BOOK OF EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

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REGIONAL ISSUES IN PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG STUDENTS IN NORTHERN MALAYSIA HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION

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ABTSRACT INFO

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Academic stress can be defined as the product of a combination of academic requirements that exceed the adaptive resources available to the individual (Phillips, Halder & Hasib, 2019). Abouserie (1994); Aherne (2001); Sadri and Marcoulides (1997) as cited from Poon & Lee (2012) claimed that academic stress can be triggered by tests and subsequent waiting for results, financial pressures, shifts in eating and sleeping habits, heavy workloads, adaptation to community and ethnic disparities, language incompetence, lack of support from family and friends. However, the situation was different for university students, as people always assumed that academic stress is an unusual issue among the population of university students, since the only thing that university students were expected to do was study and study, which was never seen as a stressful task (Reddy, Menon & Thattil, 2018). In today's reality, the educational system is a very stressful experience and during academic activities, students face a great deal of academic stress (Kuruppuarachchi, Manpreet & Maheshwar, 2012) as cited from (Manap, Hamid & Ghani, 2019).

In the context of Malaysia, Angolla & Ongori (2019) found that students have experienced high stress at the university. A study also shows that academic stress has increased from one in 10 individuals in 2011 to one in five in 2016 (Ramachandiran & Dhanapal, 2018; Rashid & Othman, 2018). Students at university also face a cultural pressure to to graduate with good grades as it could give them the chance to pursue a better job when they graduate with excellent grades (Ramli, Alavi & Mehrinezhad, 2018). A similar scenario proven by Rentala, Nayak, Patil et al. (2019) that almost sixty-three point five per cent (63.5 %) of students were facing academic stress in India. Meanwhile from another study conducted by Chen, Wong, Ran & Gilson (2009), it shows that the similar incident of academic stress existed in China due to its known ill-fated education system which was able to produce students with high scores but poor health. Kwang-Iel, Hotaek, Xiehe et al. (1997) claimed that in a transcultural study in Asia, it was revealed that in comparison to the level of stress among Japanese, Korean and Chinese students, it was found that

China's students had a high level of academic stress. This circumstance has occurred due to the pressure from parents.

PURPOSE/AIM & BACKGROUND

This study aimed to know the factors that contribute to academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution which are academic workload and financial concerns in particular. This study focused on to examine the relationship between both factors and academic stress.

Academic workload means an increase of workloads in the classroom overwhelm the students in the manner that as students have to do much more than they can, they transform to get overwhelmed and are unable to concentrate and think rationally (Essel & Owusu, 2017). According to Aam, Sara & Adamu (2017) defined academic workload as the presumed relationship between the amount of mental processing and the potential or resources needed by the assignment. Based on the study from Bedewy & Gibriel (2015), it is observed that the most widely identified reasons for the students who contributed to academic stress on test were extensive course loads which represents ninety point eight per cent (90.8%), lack of activity, represents ninety per cent (90%) and lengthy length of exams, represents seventy-seven point five per cent (77.5%). Phillips, Halder & Hasib (2019) claimed that students need to deal with academic workload that increased the risk of serious academic stress. Increased in academic stress levels can result in irregular sleep habits or can contribute to sleeping disorders (Hudd et al., 2000 as cited from Poon & Lee, 2012).

Financial concerns can be defined as the inability of the students to meet their financial needs or their financial status assessment was not in a good condition (Friedman,1991) as cited from Taft, Hosein, Mehrizi & Roshan (2014). Lim, Heckman, Letkiewicz et al. (2014) said that financial concerns can be differing in terms of the commitment such as fulfilling a basic living expenses, paying for a tuition or academic expenses. Foster (1995) as cited from Robotham (2008) the limitation in terms of financial can actually increase the impact of tension that associated with the academic stress. Finding by Berry (1995) shows a result where ninety per cent (90%) of the women students from Northern English University were concerned about their financial stability and numbers of respondents were expressing about the possibility of abandoning their study as they were unable to manage well with the academic and financial concerns. A study by Zeidner (1992) stated that financial concerns have a higher tendency to happen among the students from low-income household. Those students were having financial concerns with regards to their steady sources of income, securing the study material and tuition fees. As a coping strategy for the financial concerns, students actually took a part time job during their study period. Sands & Richardson (1984) believed that having strong financial concerns can actually become an obstacle for the students to give back their commitment in study. This is where Edmundson & Carpenter (1995) supported the statement that financial concerns may lead the students to the risk of dropping out from university.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this study was quantitative. Quantitative research was able to be specific in the survey of the study as it was build based on theories and the collected data can create the meaning objectively in comparison with the qualitative research (Williams, 2007). Hypothesis testing became the purpose of the study and individual student from Northern Malaysia higher learning institution also became the unit of analysis of the study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Other than that, the type of investigation of the study was

correlational study as this study was interested in outlining the crucial variables that associated with the problem. Next, sampling design of study was probability sampling as all the sample had a same number of chances of being chosen as a sample of the study. With a combination of cluster sampling with a simple random sampling technique, cost of data collection was low in comparison with another sampling design as it only required fewer resource for the sampling process. There were 221 respondents of this study in order to examine the relationship between the factors of academic workload and financial concerns and academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution.

