

A Study on Academic Pressure and Student Life in Indian Technical Institutions with Reference to Chetan Bhagat's Five Point Someone

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Abstract:

Students attending technical institutions in India face increasing academic pressure, which has emerged as one of the most significant concerns confronting students enrolled in these institutions. Engineering education is highly competitive and demanding in India. Students must not only strive to meet rigorous academic expectations; they must also deal with the expectations placed on them by family, teachers, and society. Technical institutions can provide an education that leads to a successful career and economic stability. Therefore, students feel a great deal of pressure to do well throughout their time as students at a technical institution. As a result, many students find themselves under significant stress from trying to maintain high grades, meet deadlines, and prepare for future job opportunities. Furthermore, most institutions use only numerical grades and rankings to measure success through an evaluation process, creating additional emotional and psychological stress for many students. Excessive academic pressure has affected the overall health and well-being of these students; many experience anxiety, emotional burnout, and feelings of inadequacy. This research study attempts to examine the experiences students have dealing with academic pressure in Indian technical institutions, using Five Point Someone by Chetan Bhagat as a reflection of these experiences. The book provides insight into the daily woes experienced by those studying at a prestigious technical university based on the Indian Institutes of Technology. Through the lives of the central characters in the story, it shows how the students are influenced by the expectations placed upon them academically, along with the institutional guidelines they must follow, as well as their peers' competitiveness with one another. The book also discusses several issues that are critical to students studying in technical fields today: pressure to maintain grades; intense competition among peers; conflicts between personal goals vs. institutional demands; emotional challenges related to maintaining high academic standards. In portraying these struggles through relatable characters and situations, the book serves as an important study of both the psychological and social conditions experienced by students who attend extremely competitive educational institutions. In addition, this study will demonstrate that Five Point Someone is not simply a fictional account of India's current technical higher education system, but rather a reflection of the sociological and educational challenges facing many students enrolled in Indian technical higher education institutions today. In particular, the authors relate that institutional grading systems, rules governing the institution, and limited options for students to learn can create a system where students feel limited in what they can accomplish and valued for their abilities. The struggles of these students illustrate that unrealistic expectations and inordinate amounts of emphasis placed on grades can lead to burnout, frustration, and inability to enjoy learning. By highlighting these issues, the novel encourages readers to question the prevailing educational model that prioritizes performance metrics over intellectual curiosity and personal development. In conclusion, the research emphasizes that addressing academic pressure in technical institutions requires comprehensive institutional reforms. Educational systems must move beyond narrow definitions of success based solely on grades and rankings and instead adopt a more holistic approach to learning. This approach should recognize the importance of student well-being, creativity, and emotional resilience alongside academic achievement. Institutions can play a vital role by strengthening counseling services, promoting mental health awareness, introducing flexible evaluation methods, and encouraging supportive learning environments. By implementing such

measures, technical institutions can help students navigate academic challenges more effectively while also fostering a healthier and more balanced educational experience.

Keywords- Academic pressure, engineering students, student mental health, Indian technical institutions, Five Point Someone, campus life, higher education stress.

Introduction

Traditionally, higher education in India has been associated with increased social mobility, increased security and new professional opportunities. Higher technical education has a very special place in the overall higher education mix due to its relationship to technological growth, innovative creation, and progress towards national objectives. Engineering and technology schools are generally regarded as being at the top-of-the-line with respect to helping develop the intellectual capacity of their students. Engineering and technology students receive some of the highest levels of training and education available, and when they graduate, they enter into a very exclusive elite that can become leaders in their fields, either by obtaining jobs, creating jobs or discovering new things. Admission to one of the premier institutes of technology in India, such as an IIT, not only indicates that you have done well academically, but also indicates your families and/or you will experience an increase in levels of social mobility that will enable you to have a much better quality of life than before. Like all high-performance environments, the technical education arena creates a competitive environment in which there is an overwhelming expectation for students to continue to perform at a high level. Academic pressures are experienced in many ways. Examples of academic pressures experienced by students include, but are not limited to, meeting or exceeding curricular demands, frequent testing, grading systems, faculty expectations, and parents and society (Nayar, 2021).

