



RESEARCH PAPER

Marks in English and Parental Pressure at School Level in Mardan, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to explore the levels of Parental Pressure for high Marks in English at secondary level in district Mardan. The research was conducted with a non-experimental quantitative design. Data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire, with a Likert scale of five choices, which ranged between strongly disagreed and strongly agreed. A total of 384 students from secondary school in the district of Mardan were the sample for this study. The data analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, i.e., percentage distribution and median scores. The levels of "parental pressure" was analyzed by finding out the mean of percentages for strongly disagree and agree (as low level), neither agree nor disagree (as moderate level) and agree and strongly agree (as high level). The results suggested a high level of parental pressure on the students to get high marks in English, and in contrast, the students have a low ability to achieve the targets. This phenomenon creates mental and psychological problems for the students, leading to their dropout from the school. The study suggested that in order to improve the students' grades in English and enhance their proficiency, the principals have to inform the parents of the adverse effects of their pressure on students through PTC (Parents' Teachers' Council) meetings.

Introduction

There are about 77 languages spoken in different regions of Pakistan. English is the official language used as medium of instruction in higher education, while the national language, Urdu, and generally acts as lingua franca (Shah, Pillai & Sinayah, 2019; Shah, Riaz, & Malik, 2019). English has occupied a dominant position in

Pakistan and is used not only in higher education but in the judiciary, media, civil services, and administration (Shah, Pillai & Sinayah, 2020). In view of the above, majority of the parents in Pakistan stress their children to attain high proficiency and secure good marks in English (e.g., Walczak et al., 2018). The parents demand their children get high marks in the "do or die" situation regardless of their preparation and ability (e.g., Khatoon & Parveen, 2009). This parental stress is a type of academic stress discussed in the literature (e.g., Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). These psychologically and physically overwhelming students noted with avoidant behaviour towards their studies (e.g., Calvo et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2006; De Jorge et al., 2011), especially English. The psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety (e.g., Dahlin et al., 2005; Eisenberg et al., 2007; Garlow et al., 2008), diminished performance, less productivity (Wong et al., 2006; Chandavarkar et al., 2007), and physical symptoms (Donaghy, 2004) found in the students with academic stress (e.g., Omogbiya et al., 2020) such as parental pressure for high marks in English. Unfortunately, in our society, the parents give too much value to high marks (e.g., Khatoon & Parveen, 2009) in English subject, creating academic stress (e.g., Pascoe et al., 2020).

In short, "external expectations such as parental attitude and high parental expectations cause stress among school students (Subramani & Venkatachalam, 2019; p. 195)" in turn changes into mental distress of students (e.g., Mboya et al., 2020; Putwain, 2007; Rao, 1954). Though some authors (e.g., Ali, 2017; Molnar, 1979) believed that parents' expectations positively affect students' achievement. The distress created by these expectations results in exam phobia. The more preliminary tests results induced by more stress (e.g., Zwettler et al., 2018) suicide intention. In some studies, this suicide intention was also termed suicide ideation (e.g., Arun et al., 2017). Therefore, the researchers believed that academic stress (e.g., Wasan et al., 2020) is the predictor for suicide intention (e.g., Assari et al., 2020b; Wai et al., 1999). As a general perception, the parents believe a student is successful if he/she gets high marks in English. This attitude of parents is creating different problems for students in the context, as discussed above. Therefore, this study aimed to find the levels of parental stress for high marks in English subject in Pakistan's secondary schools.

Literature Review

There are some factors which affect students' achievement. These stated factors were discussed as parental education (e.g., Assari et al., 2020a; Ludeke et al., 2020), socio-cultural status (e.g., Göger et al., 2020; Li & Yamamoto, 2020), positive feedback to their children (e.g., Koliijn et al., 2020; Preece & Levy, 2020), and the provision of a study-friendly environment (Sakib et al., 2020). Violating the stated above factors, the parents in the Pakistani context create a "do or die situation" for their children to get high marks (e.g., Khatoon & Parveen, 2009) in English, creating a stressful situation (e.g., Pascoe et al., 2020). The stressful circumstances for teenagers result in adverse outcomes (i.e., school dropout) in their lives (e.g., Dupéré

et al., 2018). Parental pressure is also causing students to drop out of their schools. But unfortunately, the school dropout not studied concerning parental pressure for high marks. The researchers analyzed more than 50 studies for "vulnerability stress." Not more than four have focused on the students' dropout (e.g., Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Dupere et al., 2015).

The different psychologists have termed the examination phobia as fear of examination, anxiety, and distress (e.g., Loscalzo et al., 2018; Saha, 2012) caused by the parental pressure for high marks in English (e.g., Saha, 2020). "When this distress becomes so excessive that it interferes with performance on an exam, it is known as test anxiety (Thakur & Mahavidyalaya, 2016; p. 782)". Self-efficacy and anxiety may intervene in academic performance (Caron et al., 2020; Rouxel, 1999).

