Jus et Civitas	Vol. IX (LXXIII) No. 1/2022	28 - 32	A Journal of Social and Legal Studies

The paradigm of the exam session, a Bermuda triangle for students

Iulia Adelina Ghiță

Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, Bd. Bucharest, no. 39, Ploiesti, Romania
e-mail: adelinaiulia.ionita@upg-ploiesti.ro

DOI: 10.51865/JETC.2022.1.04

Abstract

The present study aims to identify the real causes that lead to the connection between exam sessions and stress. In this regard, the answers of 97 respondents aged between 19 and 44 years old were analysed. The stress can be generated by the multiple roles that students have acquired as a result of various social contexts, the responsibilities that derive from these roles and the lack of a study routine.

Keywords: motivation; exam sessions; stress; students; learning

1. Learning difficulties

The results of a study conducted by Wendy Wood showed that stress can influence normal behaviour: "When stressed, people cannot make decisions easily, they do not find the necessary will and feel overwhelmed. When one is too tired to make a decision, one tends to repeat what he/ she usually does" (Guise, S., 2019, p. 37).

Generally, when someone perceives a situation as generating stress, a habit with negative effects is triggered. This fuels the feeling of guilt, thus resulting in another harmful habit. Misunderstanding the concepts explained by a teacher generates difficulties in solving the work tasks. That is why students prefer to postpone them for the weekend, when they claim to have more spare time. According to the conclusion presented by Wood, the stress resulting from failure to understand the homework determines its postponement (bad habit) for the weekend, which highly contributes to the overcrowding of the study day (another bad habit). "Every exam causes each student stress and tension, regardless of the values of the other measured variables, so it is not difficult to analyze in moderation the high values of learning stress" (Grigorescu, D., 2021, p.105).

A study based on the responses of 40 students from a Romanian university revealed that "self-efficacy and the feeling of success make the difference in peoples' outcomes, as a follow-up of feeling and thinking. A low self-efficacy is associated with low results in the work, a low self-esteem and negative thoughts about the individual's personal developent and accomplishments. A high self-efficacy leads to a strong sense of competence, which helps cognitives processes and performance in areas such as academic achievement" (Vasile, C., 2012, p. 785).

The prefrontal cortex is an important section of the brain, responsible for managing thinking for a short time, but also for making decisions. The prefrontal cortex focuses on the benefits and consequences of long-term actions.

The basal ganglia of the brain play a key role in forming habits. A study aimed to find answers to the question: What effects can occur if the basal ganglia are damaged? It was revealed that, if that area is affected, people are prone to losing the ability to develop habits, according to Stephen Guise.

2. Motivation in learning

The actions initiated by subjects who want to achieve their goals are based on the motivation to learn. In order to be able to discuss about a positive connotation, the student's decision to study for a reasonable mark must also be preceded by the action that leads to attaining a result of the learning process. Otherwise, the impulse to prepare for the final assessment does not lead to learning if one does not act on it. Postman (1964) stated that learning occurs just as well when such a decision is absent.

The decision "must be carefully differentiated from the motivation to achieve a goal. From the following paragraphs one shall notice that motivation is of immense importance for the success of learning. If the student's motivation to learn means that he decides he wants to achieve something as a result of learning – then we are talking about positive motivation" (Gagné R., 1975, p. 225).

The loss of enthusiasm after a certain time since the activity was initiated is an indicator of the fact that the basal ganglia, which are responsible for practicing automatisms, have taken over the control. From the author's perspective, motivation is effective when the individual sets a short-term goal, compared to the will that drives him to channel all his energy to achieve the desired goal. This statement was supported by Professor Roy Baumeister, following a 1999 study regarding students' desire to improve their body posture for two weeks. The data "showed a significant improvement in subsequent self-monitoring measures, compared to some people who were not trying to correct their position" (Guise S., 2019, p.69).

On the other hand, students are motivated to learn because they want to make their parents proud or get excellent grades. According to Emil Stan, 46% of teachers think that their students learn because they want to make their parents proud. "The main idea was that parents do not praise their children for their assistance in the family, because they do not ask for their help and because they do not expect it, under such a mentality as: I should create all the necessary conditions that they do not struggle as I did" (Stan E., 2012, p. 200).

3. Metodology

The present research aims to correlate the stress perceived by students during the exam session with the effort they put in during the semester. In this regard, a questionnaire consisting of 36 items that covered three segments was used. The three segments referred to the students' perceptions of the session, personal time management and issues related to the way they structured their notes.

The sample that participated in the research consisted of 97 students from the Faculty of Letters and Sciences and the Faculty of Economics, 93 females and 4 males, aged between 19 and 44 years old.

4. Data analysis and interpretation

After analysing the data, the results indicated that exam session represents a tense time for 12.37%, a difficult one for 10.31%, a crowded one for 18.56%, a stressful one for 44.33%, a period in which intense emotions appear for 3.09%, while 8.25% consider it a period in which the assimilated knowledge is evaluated. Only 1.03% have a positive attitude towards the session.

The data show that 91.72% of respondents have a negative perception on the session, but it is based on other reasons, such as: the lack of effective study management, the lack of a study routine, the failure to solve work tasks in a timely manner, the postponement of tasks and the issues that some students have heard from older colleagues, without verifying their accuracy.

The students' concern about the session deals with obtaining low grades for 26.38% of the respondents, being unable to pass for 43.17%, inefficient time management for 7.19%, loss of scholarships for 6.00%, inability to store a large amount of information for 2.40%. The rest of the respondents mentioned stress (1.20%), organization (2.40%), commuting (1.20%) and emotions (1.20%).

