



Academic Stress and the Pressure to Appear Productive in School Life

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<p>Received: 31.05.2026</p> <p>Accepted: 16.06.2026</p> <p>Published: 09.07.2026</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p><i>Academic stress has become one of the major concerns in contemporary school education due to increasing academic expectations, competition, and performance pressure among students. Along with academic demands, students also experience a growing pressure to appear constantly productive, successful, and achievement-oriented in school life. The present study explores the relationship between academic stress and the pressure to appear continuously productive among school students. The study identifies how examinations, parental expectations, social comparison, competition, and digital culture contribute to students' psychological and emotional burden. It further discusses the influence of such pressures on students' mental health, emotional well-being, confidence, and learning experiences. The study is based on a review of existing literature, educational theories, journal articles, and scholarly perspectives. It also considers educational practices and support mechanisms that may contribute to a healthier academic environment for students. The paper emphasizes the importance of balanced educational practices, supportive learning environments, and holistic development in promoting students' overall well-being.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Academic Stress, Productivity Pressure, School Life, Student Well-being, Educational Pressure, Mental Health</p>
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Introduction

Education plays a significant role in shaping the intellectual, emotional, and social development of students (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In modern school life, academic achievement has become one of the primary indicators of success and social recognition. Students are continuously encouraged to perform better, remain active in academic activities, and demonstrate productivity in every aspect of their educational journey. Along with classroom learning, they are expected to participate in examinations, assignments, projects, extracurricular activities, and competitive preparations. This increasing emphasis on achievement and constant performance has created a stressful educational environment where students often feel pressured to prove their worth through continuous productivity (OECD, 2019). As a result, many students experience academic stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and fear of failure during their school years.

In recent years, the pressure to appear productive has become more visible due to social comparison, parental expectations, and digital culture. Students frequently compare their achievements and activities with those of their peers, leading to feelings of inadequacy and psychological strain. Even when mentally tired, many students continue to maintain an image of

being hardworking and successful in order to gain appreciation and avoid criticism. Such pressure not only affects academic performance but also influences students' mental health, confidence, motivation, and overall well-being (WHO, 2021). Therefore, the present theoretical study attempts to examine the relationship between academic stress and the pressure to appear productive in school life. The study aims to understand how modern educational expectations and productivity culture contribute to stress among students and why a balanced and supportive educational environment is necessary for healthy student development.

Conceptual Framework

Academic Stress

Concept:

Academic stress refers to the emotional, mental, and physical tension experienced by students because of academic demands and expectations. It develops when students feel unable to manage examinations, assignments, competition, and school responsibilities effectively. Academic stress can influence concentration, emotional stability, confidence, and overall academic performance.

Components of Academic Stress:

- Examination anxiety and fear of poor results
- Heavy workload of homework and assignments
- Competition among classmates
- Difficulty in balancing study and personal life
- Pressure from parents, teachers, and society

Effects of Academic Stress:

- Creates anxiety, frustration, and emotional imbalance
- Reduces concentration and learning ability
- Causes fatigue, sleep problems, and headaches
- Decreases interest and motivation towards studies
- Affects students' confidence and mental well-being

Pressure to Appear Productive in School Life

Concept:

The pressure to appear productive in school life refers to the feeling among students that they must constantly present themselves as active, successful, hardworking, and academically engaged. Students often try to maintain a positive image through achievements, participation, and social comparison, even when they feel mentally tired or emotionally stressed.

Components of the Pressure to Appear Productive:

- Showing academic success and achievements
- Constant involvement in school activities
- Seeking appreciation from teachers and peers
- Social media comparison and competition
- Fear of being considered unsuccessful or lazy

Effects of the Pressure to Appear Productive:

- Increases stress, anxiety, and emotional pressure

- Creates unhealthy competition among students
- Leads to mental exhaustion and burnout
- Reduces self-confidence and emotional expression
- Disturbs healthy balance between study and personal life

Review of the Literatures

Verma, Sharma, and Larson (2002) conducted a study on school stress among Indian students and examined its influence on students' emotional experiences and daily activities. The study revealed that excessive academic workload, educational competition, and high academic expectations significantly contribute to stress among students. The researchers observed that academic pressure often creates anxiety, emotional exhaustion, frustration, and psychological imbalance in students' school life. The findings further highlighted that continuous academic demands negatively affect students' emotional stability, happiness, and overall well-being.

