



EFFECT OF COUNSELLING INTERVENTION ON ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

John Kanaparthi

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Acharya Nagarjuna University

Dr. Pakala Naga Suresh Kumar*

ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Education, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar – 522510, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

*Corresponding Author: drnagasuresh.education@gmail.com

Prof. T. Swarupa Rani

Research Supervisor, Department of Education, Acharya Nagarjuna University

Paper Received On: 25 APR 2022

Peer Reviewed On: 30 APR 2022

Published On: 1 MAY 2022

Abstract

Academic stress is an important concern among intermediate students due to academic demands, examinations, and performance expectations. Persistent academic stress can adversely affect students' emotional well-being, coping abilities, and academic adjustment. A structured counselling intervention can provide systematic support to help students manage academic demands and develop effective coping strategies. The present study examined the effect of a structured counselling intervention on academic stress among intermediate students. A one-group pre-test–post-test design was adopted with 40 intermediate students from Guntur City, Andhra Pradesh. Academic stress was assessed using the Academic Stress Scale developed by Akram, Khan, and Baby (2013). The intervention comprised eight structured group counselling sessions focusing on academic stress awareness, emotional regulation, examination anxiety management, time management, study skills, relaxation techniques, resilience, and adaptive coping strategies. The data were analyzed using the paired-sample t-test. The findings revealed a statistically significant reduction in academic stress following the intervention, demonstrating the effectiveness of structured counselling in enhancing students' capacity to manage academic challenges. The study emphasizes the need to strengthen counselling services in educational institutions to promote students' psychological well-being, adaptive coping, and academic adjustment.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Counselling Intervention, Intermediate Students, Psychological Well-being, Coping Strategies.



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

Introduction

Academic stress has become an important concern among intermediate students, who are generally passing through the adolescent stage, a period associated with significant academic, emotional, and social changes. At this stage, students are expected to perform well

in the examinations, complete a demanding syllabus, manage limited preparation time, and meet the expectations of parents, teachers, and peers. They may also experience pressure related to competitive examinations, higher education, and future career choices. When these demands become difficult to manage, students may experience worry, emotional tension, reduced concentration, lack of motivation, and decreased self-confidence. Such difficulties can affect their learning, academic adjustment, and psychological well-being.

Several factors contribute to academic stress among intermediate students, including examination pressure, heavy academic workload, competition with peers, fear of poor performance, parental expectations, and uncertainty about future educational opportunities. Although a reasonable level of academic pressure may encourage students to work toward their goals, excessive or prolonged stress can interfere with effective learning and emotional stability. Since adolescence is also a period of important emotional and social development, students need appropriate support to develop healthy ways of responding to academic challenges.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a useful framework for understanding academic stress. According to the model, stress is influenced not only by the demands of a situation but also by how individuals perceive those demands and evaluate their ability to manage them. Students who consider academic challenges manageable may respond more effectively, whereas those who feel that the demands exceed their coping resources may experience greater stress. Developing appropriate coping skills can therefore help students manage academic responsibilities, regulate emotions, solve problems, and respond more constructively to challenging situations.

In this context, counselling intervention can provide meaningful support to intermediate students. A structured counselling programme can help students identify sources of academic stress, develop effective coping strategies, improve time management and study habits, strengthen problem-solving skills, and build confidence in handling academic demands. It can also provide a supportive setting in which students can express their concerns and learn healthier ways of responding to pressure. Therefore, examining the effect of counselling intervention on academic stress among intermediate students is essential for identifying effective support strategies that can promote better academic adjustment and psychological well-being.

Need for the Present Study

The need for the present study arises from the academic demands faced by intermediate students while managing examinations, workload, parental expectations, and decisions regarding higher education and future careers. Structured counselling can provide systematic support to strengthen coping skills, manage academic responsibilities, and improve students' responses to challenging situations. Although academic stress has been widely studied, previous research has largely emphasized its prevalence, determinants, and associated factors rather than evaluating structured counselling interventions. A specific research gap exists regarding the effectiveness of such interventions among intermediate students, particularly within the local educational context. Limited empirical evidence is available on whether counselling can produce a significant reduction in academic stress through systematic pre- and post-intervention assessment. The present study therefore examines the effect of counselling intervention on academic stress among intermediate students. The findings may provide empirical support for evidence-based student-support programmes and assist educational stakeholders in promoting effective coping, academic adjustment, and psychological well-being.

Statement of the Problem

Managing academic stress can be challenging for Intermediate students and may affect their academic performance and overall well-being. Some students may find it difficult to cope with academic challenges and may benefit from appropriate guidance and support. Counselling can provide a supportive environment in which students can understand their difficulties and develop constructive coping strategies. A structured counselling intervention may offer focused guidance suited to their academic needs. The present study examines the change in academic stress following the counselling intervention. The problem of the present study is stated as follows:

“Effect of Counselling Intervention on Academic Stress among Intermediate Students.”