Academic pressure can be described as a situation in which students feel that they have to meet the demands and pressures of their academic experience with respect to their personal expectations and interests in achieving success. Academic pressures are a result of various types of expectations including the pressure of completing assignments, preparing for examinations, maintaining a minimum standard of academic performance, and meeting other academic expectations that institutions establish for their students.

Pressure in technical colleges is extremely high because all engineering curricula contain rigorous academic coursework, complex, or challenging content, as well as stringent grading methodologies with little or no time for enjoyment or self-exploration outside of academic studies. Engineering students often must learn several technical subjects at one time while on campus working on labs, projects, and internships; thus, many engineering students struggle trying to find balance between their academic obligations and their own personal well-being. The intense pressure students experience with respect to competing against their peers to earn grades, scholarships, and jobs only serves to increase the feelings of anxiety and stress experienced by many students.

In recent years, student mental health in post-secondary education has become an increasing area of concern among both researchers and educators, as studies have begun to show that too much academic pressure negatively impacts students' mental & emotional health. Numerous studies at various universities across India have revealed that students are feeling immense academic stress as a result of the academic demands placed on them; they are also feeling stressed out about lack of future job opportunities or how they will be able to pay back their educational costs. A variety of emotional problems can develop as a result of this academic stress, such as anxiety and/or depression; burnout, reduced level of self-confidence, etc.

Furthermore, students from various regions of the nation, who transfer to enroll at highly regarded technical institutions, commonly suffer from isolation socially, adapt culturally, and lack familial support, thus compounding their emotional struggles. Several colleges and universities have implemented mental health programs to address this issue. Among other programs, mental health services include counseling centres, student assistance services, stress management workshops, and wellness courses. The objective of these programmes is to establish an environment conducive to learning where students can receive assistance and develop appropriate methods to cope with emotional difficulties. (Das M. 2020)

In addition to academic research, literature has contributed significantly to an understanding of the actual experiences of students at technical institutes. Through characters and stories that are easy to connect with, works of fiction have the ability to provide a greater understanding of how students feel mentally and emotionally during their college years. A well known literary work that describes the daily experiences of engineering students in India is *Five Point Someone* by Chetan Bhagat. In this book, three engineering students attending the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, overcome obstacles related to the challenging academic environment and rigid requirements of the institution.

The novel utilizes a combination of humor, satire, and real-life stories to depict a realistic portrayal of students who are under pressure from the competitive nature of their education. Through the narrative, it highlights the obsessions with grades and the fear of being academically unsuccessful, along with the relational tensions between professors and students, as well as the emotional toll on students who are unable to achieve the standards set by the educational system.

The different characters portrayed in the novel represent varying responses to academic stress and institutional inflexibility. Their stories illustrate the mental strain caused by a system that places too much importance on grades and rank, as opposed to fostering creativity, curiosity, and personal growth. The novel also raises awareness of the emotional ramifications of such a system, including feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and even rebellion among students who feel overlooked within the highly competitive academic environment. In this way, the novel inspires readers to think about the broader issues facing India's education system and how technical institutions are affecting student lives. (Sharma, 2021)

Studying academic pressure from both quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a more holistic view of student perspective. The purpose of this study is to understand academic stress in different ways than can be achieved through empirical research using standardized instruments. Literature provides a more human-centered view of the experiences of students who face academic stress. Integrating both the empirical and literature perspectives will create a bridge between quantitative research on sources of academic stress and the lived experiences of students. Empirical research defines both the institutional structures that contribute to academic pressure as well as the emotional and psychological effects of academic pressure on students' everyday lives.

