



MAKING EDUCATION STRESS FREE: - A MOTIVATIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Present generation of students seems to be under tremendous pressure to perform. Parental expectations and unrealistically setting up of high goals by the students causes stress and because of this stress, students suffer from various psychological and physical disorders. Teachers also contributes significantly for this stress, showing good academic achievement, high marks, earn positions in the class places students under tremendous pressure. Drastic change in our present evaluation system is the need of the hour. Application of grading system and making board examination optional are some of the steps taken by CBSE to reduce stress. The present paper is an attempt to suggest some techniques keeping in mind the various cognitive theory of motivation to make education stress free.

Key Terms: *stress, stressors, self-efficacy, learning goals, performance goals, attribution, expectancy for success.*



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Introduction:-

The modern world, which is said to be a world of achievements, is also a world of stress. One finds stress everywhere, whether it be within the family, business organization, schools and in any other social or economic activity. Right from the time of birth till the last breath drawn, an individual is invariably exposed to various stressful situations. Thus, it is not surprising that interest in the issue has been rising with the advancement of the present century which has been called the “Age of Anxiety and Stress”.

Stress among students is a common phenomenon. Most of the students feel educational stress. Education / learning now become a stressful activity. Suicides by the students now become a very common activity. Although various schemes, procedures have been devised by various organizations such as NCERT, CBSE to make education stress-free, but even after the sincere effort on the part of these agencies, we are not able to make the classroom learning a thing of enjoyment. Examinations, parental expectations, unrealistically setting up

of a goal are some of the reasons the causes stress. Stress proves to be very fatal for the individual experiencing. Stress on one hand disturbed our physical well being also severely affected our mental health. Researches indicates that stress causes variety of diseases such as cancer, heart attack, multiple organ failure etc. stress also affects our performance on variety of tasks such as educational, social, vocational etc. stress may be caused from variety of reasons ranging from daily hassles such as wait for the bus to a very stressful events such as death, losing of a job etc.

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Psychologist often argues that some amount of stress is beneficial for happy living. They argue that stress causes arousal which in turns improves our performance. Although stress increases arousal but after some time it really creates a kind of a tension that disturbs our physical and \psychological well being.

Cognitive appraisal of the stress events determines how we react to the stressful situations. If we perceive the stressful situation as an opportunity, we rarely feel stress, but if we perceive stressful situations negatively, we feel stress. That's why it is our duty as a sincere citizen of our country , to devise strategies / methods so that a positive attitude could be developed among students , and this positive attitudes would really proves to be beneficial for students in making their learning stress-free.

What is stress? :-

A psychological and physical responses of the body that occurs whenever we must adapt to changing conditions, whether those conditions be real or perceived, positive or negative.

“Stress are our responses to events that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, our physical or psychological functioning.” **(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)**

In psychological term, stress is a state of bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium.

How we feel stress: - Our perception is the key factor

Life is a process of change, change is the law of nature, and we face lots of challenges in the course of our daily life. Therefore, anything that involves changes contains within it the demand that we adapt to it, in one way or another. Graduating from school can be as demanding as starting school, and starting a new job can be as demanding as losing a job.

How we perceive the change really determines how we manage to adapt to it.

If the perception is positive, we generally embrace the change with open arms and relief. And the story ends there.

If the perception is negative – that is if the change challenges our stamina or resources, the body will automatically dramatically respond to this perceived threat with a variety of physiological responses.

Stressors: - The activators of stress

Stressors are the events or situations in our environment that causes stress. (Robert A. Baron). These events/ situations could be both positive and negative and shares the following characteristics.

- A) They are so intense that they produce a state of overload –we can no longer adapt to them.
- B) They evoke incompatible tendencies in us, such as tendencies both to approach and to avoid at some object or activity.
- C) They are uncontrollable –beyond our limits of control.

Physiological response to stress

Walter canon a great psychologist suggested that our body's sympathetic nervous system (SNS) initiates "**flight or fight**" response to the perceived threats to physical or emotional security. Cannon found that SNS arousal in response to perceived threats involved several elements which prepare the body physiologically either to take a stand and fight off an attacker or to flee from the danger.

