Futuristic Trends in Social Sciences
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IIP Series, Volume 3, Book 2, Part 4, Chapter 3
COMPARING ACADEMIC STRESS LEVELS AMONG STUDENTS IN LIBERAL
ARTS, ARCHITECTURE, AND ENGINEERING PROGRAMS AT P.P.
SAVANI UNIVERSITY: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

COMPARING ACADEMIC STRESS LEVELS AMONG STUDENTS IN LIBERAL ARTS, ARCHITECTURE, AND ENGINEERING PROGRAMS AT P.P. SAVANI UNIVERSITY: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Abstract

Background: Academic stress has become a prevalent issue among students, resulting from the numerous expectations placed upon them both internally and externally. Adolescents, in particular, are susceptible to the challenges associated with academic stress during their transitional phase. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the sources and impact of academic stress to develop effective intervention strategies.

Objective: The study is being conducted to check the appraisal in students of liberal arts, engineering and architecture of their academic stress.

Method: The study employed a quantitative research design where participants were screened using Academic Stress Scale (Rajendran & Kaliappan,1991 from three streams namely, Liberal Arts, engineering and architecture.

Result: The result obtained demonstrated that the highest levels of stress was observed in students of liberal arts, followed by Architecture and then engineering.

Conclusion: Understanding the sources of stress would facilitate the development of effective counselling modules and intervention strategies by psychologists and counsellors in order to help students decrease their stress.

Keywords: Academic stress, stress, liberal arts, engineering, architecture

Author

Ms. Pallavi Patwari
P P Savani University
Surat, Gujarat, India.

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I. INTRODUCTION

We now use the word "stress" more frequently in our everyday speech. Despite the fact that stress is a topic we all discuss frequently, what exactly it entails is frequently unclear. We are well aware of a few words that are used to describe stress. These words include pressure, depression, burnout, stress, and strain. Many people believe that stress is something negative or positive that happens to them. Others believe that stress is the result of what an incident does to our bodies, minds, and behaviours. When something bad happens to us, we automatically begin mentally analysing the circumstances. If the situation is dangerous to us, we try to decide how to handle it and what tools and techniques we can employ. We classify the conditions as "stressful" and must respond to them using the traditional "stress response" if we determine that the demands of the scenario outweigh the talents we possess. We don't perceive a situation as "stressful" if we believe that our coping mechanisms will win over its demands. While some life circumstances can be stressful, how we perceive those circumstances ultimately determines whether or not they pose a problem for us. The impact of a stressful situation depends on how we view it, perceive it, and respond to it. We can learn to manage stress more successfully when we are aware of who we are and how we react in stressful situations. According to one definition, stress is the body's response to stresses; as a result, the intricate interactions between the body's systems can have harmful effects on its functions and organs, causing a person to become "stressed out," which can lead to significant sickness. This course satisfies Hans Selye's definition of stress as the body's general reaction to demands. According to Hans Selye (1978/1956), the demands might be either positive (Eustress) or negative (Distress). The physiological and neurological responses to stress make up the internal stress component. Hans Selye (1985) focused on the internal characteristics of stress and described stress as "nonspecific" since it can be caused by a wide range of various stressors. The Bio-Psychosocial Model of Stress (Bernard & Krupat, 1994) is one of the most complete models of stress. The Bio Psychosocial Model of Stress states that stress has three elements: an external element, an internal element, and the interplay of the external and internal elements. (1994, Bernard) Stress is a state of tension that people go through when they are faced with unusual demands, restrictions, or opportunities. Stress is a term used to describe the emotional imbalances that can result from the constraints of modern life and work expectations.

Stress is not always unpleasant, though. The absence of stress makes life boring, monotonous, and spiritless since stress is the life's flavour. Although there is no single, accepted definition of stress, the following three definitional categories are frequently used: One of these is a stimulus, an external event, typically a threat, that has a complicated impact on the body; in this understanding, stress is referred to as a "stressor," one that causes complex responses in the body's numerous systems. Stress is a state of tension that people go through when they are faced with unusual demands, restrictions, or opportunities. Stress is a term used to describe the emotional imbalances that can result from the constraints of modern life and work expectations. Stress is not always unpleasant, though. The absence of stress makes life boring, monotonous, and spiritless since stress is the life's flavour. Although there is no single, accepted definition of stress, the following three definitional categories are frequently used: One of these is a stimulus, an outside event—typically a danger—that has an impact on the body in complex ways; in this understanding, stress is referred to as a "stressor," one that causes intricate responses from the body's numerous systems.

