



ACADEMIC RESILIENCE: AN ANTIDOTE TO ACADEMIC STRESS.

Khan Tanveer Habeeb

Assistant Professor, Marathwada College of Education, Aurangbad.

Abstract

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. A common misapprehension is that resilient people are free from negative emotions or thoughts, remaining optimistic in most or all situations. To the contrary, resilient individuals have, through passage of time, developed coping techniques that allow them to effectively and relatively easily navigate around or through crises. The present article deals with the concept and characteristics of resilience, the need of academic resilience, suggestions and means for developing academic resilience in the students which will prove to be effective in dealing with academic stress encountered by the students.

Keywords: Resilience, Academic Resilience and Academic stress.



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“The real skill is learning to accept that which you truly can’t change and focus instead on what you can change.”

Introduction

Progress and issues related to academic stress in childhood adolescence are often being studied by academicians and researchers at a large scale. We also find that some students deal effectively with the academic stress while some students have a negative effect with academic failure. The possible explanation to this global concern lies in academic resilience. The term resilience is a

capacity for healthy development and successful learning despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Howard & Johnson, 2000).

Meaning of Resilience: The term resilience stems from Latin word ‘**resiliens**’ and was originally used to refer to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance (Joseph, 1994).

Definitions: “Resilience is the ability to bounce or spring back after being stretched or constrained or recovering strength or spirit.”

Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language (1958).

“An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

Merriam Webster Dictionary: “Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.”

American psychological association: Resilience is generally thought of as a "positive adaptation" after a stressful or adverse situation. In other words, resilience is one's ability to bounce back from a negative experience. It is important to note that resilience is not only about overcoming a deeply stressful situation, but also coming out of the said situation with "competent functioning". Resiliency allows a person to rebound from adversity as a strengthened and more resourceful person. In general, resiliency refers to those factors and processes that limit negative behavior associated with stress and result in adaptive outcomes even in the presence of adversities (Garmezy & Masten, 2001).

Misapprehension about Resilience: Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. A common misapprehension is that resilient people are free from negative emotions or thoughts, remaining optimistic in most or all situations. To the contrary, resilient individuals have, through passage of time, developed coping techniques that allow them to effectively and relatively easily navigate around or through crises. In other words, people who demonstrate resilience are people with optimistic attitude and positive emotionality and are, by practice, able to effectively balance negative emotions with positive ones.

Academic Resilience: In the academic context, it is defined as student's ability to deal effectively with academic setbacks, stress and study pressure (**Finn & Rock, 1997; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Catterall, 1998; Overstreet & Braun, 1999**).

Academic or educational resilience is the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by traits, conditions and experiences (**Wang, Haertal & Walberg, 1994**).

It deals with high levels of achievement, motivation and performance despite the stressful conditions that place individuals at risk of poor-performance and dropping out of school (**Alva, 1991**).

Importance of Academic Resilience in Students: Resilient students are highly optimistic, they have the ability to anticipate problems, solve problems logically, and have the ability to foster creative solutions to the problems. These students are high on self-esteem, such students are really eager to learn from the experiences. They are highly durable, flexible and independent (**Bernard, 1993**). Academic resilience is a dynamic developmental process that involves the student's internal and external protective factors that contribute to effective adjustment, academic competence and academic success (**Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000**). Internal protective factors focus on the individual characteristics such as skills, attitudes, beliefs and values. Some of the internal protective factors are cooperation and communication, empathy, strong problem solving skills, aspirations and self-efficacy (**Constantine, Bernard, Diaz, 1999; Wested, 2003**). These protective factors are related to positive developmental outcomes and psychological well being whereas external protective factors include the environmental support and opportunities available at home, school, community and from peer groups in the form of care, encouragement for participation in school activities (Wested, 2000).

Review of related literature: Resilience describes the phenomenon of serving and surviving in the face of adversity, stress, family psychopathology, trauma, etc. Resilience improves the conditions affecting an individual ability to cope (**Osofsky & Thompson, 2000**).

According to Zulfifli (1988) students always face problems in school adjustment. They face learning problems, language problems, career problem and also problems in dealing with personal and social matters. These factors aggravate stress in their life. Taking responsibilities on their own makes the student feel the stress and study pressure. **Morris (1990)** reported that high school student face academic stress in school as they are always in a race to compete with each

others to get better grades. Failure to achieve success, inability to do work in school creates stress among school students. Achieving good academic grades, character building, taking responsibilities put enormous pressure on to the students. Other than school related problem, female students face communication and family problems whereas male students feel pressure of getting involved in sports, recreation and also have financial problems. **Fariza (2005)** conducted a research on stress among high school students and found that these students have to deal with the academic world. Parents and teachers demand and expect good grades and success from them **Mates and Alison (1992)** also found that achievement in academics contributes to stress in high school students. There is rapid increase in the prevalence rate of stress among students in India (Gupta & Khan, 1987), so serious and quick efforts should be taken to eliminate stressors.

