Academic Stress and Buddhist Coping Resources among Indo-Thai Buddhist Students

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Abstract
India and Thailand have been practicing same religion since the Buddhism was introduced in Thailand by King Ashoka in 3rd century B.C. However, researcher has observed some socio-cultural factors in Buddhist coping resources are different from India. This reality leads to build a comparative research between these countries. The academic stress scale developed by researchers and Buddhist coping resources scale developed by Dr. Russ Philips was used with some modification and addition to collect the data from Buddhist students. 90 students from Assumption University, Bangkok and 90 students from Shivaji University Kolhapur, India were selected. The obtained data analyzed by student-test and stepwise multiple regression analysis. Results revealed the significant differences on both variables. Indian Buddhist students are lower on academic stress while higher on some Buddhist resources for coping with stress than Thai Buddhist students. Moreover study further found that Buddhist coping resources are much useful to deal with stress.

Keywords: Buddhist coping resources; Academic stress; Socio-cultural diversity

Introduction
Meditation and mindfulness are well known Buddhist coping resources [1]. The issue of academic stress and ways of coping much studied across many different cultures [2] but very few research has been conducted in a Buddhist context. The Buddhism is a dominating religion in Asian countries and rapidly spreading through the world. There are other coping resources also available in Buddhism. In the present study, the researcher has considered only seven resources. Meditation as a way of coping with stress is widely used by Buddhist and others also. Meditation, focusing in a relaxed and non judgmental way on one structured aspect of a situation likes breathing and mantra. Mindfulness is a central teaching of Buddhism. Mindfulness means a non judgmental awareness and acceptance of the present moment. Loving kindness means being non-judgmental, compassionate and kind to one and others. Morality means right speech, right action, and right livelihood, and doing these things with real intention. Impermanence is a scientific principle of which teach us to detach from attachment. Impermanence means realizing nothing lasts forever. Comprehensive Karma means an acknowledgment that one’s past, present, and future actions will have consequences, and that one can control his or her current activities. Fatalistic Karma means feeling a sense of helplessness that one’s past actions have led to one’s current state, and there is nothing one can do to avoid those consequences. Thus, meditating, practicing mindfulness, practicing right ethical action, loving kindness or considering the Buddhist ideas of impermanence or karma are important coping resources in Buddhism [3].

Various investigators have researched the term academic stress. If a review of the literature on academic stress taken into consideration, it seems that this is not a much old concept. According to DeDeyn Rachel [4] "academic stress is defined as a mental and emotional pressure or tension that occurs due to the demands of college life." If the pressure is prolonged and perceived as unmanageable, this experience causes a mental and emotional imbalance among students, which affects health and academic achievement. According to Wilks, [5] "academic stress is the product of a combination of related academic demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual". According to Mac George et al. [6] "academic stress viewed as a chronic stress due to the nature of academic demands associated with adverse health outcomes of depression and physical illness".

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In India the period of King Asoka the majority of people were practicing Buddhism. But later it, Buddhism became disappear up to 19 century. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who is the advisor of social revolution in India, architecture of the constitution of second largest democracy in world, protagonist of depressed people and promoter of Buddhism in India after its decline, promulgated Buddhism in India on 1956. He proposed a scientific Buddhism as a way of likelihood. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar reconstructed Buddhism in a pure way that is meant to Buddha and presently, his followers strongly practicing Buddhist teachings. However, the researcher has observed some differences in the practice of Buddhism in Indian Buddhists and other Buddhists across the different nations of Asia. This reality leads to build a comparative research between these countries. The researcher wanted to know how Buddhist principles are used to tackle their daily hassles by the new generation in these nations.

Method

Participants

Participants were 90 male and female first year undergraduates from an Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand and 90 male and female first year undergraduates from the jurisdiction of Shivaji University in Kolhapur, India; recruited by conveying them the study is limited to Buddhist students only. The mean age of participated students was 19 years.

Materials

I. Academic stress scale for college and university students (ASSCUS): This is self-constructed and developed scale for college and university students. It measures the level of academic stress experienced by pupils in the whole academic year due to various sources viz. Personal inadequacy, interactions with peers and teachers, fear of examination, inadequate facilities at college and parental expectations and socioeconomic status. The scale consists of 66 multiple choice items, like five points Likert-type scale with response options ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly. A high score on scale denotes extremely high academic stress while low score shows very little academic pressure.

II. Buddhist coping resources scale (BCRS): The BSCSS is developed by Dr. Russ Phillips, and it contains 35 items. The scale consist seven Buddhist coping resources viz. meditation, mindfulness, loving kindness, morality, impermanence, comprehensive Karma and fatalistic Karma.

Procedure

The Assumption University Bangkok was visited in November 2012 and permission were sought from the concerned department. At the time of test, administration participants were informed that they were taking part in the study in which they were asked to consider stressful events that they experience in their academic life, and rate how often they engaged in tackling the stress with Buddhist coping resources. The Indian Buddhist students also visited at various colleges from Shivaji University, Kolhapur; and they were administered two scales.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed at to find out the difference between Indian and Thai Buddhist students on academic stress. Independent samples t-test has used to analyze the differences in mean scores for Indian and Thai Buddhist students on each of the subscales of academic stress scale. The average score on the ‘fear of examination’ subscale for Indian Buddhist students is (M=32.97, SD = 9.853) significantly lower than the mean score on the ‘fear of examination’ subscale for Thai Buddhist students (M=36.26, SD = 6.629), [t (178) = 2.62, p = 0.01]. The mean score on the ‘inadequate Facilities at College’ subscale for Indian Buddhist students is (M=29.80, SD = 4.262) significantly higher than the mean score on the ‘inadequate facilities at college’ subscale for Thai Buddhist students (M=25.16, SD = 8.593), [t (178) = 4.69, p = 0.01]. The mean score on the ‘academic stress’ subscale for Indian Buddhist students was (M=188.58, SD = 46.396) significantly higher than the mean score on the ‘academic stress’ subscale for Thai Buddhist students (M=201.72, SD = 25.155), [t (178) = 2.36, p = 0.05]. It is seen from (Table 1) that rest of all subscales of academic stress scale for college students are not significant.