Review of Related Literature

Manjula (2016) examined the effectiveness of a stress management intervention among pre university students. The findings revealed significant improvement in coping skills and time management abilities, along with a reduction in academic stress, highlighting the value of structured interventions for stress management. The study suggests that planned interventions can strengthen students' ability to manage academic-related difficulties.

Akhtar and Prasant (2017) investigated stress and anxiety among 100 senior secondary students preparing for their board examinations in Jamshedpur. The study examined psychological counselling in relation to the difficulties experienced by students during this academically demanding period and reported significant differences in their stress and anxiety levels. The findings support the use of psychological counselling to manage examination-related stress among senior secondary students.

Jobby and Viswasom (2018) studied the impact of counselling services on stress among 98 first-year MBBS students using a pre-test and post-test design. The findings indicated a significant reduction in stress levels and improvement in students' coping abilities after the counselling intervention. The study highlights the relevance of structured psychological support in helping students manage stress-related difficulties.

Rentala et al. (2019) evaluated a holistic stress management programme among Indian adolescent girls through a randomized controlled trial. The intervention was found to reduce academic stress and improve psychological well-being, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive stress management approaches.

Obi and Nicholas (2020) Assessed the effectiveness of time-management counselling in reducing academic stress among 32 undergraduate students. Using a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control-group design, the study found that six counselling sessions significantly reduced academic stress, demonstrating the effectiveness of counselling in managing academic stress.

Lowe and Wuthrich (2021) tested the effectiveness of the study without stress programme, based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), in reducing academic stress among 56 final-year high school students. Using a randomised controlled trial, the study found that the intervention significantly reduced academic stress and distress and improved self-efficacy, with the benefits maintained at the three-month follow-up.

Objective of the Study

- To examine the effect of a structured counselling intervention on academic stress among intermediate students.

Hypothesis of the Study

- There will be a significant difference in the academic stress scores of intermediate students before and after the counselling intervention.

Methodology of the Study

The present study adopted a one-group pre-test–post-test experimental design to examine the effect of a structured counselling intervention on academic stress among Intermediate students. Academic stress was assessed before and after the counselling intervention using the same standardized instrument. The pre-test and post-test scores were compared to determine whether there was a significant difference in the academic stress scores following the intervention. The counselling intervention was administered uniformly to all selected participants to ensure consistency throughout the study. Ethical considerations, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of the participants were maintained throughout the research process.

Sample of the Study

The sample comprised 40 Intermediate students selected from colleges in Guntur City, Andhra Pradesh, using purposive sampling. The participants were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria, including enrolment at the Intermediate level, willingness to participate in the counselling programme, and availability throughout the intervention period. The selected sample was considered appropriate for examining the effect of the structured counselling intervention on academic stress.

Tool Used for Data Collection

Academic stress was assessed using the Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Akram, Khan, and Baby (2013). The questionnaire comprises 36 items, with responses recorded on a four-point Likert scale. The ASQ demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.829, and its construct validity coefficients ranged from 0.41 to 0.88. The questionnaire was administered at both the pre-test and post-test stages to assess changes in students' academic stress following the counselling intervention.

Counselling Intervention Programme

The counselling intervention was designed to help Intermediate students manage academic stress and develop effective coping skills. A structured counselling intervention consisting of eight group counselling sessions was implemented over a period of two weeks with the 40 Intermediate students. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted by a trained counsellor under the supervision of the researcher. The intervention was informed by Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and psychoeducational counselling principles, with emphasis on emotional regulation, constructive thinking, effective study practices, stress management, and adaptive coping strategies (Beck, 2011).

The sessions incorporated group discussions, cognitive restructuring, relaxation exercises, self-reflection activities, and practical coping strategies to help students manage academic pressures effectively. The intervention addressed major areas such as awareness of academic stress, examination anxiety, time management, study skills, resilience, and adaptive coping. Following completion of the programme, the Academic Stress Questionnaire (ASQ) was administered again to determine changes in stress levels. The effectiveness of the counselling intervention was evaluated by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores using the paired-samples *t*-test.

