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Educational Stress and Persistence in English Learning: An Inquiry into the Mindsets of EFL Undergraduates in Turkey

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It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer.

Albert Einstein

ABSTRACT

As both a lifelong move and component of formal education, language learning could be accompanied with educational stress. However, although debilitating in nature, stress especially if it is at optimal levels could have a facilitating role in keeping students persistent in their learning process. Thus, the present inquiry aimed to shed light on the possible relation between educational stress and EFL persistence. To this end, it utilized mixed methods research design involving both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were gathered through two different tools as Educational Stress Scale and Persistence Scale for Language Learning. Open-ended question form was administered to collect the qualitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data while conventional and directed content analyses were performed for the qualitative data. The findings indicated that there is weak but positive correlation between educational stress and EFL persistence. Although students were found to have relatively high levels of academic stress, they had greater tendencies to continue learning instead of giving up and voiced their potential solutions in face of academic challenge. The findings of the current study could contribute not only to the foreign language research dealing with affective constructs but also to the promising field of positive psychology interventions in EFL.

BACKGROUND

Educational Stress

Stress, viewed as a condition of imbalance between demands (from internal or external origins) and individuals' perceived capability to fulfill those demands (Selye, 1956), can present itself in different spheres of life. One of these is undoubtedly the educational arena. Given its multidimensionality, impact area and duration, education, or more specifically academic learning is more likely to cause stress in various periods for educatees. Stress among undergraduates contains numerous factors, resulting from both academic and non-academic aspects (Beiter, Nash, McCrady, Rhoades, Linscomb, Clarahan & Sammut, 2015; Mirza, Baarimah, Baig, Mirza, Halawani, Beyari, AlRaddadi & Alreefi, 2021) while the academic factors constitute the prevalent source of stress among the students, followed by physical, social and emotional ones (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Educational stress, also remarked as academic stress, has been expressed as the state of anxiety that stems from schooling (Prabu, 2015), the

output of academic demands that surpass the students' adaptive capacity (Wilks, 2008) and the intellectual and emotional strain emerging from the requirements of university life (Dedeyn, 2008). Though it is not a brand-new issue, academic stress still continues to be a pervasive and devastating problem influencing students adversely (Reddy, Menon & Thattil, 2018).

Students encounter more stress than ever in today's competitive setting, and students at universities find their academic life stressful and exhausting (Ramahsendran, Ahmad, Khan & Sasmoko, 2017). Particularly the transition to university causes undergraduates to face a lot of interpersonal, social and academic challenges (Baker, 2003; Edjah, Ankomah, Domey & Laryea, 2020). As in other developmental transitions, failure in overcoming those challenges could result in stress (Teixeira, Brandão & Dores, 2022). Different studies pointed out various academic stressors such as fear of failure, academic overloads, course awkward, inadequate time to study, workload every semester, exams, low motivation, and high family expectations (Bataineh, 2013), greater academic demand, grade competition, heavy workload, pressure from society, parental expectations, peer pressure, extra-curricular activities, continuous evaluation and low motivation (Sethi, 2021) in addition to insufficient time to broaden knowledge level and mastery over syllabus in a limited time (Reddy & Lathia, 2021). This new atmosphere experienced at university expects students to deal with the negative potentials that could damage their coping skills whereas they incline to delay action in the face of a difficult situation, and thus over the past few years the prevalence of academic stress among students is quite high and alarming (Zamroni, Hidayah, Ramli & Hambali, 2019).

University students go through educational, environmental, social and psychological adjustment problems in contemporary campus settings and need to equip themselves for academic survival and further career (Adedamola, Akin, Abiola & Ebun, 2022). Although a certain level of stress is essential for satisfactory effort and performance, high levels suggest academic stress, and it is strongly associated with emotional problems among students (Tharaldsen, Tvedt, Caravita & Bru, 2022). It poses a negative impact upon their academic achievement and well-being (Aihie, Ohanaka, 2019; Ng, Chiu & Fong, 2016). One study conducted among 843 university students showed a significant correlation between worse academic stress and poor psychological well-being of the students (Barbayannis, Bandari, Zheng, Baquerizo, Pecor, & Ming, 2022). Accordingly, Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker (2020) state that academic stress could weaken motivation and academic performance, and promote college dropout rates. Moreover, educational stress induces inadequate performance in exams, school refusals, irritability and low interest in school work (Akinyooye & Adesokan, 2021). However, the educational stress of the undergraduates could also serve as a stimulating factor when appropriate coping skills are utilized to regulate this stress (Sethi, 2021). Within this frame, showing persistence instead of giving up learning could turn out to be an effective coping mechanism to respond to the educational stress.