Similarly, parental stress for high marks in English is the leading cause of examination phobia influencing students' emotional aspects (e.g., Bussone et al., 2020), which were discussed as phobic, psychological, emotional, and cognitive components (e.g., Benau et al., 2020; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). These components are based on extreme pressure, thinking of failure, worrying about possible outcomes and mental stress, and negative thoughts (Sarason & Sarason, 1990). Other than that, examination phobia is related to lower marks, decreased motivation, and increased stress (e.g., Ali et al., 2020; Cizek & Burg, 2006; Segool et al., 2013; Wheeler et al., 2020; Zeidner, 1998). The parents' negative thoughts create a fear of exams and a decreased interest, while interest is the essential factor of learning (Krapp, 1999).

Material and Methods

This research used a quantitative approach. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the students of government secondary schools in Mardan district.

Population

A total of 84089 students are reading in 167 government secondary schools of Mardan district (32654 girls and 51425 boys), among which 80 schools are for girls, and 87 are for boys. These students were the target population of this study.

Sample size and Sampling Technique

According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, a total of 384 students from the government secondary schools were selected randomly as the sample for this study.

Instrument

To assess the parental pressure for high marks in English, "PPHM a Likert type scale was developed with five choices, having two dimensions; *Parental Expectations* (Item 1-6) and *Students Approach* (Item-7-11). The tool's validity was

found out through two experts in the field, and reliability was found through Cronbach Alpha, as shown in table 1.

Table 1
Validity and Reliability Measurement Indices for Variable PP (N=384)

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach Alpha
Parental Pressure for high Marks (PPHM)	0.85	0.775	0.92

Results and Discussion

The Parental Pressure levels for High Marks in English, Parental Expectations, and Students Attitude were found with descriptive statistics, i.e., percentage distribution and Median. The "levels" categorized concerning the percentages of the scale as given below:

Low Level: Average of the Percentages of Strongly Disagree + Disagree

Moderate Level: Percentage of Neither Agree nor Disagree

High Level: Average of the Percentages of Agree + strongly Agree

Each item's levels were found out at the first instance, followed by each dimension and the whole variable.

Table 2
Per centage of Response for Parental Expectations dimension's items (N = 384)

NO.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		Low		Moderate		High
1	My parents have high expectation from me میرے والدین کو مجھ سے بڑی توقع ہے۔	(40.8%) 21.4	19.4	(6.5%)	(52.7%) 30.7	22.0
2	My parents have no contribution in my preparation to get high marks اعلیٰ نمبر حاصل کرنے کے لئے میری تیاری میں میرے والدین کا کوئی تعاون نہیں ہے۔	(30.7%) 15.3	15.4	(16.3%)	(53.0%) 30.3	22.7
3	My parents have given me a	(35.7%)			(45.8%)	

	target for high marks میرے والدین نے مجھے اعلیٰ نمبر کا ہدف دیا ہے۔	15.5	20.2	(18.5%)	21.2	24.6
4	My parent pressurize me to get high marks in SCC examination by hook are by crook میرے والدین مجھ پر دباؤ ڈالتے ہیں کہ میں ایس سی سی امتحان میں اعلیٰ نمبر حاصل کروں	(27.4%)			(61.8%)	
		15.0	12.4	(10.8%)	30.3	30.5
5	My parents have zero tolerance for my failure میرے والدین میری ناکامی کو برداشت نہیں کریں گے۔	(28.4%)			(57.0%)	
		13.1	15.3	(14.6%)	26.2	30.8
6	My parents expect me to lead in the race for high marks میرے والدین توقع کرتے ہیں کہ میں اعلیٰ نمبروں کی دوڑ میں	(18.2%)			(67.2%)	
		10.0	8.2	(14.6%)	30.9	36.3

Table 2 shows that, among secondary school students, 40.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagree that their parents have high expectations in English subject from them. While 6.5 percent more neither agreed nor disagree, and 52.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Among the students, 30.7 percent strongly disagreed or disagree with the statement that their parents have no contribution in their preparation to get high marks in English. Furthermore, 16.3 percent of the students neither agreed nor disagreed with the information. And 53.0 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the idea.

About 35.7 percent of the students have perceived that their parents have set a high target for them to get high marks in English. While 18.5 percent were neither agreed nor disagreed, and 45.8 percent were agreed or strongly agreed.

Among the students, 27.4 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed that their parents pressured them to get high marks in English, while 10.8 per cent more were neither agreed nor disagreed, and 61.8 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

About 28.4 percent of the students were strongly disagreed or disagreed that their parents have zero tolerance for their failure in the given target. More than 14.6% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 57% were agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Among the students, 18.2 percent strongly disagreed or disagree with the stamen that their parents expect them to lead in the race for high marks in English,

while 14.6 percent more neither agreed nor disagreed and 67.2 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 3

Per centage of the Response for Students' Approach dimension's items (N = 384)

