory, students become actively engaged in educational activities to the extent that classroom endeavors affirm their competencies and prove themselves to be interesting and relevant to students’ lives. As needs, both competence and self-determination represent energizing states that, if nurtured, facilitate interest enjoyment, engagement and well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2000.).

The three factors, namely, autonomy, competence and relatedness, that SDT proposes as important in determining intrinsic motivation of individuals have been taken as variables in the study Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) measures the perceived autonomy among students, Activity Feelings Scale (AFS) measures the Intrinsic Motivation and Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) measures the regulation style (Intrinsic or extrinsic). SRQ-A shows the motivational level of the student and the position of internalization that the student has acquired. The SRQ-A and
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AFS are the two tools of the study that reflect on the perceived intrinsic motivation of the student.

The present study sought to relate stress among Secondary and Higher Secondary students with indicators of self-determination and internalization of motivational control with gender and school type (Private and government schools as factors of student characteristics). The study was carried out in and around Lucknow, the capital city of the state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) in North India. The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved assessment of stress, self-esteem and level of Self-Determination. A semi-structured interview for an in-depth qualitative analysis was undertaken in the second phase where eight cases drawn from the first part of the study were interviewed.

The total sample size was 240, comprising of 30 students (15 boys and 15 girls) each from grades IX to XII who volunteered to participate in the study. The students were drawn from two school types (private and government schools). The government schools students were from lower SES while the private schools students were from the middle and upper SES families.

The study showed that the level of experienced Stress amongst students was moderate and there was a negative correlation between Stress and esteem with lower levels of self-esteem and low competence belief are more likely to experience stress. The data showed that Self determination; Esteem and Autonomy are positively correlated.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MONAVA) showed that the scores of students in the measure taken together were significantly affected by level of education, school type and gender. Education into school type and Gender X School Type interaction effect
were also significant. The data was analysed using ANOVA following MANOVA. ANOVA showed that level of Education had significant main effect on LCQ Scores. With the secondary school students showing a higher mean score than their higher secondary counterparts. The mean difference for Private and Government School students were significant for SRQ-A and CAFS measures.

Stress and self-esteem scores were significant the secondary level students had higher mean scores in both these variables compared to mean scores of higher secondary students for Gender groups with girls showing higher stress and lower self-esteem mean scores. While level of education X school type X gender interaction effects were non significant for any of the variables in the study, some of the first order interactions had significant effects.

The data were subjected to cluster analysis to find out if the sample of students can be reliably grouped on the basis of their profiles in respect of individual score in all the variables. Cluster Analysis showed that three clusters could be generated on the basis of the profiles MANOVA showed that these three clusters were significantly different in respect of the scores on different variables. Following the MANOVA, the scores on each variable were analysed by ANOVA which showed that the clusters differed significantly in respect of stress and self-esteem measures. Reliability of the cluster formation were further analysed through Discriminant Function Analysis which showed that stress, self-esteem and LCQ measures significantly discriminated across the three clusters.

Qualitative analysis of eight studies showed that stress among students is clearly related to different factors of self-determination and intrinsic motivation. Individual
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students with high and low stress levels were clearly differentiated on the basis of their self-esteem or perceived competence autonomy and sense of relatedness.

Overall, the study did not reveal a high level of general stress among the students in the study. However, the findings clearly show that stress can be analysed from the SDT perspective and that students can be reliably categorized into different levels of stress on the basis of their intrinsic motivation profiles. Some limitations of the study and implications of the findings have been discussed.