Persistence for Language Learning

Language learning, both as a lifelong endeavor and a part of formal education, requires time, patience and effort. Although it could be an intriguing and enjoyable process, learning a new language is not free of challenges and strains. Mastery over a second language, especially a language which is not cognate with one's own, is a critical long term enterprise (Belnap, Bown, Dewey, Belnap & Steffen, 2016). Hence, the nature of language learning necessitates learners to be perseverant academically in the long run.

Academic perseverance enables students to pursue their academic goals with a constant concentration and tenacity, not allowing barriers to discourage them (Sudina & Plonsky, 2021).

Referring to perseverance and dedication to learn English, EFL persistence involves goal-driven actions of the learners who have the ultimate aim of achieving English (Mutlu, 2017), and the successful mastery of language learning profoundly relies upon learners' sustained effort (Teimouri, Plonsky & Tabandeh, 2022).

Within the scope of language learning, several studies have investigated different aspects of persistence. To illustrate, one study (Matsumoto & Obana, 2001) on L2 persistence of university students learning Japanese found out that the sense of anxiety for poor academic achievement caused the students to discontinue learning Japanese. Another study conducted by Habók and Magyar (2020) revealed the negative impact of difficulty of the material on persistence in learning since the participant students did not give high rating to studying a language when the material was difficult for them. Ramage (1990) and Fryer (2019) also shed light into the critical relation between persistence and interest in language learning. Not only interest but also expectancy of success could induce persistence in language learning (Loh, 2019). National Research Council (2012) gives a broader schema showing the factors that support or constrain persistence in learning:

Figure 1. Factors that support or constrain persistence in learning.

As apparent in the figure, factors hindering or/and contributing to student persistence could be individual, contextual and structural. Although they represent different faces of the components present in the learning process, they may feed each other and influence student persistence altogether. For instance, Cheng and Lee (2018) found the learning environment, learning materials and demands of the scheme, more specifically, workload and study schedule, as the crucial factors hindering student persistence in language learning. Moreover, another study (Northwood & Thomson, 2012) revealed the higher level of motivation, positive attitudes and learner autonomy as the factors allowing students to be continuers in their language learning process as compared to discontinuers. Apart from learning enjoyment, Hejazi and Sadoughi (2022) indicated the teacher support as one of the essential factors in sustaining student persistence.

Persistence could act as a coping strategy in the face of academic stress, as well. As suggested by Wahyuni, Rozimela, Ardi, Mukhaiyar & Darmansyah (2022), living in such a stressful environment, it becomes essential for recent students to adopt perseverance in the 21st century, and such perseverance could allow them to deal with failure, to overcome academic challenges, to get focused on their goals and not to give up. Likewise, Kegaan (2017) asserts that persistence could enable students to compensate for what they lack in their language learning skill and to realize their goals. Thus, perseverance as a learning strategy to boost motivation (Menéndez, Grande, Sánchez & Camacho-Miñano, 2018), could also feed students' sense of resilience in face of academic difficulties.

