IDENTIFYING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF LOW ACADEMIC GRADES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AS A MEDIATOR

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ABSTRACT
Considering the psychological factors that significantly associated either positive or negative with student's academic grades is vital to help the student's success and persist in higher education. Therefore, this study was carried out to address the psychological correlates of low academic grades among university students. This study also highlighted the mediating role of socio-economic status in relation to psychological correlates (stress, anxiety, and depression) that affect the low level of academic outcomes among university students. For that purpose, a sample of (N=300) students belonging to diversified socio-economic status were selected by using an online G. Power sample calculator. The sample was chosen by using a convenient sampling method. In this study, the psychological correlates were level of stress, anxiety and depression that was measured by using DASS-42 item scale and the current CGPA was considered as student's level of academic grade. Similarly, self reported socio-economic status was considered as a mediating variable in relation to stress, depression, and anxiety among students. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS. The results of this study revealed that stress, anxiety, and depression were significantly correlated with the low level of academic grades among the students. The findings also showed that the level of socio-economic status of university students plays a significant mediating role in relation to stress, anxiety, and depression. Based on the results, the study suggested minimizing the level of stress, anxiety, and depression to improve the academic grades of the students.
Keywords: Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Socio-Economic Status, Mediator.

INTRODUCTION
Throughout the human life span education plays a fundamental role and it also empowers human beings to become self-reliant to contribute positively to the prosperity of the nation. It is an acknowledged fact that Education is the process or act of obtaining awareness and preparing oneself or for the successful future life. It enables people to be aware of their rights and duties. By getting education the students enable themselves to develop good cognitive and physical growth and establish their beliefs and values (Lazar, 2015). Education is considered as a road map for living a successful life. This requires hard work to attain good grades. It has been noticed that some students fail to meet the educational challenges. They do not find time for themselves, and their life disturbs them from getting good grades which can be the cause of different physical and mental health issues. The burden of educational load and lack of time management

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also become a core cause of stress, depression, and anxiety among adults (Jaja, 2013). Hence, there is a need to discuss the psychological correlates in detail.

Psychological Correlates of Academic Grades

It has also been observed that the academic grades of the learners are linked with many factors such as the level of social support, level of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, level of academic motivation, mental stress, and level of satisfaction with life, anxiety, and depression. These psychological correlates can affect academic grades of students because students are very much concern about their grades. They are willing to do the tasks assigned by their teachers to get good grades. If they fail to do so it causes depression and anxiety among students. Parental pressure also plays an important role in the onset of psychological issues. When the parents pressurize students to get good grades then it also leads to depression and anxiety among students which affects the level of their academic grades (Deb & Sun, 2015). The workload of education can become a vital cause of psychological distress among students due to their hectic lifestyle. Sometimes workload becomes so exhausted that it does not prove to be a boon instead it becomes burden (Richardson & King). Psychological issues can be in the form of stress, depression and anxiety that also be the cause of their low grades. Educational workload and getting good grades can cause depression and anxiety among students (Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013).

Role of Socio-Economic Status

Socioeconomic status also plays a pivotal supportive role in academic achievements. There is a fact that the students who belong to high socioeconomic status achieve good grades while those with low socioeconomic status face hurdles in getting good grades. However social support and parental participation also play an important role. Students with high socioeconomic status avail multiple resources which support them in achieving high grades whereas the students with low socioeconomic status do not avail resources that results as low academic grades (White, 1982).

Various research revealed the effects of socio-economic status in relation to high or low academic outcomes among the students. A study conducted by Avisati (2020) explored the role of socio-economic status in connection with academic outcomes of students and revealed a positive significant contribution of socio-economic status. Evidence also showed that the students belonging to poor economic backgrounds are lower in their academic grades and drop during the academic semester (Charalambous, 2018).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Psychological variables such as stress, anxiety and depression are considered as negative variables linked or associated with poor academic grades. A study conducted in Iran on a sample of (N=344) young adults who were studying in different educational institutes. During the process of screening of psychological distress, the results reported a higher psychological distress that was significantly correlated with lower academic grades, poor academic motivation and with future anxiety (Sirin, 2005).

Reardon (2011) conducted a survey of public sector universities to check the level of anxiety and depression among the graduate students. The results of the survey showed a mild to moderate level of anxiety and depression among the students. Furthermore, this also revealed that the students who scored higher on depression were lower in their self reported CGPA.

According to Mistry et al (2010) psychological distress is significantly correlated with the learning process of the students. The study pointed out that the overall mental condition of the students is linked with their leaning outcomes throughout academic year. The study concluded that low confidence, stress, and academic anxiety are the variables linked with student's low academic performance.