Liu and Lu (2011) conducted a study on stress in school and academic achievement among Chinese high school students. The study examined the relationship between school-related stress and students' academic performance. The findings revealed that academic stress arising from school performance, future uncertainty, and lack of free time significantly affected students' educational experiences. The researchers observed that higher levels of academic stress were associated with lower academic achievement for the majority of students. The study further highlighted that excessive academic pressure can adversely affect students' academic development and overall well-being.

Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) conducted a study on academic stress, parental pressure, anxiety, and mental health among Indian high school students. The study examined the relationship between academic pressure and students' psychological well-being. The findings revealed that a large proportion of students experienced significant academic stress due to examination pressure, parental expectations, and concerns about academic achievement. The researchers observed that increased academic stress was associated with higher levels of anxiety and poorer mental health outcomes. The study further highlighted that continuous pressure to perform well academically adversely affects students' emotional well-being and overall adjustment in school life.

Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020) conducted a study examining the impact of stress on students in secondary school and higher education. The findings indicated that academic stress negatively influences students' mental health, emotional balance, motivation, and academic performance. The study identified educational competition, performance pressure, excessive workload, and unrealistic expectations as major contributors to stress among students. It also emphasized the importance of supportive educational practices, emotional guidance, and balanced learning environments for promoting students' psychological well-being and healthy academic development.

Mishra and Choudhuri (2024) conducted a study on gender differences in academic stress among higher secondary school students of Varanasi. The study investigated the level of academic stress experienced by male and female students studying in Class XI. The findings revealed that academic stress is a significant concern among higher secondary students due to increasing academic demands, examination pressure, and performance expectations. The researchers observed differences in the perception of academic stress between male and female students. The

study further highlighted that academic stress affects students' emotional well-being, adjustment, and overall school experience, indicating the need for appropriate support mechanisms within educational institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Academic stress and the pressure to appear constantly productive have become major concerns in modern school life. Students often experience mental and emotional pressure due to academic competition, social expectations, workload, and the fear of failure. The growing culture of continuous productivity further increases stress and affects students' overall well-being. Therefore, the problem of the present study may be stated as: "Academic Stress and the Pressure to Appear Productive in School Life."

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the factors contributing to academic stress and the pressure to appear productive in school life.
2. To explore how academic expectations and performance-related demands influence students' perceived need to appear productive in school settings.
3. To identify educational practices and support mechanisms that can foster a healthier academic environment for students.

Significance of the Study

The present study holds both **social and educational significance** as it addresses the growing concern of academic stress and the pressure on students to appear continuously productive in school life.

Educational Significance

The study is important in understanding how academic expectations, assessment practices, and school environments contribute to student stress. It helps in highlighting the need for more balanced and learner-friendly educational practices aligned with holistic development. The findings may support educators and policymakers in improving teaching strategies and reducing unnecessary academic pressure in schools.

Social Significance

On a social level, the study draws attention to the psychological impact of constant performance pressure on adolescents. It helps in understanding how societal expectations and competition influence students' mental well-being and self-perception. The study may contribute to creating awareness among parents, teachers, and communities about the importance of mental health and balanced development in school-going children.

Methodology

The present study is theoretical and descriptive in nature. It was conducted through an extensive review and analytical examination of existing literature related to academic stress and the pressure to appear productive in school life. Relevant information and scholarly perspectives were collected from secondary sources such as research journals, books, dissertations, educational reports, articles, and authentic online academic resources related to students' mental health, educational

pressure, and psychological well-being. The study mainly focused on understanding how academic expectations, competition, social comparison, parental pressure, and productivity culture influence students' emotional and academic experiences in contemporary school life.

Discussion

Discussion as per Objective 1

Academic stress has become a common experience among school students due to increasing academic demands and the growing expectation to perform consistently well in educational settings. Factors such as examination pressure, extensive syllabus coverage, frequent assignments, and continuous evaluations contribute significantly to students' stress levels. In many schools, competitive classroom environments and comparisons among peers encourage students to focus heavily on academic achievement. Expectations from teachers, parents, and society often create additional pressure to meet high standards of performance. Consequently, students may feel compelled to remain constantly engaged in academic activities in order to demonstrate productivity and competence. This persistent pressure can reduce opportunities for relaxation, recreation, and personal growth, thereby affecting students' emotional well-being and overall school experience. The increasing use of academic rankings, performance tracking, and achievement-based recognition may further intensify students' concerns about meeting expectations and maintaining a positive academic image among peers and teachers.