Notwithstanding more than 60 sixty years of research on second language (L2) motivation, there have been only a few studies focusing on L2 persistence (Feng & Papi, 2020). Similarly, Dörnyei (2020) also states that both direction and the magnitude of the behaviour is determined by motivation; that is, motivation influences selection of action, the effort to put on it and persistence though persistence has received less attention in the previous research agenda. Additionally, Richards (2022) claims that focus on cognitive dimensions of language learning has underrated the impact of emotions in learning and teaching practices. Through looking into the sense of educational stress and persistence as non-cognitive student traits, the present inquiry could cast more light on the affective factors that may play significant roles in language learning. Hence, the findings of this study could contribute not only to the foreign language research dealing with affective constructs but also to the promising field of positive psychology interventions in EFL. To be able to add one more brick into the gap of research investigating educational stress and EFL persistence in the same pot, the current study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the level of educational stress that EFL undergraduates have?
2. Do the EFL undergraduates show persistence for learning English?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between educational stress and EFL persistence?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This descriptive inquiry utilized mixed method research design to gain a deeper insight into the educational stress and persistence issues in English learning. The study applied the convergent design where two different approaches are integrated to elicit triangulated results (Dawadi, Shrestha & Gri, 2021). In convergent parallel mixed resign, two data sets are gathered concurrently, and analysed independently applying quantitative and qualitative analysis approaches and merged by the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

EFL learners at university level constituted the participants of the study. Using random sampling, the present study included 43 EFL students. Demographic information of the participants is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Variables		**f**	**%**
Gender	Female	20	47,6
	Male	22	52,4
Age	17-20	12	27,9
	21-24	26	60,5
	over 25	5	11,6
School Year	1st year	23	54,8
	2nd year	8	19,0
	3rd year	11	25,6

The present study included 22 male and 20 female students, and the age of the most students was between 21 and 24 (60%). Since the EFL students were enrolled in the Department of Translation and Interpreting, their school year was also analysed for probable influences. However, more than half of the students (54,8%) were 1st year students. Since only two students were in their 4th year, they were merged with the 3rd year students in analyses.

Data Collection Procedure

This study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools to ensure the triangulation. Quantitative data were gathered through two different scales as Educational Stress Scale (Sun, Dunne, Hou & Xu, 2011) and Persistence Scale for Language Learning (Mutlu, 2017). Each scale was supported with an open-ended question to elicit the students' views on academic stress and EFL persistence.

Since the Educational Stress Scale was not in the Turkish language, students were administered its adapted form (Akın, Gediksiz, Arslan & Akın, 2012). The scale consisted of 16 items with five sub-dimensions: *pressure from study* (4 items)*, workload* (3 items)*, worry about grades* (3 items)*, self-expectation* (3 items) *and despondency* (3 items). This Likert-type scale consisted of items ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The highest score to get was 80 while the lowest score was 16, and there were no reverse coded items. As to the Persistence Scale for Language Learning (Mutlu, 2017), it was already developed in the Turkish language, and it was composed of 18 items with no sub-dimensions. It was a five-point scale ranging from *not at all true of me* (1), *slightly true of me* (2), *moderately true of me* (3), *very true of me* (4) to *completely true of me* (5).

Students were also given an open-ended question form related to each scale. The questions were as follows:

a. Considering your academic life at university, under what circumstances do you feel under stress?
b. What do you do when you feel stressed and have difficulty while learning or improving your English?

Data Analysis

The data were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The scales were analysed through the SPSS Program using certain statistical analyses. Mean scores and frequencies were presented descriptively. The mean scores were given for each sub-dimension for educational stress. For EFL persistence, each item was measured. To do this, the study benefited from the class width formula (class range/number of classes) of Tekin (2002) referred by Özer (2020) and used in other studies (İra & Geçer, 2017; Kaplanoğlu, 2014; Yaman & Tekin, 2010). Class width levels for the evaluation of mean scores in the present study were as follows:

1-1.80: "*not at all true of me*",

1.81-2.60: "*slightly true of me*",

2.61-3.40: "*moderately true of me*",

3.41-4.20: "*very true of me*" and

4.21-5.00: "*completely true of me*".

To identify probable relation among age, gender and school year with the educational stress, some parametric tests such as independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA and post-hoc were used; however, since the mean scores of the EFL persistence scale could not pass the normality test, non-parametric tests were applied. The probable relationship between educational stress and EFL persistence was gauged through Spearman's correlation.