According to Duncan (2012), socio-economic status also reflects both material and social benefits and disadvantages. Research has consistently revealed that people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds typically have greater access to educational resources, such as high-quality schools, tutoring, literature, and technology, which can help them do better in class and resultantly they achieve satisfactory academic grades as compared to those who belongs to low socio-economic status.

A high correlation between socioeconomic status and academic achievement has been repeatedly reported by many national and international research. An international study reported that children from higher SES families typically do better on tests than their classmates who belong from lower SES

backgrounds. There are variations in how well people perform in school depending on their socioeconomic status across various nations and educational systems (Magnuson, 2012).

The socioeconomic status of students may influence how well they do academically perform due to a variety of reasons. First, children who come from families with higher SES frequently have access to get admission in high standard schools, private tutoring, and learning-enhancing activities. With the use of these technologies, learning may be made simpler, and more learning opportunities can be offered, which will benefit students' academic performance (Pong, 2009).

It has been reported by different studies that parental education and socio-economic status is a powerful predictor of how well kids perform in school. More educated parents often have a better understanding of how the educational system functions as well as the knowledge and abilities to support their children's learning. They are more likely to engage in educational activities at home, assist with academics, and promote a positive learning attitude (OECD, 2019). Additionally, a student's socioeconomic status might have an impact on their social and cultural capital, which can have an impact on how well they perform in school. Higher SES students frequently have access to a greater variety of resources, including social connections, cultural experiences, and educational role models.

However, it's critical to remember that several factors play a role in the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. There are exceptions and variations within and across nations even though greater SES is often associated with better academic performance. Despite having a lot of social and economic issues, certain studies have indicated that some children from low-income families perform quite well in school. The significance of looking into other variables that could mediate or mitigate the link between SES and academic success is shown by these unusual examples (Stephens & colleagues, 2014).

The achievement gap brought on by differences in socioeconomic position has recently been the focus of scholars and policymakers. There have been efforts made to create interventions and policies that will lessen educational disparities and offer all kids, regardless of socioeconomic origins, equitable educational opportunities. Policymakers and educators may create focused initiatives to close the gap and advance educational fairness by comprehending the effects of socioeconomic status on academic success and recognizing the underlying processes (Reardon, 2013).

Socioeconomic status significantly affects academic success. Comparing their counterparts from poorer socio-economic origins with those from wealthier socio-economic backgrounds, students from the latter group often achieve superior educational results. Access to educational resources, parental education level, and social and cultural capital are a few of the variables that might affect how socioeconomic position affects academic accomplishment. To provide equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances, it is crucial to design interventions and policies that are focused on eliminating these discrepancies (OECD, 2018).

Rationale of the Study

A student's level of socio-economic status is a core factor that affects the overall level of student's performance throughout the academic years. This is also considered as a social factor for continuing study and to avail better grades. Studies reported that the students with high socio-economic status perform well, and they score low on stress, anxiety, and depression. Socio-economic status is also associated with good grades among students (Munir et al., 2023). As the previous studies conducted only pointed out the psychological correlates of academic grades so there was a gap in research and rare studies reported the mediating role of student's level of socio-economic status. Therefore, the core aim of this study is not only highlighting the psychological correlates of low academic grades but also seek out the mediating role of socio-economic statuses in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression.

Significance of the Study

This is an acknowledged fact that apart from good teaching the level of socio-economic status of the students is also a contributing variable for achieving good grades. Furthermore, the level of parental support in teaching and resources used in the school are linked with students' overall performance. As this study aims to check the mediating role of socio-economic status in association with stress, anxiety and depression and academic grades of the student so the outcomes of the study will contribute to parents, teachers, and

policymakers to reduce psychological ailments and also understand how socio-economic status affect on the academic grades of the students.

Objectives
1. To find out the psychological correlates of low academic grades of university students.
2. To check the mediating role of student's Socio-Economic status in relation with stress, anxiety and depression.

Hypothesis
1. Level of stress, anxiety and depression will significantly correlate with student's academic grades.
2. Socio-economic status will play a mediating role in relation to stress, anxiety, depression, and academic grades.

METHOD
Throughout the study different methods and strategies were used to check the relationship of the research variables. The methods used in this study are as under.

Research Participants
The populations of this study were university students who were studying in different disciplines and belonging from diversified demographic areas. The total sample of this study was (N=300) including both genders.

Research Design
This study was quantitative in nature with cross-sectional research design. The participants were approached by using convenient sampling methods and the responses were collected by using valid and reliable scales.

Variables
In this study, three variables were used. Psychological correlates such as stress, anxiety and depression were the independent variables and academic grades were the dependent variables. The self reported level of socio-economic status was the mediating variable used in this study.