Discussion as per Objective 2

Academic expectations and performance-related demands significantly shape students' perceived need to appear productive within school settings. Expectations to achieve high grades, perform well in examinations, and meet academic standards often encourage students to demonstrate continuous engagement in educational activities. Performance-oriented practices, including regular assessments, progress monitoring, and recognition of academic achievement, may reinforce the belief that productivity is closely linked to success. Consequently, students may feel the need to constantly display effort, efficiency, and accomplishment in order to meet these expectations. Over time, this perception can influence students' attitudes toward learning, leading them to value visible achievement and constant activity as indicators of personal worth and academic competence. Such pressures may contribute to heightened stress levels and create challenges in maintaining a balanced approach to education and personal well-being. In some cases, students may even overlook the importance of rest and self-care, believing that continuous academic engagement is necessary to gain recognition, approval, and future educational opportunities.

Discussion as per Objective 3

Educational practices and support mechanisms play an important role in fostering a healthier academic environment for students. Supportive teacher-student relationships can create a sense of trust and encourage students to communicate their academic concerns without fear of judgment. Balanced assessment practices that focus on learning and growth rather than solely on performance may help reduce unnecessary pressure. Counseling and guidance services can provide students with strategies for managing stress, improving time management, and developing resilience. Furthermore, opportunities for participation in co-curricular activities, collaborative learning experiences, and peer support programs can contribute to students' overall development and well-

being. By promoting realistic academic expectations and recognizing diverse forms of achievement, schools can help students develop a more balanced understanding of success, reducing the pressure to appear constantly productive while supporting healthy academic engagement. Such efforts can encourage students to view learning as a meaningful process of growth and development rather than merely a continuous pursuit of performance, productivity, and academic recognition.

Nep 2020 Recommendations Related to Academic Stress and Productivity Pressure

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces educational reforms that address factors associated with academic stress and the pressure to maintain constant productivity in school life. The policy promotes holistic development, flexible learning, and reduced examination burden to support student well-being.

1. Assessment and Learning Reforms

NEP 2020 encourages competency-based learning instead of rote memorization. Flexible board examinations, modular assessment practices, and freedom in subject selection aim to reduce excessive academic pressure and unhealthy comparison among students.

2. Student Well-being and Balanced Development

The policy emphasizes mental health support through counseling services, teacher awareness, and supportive school environments. It also promotes holistic progress evaluation and equal importance to academics, arts, sports, and vocational learning to encourage balanced student development

Educational Implications

- Schools should adopt assessment practices that reduce overemphasis on marks and encourage conceptual understanding, helping students experience less performance pressure in daily academic life.
- Teachers can create classroom environments that value effort, creativity, and participation rather than constant comparison, which may reduce the pressure to appear consistently productive.
- Counseling and emotional support systems should be strengthened in schools to help students manage academic demands and stress more effectively.
- Curriculum planning should include balanced academic workload with co-curricular activities, allowing students to experience learning beyond continuous academic output.
- Parents and educators should be more aware of how constant expectations for achievement can affect students' mental well-being and self-confidence.
- Schools can encourage reflective learning practices where students are given space to learn at their own pace instead of being pushed toward uniform performance standards.
- A more supportive and flexible school culture can help reduce unhealthy competition and promote a healthier understanding of success among students.

Conclusion

Academic stress and the pressure to appear productive have become significant concerns in contemporary school life. Increasing academic expectations, competition, workload, performance

pressure, and social comparison continuously influence students' emotional and psychological well-being. The analysis of related literature indicates that many students experience anxiety, emotional exhaustion, fear of failure, and mental fatigue while attempting to maintain academic achievement and a socially accepted image of productivity. The culture of constant performance often encourages students to prioritize achievement over emotional balance and personal well-being.

The study further indicates that excessive stress and the pressure to appear productive may create anxiety, fear of failure, mental exhaustion, and loss of interest in learning among students. Healthy educational practices, emotional support, balanced academic expectations, and awareness regarding mental health are necessary to reduce such pressure in school life. The findings of the study may help teachers, parents, and educational institutions better understand students' psychological needs and encourage a more supportive and balanced learning environment.

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