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II. ACADEMIC STRESS

For the longest time, people believed that students were the least likely to have stress or other issues. According to Masih and Gulrez (2006), stress has evolved into a lifestyle issue that can affect everyone, regardless of stage of development (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2016). Studying was the sole task that was expected of students, and it was never thought of as stressful. Expectations that parent had for their kids turned out to be stressful because they grew into heavier loads that these kids were unable to bear. One student commits suicide every hour, according to figures from the National Crime Records Bureau (Saha, 2017). According to the statistics, 1.8% of students killed themselves after failing a test, and suicide rates increased by 80% in a year. India has the highest suicide rate in the world for those in the 15-to-29 age group, according to a 2012 Lancet analysis (as stated in "India Has the Highest Suicide Rate", n.d.), and these figures don't seem to be going down. These concerning numbers have been linked primarily to academic stress. According to Lee & Larson (2000), this stress is the result of a relationship between environmental stressors, student assessments, and their responses to those assessments. It has now established itself as a serious reality that is a "career stopper" (Kadapatti & Vijayalaxmi, 2012). As a result, it becomes a big reason for worry because it is an indicator of the growing problems with mental health in India (Nadamuri & Ch, 2011). It is crucial to recognise that less stress does not automatically translate into improved performance from students; rather, in these circumstances, they could view the assignment as uninteresting and get easily bored (Uchil, 2017).Although some degrees of stress encourage students to perform at their best, when that stress is not well managed owing to a lack of resources, it can have negative effects on both the student and the institution. No matter what the cause is, every person experiences the same stress response. For instance, the body would react the same way to stress from a marriage, exam worry, work stress, etc. This is mostly caused by the sympathetic dissociation of our nervous system and the adrenocortical axis, which results in the "fight or flight" response (Bourne & Yaroush, 2003). Heart rate (HR), blood pressure (BP), respiratory rate, increased blood flow towards skeletal muscles, etc. and other physiological changes that can be seen in the body.

The educational system also facilitates, which causes kids to suffer higher levels of stress. Agrawal & Chahar (2007), Sreeramareddy et al. (2007), the size of the syllabus (Agrawal & Chahar, 2007), the semester grading system, the lack of resources and facilities, the long hours, and the demands of rote learning are a few of the sources (Deb et al., 2015). Parents and institutions repeatedly instill a fear of failure in their children, which lowers their confidence and self-esteem. Increased expectations were listed as one of the reasons contributing to higher stress levels by Ang & Huan (2006). Thus, given that different stressors can lead to different stress reactions in the body, it is important to understand the causes of stress in order to create interventions that are specifically aimed at lowering students' stress levels. This will assist to promote an individual's overall well-being. Although many people view college as a great experience, many students also view it as chronically stressful because of the academic demands it places on them, such as tests, papers, and presentations (Murphy & Archer, 1996). Stress in childhood is becoming more common and more severe. The strain on children to mature emotionally and psychologically at younger and younger ages, the decline in the number of loving parents, and the resulting decline in parental love and support are some variables that may contribute to this stress. Adolescence is

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the stage where a youngster goes through a psychological transformation as they become older and enter puberty. A growing individual passes through this developmental stage as they transition from childhood to maturity. Irvine (2002) lists a variety of stressors for kids, including parental divorce and separation, failure in school, and social rejection. Stressful situations are also thought to get worse as adolescence progresses since teenagers frequently deal with stressors like peer pressure, home problems, and academic worries. Teenage years can be thought of as a confusing time. The people throughout this time are no longer seen as children but are still regarded as being too immature to be recognised as adults. Both the shift from adolescent to childhood and the reverse, from childhood to adolescence, have been seen as developmental transitions. Biological, social, and psychological shifts tend to increase a person's vulnerability.