Table-1
Eight-Session Counselling Intervention Programme to Reduce Academic Stress among Intermediate Students

Session	Focus Area	Core Counselling Activities
1	Orientation and Rapport Building	Introduced the programme, established rapport, explained group norms, and encouraged active participation.
2	Understanding Academic Stress	Increased awareness of academic stress, identified individual stressors, and explored their impact on learning.
3	Emotional Awareness and Self-Management	Identified emotions and stress triggers and practiced appropriate emotional regulation strategies.
4	Time Management and Academic Planning	Set realistic study goals, organized study schedules, prioritized tasks, and reduced procrastination.
5	Learning Strategies for Academic Success	Strengthened concentration, memory, active learning, note-making, and revision skills.
6	Positive Thinking and Cognitive Restructuring	Practiced cognitive reframing, positive self-talk, and structured problem-solving techniques.
7	Relaxation and Stress Reduction	Practiced deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, and guided imagery.
8	Examination Readiness and Resilience Building	Strengthened examination confidence, developed personal coping plans, reviewed key skills, and reinforced adaptive coping strategies.

Session-wise Counselling Intervention Programme

Session 1: Orientation and Rapport Building

The first session focused on creating a supportive and trusting counselling environment. Participants were welcomed to the programme and informed about its objectives, structure, and expected outcomes. Group guidelines regarding confidentiality, mutual respect, and active participation were established. Ice-breaking and introductory activities helped participants become comfortable with one another, encouraged open communication, and promoted a positive attitude towards the counselling process.

Session 2: Understanding Academic Stress

This session aimed to improve students' understanding of academic stress and its influence on learning and personal well-being. Participants explored common academic stressors such as examinations, assignments, parental expectations, time pressure, and fear of failure. Through guided discussions and self-reflection, they recognized how stress affects their thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and academic performance, thereby increasing self-awareness of their individual stress experiences.

Session 3: Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation

The third session emphasized recognizing and managing emotional responses to academic challenges. Participants identified common emotions associated with stress, including anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt, and examined situations that triggered these feelings. They practiced simple emotional regulation techniques, self-monitoring, and constructive emotional expression to improve emotional stability and self-control during demanding academic situations.

Session 4: Time Management and Academic Planning

This session focused on improving students' ability to organize their academic responsibilities effectively. Participants learned how to set realistic academic goals, prioritize important tasks, prepare balanced study schedules, and allocate sufficient time for revision and recreation. Practical planning activities encouraged the development of disciplined study habits, reduced procrastination, and promoted efficient use of available time.

Session 5: Learning Strategies for Academic Success

The fifth session introduced effective learning techniques that enhance academic achievement. Participants were guided in preparing organized notes, improving concentration, strengthening memory, applying active learning strategies, and using systematic revision methods. These evidence-based study practices were designed to increase learning efficiency, improve academic confidence, and support better examination preparation.

Session 6: Positive Thinking and Cognitive Restructuring

This session helped participants identify negative thinking patterns that contribute to academic stress. Students learned to challenge irrational beliefs, replace self-defeating thoughts with realistic and encouraging perspectives, and develop positive self-talk. Structured problem-solving activities further strengthened their confidence, resilience, and ability to approach academic difficulties with a constructive mindset.

Session 7: Relaxation and Stress Reduction

The seventh session provided practical techniques for reducing physical and psychological tension associated with academic stress. Participants practiced deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness techniques, and guided imagery under the counsellor's guidance. Regular practice of these relaxation methods helped improve emotional calmness, concentration, self-regulation, and overall psychological well-being.

Session 8: Examination Readiness and Resilience Building

The final session consolidated the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the intervention programme. Participants reviewed effective coping strategies, discussed common examination-related concerns, and developed personalized action plans for managing future academic challenges. The session reinforced self-confidence, resilience, and healthy study habits, encouraging students to apply the learned strategies independently for sustained academic success and long-term psychological well-being.

Evaluation of the Intervention

The effectiveness of the counselling intervention was evaluated by comparing the pre-test and post-test academic stress scores using a paired-samples *t*-test. The mean difference was examined to determine the extent of change following the intervention. A significant reduction in post-test scores indicated the effectiveness of the counselling programme in reducing students' academic stress.