As for the open-ended question form, the responses were subjected to the content analyses. Educational stress question was analysed through directed content analysis, which starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes (Hseieh & Shannon, 2005). Analysis and the interpretation of the collected data were essentially guided by the existing categories (Kibiswa, 2019) or in other words the existing sub-dimensions of the Educational Stress Scale. The codes drawn out of the data were placed under the appropriate category or sub-dimension available. Conventional content analysis was applied for the question of persistence. Students' answers were read and reread to get the sense of the whole, meanings were condensed, and codes were formulated out of these condensed meaning units, and these codes were grouped into categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). All the answers for open-ended questions were put into analyses. 29 responses for education stress question and 30 responses for the EFL persistence question were elicited from the students; thus, 59 answers analysed qualitatively.

Quantitative Findings

Findings of Educational Stress

Table 2. EFL Students' Level of Educational Stress

Sub-dimensions	Min.	Max.	X	SD
Pressure from study	1,25	4,00	2,56	,592
Workload	1,00	4,33	2,59	,858
Worry about grades	1,00	5,00	2,82	,932
Self-expectation	1,67	5,00	3,70	,965
Despondency	1,00	5,00	2,73	,914
General	**1,75**	**3,81**	**2,86**	**,519**

Findings indicated that students seemingly had a high level of educational stress in general (X=2.86) given the maximum mean score (X=3.81). More specifically, the participants appeared to have highest stress in self-expectation, and it was followed by pressure from study and workload.

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test Results for Gender

Gender	N	X	sd	t	df	p
Female	20	2.93	.471	1.07	40	.288
Male	22	2.76	.541			

Though not statistically significant, the results for gender showed that female students had slightly higher level of education stress than male students.

Table 4. One -way ANOVA Results for Age and School Year

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	LSD
Age	Between groups	2,687	2	1,344	6,224	,004	17-20> over 25
	Within groups	8,636	40	,216			21-24> over 25
	Total	11,324	42				
School Year	Between groups	,671	2	,336	1,231	,303	
	Within groups	10,634	39	,273			
	Total	11,305	41				

Age caused a statistically significant difference among the students ($p<.05$). Considering the difference among age groups, it can be said that students between 17-20 and 21-24 had higher educational stress than those over 25. However, there was not a statistically significant difference in terms of school year.

Findings of Persistence for Language Learning

Quantitative Findings

Table 5. Students' Persistence Levels for Language Learning

EFL Persistence Items	X	SD	Level
I insist on reaching my goal of learning English even if it involves considerable trouble	3,95	1,112	Very true of me
When I get a poor mark in my English class, I work harder next time	3,88	1,028	Very true of me
I try my best to do all I can to learn English	3,86	1,125	Very true of me
My ultimate goal of mastering English motivates me to overcome day to day difficulties	3,84	1,045	Very true of me
If I fail to solve a problem I faced in a language assignment, I try again and again in the hope that I will be successful	3,79	,914	Very true of me
Once I decide to do something when learning English, I do not give up until I reach my goal.	3,74	1,071	Very true of me
I continue to invest time and effort in language activities in spite of the hard work and patience they require	3,70	1,013	Very true of me
I am not discouraged by setbacks I face in my English learning process	3,60	1,003	Very true of me
If I am not good at a skill in English, I keep struggling to master it	3,60	,979	Very true of me
I work hard to learn English	3,53	1,222	Very true of me
I continue a difficult language activity even when the others have already given up on it	3,53	1,141	Very true of me
When I have trouble with a language point, I practice it more	3,49	1,077	Very true of me
The more difficult a language activity is, the more determined I am to finish it	3,49	1,183	Very true of me
I make an effort to follow through with the plans I make for my studying when learning a language skill	3,49	1,099	Very true of me
General EFL Persistence	**3,56**	**,869**	**Very true of me**

Findings of EFL persistence displayed a high level of persistence for language learning. The table above included only the items with "very true of me" level, and they were listed according to their mean scores. The item with the highest score highlighted the insistence for reaching goals. Similarly, the ultimate goal of mastering English was found to motivate students in tackling the difficulties. Therefore, they reported not to give up until they realize their goals. Additionally, obstacles or setbacks seemed not to discourage the students, instead the students remarked that they continue investing time and effort, practising and working hard in the face of difficulty.