According to the definition of a transition, it is the change from "one state of certainty to another with a period of uncertainty in between." For many children, moving from elementary to secondary school is a stressful experience. More than at any other point in life, schools are noticeably bigger, academic demands are higher, school circles and peer pressures alter more drastically. Adolescence is frequently characterised as a time of increased egocentrism, turbulence, and risk-taking behaviour experimentation. Adolescents' close emotional links to their parents are put to the test as they start to assert their independence and individuality. The choice of courses is made at the senior secondary level in the Indian context. According to these courses, the student's future develops. Teenagers begin to experience academic pressure at this stage because it immediately affects their employment possibilities. The level of stress was the same for both genders. Boys were more likely to express concern over events unrelated to interpersonal issues, such as subpar academic performance, becoming sick, relocating to a new place, and other occurrences. The majority of girls' stress came from their relationships, including conflicts with their siblings, peers, or friends. According to Aldwin & Greenberger (1987), the most frequent cause of stress among students is academic issues. According to Schafer (1996), the most annoying daily annoyances were typically pressures associated to education, such as the constant pressure to study, a lack of free time, having to write term papers and take tests, future plans, and dull teachers. According to Struthers et al. (2000), poorer course grades were correlated with high levels of academic stress. Exams, assignments, deadline pressure, grade pressure, and uncertainty all contribute to the high degree of academic stress that students endure. In conclusion, this stress has a negative impact on their ability to learn. Children who are under stress sometimes lack interest in things that they might otherwise find fun and exhibit violent behaviour, social phobia, shyness, and emotional disorders. Individual assessments and interpretations often determine how people react to stressful events, but some are fundamentally more stressful than others.

Students feel tension, trepidation, and worry when they perceive challenging situations as harmful or frightening. The activation of the autonomic nervous system also causes a variety of physiological and behavioural changes in them. According to Panchanath and Shanmugaganiesan (1992), the degree of the perceived danger or threat directly correlates with the intensity of the reaction. The nature and severity of the stress stimuli, the person's prior experiences, the presence and level of social support in the surroundings, and a host of other factors all play a role in the behavioural changes brought on by stress. When under experimentally generated stress, people have a tendency to seek out other people who

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are also under stress; they are less inclined to seek out others who are not under stress (Yets, 1936). Chronic stress and deprivation can cause students to develop a condition of withdrawal and social apathy that can be challenging to change after the stress is gone. According to Dixon, Wayne, Heppner, Paul, Anderson, and Wayne (1991), academic stress has also been linked to schizophrenia, depression, suicide, and a host of other maladaptive behaviours like delinquency and crime.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Reddy et al. (2018), there are differences in stress among the streams. Stress management is crucial on a personal, social, and institutional level. It has been discovered that stress management techniques like feedback, yoga, life skills training, mindfulness, meditation, and psychotherapy are effective. The key to managing stress is to pinpoint its primary cause. Professionals can create customised stress management plans. The holistic wellbeing of the students is crucial for both them as individuals and the institution. In his study, Dimitrov (2017) asserted that stress can be reduced by ensuring that students place the highest priority on their welfare. Some of the areas to concentrate on are food, exercise, work, and leisure. Additionally, he came to the conclusion that the educational system places too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on kids' overall development.

As the emphasis is only on the academics and not the mental growth of a go-getter, students are typically conditioned in a way that makes them scared to take on impending problems. The selection of educational media is limited. The fact that English is the sole language offered may be a barrier for students from rural backgrounds. Employability-focused courses are not commonly offered. For better jobs, recent grads need to strengthen their communication skills more. In their study, Sharma et al. (2016) noted the adoption of a number of techniques to reduce stress. One physical activity performed each day can help with the stress issue. Additionally, one might start using different time management strategies and engage in extracurricular activities that are advantageous for students. Additionally, it was advised that institutions should have a relaxing atmosphere to reduce stress. The teaching method can be given new life by altering the teacher's delivery style and offering mentors.