Specifically, this study will explore the issue of academic pressure at Indian technical (engineering) institutions, through an analysis of the experiences presented in the book, *Five Point Someone*. The themes established within the novel can be analyzed along with current empirical research on student mental health and stress, to investigate how institutional structures, academic pressures, and social factors ultimately affect the lives of engineering students. Additionally, this research will highlight how academic pressure can affect students' overall health, interpersonal relationships, and personal identity. By taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study of academic pressure, this research will contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding educational reform and student support services in higher education institutions in India. (Banerjee, 2022)

Review of Related Literature

One of the earliest critical analyses of the book came from P. A. Lone (2019) who looked at how the hyper-real educational system was represented in *Five Point Someone*. Lone argued that the Indian technical education system is presented in the novel as being too mechanistic and highly competitive towards its students, based primarily on numeric values and grades. Lone concluded that the narrative shows a rising dissatisfaction among students with their academic/educational environment because of its limitations on their creativity and independent thinking. Lone argued that the book serves as an example of the way Indian technical education has created institutions with very rigid organizational structures that dominate the way young people go through the technical education system.

A. Gupta (2021) also studied the characters' psychological struggles as presented in the book. Gupta focused on the conflict and dilemma that students experienced in the novel. Gupta concluded that while students had to perform to the expected standard of performance in their academic lives, the characters in the book had their goals and aspirations for personal achievement (other than academic) at odds with what was expected of them

academically. Gupta concluded that Bhagat's narrative is an accurate representation of the emotional struggles of youth as they confront the difference between their dreams, desires and aspirations and the institutions that they belong to.

Two scholars, A. Vimal and R. S. Pillai (2024), have made a significant contribution to the scholarship surrounding works by Bhagat by analyzing how Bhagat has portrayed modern Indian society in his novel *Five Point Someone* and in another of his novels as well. According to Vimal and Pillai's study, Bhagat's fiction reflects larger social changes in modern India: specifically, the transformation of young people's aspirations and the stresses related to professional education. The authors point out that the book not only portrays the life of students, but it also conveys the social and cultural factors that shape the experiences of young people today.

Scholars also are interested in studying adapted and narrative forms of Bhagat's novels. For example, S. K. Pandey (2024) examined *Five Point Someone* and other books by Bhagat and compared them as they moved from literature to film. His study shows how the themes of academic pressure, friendship and youth rebellion transitioned into visual representations through film, as Bhagat's work has greatly influenced society culturally. N. J. Pawar (2024) has further expanded the research on Bhagat by characterizing him as one of the leading voices of contemporary social realities.

Pawar argued that Bhagat's novels resonated strongly with younger readers because they depicted relatable experiences, including academic stress, career uncertainty, and the search for identity in a rapidly changing society.

Authors A. Prasad and S. Wankhede (2022) examined social issues found in the fiction of Chetan Bhagat. Their analysis suggested that Bhagat integrated contemporary societal issues into his literary works. In particular, they noted how Bhagat's debut novel, *Five Point Someone*, sheds light on the limitations of an academic system that values grades above creativity and personal development.

V. Bujji Babu (2025) conducted a critical analysis of Chetan Bhagat's novels by examining their popularity among readers and their social commentary. Babu concluded that Bhagat's distinct writing style and use of everyday language has greatly contributed to the popularity of his novels among young adult readers and that this style has also allowed Bhagat to comment on major societal problems, including the pressure to perform in school and the aspirations of youth.

Rao's (2021) research on identity crises experienced by students and illustrated in *Five Point Someone* focused on the youth depicted in the novel. Rao's research found that the characters in the story struggle with their identity as they pursue success in an overly competitive academic environment where success is defined solely by performance measurements such as tests and grades.

Previous studies have analyzed the purpose of Bhagat's works and their relevance to contemporary issues affecting the youth. For example, S.R. Pandya (2017) argued that the novel served as a wake-up call regarding how our current educational system is failing students by placing too much attention on academics and not enough on meeting their emotional/creative needs.

R. Singh and P. Singh (2023) also discussed character development in Bhagat's fiction, notably how he uses humour, simple language, and relatable characters to convey complicated social issues in an engaging manner to his readers.

Studies on other themes related to contemporary Indian English fiction, youth culture, and the impact of popular fiction on reading culture have also been done by many scholars. Meenakshi Mukherjee (2023) studied how contemporary Indian English fiction reflects the aspirations and fears of the youth by representing educational, identity, and social mobility issues.