For the extent of researcher interference, the minimal interference was chosen as this study did not wish and would not request or conducted any action that would interfere with the subject normal flow of work as it was done under a natural environment. In addition, time horizon of this study was cross sectional as it was believed that the data could be gathered just once and time taken to gather the date was over a period of days or weeks or months to find the answer for the research question. Other than that, non-contrived was the study setting for this study as it was conducted under a natural environment without any manipulation of the original condition. Furthermore, this study was conducted in the organization in which called as field study with a minimal researcher interference.

Next, for the measurement of data, the study used rating scales to get the attitudinal responses of the respondents. The rating scales used was Likert Scale under interval scale where it is designed to examine on how strong the respondents agree or disagree with the statements. Other than that, nominal and ordinal scale were also being used in order to measure the gender, current Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) and family income of the respondents in the Section A (Demographic Profile).

Meanwhile for the data collection method, this study collected the data using questionnaire method via electronic questionnaire. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 26. In order to test the reliability of data, the study used Cronbach's Alpha to examine how well the items in the questionnaire were positively correlated to each other. Once the data were ready for analysis, the study was ready to test the hypothesis that was already developed in the study. Furthermore, Descriptive Statistics has been used as the statistical technique of this study in order to know the extent of academic stress. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was also being used to examine the relationship between academic workload, financial concerns and, the academic stress. In addition, the study used Multiple Regression Analysis to investigate the most dominant factor that contributed to academic stress.

Descriptive Statistics help to transform the raw data into a type that can include information to explain a series of variable in a particular situation (Sekaran, 2003). Descriptive such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, median and mode are related to the purpose of the study which to examine the relationship between academic workload, financial concerns and, the academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution. Other than that, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient gives the information whereby it will show the direction, strength and significance regarding the bivariate relationship of all interval variables in the survey meanwhile Multiple Regression Analysis was able to analyze the relationship between a number of independent variables with one dependent variable (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

FINDINGS/RESULTS

Table 1: *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37	16.7
	Female	184	83.3
Current CGPA	0.00-0.99	30	13.6
	1.00-1.99	5	2.3
	2.00-2.99	11	5.0
	3.00 and above	175	79.2
Family Income (Monthly Basis)	Below RM1500	74	33.5
	RM1501-RM3500	66	29.9
	RM3501-RM5000	40	18.1
	RM5001 and above	41	18.6
Total		**221**	**100**

Table 1 depicts that 16.7% which represents 37 respondents are males while another 83.3% which illustrates 184 respondents are females. From the results, it is proven that the number of females responded to the questionnaire is higher than the males. In addition, the finding also reveals that the highest current CGPA of the respondents is between 3.00 and above which represents 175 respondents with 79.2%, followed by 0.00-0.99 that presents 30 respondents with 13.6%. Another 11 respondents with 5.0% obtained the CGPA of 2.00-2.99 meanwhile the lowest CGPA of the respondents is between 1.00-1.99 with 5 respondents that illustrates 2.3%.

The last demographic profile of the respondents is family monthly income. The range of the family monthly income divided into four. From the results of the finding, the highest respondents of 74 students (33.5%) live with the family monthly income of below RM1500, followed by RM1501-RM3500 that represents 66 respondents with 29.9%. Meanwhile another 18.6% (41 respondents) come with the background of family monthly income of RM5001 and above. The least family monthly income of the respondents is between RM3501-RM5000 with 18.1% that represents 40 respondents.

Table 2: *Result of Extent of Academic Stress Among Students in Northern Malaysia Higher Learning Institution*

Items: Dependent Variable	Mean
I am able to pay attention in the class	3.53
I have a good attendance in class	4.34
I enjoy doing the assignments	3.29
I have the ability to handle stress	3.35
I organize my study time carefully	3.39
I can achieve my academic goals	3.65
I have a normal sleep habit	2.86
I can make academic decision easily	3.41
I am energized to study	3.24
I think I can be successful in future career	3.87

Based on the above Table 2, the mean for the first item obtained is 3.53. Meanwhile, from the second item until fifth item of this section, the mean obtained are 4.34, 3.29, 3.35 and 3.39 respectively. In addition, the mean value of 3.65, 2.86 and 3.41 are obtained for the sixth until items eighth. Besides, mean value for the nineth item is 3.24 meanwhile the mean value for the

last item is 3.87. From the discussion above, all the mean values show high mean values which indicate that most of the respondents have an understanding towards academic stress.

The finding is aligned with a study carried out by Aihie & Ohanaka (2019) who agreed that academic stress has became a contributing factor that gives impact to the quality life of the students and also results in poor academic performance. However, as there are many demands needed to be fulfilled by them, the reaction of them to the demands differed form each other as they are striving to perform well towards achieving good academic performance. Therefore, it can be said that when they suffered from academic stress, they began to skip classes as part of coping method as they were facing difficulties to perform well in academic and began to freak themselves out (Lawrence, Aduka & Desa, 2017).