The relationship between student mental health and academic stress was identified by Subramani and Kadhiravan (2017). He agreed that students are constrained by the academic system and that there is a link between academic stress and mental health. In addition, there is not enough assistance from parents and schools in terms of guidance, which demoralises pupils by placing excessive pressure on them to achieve higher grades. When students contribute positively to the academic forums, they are in good mental health. They also suggested that because private school students receive more homework and other academic-related responsibilities than children at government schools, they are under more pressure. There was a noticeable disparity between the mental health of children in private and public schools. In contrast to government school kids, who come from a low socioeconomic background and receive little exposure, he claimed that students from private schools receive different nurturing and exposure. This is one of the factors contributing to the rise in stress.

Kaur (2014) acknowledged that the academic Stress affects adolescent mental health. Compared to boys, girls who are under academic pressure have poorer mental health.

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According to the survey, parents frequently put pressure and stress on their children. The result is a decrease in mental health. Prabu (2015) conducted research on students in higher education and suggested that male students experience higher levels of stress than female students. Academic stress is higher for urban students than for rural ones. The stress levels of students in public schools are lower than those in private schools. Students in the Science stream are under more pressure than those in the Arts stream.

In his study, Bataineh (2013) evaluated the academic pressures that university students experience. The findings of the analysis show that academic overload is unacceptable, that there is not enough time for study because the subject matter is so broad, and that the family has high expectations. Stress and a lack of motivation are a few of the factors. The main factor contributing to stress is fear of failure. The students of the various Specialisations were not significantly different from one another. Deb et al. (2014) conducted study on 400 male students in the 10th and 12th grades at five high schools in Kolkata. 35 percent of pupils have advanced degrees. Stress and high levels of anxiety were shown by 37%. It is believed that pupils with lower qualifications are more stressed than those with higher qualifications. It has been observed that pupils who participate in extracurricular activities are less stressed than those students who don't.

"Academic Stress, Coping Strategies, and Mental Health Problems Among University Students: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis" by Leung et al. (2021): This meta-analysis examines the relationship between academic stress, coping strategies, and mental health problems among university students. It provides insights into the prevalence of academic stress and its impact on mental well-being.

"Exploring the Relationship Between Academic Stress, Resilience, and Subjective Well-Being Among College Students" by Zhang et al. (2020): This study investigates the relationship between academic stress, resilience, and subjective well-being in college students. It explores the role of resilience as a potential protective factor against the negative effects of academic stress.

"Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Academic Stress and Psychological Well-being Among College Students" by Son et al. (2020): This research explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic stress and psychological well-being among college students. It sheds light on the unique stressors faced by students during the pandemic and their effects on mental health.

"Academic Stress and Burnout Among Medical Students: A Systematic Review" by Kumar et al. (2020): This systematic review examines the prevalence of academic stress and burnout among medical students. It highlights the factors contributing to stress and burnout in medical education and discusses potential interventions to mitigate their effects.

"Academic Stress, Perfectionism, and Depression Among Graduate Students: The Mediating Role of Psychological Flexibility" by Pau et al. (2019): This study investigates the relationship between academic stress, perfectionism, depression, and psychological flexibility among graduate students. It explores how psychological flexibility may influence the link between academic stress and mental health outcomes.

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Please keep in mind that these studies are just a few examples, and there are many more recent studies available on the topic of academic stress. Conducting a comprehensive literature search will help you find the most relevant and up-to-date research for your review.

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. **Significance and Objectives of the Research:** The objective of the research on academic stress among students is to investigate and understand various aspects related to academic stress, including its causes, impact, and potential interventions. The specific objectives may vary depending on the scope and focus of the research, but some common objectives could include:

2. **Identify Stressors:** The research aims to identify the specific factors or stressors that contribute to academic stress among students. This involves examining various aspects such as workload, high expectations, competition, time management, social pressures, and personal factors that may induce stress.

3. **Assess Impact:** The research seeks to assess the impact of academic stress on students' mental health, well-being, and academic performance. It aims to measure the psychological, emotional, and physical consequences of stress, as well as its effects on learning outcomes and overall educational experience.

4. **Understand Coping Mechanisms:** The objective is to explore the coping mechanisms employed by students in response to academic stress. This involves investigating the strategies students use to manage stress, seek support, and maintain a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and personal well-being.