Mode of Data Collection
In person mode of data collected was used in which the researcher himself/face to face interacted with the study participants and administered the scale.

Mode of Data Analysis
The collected responses from the study participants were scored according to the instructions given in the scale and the quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
The students with minimum age of 19 years and above who were studying in different programs in the university were included in this study. The participants under 19 and above 40 years were excluded from the study.

Method of Measuring the Variables
The psychological correlates (stress, anxiety, and depression) were measured by using DASS-42 item scale. This scale measures the three different aspects of psychological distress. This scale was valid and reliable. On the other hand, self-reported socio-economic status was the part in demographic variable in this study used as a mediator between stress, anxiety, and depression. Lastly, the students' current CGPA was their academic grades.

Ethical Values Adapted During Study
APA ethical standards were used in this study such as informed consent, confidentiality of data, risk benefit ration etc.

RESULTS

The outcomes of the study analyzed by using SPSS are as below.

Table 1 Demographic variable information (N=300)

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	150	50.0
Female	150	50.0
Academic Performance		
Lower Level	101	33.7
Moderate Level	119	39.7
High Level	80	26.7
Qualification of respondents		
B.S	143	47.7
M.Phil	92	30.7
PHD	65	21.7
Socio Economic Status		
Lower class	105	35.0
Middle class	117	39.3
Higher class	77	25.7
Family System		
Joint Family	181	60.3
Nuclear Family	119	39.7

Note: This table shows the demographic information (frequencies, percentages) values derived from the sample (N=300).

Table 2 Results of psychological correlates of low academic grades among students (N=300)

Clinical Variables	Level	Frequency	Percent
Stress	Normal	37	12.3
	Mild	38	12.7
	Moderate	118	39.3
	Severe	102	34.0
	Extremely Severe	5	1.7
Anxiety	Normal	50	16.7
	Mild	21	7.0
	Moderate	124	41.3
	Severe	97	32.3
	Extremely Severe	8	2.7
Depression	Normal	43	14.3
	Mild	31	10.3
	Moderate	119	39.7
	Severe	98	32.7
	Extremely Severe	9	3.0

Note: The above table shows the results of psychological correlates i.e. stress, anxiety and depression level for overall respondents.

Table 3 Showing the Descriptive Statistics of study variables (N=300)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range
Age in Years	25.21	3.27	19-30
Academic Performance	3.08	0.48	2.30-3.90
Depression	18.03	6.11	6-30
Anxiety	13.32	3.99	4-24
Stress	22.58	6.43	8-35

Note: The above table shows the descriptive statistics of overall study variables discussed by the researcher in under study research work.

Table 4
Mediation Analysis used Socio Economic Status as mediator in relation with Depression, Anxiety and Stress. Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the mediator (Hayes process v4.0)
Mediation Analysis Model: 4   Sample Size: 300
M: Socio Economic Status   (Mediation variable)

Effect	Coefficients	SE	T	P	95% CI.LL	95% CI.UL
Constant	3.58	0.09	37.65	0.000**	3.39	3.77
Predictor-outcome	-0.059	0.002	-24.29	0.000**	-0.06	-0.05
Mediator-outcome	0.13	0.02	6.89	0.000**	0.09	0.17
DE	-0.06	0.002	-24.29	0.000**	-0.06	-0.05
IE	-0.01	0.002	---	---	-0.02	-0.008

Note: The working process of mediation analysis and the values of direct and indirect effect size show that socio economic status plays role as a mediator in relation to depression, anxiety, and stress among the students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study was carried out to identify the psychological correlates of low academic grades and focusing on the mediating role of socio-economic status among university students. In this connection the first hypothesis was developed to check whether there are significant correlations between psychological variables i.e. stress anxiety and depression with academic grades of students. The results of the study showed a significant relationship between the variables. Hence, the hypothesis accepted, and the results are same as reported in the previous studies such as Agnafors (2021) conducted a study to check the relationship of mental illness with lower academic grades among students and the results reported positive relationship of stress, depression, and anxiety with low academic grades among students. The second hypothesis was aimed to check the mediating role of socio-economic status with stress, anxiety, and depression. The results showed significant mediation of socio-economic status. Hence, this hypothesis accepted, and the study results are in accordance with the results of past research. Dohrenwend et al. (2019) reported a relationship of low socio-economic status with higher depressiveness among adults.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study it concluded that the academic grades of the students are lined with different factors. This study highlighted psychological factors and reported that stress, anxiety, and depression are the variables linked with the lower academic grades of the students. Similarly, the level of socio-economic status plays a mediating role in reducing psychological distress among the students. Hence, based on results, it is suggested that some intervention programs reduce the psychological issues of the students to improve the academic grades of the students.

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