Table 3: *Result of Relationship Between Academic Workload and Academic Stress*

Variables	r value	p value	Decision
Relationship between academic workload and academic stress	0.819	P= 0.000, p<0.05	$H_{\alpha 1}$ is accepted

The findings of the study revealed that academic workload does contribute towards academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution. Based on the result, it shows that there is a significant strong positive correlation between academic workload and academic stress (r=0.819, p<0.000, p<0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between academic workload and academic stress. Most of the respondents in this study agreed that they had to study for 18 to 23 credit hours in each semester in order to graduate on time. Due to this, the students were facing difficulties between to balance the academic workload and to satisfy the lecturer's expectation.

This finding was related with the finding by Phillips, Halder & Hasib (2019) which stated that the students suffered from academic stress due to their inability to handle the academic workload assigned to them where it was difficult for them to balance out between classes and study at the same time. Thus, this affected their academic success which was related to the finding of this study where most of the students agreed that they were unable to achieve their targeted grade due to the academic workload that would cause them to suffer from academic stress. Besides, the findings of this study also aligned with the findings by Aam, Sara & Adamu (2017) where high level of academic workload including a combination of three activities involving class attendance (both face-to-face and online), teaching materials, including reading or research and undergoing assessment tasks would influence the academic stress among the students which in this study, majority of the students agreed that academic workload had caused them to have a limitation in balancing academic workload and meeting the expectation of the lecturers which subsequently trigger the occurrence of academic stress.

Table 4: *Result of Relationship Between Financial Concerns and Academic Stress*

Variables	r value	p value	Decision
Relationship between financial concerns and academic stress	0.474	P= 0.000, p<0.05	$H_{\alpha 2}$ is accepted

The finding of the study has proven that financial concerns contributed towards academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution. Based on the result, shows that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between financial concerns and academic stress (r=0.474, p=0.000, p<0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between financial concerns and academic stress. Most of the respondents agreed that they had a limited funds of monthly expenses. This condition enabled to influence their focus in classes in which directly contributed to the academic stress among them. The respondents who are from low or middle-income family become the ones who have the tendency to experience limitation of funds in terms of cost of living as a student. The respondents agreed that part time job has become the initiative to cope with that funds limitation as they still need to fulfil their financial demand by hook or by crook.

The finding of financial concerns was aligned with the finding by Lawrence, Nur Surfina, Zalina et al. (2017) who emphasized that the students suffered from academic stress due to the demand to do well academically but at the same time have to cope with their financial condition that have demands that need to be fulfilled. Furthermore, the similar finding also supported by Zeidner (1992) which stated that the students that came from low-income household had a high tendency to face with financial concerns that directly contributed to academic stress and this study also found out that financial concerns was influenced by the family income as they had limited flow of money for their monthly expense. Thus, they had to cope with the financial demands by taking a part time job and directly faced with academic stress due to their inability to balance between study and job.

Table 5: *Result of Most Dominant Factor*
Based on the findings, it is proven that academic workload is the most dominant factor that contributes to academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution as the standardized beta value for academic workload is 0.823 which is the highest one in comparison with the standardized beta of financial concerns which is -0.008. As P-value of academic workload is 0.000 < 0.05, it indicates that academic workload is the main factor that contributes academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution. In addition, the model is statistically significant as indicated by F-value of 221.567, p=0.000<0.05.

The findings of this study proved that academic workload is the most dominant factor that contributes to academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia Higher learning institution where the respondents in this study agreed that they had to register high credit hours per semester and accompanied by course of work and syllabus that needed to be finished with

Variables	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	t-value	p-value
Academic workload	0.852	0.823	17.165	0.000
Financial concerns	-0.006	-0.008	-0.161	0.872
R2	0.670			
F-value	221.567			
P-value	0.000			

the allocation of time which somehow became the main contributor to the academic stress. The finding of this study aligned with the finding by Agolla & Ongori (2009) where academic workload has become the major stressor with 48.4% of the respondents agreed that the major stressor in the academic stress among them is academic workload. Therefore, it can be concluded that academic workload is the most dominant factor that contributes to academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, the result of the study has proven that academic workload and financial concerns are the factors that contribute towards academic stress. These results could help in

providing the information on   the factors that contribute to academic stress among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution which allow the students to have a better understanding on how academic stress is able to give impact on their academic performance. To simplify, this study was believed to help in contributing for the existing knowledge of the students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution with regards to the influence of academic workload and financial concerns. Lastly, it can be concluded that this study can help to increase the awareness among students in Northern Malaysia higher learning institution regarding the problem and obstacle that will lead to academic stress meanwhile at the same time provide several methods for them in overcoming the obstruction.

For the future research, it is suggested to conduct a comparative study among students from the Social Science and Science & Technology (S&T) programs in analysing academic stress. Furthermore, the comparison also can be done in the context of gender to identify which one is more prone towards academic stress. Perhaps, this study is suggested to apply mixed method of research methodology as it is useful in providing a better understanding of contradiction between quantitative results and findings of qualitative (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013).
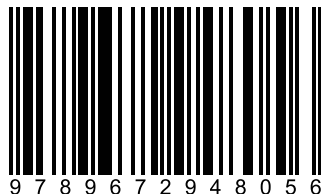
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