

Effects of Academic Expectations Stress on Academic Achievements

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Abstract: High academic expectations tend to be one of most significant features of Asian families, compared to non-Asian families. Parents' expectations for high academic achievement of their children leads to high academic stress on students. Academic expectation stress (AES) is an important variable that reflects on-campus students' mental state. However, relatively few studies specifically examine the impact of AES. Thus, the present study focuses on the effect of AES on academic achievements. Moreover, the relation between family educated level and academic achievements is also examined. The statistics are collected by questionnaires, and differences between groups were analyzed. Results show that academic expectation stress might affect academic achievement. In addition, family educated level might also have an impact on academic achievements. The results emphasize the influence of AES on students. Future research could focus on whether stress-relieving interventions are effective in reducing students' academic expectation stress levels. Educators should focus on helping students develop reasonable academic expectations to avoid the effects of stress.

Keywords: academic expectations stress, high school students, academic achievements

1. Introduction

Asian families mainly pay their attention to their children's academic achievements, instead of children's academic stress derived from parents' expectations. However, not much parents take notice of it, ignoring the negative impact it may bring about. As more and more studies focus on the influence of AES, the importance of it obviously appears. Higher AES makes lower self-confidence, heavier anxious level, even worse peer relationship. In this research, the correlation between AES and academic achievements is emphasized, and in the future, there are much more to discover the effects of AES.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Effects of Academic Achievements

2.1.1. Meaning of Academic Achievements to Chinese High School Students

For eastern Asian students, academic achievement is a predominant way for their family to participate in socializing: poor academic achievements of a student may bring about shame and dishonor to his

or her family, even make the whole family members lose their confidence in supporting the student to continue education; academic achievements plays as a chance for students to elevate their family to higher social status as well; Therefore, success in academic achievements is strengthened by these notions [1]. Relatively speaking, western students have an obvious difference, for which they need not to be afraid of humility and family expectations, and there is comparably less academic stress. As a study comparing students in between Canada and Singapore, Canadian teenagers' stress caused by self and other expectations is lower than that of Singapore teenagers [2].

2.1.2. Factors of Academic Achievements

Researchers point out that educated level of parents, cognition of subjects, family structures and academic expectations are all impact factors of academic achievements. As for high school students, entering a high-qualified university is certainly the foremost goal, and they often possess a fairly high expectations [3]. The expectation for academic performance has a positive correlation with decreased disobedient behaviors, investment in education, declined dropout rates [4]. Undoubtedly, these factors can facilitate the promotion in academic achievements together: high expectations lead to more academic investments and higher academic performance; conversely, students with low expectations will probably underestimate their values and become hopeless [5]. Nevertheless, excess expectations bring negative effects. For example, exorbitant self-expectations increase pressure and anxiety, reducing confidence [6]. Especially at the time close to National College Entrance Examination, academic stress will skyrocket as time approaches [7]. If students set an excessive expectation, they have to spend time in confronting pressure, relieving stress, instead of establishing sounder foundation and getting more prepared about the exam.

2.2. Academic Expectation Stress

2.2.1. Definition of Academic Expectation Stress

Obviously, academic expectations stress is the stress originated from academic expectations. As for Asian societies, education plays an important role in Asian households, even some of them are willing to sacrifice much of their happiness and wealth in order to gain high-qualified educations. Academic stress is an indispensable factor when students pursue high academic performance. It relates to most of psychological diseases, such as anxiety and depression. Research about Singaporean international students concludes that academic expectations stress has a strong correlation with problematic internet uses, which these uses significantly positively influences loneliness [8].

2.2.2. Effect of Academic Expectation Stress

Prior study measured AES done by Lokman Koçak in 2020, and the research indicated the relationship between AES and maladjustment of secondary school students by regressive models. The results show that poor self-supervision ability has no clear relationship with AES. Maladjustment of students can positively predict AES, failure, fragility, lack of self-control and pessimism can negatively predict academic expectations stress. Failure is determined since high school students feel that they are not good enough and regard themselves as losers, then lose willingness of learning; Pessimism will occur when a pessimistic high school student are dominated by the feelings of failure, and believes failure will accompany with his or her whole life. As a result, it is predicted that high school students will experience relatively high academic expectations stress [9].

Another study indicated that peer relation has a strong positive correlation with academic expectations. Sex differentiation has no obvious correlation with expectation and peer relation [10]. Eyüp Çelik and Selami Yildirim found out that examination anxiety has a strong positive correlation.