- Heart rate and blood pressure increases.
- Perspiration increases.
- Hearing and vision becomes more acute.
- Hands and feet get cold, because blood is directed away from the extremities to the large muscles in order to prepare for fight or fleeing.

Cognitive appraisal of stressors: - A Real cause for all the stress

Selye and Cannon suggested that when we feel stress our body reacts and we either fight or flight. Other psychologist like **Selye** suggested that stress is the major cause of all type of physical illness. He suggested three stages and describes that at the last stage our all the physiological coping strategies is lost and we are prone to severe physical illness. However a critical weakness with **Selye's** model is that it fails to consider the importance of cognitive processes in determining whether we interpret a specific event as stressful. The importance of these processes is made clear by the following fact: when confronted with the some potentially stress inducing situation, some persons experiences stress, whereas others do not one reason involves individuals cognitive appraisals in simple terms, stress occurs only to the extent that the persons involved perceive:-

- 1) That the situation is somehow threatening to their important goals.(often described as primary appraisal) and
- 2) That they will be unable to cope with these dangers or demands (often described as secondary appraisal)

(Croyle, 1992: Lazarus & folkman,

1984)

Stress management: - Meaning and techniques

Stress management encompasses techniques intended to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with psychological stress.

Techniques of stress management include:-

- Self-understanding (self-identification as a Type-A or Type-B personality.)
- Self-management (becoming better organized)
- Conflict resolution.
- Positive attitude.
- Self-talk.
- Breathing exercise.
- Meditation.
- Exercise.
- Altering your diet.
- Taking more regular and effective rest.

Innovative strategies to make education stress-free: - Applying Motivational theory concepts.

This section talks about innovative techniques/ strategies to make learning stress-free. This section will focus on how to make the classroom a happy place for learning. This section talks about innovative strategies by focusing on the concept of cognitive theories of motivation. Here it is an attempt made by me to present/devised/suggest some innovative strategies to make education stress free by applying the following four cognitive theories of motivation.

- Expectancy x Value theory.
- Self-efficacy theory
- Goal theory
- Attribution theory

Applying expectancy x value theory

Expectancy x value theory suggests that people are motivated to engage in an activity to the extent that they expect to succeed times they place on the success. (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 2000). This theory clarifies that people are motivated to engage in activity, that they perceive to be achievable/ doable and also engagement in the said activity will bring desired results. Two important point is basically emphasized in this theory. Expectancy for success is the main concept of this theory. Expectancy for success answers the questions, “Am I able to do this task? “ (Eccles, wigfield, & schiefelt, 1988: wigfield, 1994). It is influenced by two primary factors.

- A) Perception of task difficulty.
- B) Self-schemas

Another important point emphasized in this theory is the concept of value, task value, the second component of expectancy value theory answers the question,” why should I do this task? “And is influenced by four factors (Eccles, Wigfiels & schiefele, 1988)

- A) Intrinsic interest
- B) Importance
- C) Utility value
- D) Cost

We are able to a great extent in our attempt to make education stress free by implying the concept of expectancy x value theory, while dealing with the students. This theory suggested that if learners have high expectancy for success they persists longer on tasks , choose more challenging task and achieve higher than those whose expectations are lower (Eccles 1998 ; Wigfiels 1994).

That’s why it is responsibility of the teachers to encourage students, avoid using harsh and unnecessary punishment. Make students believe in their ability. Innovative teaching strategies are the need of the hour. If we want to reduce educational stress we have to create a kind of intrinsic interest in our students. We need to emphasize the utility aspects of learning. We need to develop a positive attitude among students, so that they perceive the task to be achievable. Always encourage students .Teachers should always encourage students and make students believe in their abilities.

Self-efficacy theory: - Encouraging students to believe in your own ability

This theory emphasized the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a believe about one's own capability to organize and complete a course of action required to accomplish a specific type of task (**Bandura, 1986: schunk, 1994**).

Four factors influence people believe about their capability of succeeding on specific tasks (**Bandura, 1986**). They are as follows:-

- A) Past performance
- B) Modeling
- C) Verbal persuasion
- D) Psychological state

We are able to reduce stress among students by making students a person of high self-efficacy. Researches demonstrated the effects of self-efficacy on performance. Students who believe they are capable of succeeding-those high in self-efficacy-expect to do so, and this expectation strongly affects their motivation. for instance ,compared to low-efficacy students, high-efficacy learners accept more challenging tasks, exert more effort ,persist longer ,use more effective strategies and generally perform better.(**Eccles,1998;wigfield,1994,wigfield&Eccles,1992**)

It should be the responsibility of all the teachers to make each and every student a person of high self-efficacy. Following strategies may be used by the teachers to improve self-efficacy.