Researchers have identified several stressors in academics. Academic stressors include student's inability to develop adequate study skills (**Carveth et al., 1996**), studying for exams grade competition, fear of academic failure (**Kolko, 1960**), large amount of content to master in each semester in stipulated amount of time predicts academic stress (**Abouserie, 1994**).

In the discussion of resiliency in children, Benard (1995) argued that resilient children usually have four attributes in common:

Social Competence: Ability to elicit positive responses from others, thus establishing positive relationships with both adults and peers

Problem-solving skills: Planning that facilitates seeing oneself in control and resourcefulness in seeking help from others

Autonomy: A sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment, and

A sense of purpose and future: Goals, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future

Resilience: An Innate Quality or Dynamic Process?

During early waves of resilience research, researchers tended to regard and label individuals who transcended their adverse circumstances as "hardy," "invulnerable," or "invincible" (**Werner & Smith, 1982**). Such labels implied that these individuals were in possession of a rare and remarkable set of qualities that enabled them to rebound from whatever adversity came their way – almost as if these fortunate individuals possessed a sort of magical force field that protected them from all harm. Increasingly, however, researchers have arrived at the consensus that

resilience is not some remarkable, innate quality but rather a developmental process that incorporates the normative self-righting tendencies of individuals (**Masten, 2001**). In fact, **Garmezy (1993)** cautioned against the use of the term invulnerable because it implies that people are incapable of being wounded or injured. **Masten (2001)** referred to the resilience process as “ordinary magic,” simply because a majority of individuals who undergo serious adversity “remarkably” manage to achieve normative developmental outcomes. Research in resiliency concludes that each person has an innate capacity for resiliency, a self-righting tendency that operates best when people have resiliency-building conditions in their lives. It is grounded in the belief that all humans possess an inborn developmental Resilience wisdom and seeks to better contextualize how teachers can tap this wisdom (**Benard, 1995**). In her book, *Fostering Resiliency in Children*, **Bonnie Benard (1995)** claimed: We are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose (p. 17). Researchers increasingly view resilience not as a fixed attribute but as an alterable set of processes that can be fostered and cultivated (**Masten, 2001; Pardon, Waxman & Huang, 1999**). Researchers emphasize the interactive processes – between the individual and environment and between risk and protective factors – as the crucial underpinnings of developing resilience. Subsequently, ecological systems theory, articulated by **Brofenbrenner (1989), Garabino (1995),** and **Garmezy (1991)**, functioned as a way to examine the interplay between individuals and their environments and the resulting impact upon the individual’s development. Garmezy’s (1991) triadic model of resilience provided a widely accepted ecological framework for understanding the resilience process. Multiple scholars use this framework to study resilience (**Gordon & Song, 1994; Morales & Trotman, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1982**). The triadic model described the dynamic interactions among risk and protective factors on three levels (individual, family, and environmental). The model also emphasized that resilience is a process that empowers individuals to shape their environment and to be shaped by it in turn. Similarly, **Cicchetti and Lynch’s (1993)** interactive ecological-transactional model of development highlighted how certain contexts (e.g. culture, neighborhood, family) interact with each other over time to shape development and adaptation. These ecological models highlight the intersection of varying influences upon one’s development and how risk and protective actors can interact to enhance or inhibit a person’s resilience. Resilience Implicit in the concept of resilience as a dynamic process

is the understanding that resilience can grow or decline over time depending on the interactions taking place between an individual and their environment and between risk and protective factors in an individual's life (**Borman&Rachuba, 2001; Werner & Smith, 1992**). Therefore, an individual may be resilient at certain times - and not at others - depending upon the circumstances and relative strength of protective factors compared to risk factors at the given moment (**Winfield, 1991**). Interestingly, the term resilience was adopted in lieu of earlier terms because it more accurately conveyed the dynamic process (**Wolin&Wolin, 1993**). **Masten (1994)** contributed the idea that resilience is a pattern over time, characterized by good eventual adaptation despite risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities. Pushing scholars to look beyond the individual level of resilience,

Characteristics of Resilient Person:

- 1. Awareness:** Resilient people are aware of the situation, their own emotional reactions and the behavior of those around them.
- 2. An Understanding that Setbacks and failures are Part of Life:** Resilient people possess the understanding that life is full of challenges and we cannot avoid many of these problems, we can remain flexible and willing to modify with the change.
- 3. An Internal Locus of Control:** Resilient people believe that their actions will affect the outcome of an event of course, some factors are simply outside of one's personal control, such as natural disasters.
- 4. Strong Problem-Solving Skills:** Problem-solving skills are essential. When a crisis emerges, resilient people are able to spot the solution that will lead to a safe outcome.
- 5. Having Strong Social Connections:** Whenever one is dealing with a problem, it is important to have people who can offer support. Friends, family member, co-workers, and online support groups can all be potential sources of social connectivity.
- 6. Identifying as a Survivor, Not a Victim:** When dealing with any potential crisis, it is essential to view oneself as a survivor. Avoid thinking like a victim of circumstance and instead look for ways to resolve the problem. While the situation may be unavoidable, one can still stay focused on a positive outcome.
- 7. Being Able to Ask for Help:** While being resourceful is an important part of resilience, it is also essential to know when to ask for help. During a crisis, people can benefit from the help of

psychologists and counselors specially trained to deal with crisis situations. Other potential sources of assistance include:

- **Books** - Reading about people who have experienced and overcome a similar problem can be both motivating and good for ideas on how to cope.
- **Online Message Boards** - Online communities can provide continual support and a place to talk about issues with people who have been in a similar situation.
- **Support Groups** - Attending support group meetings is a great way to talk about the challenges one is facing and find a network of people who can provide compassion and support.