S. Banerjee (2022) also investigated the rise of popular fiction in India and its effects on reading culture, suggesting that writers like Bhagat had significant success in attracting young readers to English literature through relatable themes that they could connect with in their everyday lives.

The investigation into representation of campus life and student experiences in the context of modern fiction written by Indian authors shed light on youth culture and challenges encountered in education (R. Sharma, 2021). In addition, B. Das (2020) provided insight into the connection between youth and education in contemporary literature, noting how primarily educational institutions tend to provide a space for individuals to come to terms with their identity and future aspirations.

A broader perspective taken by P.K. Nayar (2021) and Bruce King (2020) on the literature produced by Indian authors writing in English today provided additional information on how these stories typically comment about globalization, youth culture and the social developments taking place as a result of global change.

Due to his historical foresight, A.K. Mehrotra (2021) suggested that the development of English literature in India has experienced radical changes since the turn of the century making it the ideal medium in which current literary trends can be explored. Tharu and Lalita (2020) took this a step further by discussing contemporary narratives related to social strain resulting from a shift in present day society and childhood.

Lastly, Meenakshi Mukherjee (2024) examined how contemporary Indian novels created by Indian authors in English often portray how the author seeks to connect his readers emotionally through both the successful and unsuccessful goal-setting experiences that form part of their lives as youth. This demonstrates how an author's understanding of popular culture can shape readers' perspectives on society and identify themes present in the works of contemporary authors as well provide insight into the larger social issues facing modern society.

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that *Five Point Someone* has been widely recognized as an important text for understanding youth culture, academic pressure, and the challenges of the Indian education system. However, many studies have focused either on literary analysis or on the broader cultural context of Bhagat's writing. There remains a need for comprehensive research that examines the novel in relation to academic pressure and student life in technical institutions. The present study attempts to address this gap by integrating literary interpretation with a deeper examination of educational realities reflected in the novel.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the present study is to examine the nature and impact of academic pressure on students studying in Indian technical institutions. The study also seeks to explore how student experiences in such environments are represented in *Five Point Someone*. Another objective is to analyze the relationship between academic expectations, institutional structures, and student well-being. The research further aims to identify the ways in which academic pressure influences students' social relationships, emotional health, and personal identity. Finally, the study attempts to suggest measures that educational institutions can adopt to reduce stress and create a more supportive learning environment.

Research Methodology

The present research is based on a descriptive and analytical research design that integrates literary analysis with secondary data analysis. The study relies primarily on qualitative research methods to explore the complex relationship between academic pressure and student life in Indian technical institutions.

The data for the study were collected from a variety of secondary sources including academic journals, research reports, books, and newspaper articles published. These sources provided insights into recent developments in the field of student mental health and academic stress. The literary text *Five Point Someone* was analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify key themes related to academic pressure, institutional culture, and student identity.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The present study takes a qualitative, analytical approach to explore the thematic, social, and psychological dimensions of Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone*. By closely examining the text, the analysis identifies key themes such as academic pressure, youth identity, friendship, and the limitations of the contemporary education system. The story revolves around three engineering students—Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok

Gupta—at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology. Through their experiences, the novel paints a realistic picture of the challenges faced by students navigating highly competitive academic environments.

One of the clearest themes that emerges is the intense academic pressure within elite technical institutions. Constant evaluation and a rigid grading system create an environment where students are perpetually judged by their scores. In the novel, the protagonists' grade point average hovers around five points—a number that comes to symbolize more than just a score. It reflects how educational systems often reduce students to numbers, valuing rankings over individual talents, creativity, or curiosity. Bhagat effectively shows that such a focus on grades can breed feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and frustration.

The analysis also highlights how the academic system depicted in the novel fosters competition rather than collaboration. Students are pushed to prioritize marks over true understanding, turning learning into a mechanical, exam-driven process. The pressure to succeed can overshadow the real purpose of education, which ideally should nurture intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and innovation. The story demonstrates that in such an environment, students sometimes resort to desperate or even unethical measures simply to cope with institutional demands.