Self-expectations can significantly predict examination anxiety and examination anxiety is highly correlated with self-expectations. Academic self-expectations stress has a relationship with examination anxiety. can enhance Academic achievements motives can be promoted by support and positive attitudes from parents and teachers. Those positive attitudes could also reduce academic expectations stress and examination anxiety [11].

3. Method

The statistics are obtained from Jinhua Foreign Language School's eleventh grade students by sending questionnaires. Academic achievements and academic expectations are obtained by asking students to provide grades of one of simulated National College Entrance Examination and expected grades in National College Entrance Examination.

Academic Expectations Stress Inventory (AESI) consists of 9 questions, five related to academic stress generated by expectations from parents or teachers, 4 related to academic stress from students themselves. The AESI has a Likert-type scale ranging from 0(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree).

The obtained statistics are divided by two standards: Firstly, participants are divided by the grades from AESI, and points from 1 to 2 are regarded as low-level group, points of 3 are regarded as middle-level group, points from 4 to 5 are regarded as high-level group. Secondly, they are divided according to parental educated level, and data of lower than bachelor's degree are regarded as low-level group, data of bachelor's degree are regarded as middle-level group, data of higher than bachelor's degree are regarded as high-level group. The scores from AESI are calculated to population average, keeping integer.

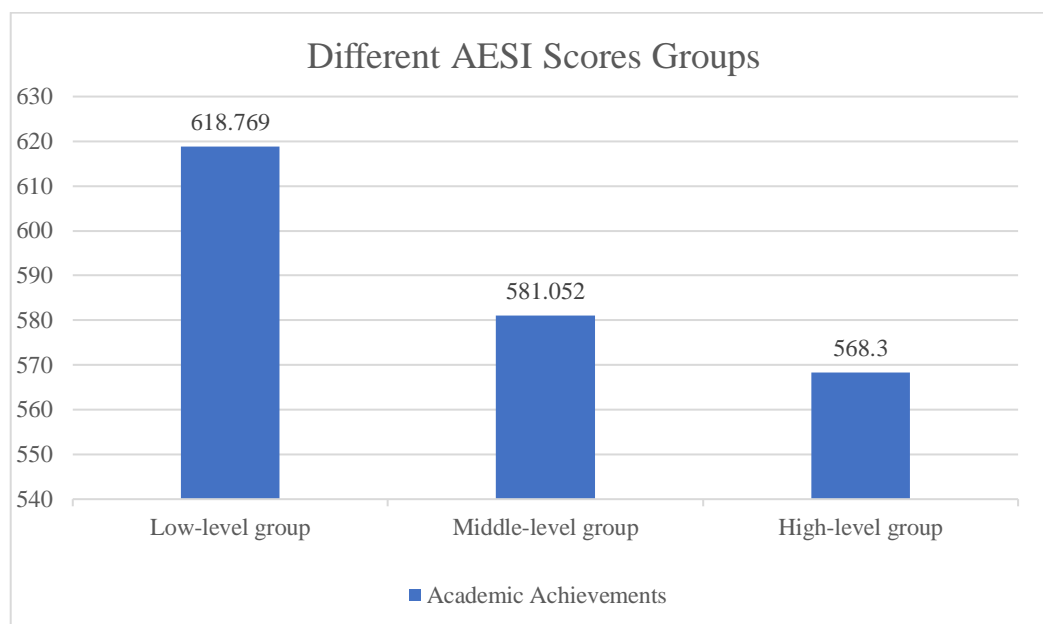


Figure 1: Different AESI Scores Groups.

As shown in Figure 1, students' academic performance is higher when they are at a lower level of academic stress. A comparison of the high academic expectancy stress group and the medium academic expectancy stress group reveals that academic expectancy stress may have some negative effects on academic performance. A comparison of the mean academic performance of the low academic expectancy stress group and the medium academic expectancy stress group shows that even moderate levels of academic stress can have an effect on academic performance.

Conversely, academic achievement may also have an inverse effect on academic expectation pressure. For example, the group of students with higher academic achievement feels lower levels of academic expectancy pressure.