5. **Examine Risk Factors and Protective Factors:** The research aims to identify both risk factors that contribute to higher levels of academic stress and protective factors that can mitigate stress and promote resilience. This could involve analysing individual characteristics, family dynamics, school environment, and social support networks. Develop interventions: Based on the findings, the objective is to develop evidence-based interventions and strategies to address academic stress among students. These interventions may include stress management programs, counselling services, academic support systems, mindfulness techniques (Vajpayee and Sanghani, 2022a; Vajpayee et al, 2022), and initiatives to promote a healthy learning environment Vajpayee, 2017a; 2017b).

6. **Evaluate Existing Support Systems:** The research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of existing support systems and resources available to students to manage academic stress. This could involve assessing the accessibility, adequacy, and utilization of counselling services, academic accommodations, and other support mechanisms provided by educational institutions (Sheokand et al 2023).

7. **Inform Policy and Practice:** The objective is to provide insights and recommendations to policymakers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders involved in student well-being and education. The research aims to inform the development of policies, guidelines,

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and practices that prioritize students' mental health, stress management, and overall academic success.

Inclusively, the objective of the research on academic stress among students is to generate knowledge, understanding, and practical solutions that can contribute to reducing stress levels, improving student well-being, and enhancing their educational experience.

V. HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH

1. **H0 (Null hypothesis):** There is no significant difference in the level of academic stress experienced by students in the fields of liberal arts, engineering, and architecture.

   There is no statistically significant difference in the academic performance scores among different schools within the university.

2. **H1 (Alternative hypothesis):** There is a significant difference in the level of academic stress experienced by students in the fields of liberal arts, engineering, and architecture.

   There is a statistically significant difference in the academic performance scores among different schools within the university.

3. **Design:** The study utilizes a simple research design to investigate and compare the levels of academic stress among different schools.

4. **Sample:** The sample population comprised 60 participants, including both male and female students aged between 18 and 22 years. The sample was divided into three groups, each consisting of 20 students from the following fields of study:

   - 20 students from the Liberal Arts program
   - 20 students from the Architecture program
   - 20 students from the Engineering program

5. **Tools used:** The Academic Stress Questionnaire developed by Mohammad Akram, Mohd. Ilyas Khan, and Sabiha Baby from Aligarh Muslim University consists of 36 items. Respondents rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "no stress at all" to "slight stress," "a lot of stress," and "extreme stress." The questionnaire measures various dimensions related to academic stress. Here is a systematic breakdown of the questionnaire items:

   - Inadequate academic environment in the college (item no. 1,5,12, 21,30,34,43,51,57)
   - Lack of adjustment (item no. 9,11,14,16,24,26,39,52)
   - Apprehensive about future (item no. 2,15,18,19,22,28,46)
   - Poor administration (item no. 3,4,7,10,17,29)
   - Worries (item no. 25,37,41,49,50)

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6. **Procedure:** To minimize paper usage, a Google Sheet was created to record the relevant details of the study. Students from different departments were approached and provided their consent before filling in the required information. The collected data was then carefully extracted and analysed. Graphical methods were employed to aid in the analysis process.

7. **Statistical Analysis:** Descriptive analysis was conducted on the gathered data. Normality assumptions were assessed, and the statistical mean was computed using Microsoft Excel.

VI. RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

The result of the data sheet was analysed and descriptive analysis was computed on the data. Graphical representation of the data is as shown below

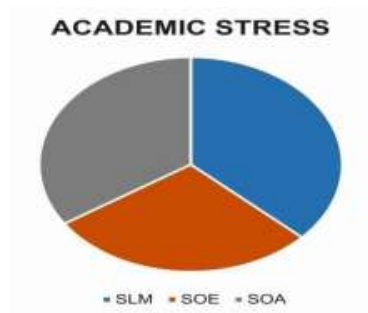| School	Total	Mean
SLM	1,286	64.3
SOA	1,196	59.8
SOE	1,004	50.2

Figure 1: Pie chart showing comparative analysis

The results of the study revealed significant differences among three student groups: liberal arts, engineering, and architecture. The liberal arts group consisted of 20 students, totaling 1,286 individuals, whereas the engineering group had 1,004 students and the architecture group had 1,196 students.