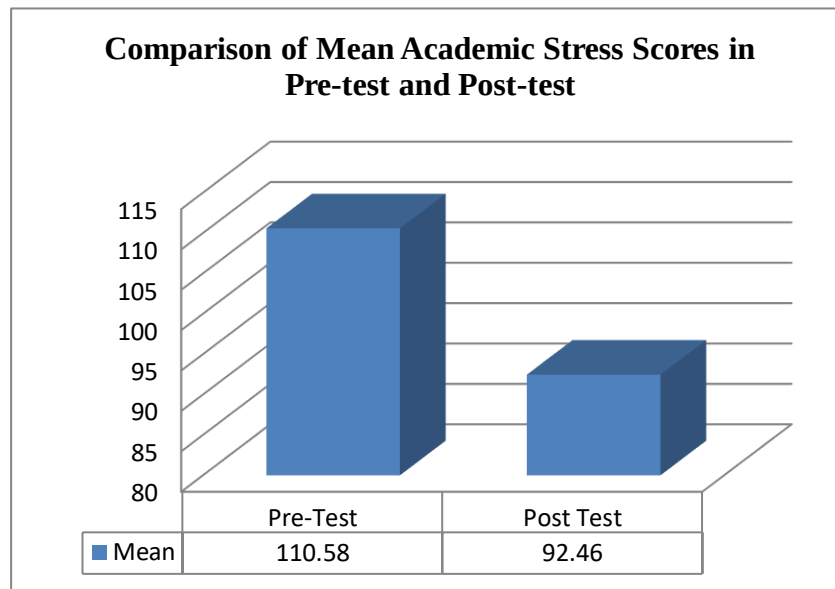
Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected to examine the effectiveness of the counselling intervention on academic stress among Intermediate students. The pre-test and post-test academic stress scores were analysed using the mean, standard deviation, and paired-samples *t*-test. The results are presented and interpreted in the following table.

Table-2
Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Academic Stress Scores

Assessment	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t-Value
Pre-Test	40	110.58	12.63	18.12	6.91*
Post Test	40	92.46	10.74		

*Significant at the 0.01 Level



The results presented in Table 2 indicate a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test academic stress scores of Intermediate students. The mean academic stress score decreased from 110.58, with a standard deviation of 12.63, in the pre-test to 92.46, with a standard deviation of 10.74, in the post-test, showing a mean difference of 18.12 points. The obtained *t*-value of 6.91 was significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the counselling intervention significantly reduced academic stress. Thus, the hypothesis that the counselling intervention would significantly reduce academic stress was accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that the counselling intervention was effective in reducing academic stress among Intermediate students. The significant reduction in stress scores after the intervention suggests that structured counselling provided students with practical and psychological support to manage academic demands more effectively. The intervention focused on cognitive restructuring, relaxation, time management, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies, which may have helped students respond more constructively to academic challenges. The results also suggest that counselling can provide students with an opportunity to understand their sources of stress, develop appropriate coping strategies, and improve their confidence in handling academic difficulties. The study highlights the importance of integrating systematic counselling support into educational institutions, particularly at the Intermediate level, where students face academic demands and decisions concerning higher education and future careers. Overall, the study provides empirical support for structured counselling as an effective educational intervention for reducing academic stress and promoting students' academic adjustment and psychological well-being.

Educational Implications

The findings suggest several practical implications for educational practice. Teachers should create a supportive classroom environment and minimise unnecessary academic pressure that may intensify students' stress. Counsellors can work closely with teachers to identify students experiencing persistent academic difficulties and provide timely support. Educational institutions should provide training for teachers to recognise behavioural and academic indicators of stress and respond appropriately. Regular counselling and stress-management programmes can be integrated into student support services to strengthen students' coping abilities. Life-skills and study-skills activities can also be included in student development programmes to enhance students' academic preparedness and adjustment. Parents should be encouraged to maintain realistic expectations and provide constructive encouragement rather than excessive performance pressure. Collaboration among teachers, counsellors, parents, and institutional authorities can help establish a coordinated support system for students facing academic challenges.

References

- Akhtar, Z., & Prasant. (2017). Psychological counselling: Ways of alleviating stress and anxiety among senior secondary school students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 4(2), 6–14.
- Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive behaviour therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Chaudhary, N. (2019). Effect of cognitive behavioural therapy on stress among students appearing for competitive exams. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(4), 1132–1138.
- Deb, S., Strodl, E., & Sun, J. (2015). Academic stress, parental pressure, anxiety and mental health among Indian high school students. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences*, 5(1), 26–34.
- Gladding, S. T. (2018). *Counselling: A comprehensive profession* (8th ed.). Pearson.
- Jobby, A., & Viswasom, A. (2018). Impact of counselling services in stress reduction among first-year MBBS students. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, 12(4), JC15–JC18.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Lowe, C., & Wuthrich, V. M. (2021). Randomised controlled trial of study without stress: A cognitive behavioural therapy program to reduce stress in students in the final year of high school. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 52(2), 205–216.
- Manjula, M. (2016). Academic stress management: An intervention in pre-university college youth. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 42(1), 105–113.
- Obi, O. P., & Nicholas, I. J. (2020). Time management counselling intervention for undergraduate students with academic stress. *World Journal of Innovative Research*, 9(5), 1–5.
- Rentala, S., Thimmajja, S. G., Tilekar, S. D., Nayak, R. B., & Aladakatti, R. (2019). Impact of holistic stress management program on academic stress and well-being of Indian adolescent girls: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 8, 1–9.