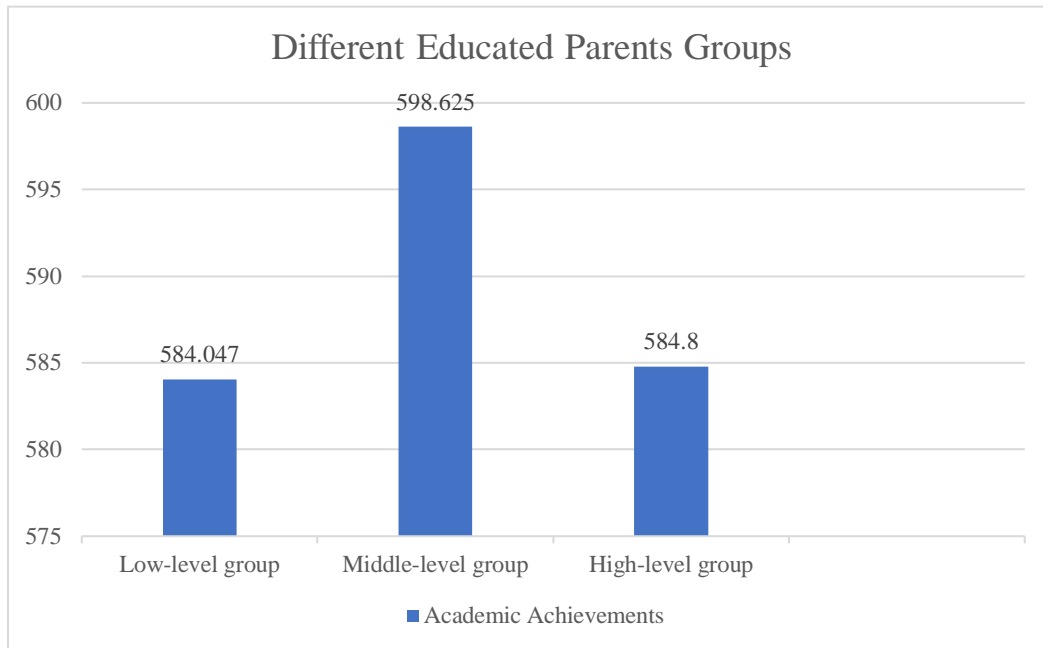


Figure 2: Different Educated Parents Groups.

As shown in Figure 2, students' academic performance is higher when they are at a middle level of academic stress. A comparison of the high parental educated level group and the low parental educated level group reveals that too high or low parental educated level may lead to lower academic performance.

The specific questions from AESI scale are presented below (see Figure 3). All questions are translated into Chinese properly.

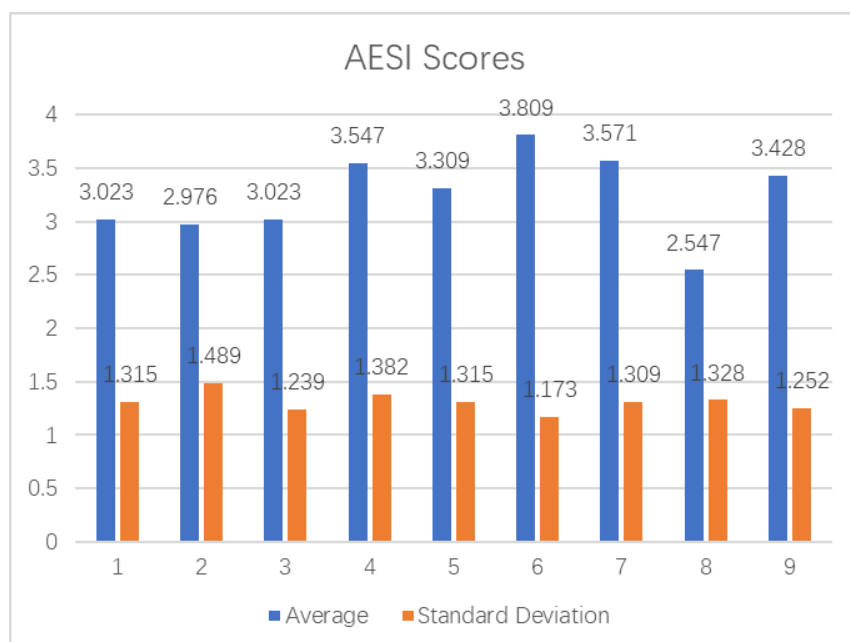


Figure 3: Scores of Academic Expectations Stress.