Friendship emerges as another central theme and serves as a crucial coping mechanism. The bond among Hari, Ryan, and Alok forms the emotional core of the novel. Despite their differing personalities and personal circumstances, their friendship provides support, encouragement, and companionship, helping them navigate the pressures of college life. Bhagat shows that friendships formed during these formative years can be vital sources of resilience, offering a safe space to share fears, frustrations, and dreams amid overwhelming academic expectations.

The novel also delivers a strong critique of rigid, exam-centered education. The institutions in the story value conformity, discipline, and performance measured solely by grades, often discouraging creativity and independent thinking. Ryan Oberoi, in particular, embodies intellectual rebellion. He challenges traditional academic norms, emphasizing practical learning, experimentation, and curiosity over rote memorization. Through Ryan, the novel highlights the limitations of a system that rewards theoretical knowledge while neglecting innovation and practical skills.

Character analysis reveals that each protagonist represents a different facet of student life and social reality. Hari Kumar, who narrates the story, reflects the average student grappling with self-doubt and pressure. His perspective provides insight into the emotional and psychological challenges of balancing personal aspirations with institutional expectations. Ryan represents creativity, independence, and defiance of authority, while Alok embodies the socio-economic pressures that weigh on many middle-class Indian students. Alok's family expectations add an extra layer of stress, making academic success a responsibility not just to himself but to his family.

Together, the trio's experiences reveal the tension between individual ambition and institutional constraints. Each student approaches challenges differently, yet all struggle against the rigid structures of the academic system. Bhagat illustrates how strict evaluation mechanisms can undermine confidence, stifle curiosity, and discourage experimentation, showing that education can inadvertently become a source of fear rather than growth.

The study also interprets *Five Point Someone* as a broader commentary on the structure of higher education in India. The novel portrays an environment where grades, rankings, and performance metrics dominate, often at the expense of personal development, creativity, and emotional well-being. The relentless pressure to succeed academically leads many students to stress, burnout, and disillusionment. By highlighting these realities, the novel raises questions about whether contemporary educational practices truly serve the holistic development of students.

Beyond academic critique, Bhagat's narrative captures the cultural and social dynamics of youth in modern India. The story reflects the aspirations, insecurities, and evolving identities of young people transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. The characters wrestle not only with exams but also with friendships, family

responsibilities, and the search for self-identity. Through humor, dialogue, and relatable situations, the novel portrays the emotional complexities of student life with authenticity.

The storytelling approach itself contributes significantly to the novel's impact. By narrating the story through Hari Kumar's first-person perspective, Bhagat creates an intimate and relatable account of college life. Readers experience the emotional highs and lows of the characters more directly, which strengthens the novel's realism and its engagement with broader social issues.

Overall, the study concludes that *Five Point Someone* is far more than a campus tale. It is a critical exploration of the pressures and expectations inherent in elite educational institutions. Through realistic depictions of student experiences, Bhagat exposes the structural limitations of traditional academic systems and illuminates the psychological toll of excessive competition. The novel ultimately advocates for a more balanced, student-centered approach—one that values creativity, emotional well-being, and intellectual curiosity alongside academic achievement.

Findings of the Study

The detailed analysis of Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* uncovers several key insights into the academic, psychological, and social dimensions of student life in Indian technical institutions. The study shows that the novel is more than just popular fiction—it also offers a meaningful commentary on the realities of contemporary education and the experiences of youth navigating highly competitive academic environments.

One of the central findings is that academic pressure forms the backbone of the narrative. The institutional setting depicted in the novel reflects a rigid, performance-driven system where students are constantly judged by grades and rankings. This competitive grading culture creates a constant atmosphere of stress and anxiety. The protagonists—Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta—struggle to meet these high expectations. Their five-point grade average comes to symbolize the challenges faced by students who fail to achieve top marks and often feel marginalized or inferior. In this way, the novel highlights how education systems tend to prioritize numerical scores over creativity, curiosity, or practical understanding.