The mean score obtained by liberal arts students was 64.3, which was the highest among the three groups. This suggests that liberal arts students face various challenges such as dealing with complex theories, a demanding syllabus, high assignment pressure, and strict attendance requirements. These factors may contribute to their higher mean score, indicating their engagement with the subject matter.

Architecture students obtained the second highest mean score of 59.8. This finding suggests that architecture students experience significant academic stress. The nature of their

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field, which involves practical and cognitive processing, may contribute to this stress. Architecture is known to be a demanding discipline, requiring constant striving for excellence, intense competition among students, and the need to consistently produce creative output. The breadth of information, processes, and data that architects must learn further adds to the challenges they face.

In contrast, engineering students obtained the lowest mean score of 50.2. This result may be attributed to the structured curriculum and a fixed amount of cognitive load they encounter, focusing primarily on specific theories. Engineering students may have fewer opportunities to explore additional information beyond their core subjects, which could potentially contribute to their lower mean score.

The study reveals the diverse academic experiences and challenges faced by students in different fields of study. Liberal arts students demonstrate higher engagement with the subject matter, likely due to the complexity and demanding nature of their curriculum. Architecture students face significant stress due to the practical and cognitive aspects of their field, while engineering students may have a more structured and focused academic experience.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding the unique characteristics and demands of each field of study when evaluating students' performance and analyzing their academic stress levels. Further research and interventions could be developed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by students in each discipline, ultimately enhancing their overall academic experience and well-being.

Inclusively, these findings highlight the differences in academic experiences and challenges faced by students in liberal arts, engineering, and architecture. It is important to consider these factors when analysing the performance and academic stress levels of students in various fields of study.

VII. FUTURE LINE OF STUDY

Further prospects of the research based on the presented findings could include:

1. **In-depth Exploration of the Challenges Faced by Students in each Field:** The study provides an initial understanding of the challenges faced by students in liberal arts, architecture, and engineering. Further research can delve deeper into these challenges to identify specific areas where students encounter difficulties. This could involve conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather qualitative data that complements the quantitative analysis.

2. **Investigation of Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems:** Understanding how students cope with the challenges in their respective fields can provide valuable insights for developing effective support systems. Research could explore the strategies employed by students in different fields to manage academic stress, enhance engagement, and improve performance. This information can help educators and institutions develop targeted interventions and support programs.

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3. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting longitudinal studies would allow researchers to track the academic progress and well-being of students over an extended period. By following students from their initial enrolment through their graduation or beyond, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolving challenges and experiences in each field. Longitudinal studies can also provide insights into the long-term effects of academic stress and the factors influencing students' persistence and success.

4. **Comparative Analysis Across different Institutions or Regions:** Expanding the research to include multiple institutions or diverse regions can provide a broader perspective on the academic experiences and challenges faced by students. Comparing the findings across institutions or regions may reveal variations in curriculum design, teaching methods, and support systems. Such comparative analyses can inform best practices and policies to improve the educational experiences of students in different fields.

5. **Exploration of the Relationship between Academic Performance and Mental Well-Being:** Investigating the link between academic performance and mental well-being is crucial, especially in high-stress fields such as architecture and engineering. Researchers can examine the impact of academic demands on students' mental health and explore strategies to promote well-being alongside academic achievement. This could involve collaborations with mental health professionals or incorporating psychological measures into the research design.

6. **Evaluation of Interventions and Support Programs:** Building upon the insights gained from this research, evaluating the effectiveness of existing interventions or developing new support programs becomes essential (Vajpayee and Mishra 2003). Researchers can assess the impact of initiatives aimed at reducing academic stress, fostering student engagement, and promoting success in each field. This evaluation can provide evidence-based recommendations for institutions and educators to implement effective interventions (Mishra and Vajpayee, 2000).

By pursuing these further prospects, researchers can continue to deepen their understanding of the challenges faced by students in liberal arts, architecture, and engineering, ultimately contributing to the development of tailored interventions and support systems that enhance the overall academic experience and well-being of students in these fields.

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