4. Discussion

In research located in Pakistan, Nadeem, Saima and Rana discovered that parental educated level can positively affect high school students' academic achievements. They randomly selected 200 tenth grade students as samples, collected data through questionnaires, interviewing and direct observations. They verified their speculation of relationship by using independent Z test to analyze the data [12].

In a study located in China, scholars researched the relationship between STEM grades of Chinese students and their families, adopted sample data from Database of Investigation of Curriculum and Instruction in China (ICIC), analyzed from the perspective of parental engagement and household social and economic environment. The result revealed that parental expectations have a significant influence to filial academic achievements. Parental educated level markedly affects filial STEM scores [13].

High school students are at a pivotal stage of personal growth. Under such a circumstance of emphasis on academic achievements in eastern Asian culture, they especially need every help to confront problems by academic pressure.

5. Suggestion

As for parents, they need to modify their behaviors. As the absolute and sole supporting power for students, they are still influential and irreplaceable for students. Therefore, parents are most needed when students get poor academic performance. Giving students support and encouraging them appropriately, instead of comparing them to top or talented students are beneficial for students' mood. Misbehavior like saying "everything is considered for you" or "you have to consider about my donation in working", or trying to make use of students' shame to exert even more stress on students should be avoided. In short, parents should have reasonable expectations for their students' academic performance and give them moderate rather than excessive academic pressure. In addition, parents should be aware that academics are not the whole story of their students' lives. As the person closest to the student, parents are one of the best people to relieve the student's academic stress through extracurricular activities.

As for the society, the guidance of public opinions should not judge students solely by their grades. Nowadays, when Internet has spread all over the world, students can easily get information, then subconsciously make useless comparisons which make them fall into self-abasement. As a part of society, each individual is bound to respect others. For students, they should encourage themselves to improve themselves in diversity. In other words, students can express their talents in other aspects despite their poor academic performance, instead of being mocked. Part of the pressure students feel comes from their uncertainty of future employment patterns and the stressful employment situation portrayed in the media. In addition to actually increasing the number of jobs and boosting graduates' confidence in employment, society should step up publicity, especially about diverse and flexible employment paths. In this way, by relieving students' employment pressure, it will help them to get rid of the over-emphasis on grades during their school years, as the idea of "getting into a good university to get the job of your choice" is still prevalent in China. As for school, it should not be merely a ladder to move upward. Conversely, it should be a epitome of students' life, allowing students to discover their own values, experiencing their life, and laying the foundation for university and social life in the future. Hence, high schools should provide a platform for students to properly relieve pressure, balance their time between relaxing and learning, and avoid wasting time on useless meetings and lectures.

As for teachers, they should appropriately care about students and focus on their psychological development, stress variation, mental variation and so on. Teachers should actively communicate with parents about students' problems, provide fit solutions. As a person who imparts knowledge and

regulates students, teachers should arrange proper teaching plan, order suitable homework, balance pressure and natural instincts of students, for which high school students need to release their feelings. Class atmosphere also needs to be controlled, avoiding invalid competitions and comparisons. Parent-teacher conferences need to receive more attention from teachers as a means of communicating with families. Instead of just describing the student's education, teachers should pay more interactive discussions with parents about the student's situation during parent-teacher conferences. Symptoms of stress-related distress should be identified early on. In general, early symptoms are more likely to be treated effectively. In addition, when subject teachers are unable to deal with a student's psychological problems, they should promptly seek help from a psychotherapy professional.

As for students, they need to have a clear sense of their own ability and future development. They should also understand suggestions from parents and teachers, maintain their willpower, and comprehend social situation. Stand still and refuse to make progress makes no benefits but wastes invaluable studying time and being flabby to stress. At the same time, students should not degrade and abuse others. Instead, they should show their consideration, fully realize others' situations, and provide sincere suggestions.

6. Conclusion

This study mainly focuses on the effect of academic expectations stress of secondary school students on academic achievements. The results show that academic expectations stress is negatively associated with academic achievements, which is consistent with most prior studies. In results of examining parental educated level, it is not consistent with most studies' result. However, this variation can be explained by contingency and other factors out of control, such as family income, parental educational investment and so on.

Based on results of prior studies and the present study, academic expectations stress from high school students is proved to be a key factor of their academic achievements. However, the relationship between AES and academic achievements may exist relatively complicated influencing mechanism. Parental occupations, educated level, income may play an important role in the relationship above. Future research needs to clarify the mechanisms of influence between variables, especially mediating or moderating factors.

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