Table 1: Shows the difference on academic stress among Indian and Thai Buddhist students.

| Variables                              | Nations | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | df  | t     |
|----------------------------------------|---------|----|------|----------------|-----|-------|
| Personal inadequacy                    | India   | 90 | 46.96| 12.962         | 178 | 1.78  |
|                                        | Thailand| 90 | 49.79| 7.779          |     |       |
| Interactions with peers and teachers   | India   | 90 | 50.00| 12.836         | 178 | 1.27  |
|                                        | Thailand| 90 | 52.03| 8.144          |     |       |
| Fear of examination                    | India   | 90 | 32.97| 9.853          | 178 | 2.62**|
|                                        | Thailand| 90 | 36.26| 6.629          |     |       |
| Inadequate facilities at college       | India   | 90 | 29.80| 4.262          | 178 | 4.69**|
|                                        | Thailand| 90 | 25.16| 8.593          |     |       |
| Parental expectations and SES          | India   | 90 | 33.50| 12.950         | 178 | 0.19  |
|                                        | Thailand| 90 | 33.84| 10.617         |     |       |
| Academic stress                        | India   | 90 | 188.58| 46.396         | 178 | 2.36* |
|                                        | Thailand| 90 | 201.72| 25.155         |     |       |

* Significant at 0.05 level of alpha, ** Significant at 0.01 level of alpha

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As is evident in (Table 2) that the there is no significant difference on ‘Meditation’ as a Buddhist coping resource is similar in both nations. However, rests of all coping resources significantly differ in both countries. Indian Buddhist students are higher on ‘Mindfulness’, ‘Morality’ and ‘Impermanence’ while Thai Buddhist students are higher on ‘Loving Kindness’, ‘Comprehensive Karma’ and ‘Fatalistic Karma’. As seen from (Table 3) that the ‘Mindfulness’ and ‘Meditation’ emerged as significant predictors of academic stress among Thai Buddhist students, while ‘Mindfulness’, ‘Impermanence’ and ‘Morality’ emerged as significant predictors of academic stress among Indian Buddhist students. However none of the other independent variables i.e. ‘Loving Kindness’, ‘Comprehensive Karma’ and ‘Fatalistic Karma’ contribute significantly to academic stress among Thai and Indian Buddhist students. When the first variable, ‘Mindfulness’ was entered the obtained adjusted $R^2 = 0.042$, when ‘Meditation’ was entered the adjusted $R^2 = 0.109$. It means that these models account for respectively 4.2%, 10.9% of the variance in academic stress among Thai Buddhist students. About Indian Buddhist when the first variable, ‘Mindfulness’ was entered the obtained adjusted $R^2 = 0.300$, when ‘Impermanence’ was entered the adjusted $R^2 = 0.521$ and when ‘Morality’ was entered the adjusted $R^2 = 0.560$. It means that these models account for respectively 30%, 52.1% and 56 % of the variance in academic stress. In the model of Thai Buddhist students the first predictor $F = 4.950; p < 0.004$, for second predictor $F = 6.425, p < 0.007$ is significant. In the model of Indian Buddhist students the first predictor $F = 39.091; p < 0.000$, for second predictor $F = 49.339, p < 0.000$ for third predictor $F = 38.726, p < 0.004$ is significant. In the model of Thai Buddhist students the standardized coefficient beta for ‘Mindfulness’ $B = -0.302; p < 0.004$, for ‘Meditation’ $B = 0.284; p < 0.000$. In the model of Indian Buddhist the standardized coefficient Beta for ‘Mindfulness’ $B = 0.583$, $p < 0.000$ for ‘Impermanence’ $B = 0.429$; $p < 0.000$ and for ‘Morality’ $0.213$. Therefore, it is stated that these predictors have a significant impact on criterion variable. The hypothesis No. 2 ‘academic stress due will not significantly predict by Buddhist coping resources’ is partially rejected in this study. If we consider these two cultures, it is seen that ‘Mindfulness’ and ‘Meditation’ Buddhist coping resources has been effectively used in Thailand.
while ‘Mindfulness,’ ‘Impermanence’ and ‘Morality’ in India. Interestingly, ‘Mindfulness’ shown by the study to be highly effective coping resources in both nations.

**Conclusion**

Following findings have been drawn from the study:

I. Indian Buddhist students are experiencing more academic stress due to inadequate facilities at colleges than Thai Buddhist students. While Thai Buddhist students are experiencing more academic stress due to fear of examination than Indian Buddhist students. Moreover, the overall level of academic stress is higher among Thai students than Indian students.

II. There is a significant difference between Buddhist coping resources. Indian students are higher on ‘Mindfulness’, ‘Morality’ and ‘Impermanence’ than Thai Buddhist students. While Thai students are higher on ‘Loving Kindness’, ‘Comprehensive Karma’ and ‘Fatalistic Karma’ than Indian students.

III. ‘Mindfulness’ and ‘Meditation’ are most beneficial to predict academic stress for Thai students while ‘Mindfulness’, ‘Impermanence’ and ‘Morality’ are most useful to predict academic stress for Indian students.

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