Table 6. Mann Whitney-U Test Results for Gender

Gender	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**	**U**	**p**
Female	20	25,48	509,50	140,5	.045
Male	22	17,89	393,50		

Concerning the EFL persistence, female students were found to have higher level of persistence, and this difference was statistically significant ($p<.05$).

Table 7. Kruskal Wallis Test Results for Age and School Year

		N	**Mean Rank**	**df**	**X^2**	**p**
Age	17-20	12	24,04	2	2,752	,253
	21-24	26	22,71			
	over 25	5	13,40			
School Year	1st year	23	23,78	2	1,974	,373
	2nd year	8	20,25			
	3rd year	11	17,64			

Students at ages between 17-20 and 1st year students were found to have higher levels of EFL persistence although age and school year did not cause statistically significant difference.

Table 8. Correlation between Educational Stress and EFL Persistence

Variables	*N*	*r*	*p*
Educational Stress			
EFL Persistence	43	.194	.212

Although educational stress and EFL persistence were found to correlate positively, this relation was found to be weak, and the result was not statistically significant.

Qualitative Findings

Table 9. Findings of Educational Stress

Categories	Codes
Pressure from Study	Future/ anxiety for job (5) Competition/rivalry (1)
Workload	Exams (15) Presentations (2) Assignments (1) Speaking English (1)
Worry about Grades	Effect of grade on future (1) Expectation of instructor (1)
Self-expectation	Exams (when not studied for) (3) Anxiety for success (3) Unfulfilled expectation despite effort (1) In case of procrastination (1)
Despondency	Always (2)

Qualitative findings revealed academic stress in all sub-dimensions included in the educational stress scale. Although exams could appear associated with grades, worry about grades in the scale were mostly related to a sense of disappointment to other parties as family and instructors; thus, exams were added under workload. Pressure from the study involved student responses regarding anxiety for job (f=5) and competitive atmosphere (f=1).

Excerpt 1: *I feel stressed when I think of my future. University life is good, but thinking of the graduation day makes me feel anxious*.

Excerpt 2: *Although I handle with the academic hardships at all costs, I feel under stress when I think of the difficulties in finding a job after graduation*

Exams (f=15), presentations (f=2) and assignments (f=1) presented themselves as workload in the analysis.

Excerpt 3: *I feel stressed and under pressure during the exam periods even if I have studied for it.*

Excerpt 4: *I feel under stress only when I think of such things that require skilful and hard work as midterms, finals and projects.*

The probable influence of grades on future life (f=1) and anxiety for not meeting the instructor's expectations in the face of low grades (f=1) were evaluated as worry about grades.

Excerpt 5: *Even though I know that grades are not very important, I feel stressed when I get a low score. If my instructor is strict on grades, I still feel under stress when I think that I won't be able to meet his/her expectations*.

Exams especially when not studied on time (f=3), sense of failure (f=3) and showing procrastinative behaviour (f=1) were found to cause academic stress in terms of self-expectation. The answer of "always" was evaluated as a general sense of despondency in the analysis.

Excerpt 6: *I feel stressed if I cannot feel that I have studied enough for the exam*.

Excerpt 7: *Decrease in my grade-point average makes me feel stressed and sad.*

Excerpt 8: *I feel stressed mostly in my busy times if I have procrastinated my studies and assignments. I feel anxious about not being able to complete my studies in exam weeks*.

Table 10. Findings of Persistence for Language Learning

Categories	Codes
Passive orientation	Give up learning (2)
	Procrastination (1)
Active orientation	Having a break for a while (9)
	Going on learning (8)
	Self-motivation (5)
	Seeking for help (3)
	Dealing with activities in English (3)
	Dealing with other things (3)
	Searching for new online resources (1)
	Making the process enjoyable (1)
	Preparing a list for solutions (1)

Concerning the EFL persistence, students were found to react actively more in the face of difficulty in language learning. Active orientation included having a break for a while (f=9) to be able to continue better, going on learning (f=8), motivating the self (f=5), seeking for help (f=3).