Types of Resilience:

- 1. Individual Resilience-** The ability for an individual to cope with adversity and change.
- 2. Community Resilience-** The ability for an individual and the collective community to respond to adversity and change.
- 3. Organizational Resilience-** The ability for a business or industry, including its employees, to cope with adversity and change.(cited from **Arun Kumar (2015)the impact of socio economic status on happiness, hope and resilience of undergraduates, dept of psychology ,Maharshi Dayanand University)**

10 ways to develop Resilience (According to American Psychological Association)

- 1. Make connections.** Good relationships with teachers, peer groups and family members, or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.
- 2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.
- 3. Accept that change is a part of living.** Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.
- 4. Move toward your goals.** Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead

of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

5. Take decisive actions. Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

7. Nurture a positive view of yourself. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

8. Keep things in perspective. Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

9. Maintain a hopeful outlook. An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

10. Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope. The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.

Practical suggestions for students (According to McNamara 2004)

Here some suggestions are presented for the students when they are under academic related stress or depression. McNamara (2004) recommends students that when they are finding it difficult to get their stress or depression under control, try the following:

1. **Think about the problem:** When the pressure rises, you need a breathing space to put things in perspective and plan your next move. Take a small break if you can. Think about the main aspects of your life, your family, schoolwork, friends, and free time.

2. **Get it sorted:** start by dealing with the effects of stress.

- **Write it down:** Stress makes it hard to remember things and to concentrate. Try using diaries and make a list of problems to deal with it later.
- **Make time to plan:** Stress makes planning and decisions difficult e.g. when preparing for an exam, use timetables and planners to decide what you will study each evening or each week.
- **Take a break:** stress makes you tired. Give yourself proper breaks, for meals, refreshments, exercise and at the weekend. Look after yourself: stress makes it harder to get over an illness and makes you more vulnerable to ill health. Learn to stop before you are completely worn out.
- **Relax:** stress makes you feel pressured. Slow down, calm down and take the urgency out of your life.
- **Get stuck in:** stress tempts you to avoid difficulties or put off dealing with them, so that they do not get resolved. Try not to keep putting things off and try to face them instead. It is often best to do your least favorite or hardest task first bit by bit.
- **Manage your time:** Time is valuable. Know about time management technique.

3. **Think ahead:** Think about what's important to you in the long term. Choose solutions to problems that will be helpful in the long term.

4. **Make it easy on yourself:** All different types of stress can add up, so don't be afraid to try to sort out the small problems as well as the big ones. It will make you feel more in control.

5. **Look after your health:** To stay healthy, make sure you get regular meals and regular exercise. Exercising can give you lots more energy (McNamara, 2004).

Suggestions just before the exam

- Keep calm and focused.
- Remember everybody worries about exams, and it is normal to find your mind filling up with alarming thoughts. Just remember, thinking these things does not make them true. Have summary notes written on cards that you can use it before you go to exam; at this stage you really just need words that will trigger your memory-(PQ4R). Before you start, take a deep breath or count up to ten.
- Read the instructions carefully.

- Read the full exam paper before you start. Write short notes beside the questions you are going to do, to give you confidence and trigger your memory.
- Adapt what you know to the questions, but try to keep to the point.
- Be disciplined about the time keeping.
- Use your best handwriting (McNamara, 2004).

Role of Teacher in Developing Academic Resilience

- Teachers and education policy makers had to conventionally focus on teaching methods and learning styles while examining and identifying the underlying cause for low academic performance amongst students.
- Teachers and counselors should be provided a training for expert dealing with the academically weak and underachieving students as part of their faculty development program
- The teachers should also identify the underlying cognitive processes such as self-belief system, persistence, attributional styles and perceived control as they also provide a vital contribution to academic performance of the students.
- The teachers should design and plan counseling programs for students.
- Teachers should inculcate a feeling to avoid seeing academic underachievement crises as insurmountable problems in the students.
- Teachers should strengthen the social relationship in the students by assigning group projects.
- Teachers should help in developing insightful and visionary outlook.
- Teachers should develop a problem solving attitude in the students.
- Teachers should have frequent talks with the parents regarding the academics and the behavior of the students.
- Teachers should give ample opportunities for self-expression.
- Teachers should work for developing self-confidence in the students.
- Teacher can fill up new zeal,enthusiasm and vigor in the lives of the students.

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