The analysis also emphasizes the psychological impact of this academic pressure. The characters frequently experience anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional frustration as they contend with constant evaluation and fear of failure. Bhagat shows how these pressures affect not only students' learning but also their overall mental well-being. The novel illustrates that academic stress is not merely an educational concern; it is deeply psychological and social, shaping how students perceive themselves and their abilities.

Friendship emerges as another crucial theme. The bond among Hari, Ryan, and Alok forms the emotional core of the story, providing a source of support, encouragement, and companionship amid the high-pressure environment. Their friendship acts as a coping mechanism, helping them navigate both academic challenges and personal struggles. Bhagat demonstrates that strong interpersonal relationships can buffer the negative effects of stress, offering resilience and stability in otherwise demanding circumstances.

The novel also critiques the rigid, exam-oriented structure of higher education. The institutional culture depicted favors memorization, strict discipline, and standardized evaluation, leaving little room for independent thinking or innovation. Ryan Oberoi, in particular, embodies intellectual resistance. He advocates practical learning, experimentation, and creativity, challenging the limitations of a system that values rote memorization over meaningful understanding. Through Ryan, the novel encourages readers to question the rigidity of traditional academic models and to imagine more flexible approaches to learning.

The study finds that the characters themselves symbolize different aspects of student life. Hari Kumar represents the average student, caught between personal insecurities and academic expectations. Ryan embodies creativity, curiosity, and rebellion against conventional definitions of success. Alok Gupta reflects the socio-economic pressures many students face, balancing family responsibilities with academic ambitions. Together, they illustrate how personal, social, and economic factors intersect to shape students' experiences within elite institutions.

Another important insight is how the novel explores the tension between institutional demands and individual aspirations. Students enter prestigious colleges with high hopes, yet rigid academic structures often limit opportunities for creativity or experimentation. The struggle of the protagonists to reconcile personal talents and interests with system-imposed expectations mirrors the broader issue in many higher education institutions, where standardized evaluation can stifle intellectual freedom.

The study also highlights the novel's social commentary on youth culture in India. Through realistic storytelling and relatable characters, Bhagat captures the pressures, dilemmas, and aspirations of young people balancing academics, personal relationships, and self-discovery. The narrative reflects the universal challenge of navigating competitive environments while seeking identity and purpose.

The novel's accessible narrative style further enhances its impact. Humor, informal language, and realistic dialogue make the story engaging, particularly for young readers. This approach allows Bhagat to address serious issues such as academic stress and institutional rigidity while keeping the narrative lively and relatable.

Finally, the study concludes that *Five Point Someone* offers a critical reflection on modern higher education. The novel underscores the need for reforms that foster creativity, flexibility, and student well-being alongside academic achievement. By highlighting the experiences of Hari, Ryan, and Alok, Bhagat encourages educators, policymakers, and institutions to adopt a more holistic, student-centered approach.

Overall, the study shows that *Five Point Someone* is more than a campus story—it is a compelling exploration of student life in elite technical institutions, emphasizing the importance of balancing academic excellence with emotional well-being, personal development, and creativity.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the complex relationship between academic pressure and student life in Indian technical institutions. Through the analysis of *Five Point Someone* and contemporary research on student mental health, the study demonstrates that academic pressure is a multidimensional phenomenon that affects students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and social relationships.

The findings suggest that the current structure of technical education in India often prioritizes grades and competition over creativity, personal growth, and holistic learning. While academic rigor is essential for maintaining educational standards, excessive pressure can undermine students' motivation and psychological health.

Literature such as *Five Point Someone* plays an important role in bringing attention to these issues by portraying the lived experiences of students within technical institutions. The novel serves as both a narrative of student life and a critique of the rigid academic structures that dominate the Indian education system.

In order to address the challenges associated with academic pressure, educational institutions must adopt a more balanced approach to teaching and learning. This approach should include flexible evaluation systems, student counseling services, and opportunities for creative and interdisciplinary learning. By prioritizing student well-being alongside academic excellence, institutions can create an educational environment that supports both intellectual development and personal growth.

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