Excerpt 9: *I rarely have difficulty in learning English. At that time, I generally have a break and clear my head. Then, I can easily learn. It always works.*

Excerpt 10: *If I feel stressed and have a difficult time learning English, I give a break for a while. Then, I continue studying where I have left. I make an effort to solve the problem. I learn the source of the problem*.

Excerpt 11: *Feeling stressed while learning English gives me more ambition to study harder.*

Excerpt 12: *I remind myself of why I want to learn English and I chose such a major, and I try to motivate myself.*

Excerpt 13: *I seek for help from somebody with a good command of English.*

The students also seemed to prefer dealing with activities in English such as watching movies and listening to songs in English (f=3) as well as searching for different online resources.

Excerpt 14: *I watch a serial or movie in English to feel relaxed. Watching something without translation (subtitles) cheers me up*.

Regarding the passive orientation, giving up learning and procrastinating emerged from the analyses.

Excerpt 15: *I procrastinate and deceive myself by saying "I will deal with it later". I do not persevere unless I run into difficulty. I don't like withstanding hardships; I take the easy way out. I sleep if I feel under stress.*

DISCUSSION

Educational stress and persistence in English learning constituted the focus of the present study. The probable relation between these non-cognitive factors and whether stress takes the facilitating or debilitating role in showing EFL persistence were questioned apart from the relationships among different variables such as age, gender and school year.

The participating students appeared to have high levels of educational stress. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that they felt stress especially in terms of self-expectation, pressure from study and workload. Exams, presentations and assignments were found to cause stress among students. This finding aligns with another study conducted by Adasi, Amponsah, Mohammed, Yeboah and Mintah (2020) showing that academic-related stressors such as assignments, courses, presentations, tests and end of semester exams put so much pressure on learners. Students also felt under stress when they could not meet their own expectations by not studying enough for the exams, having anxiety for success and procrastinating their studies. Worries about their career expectations also seemed to put the students under stress. Another study exploring the potential correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of university students found academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans as the top three concerns (Beiter et al., 2015). Given gender, female students had higher levels of academic stress. In different studies, female students were also found to experience higher academic stress (Abouserie, 1994; Bang, 2009; Misra & Mckean, 2000; Nakalema & Ssenyonga, 2014; Rayle & Chung, 2008). As for the age, younger students had a higher level of academic stress. Khan, Altaf and Kausar (2013) also found out that younger students experienced higher academic stress than older ones since they were not so adjusted to the educational stress of university life as senior students. Thinking that they are new to university life, it seems natural for them to have worries and adjustment problems. New study skills, new learning systems, new expectations and new people in a totally different environment than high school are more likely to lead to a sense of anxiety, strain and thus stress. The transition to university causes undergraduates to face a lot of interpersonal, social and academic challenges (Baker, 2003; Edjah, Ankomah, Domey & Laryea, 2020). In the current study, although age caused a statistically significant difference among students in terms of academic stress, the school year did not lead to such a difference. Similarly, the study (Misra, McKean, West & Russo, 2000) also found no significant difference between school year and the stressors.

When it comes to EFL persistence, the participants were also found to have higher perceptions in their perseverance in learning English. They showed persistence especially in realizing their goals. They claimed not to give up on the path to reaching their aims. Their ultimate goal of learning English seemed to promote their motivation in overcoming the challenges. Therefore, those challenges allowed the students to exert more effort and invest more time in learning English instead of intimidating them. Within the frame of persistence, the present study identified female students to have higher levels of perseverance. However, another study (Wu, Foong & Alias, 2022) detected male students as having higher perceptions than females in English learning performance. There are different studies finding females as having more persistence in different academic fields such as computer science (Milesi, Perez-Felkner, Brown, & Schneider, 2017), communication, arts and psychology (Garcia, Cheung & Loredo–Abuyo, 2015) and law education (Zimmerman & Brogan, 2015). Actually, there is lack of empirical evidence that taps into the baffling boundaries between male and female counterparts in the construct of grit (Kumar & Rathee, 2019). Thus, more studies should be conducted if we are to draw a more general picture on the role of gender in persistent behaviours of students especially in the field of language learning. As to the age, as in the findings of the educational stress, younger students showed greater persistence in language learning. Therefore, it could be