NO.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		Low		Moderate		High
7	Parental pressure has negative effects on my performance والدین کے دباؤ سے میری کارکردگی پر منفی اثر پڑا ہے	(16.5%)		(69.5%)		
		5.3	11.2	(14.0%)	35.4	34.1
8	My parents have some priorities for my future profession which differs from my own میرے والدین کی میرے مستقبل کے پیشے کے لئے کچھ ترجیحات ہیں	(18.4%)		(65.9%)		
		6.7	11.7	(15.7%)	30.8	35.1
9	I am not sure to achieve their target marks مجھے یقین نہیں ہے کہ میں ان کا ہدف حاصل کروں گا۔	(30.3%)		(57.4%)		
		14.5	15.8	(12.3%)	30.4	27.0
10	I may face anger, if not achieved the target marks میں نے ہدف اسکور حاصل نہیں کیا تو مجھے غصے کا سامنا کرنا پڑ سکتا ہے۔	(30.1%)		(56.8%)		
		13.4	16.7	(13.1%)	29.5	27.3
11	I may lose my educational budget, if not achieved the target marks میں اپنا تعلیمی بجٹ کھو سکتا ہوں ، اگر مطلوبہ اسکور حاصل نہ کیا تو	(16.7%)		(68.1%)		
		11.3	5.4	(15.2%)	38.2	29.9

The 3 table shows that about 16.5 percent of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that their parents' pressure negatively affected their performance. While 14 percent of the students neither agreed nor disagreed. Among the students, 69.5 percent more were agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Among the students, 18.4 percent were firmly disagreed or disagreed that their parents have some future professional priorities, which differs. In comparison, 15.7per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 65.9 per cent more were agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

About 30.3 per cent of the students were strongly disagreed or disagreed with assuring to achieve their parents' targeted marks in English. In comparison,

12.3 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 57.4 per cent more were agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Among the students, 30.1 per cent were firmly disagreed or disagreed that they may face their parents' anger if their targets not achieved. In comparison, 13.1 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 56.8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

About 16.7 per cent of the students were strongly disagreed or disagreed that they may lose their educational budget if they failed to achieve their parents' targets. In comparison, 15.2 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, and 68.1 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 4
Levels of Parental Pressure for High Marks (N=384)

Dimensions of Variable PPHM	Min	Max	Median	Levels		
				Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Parental Expectations	5	23	15	30.2	13.55	56.25
Students' Approach	8	20	18	22.4	14.06	63.54
Overall Parental Pressure for High Marks	13	43	33	26.3	13.805	59.895

Table 4 shows that the Parental expectations minimum score was 5, and the maximum score was 23. Similarly, for students' approach, the minimum score was 8, and the top score was 20. Likewise, Parental Expectations' median score was 15, and the Students' Approach was noted as 18.

While talking about the dimensions, about 30.2 per cent of the students perceived Parental Expectations as low. In comparison, 13.55 per cent of the students perceived it as moderate, and approximately 56.25 per cent of the students perceived its level as high.

About the Students' Approach, 22.4 per cent of students perceived its level as low, while 14.06 per cent perceived its level as moderate, and 63.54 per cent more perceived it as high. It means that majority of the students were against the expectation of their parents to get high marks in English.

While discussing the overall result as extracted, the parents have high expectations of their children's race for high marks in English. In contrast, their children are highly rejecting their expectations, which produces a phenomenon of like distress.

This study aimed to analyze their children's Parental Pressure levels to get high marks in English in SSC annual examination, conducted by the BISE Mardan. Unfortunately, here in the context, no one is agreed to accept the children's

differences. On the other hand, the parents give high targets to their children regarding their English academic achievements. This parental approach affects the performance of the students negatively. For example, causing their school dropout (Mughal et al., 2019; Njoku et al., 2020), increased suicide intention (e.g., Assari et al., 2020b; Khan&Hyder, 2006; Ward-Ciesielski & Wilks, 2020), high level of exam phobia (Ali et al., 2020; Javed, 2011), and parental stress (e.g., Khatoon & Parveen, 2009) in the Pakistani context.

This study has revealed that, in the Pakistani context, a high level of Parental Expectation for high marks in English subject of their children exists. In contrast, the students' high-level of negative approach against those parental expectations found out.

It proved that in the context, there is found a high level of Parental pressure for high marks in English subject as perceived by the students of secondary schools in Mardan District.

In the long run, this "parental pressure for high marks" creates exam phobia (e.g., Ahmed, 2015; Dupere et al., 2015; Harkness et al., 2006; Horesh et al., 1999; Lee et al., 2009; McGirr et al., 2008). This exam phobia results in suicide intention and school dropout at the secondary level (Ali et al., 2020; Rizvi & Fitzpatrick, 2020).

The parents should be aware of the negative aspects of their pressure on the students for high marks, without knowing their ability and individual differences. Here, the primary responsibility is to fall on the school principals' shoulders to make the parents aware of the dilemma through PTC meetings.

Conclusion

The parents in the context are pressurizing their children to get high marks in English subject in their annual examinations held under the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Mardan. Mostly, the parents are uneducated and don't know about their children's individual-differences and abilities. The parents warn their children about stopping their educational budget and even discontinuing their education if the targets were not achieved. This condition is causing many problems such as students' suicide intension and examination phobia, which help students' dropout of their schools.

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