- Attempt to increase learner self-efficacy by modeling efficacy and providing evidence of accomplishment.
- Make student aware about their abilities.
- Do not expect much.
- Always encourage student to set realistic goal.
- Give student proper feedback.
- Always use the technique of verbal persuasion
- Effective modeling by the teacher.

Goal theory: - An effective way to reduce stress

Setting up of goal also contributes to the stress among students. Researches demonstrated the fact that the goal set by the students for the learning contributes significantly for the stress among students. goal theory demonstrated that students sets the following four type of goals for the learning and the goal that each student set is responsible to a large extent for the stress:-

- Learning goals
- Performance goals
- Social goals
- Work-avoidance goals

Learning goals

A learning goal (sometimes called a mastery goal) focuses on mastery of a task, improvement, and increased understanding (**Dweck&Leggett, 1988; Pintrich, 2000**)

Learning goals are highly desirable. Research indicates that students who adopt them have high efficacy; they persist in the face of difficulty; attribute success to internal, controllable causes; accept academic challenges; and use effective strategies, such as elaborative questioning and summarizing (**Alexandar, 1988, Brunning, 1999**)

Because of this type of goal emphasized on mastery of the subjects, that's why students who set learning goals feels less anxiety. If they fail on some task, they think that failure clearly indicates the lack of effort on their part. They increase their effort, whenever they fail. This type of students feels less anxiety and stress.

It should be the responsibility of all the teachers to promote learning goals. Students should be encouraged to learn the new concepts. Unhealthy competition should be avoided.

Performance goal

Performance goal focuses on competence or ability and how it compares to the competence or ability of others. (**A .Elliot McGregor, 2000; A. Elliot & Thrash, 2001**).

Students who set performance goal for learning always try to earn grade, to attain some positions in the class. These type of students always compares their performance with that of others. Researches indicate that failure on a performance goal can lead to anxiety and performance-avoidance orientation in the future. Now a day our grade/marks, position in the class is a kind of assign of our competence, even the teacher encourages students to earn grade to attain position in the class. That's why students think that their only aim is to just get first position in the class. And this type of attitude contributes significantly for the stress.

So in order to reduce stress and make education stress free, we must encourage students to set learning goals.

Social goals

Social goals focuses on gaining social acceptance , gaining teachers, peers approval, achieving stress among peers, honoring commitments and assisting and supporting others.

Social goals help students to engage in any activity for a longer period of time. Social goals if combined with learning goals reduced stress to a great extent, and motivated students to learn.

Work-Avoidance goals

Students with work-avoidance goals feel success when tasks are easy or they can accomplish the tasks without exerting much effort (**Dawson & McInerney 2001; Gallini, 2000**).

Students with work-avoidance orientation, complete an assignment with as little effort as possible. In group activity these type of students are largely responsible for the social loafing phenomenon. Teachers always encourages students to set learning goal because it helps the student to learn something without undue stress and anxiety.

Attribution theory: - Our explanation for success & failures

Attribution theory is a cognitive theory of motivation that attempts to systematically describe learners' explanations for their success and failures.

How we attribute our success and failure is largely responsible for stress. Following strategies may prove to be very useful for the teachers:-

- A) Encourage internal attributions for success and controllable attributions for failures.
- B) Encourage student to believe in your own ability.
- C) Emphasize that hard work is the only way to achieve success.
- D) Avoid harsh and unhealthy criticism.

Conclusion

Today's world is world of great opportunities with increases in learning, new avenues is opened for us. But at the same time it also places a demand on us to deal effectively with the change. This increase in learning and advancements in technologies requires efforts on our part to adjust to this changing world. This causes stress. Parental expectation, social recognition, getting jobs, performs better than the others, places students on a very stressful environment. It is the responsibility of each and every individual specially teachers and parents to save the future of our country, by making learning an entertaining activity.

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