concluded that high levels of educational stress did not discourage students, instead it supported their perseverance in learning. As a matter of fact, correlation results also displayed a positive relationship between educational stress and persistence in English learning. Though the correlation was weak, the positive orientation could hint at the fact that academic stress could also act as a trigger for students' motivation and coping skills. This result could move us towards the notion that certain level of stress could be effective in students' performance (Adedamola, Akin, Abiola & Ebun, 2022; Ascher & Tonies, 2021; Fathiyah, 2022; Reddy, Menon & Thattil, 2018; Tharaldsen, Tvedt, Caravita & Bru, 2022). However, the opposite could be expected from such constructs connoting two different feelings just hypothesized in another study (Lee, 2017) that found a negative relationship between perseverance and stress. However, what seems critical is to have a certain level of stress and manage it well. Otherwise, poor stress management could influence the perseverance adversely (Lee, 2017). Since some can show a negative reaction to stress whereas some others can use their own resources to fight the stressors (Montano, 2021), what is critical is to detect the stressors in academic life clearly, keep the stress level at optimal level and use educational stress as a motivator to achieve more rather than as a demotivator or a reason to give up learning.

Students' coping strategies also revealed the positive relationship between educational stress and persistence in English learning because most of the students remarked active solutions to go on learning in face of a difficulty or sense of stress. They preferred having a break for a while to be able to have a fresh start again. Restorative breaks are likely to ensure deep learning and sustainability of the performance (Albulescu, Macsinga, Rusu, Sulea, Bodnaru & Tulbure, 2022). They also claimed to benefit from self-motivation to continue learning English. Therefore, motivating the self and finding meaningful goals could feed student resilience in English learning. As a matter of fact, the tendency to persist in learning could also pave the way for motivation. It could act like a cycle. As another study (Trigueros,Aguilar-Parra, Cangas, Bermejo,, Ferrandiz & López-Liria, 2019) suggests, resilience poses a positive influence on self-motivation, and self-motivation enhances academic performance accordingly. Help-seeking was also another solution they found when they felt under academic stress. Academic help-seeking could support academic performance as a learning strategy (Martín-Arbós, Castarlenas & Duenas, 2021), promote academic persistence and coping with academic challenges (Averina & Kuswandono, 2022) and help successful language acquisition (Tan, Yang & Yao, 2022). Moreover, dealing with activities in English such as watching movies and listening to songs in target language were the signs of persistence during the times of educational stress. Although the number was low, there were few students who chose to give up or procrastinate. Given the individual differences in students, it is natural for some to show an avoidance tendency in confronting the academic stress. Other studies shed light into the association between academic stress and procrastination (Hussain & Sultan, 2010; Kaur & Billing, 2022; Kuftyak, 2021).

Tapping into the educational stress and EFL persistence, the current inquiry revealed that stress and persistence do not necessarily have negative relation as expected, and certain levels of academic stress could trigger the sense of perseverance in language learning and allow students to find possible ways to cope with the academic difficulties.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In an ever-changing world, though it seems quite legitimate to confront academic stress especially for undergraduates, it is also pivotal to cultivate the sustainability and continuity of learning. Therefore, instead of ignoring the academic stress, students should be encouraged and trained to gain problem solving skills. Active struggle with academic stress rather than a passive acceptance of it could feed their sense of persistence. To achieve this, educators should instil the importance and value of effort into the educatees, and not only product but also the power of process should be highlighted so as to keep students active in their learning process. What is more, instructors should teach their students to use failures as new opportunities instead of punishing them. Changing negative mindsets about failures into positive ones could prevent students from giving up on hard-time experiences of language learning. This could work during exam and assignment periods, as well since those are the occasions students tend to experience stress most. Additionally, it is significant for students to split up their study times into sessions instead of cramming all into one week or month, and to set realistic and feasible goals while learning language. This could avoid the stress stemming from self-expectation. Last but not least, students should be encouraged to take active roles in their career even before graduation to inhibit despair related to their profession. Such a long journey as language learning could be accompanied with educational stress; however, it could also be attained through persistence. If students persist, they can achieve mastery over the English language.

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