One can notice that most subjects mentioned stress as the main stressor during preparation for their final assessment. In this respect, it is necessary to identify the elements that set stress as the main factor. Thus, 40.21% of the subjects consider that the 3 weeks allocated to the knowledge assessment represent a quite limited amount of time, 20.62% are afraid that they will fail, 11.34% consider that the subject is difficult, 7.22% do not trust their potential, 9.28% mention that emotions will create problems during the exam. The rest associated stress with lack of organization as their defining characteristic (3.09%), insufficient time allocated to rest (2.06%), other roles they play in society, which affect their study time (2.06%).

How can people's opinion influence the way the subject relates to activities or life experiences? The data indicated that the session is generally perceived as a stressful time by 19.35% of students, 18.28% found out that most students have failed exams, 17.20% mentioned that the exams are very difficult, 8.60% said that teachers have very high expectations, 10.75% did not try to find out what the session entails. The others mentioned it is a time in which each student identifies what bits of information he/ she managed to assimilate (2.15%) and 1.08% specified that the period is intense because the exams take place physically.

According to the above data, a correlation can be made between the students' perception about the exam session (stressor) and the elements that fuel stress. It should be noted that students have doubts about their ability to pass the exams at certain subjects and that they lack confidence in their own potential. Among the elements indicated as being associated with stress and the answers regarding what they learned from their second or third year colleagues, one can notice the concern about passing at certain disciplines, the difficulty of preparing in a relatively short time, as well as the obvious stress. During the analysis of the answers, a representative group of subjects (8.06%) mentioned that teachers have high expectations.

Pre-university education has a significant contribution to shaping the perception according to which students learn in order to please teachers. A teacher whose students receive grades between 8 and 10 during the school year is a reputed teacher. From this point of view, it is a real problem if students are encouraged to attend classes just to please their teachers. The school needs to reconsider its approach and the methods it applies. The grade is an assessment the teacher makes in a certain period, for a certain discipline, and not a label of the student: Mihai is a grade 7 student.

An important segment of analysis is the effort that the students make during a semester. As for the amount of information they have been able to understand during the courses, most students are able to understand the topic of the discussion, but there is a percentage of 6.19% who understand 20% of what is being taught. 5.15% grasp only 30% and 9.28% figure out about 40%. The main difficulties the subjects encounter in understanding are: the specialized terms (41.94%), the large amount of information they have to assimilate in a short time (17.20%), bibliographic data (2.15%), online courses (1.08%). 34.41% do not encounter difficulties, and the rest of the subjects were absent from classes.

Most difficulties can be overcome if there is a concern in this regard. Asked if, after completing a module in a subject they considered difficult, they usually solve all the seminar activities the day they are suggested to, the results indicated that 12.37% try to solve them on the same day, while 87.63% prefer to postpone them for the weekend, even if they know it is not an effective solution. The second strategy proves inefficient. If the recently discussed but not understood amount of information is reviewed, it can still be assimilated in a percentage of 20-25%.

On the other hand, postponing an assignment until the weekend requires an average modification of 2-3 hours of the study time for each subject. During this time, the student must revise the material at least twice, read the notes twice, understand his/ her writing, obtain additional information from colleagues and compare it to what he noted, make a scheme of the lesson and, finally, memorise the information. 74.23% of respondents are aware that solving tasks in a short time after attending classes will significantly reduce the time devoted to these activities on weekends.

The main obstacles respondents face that determine them not to solve their tasks in a timely manner are: reluctance to solve them 1.04%, children 1.04%, friends 2.08%, lack of motivation 4.17%, housework 5.21%, work place 8.33%, family 10.42%, lack of time 40.63%. Only 5.21% usually solve the given tasks in a timely manner.

A relatively small percentage (8.25% of the subjects) consider that it is a period in which the assimilated knowledge is evaluated. It is the same sample that tries to solve the seminar activities in a timely manner.

5. Research conclusions

Consequently, the stress the students feel during the session is fueled by the information they obtain from their colleagues in the second or third year of study, the lack of efficient time management, including time devoted to study, inefficient methods of learning, lack of trust in one's potential.

According to authors, the main factor that causes stress can be: "the transition from pre-academic to academic education, the need to adapt to independent living, to gain insight into new social networks, to comply with high academic requirements constitute potential stressors that may affect the performance of students"(Iurea C, Safta C., 2018, p.128).

The results are conclusive enough to draw a conclusion about the negative label that was unfoundedly attributed to the exam sessions. The subjects who associated the session with stress and tension are those who express a concern about their ability to pass the exams or the challenge of storing a large amount of information. "And this situation amplify the stress of not being serious, responsible, independent, competitive etc. about all and each of these statuses and associate roles" (Eftimie S., Mărgărițoiu A., 2020, p. 66). For example, one of the students confess that: "As student I would have need that somebody gave me supplementary information about homework solving. And I believe that, sometimes, my pupils would have needed, too" (female, 22 year old, no children, 1 year experience)" (Eftimie S., 2020, p.40).

Bibliography

1. Eftimie, S., Mărgărițoiu, A. (2020). *Adults education during pandemic times: Personal and professional perspectives*. In: Jus et Civitas-A Journal of Social and Legal Studies. Vol. No.2 Ploiești: Editura Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești.
2. Eftimie, S. (2020). *Online Education-teachers' perspective*. In: Jus et Civitas-A Journal of Social and Legal Studies. Vol. No.2 Ploiești: Editura Universitatii Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești.
3. Gagné, R. (1975). *Condițiile învățării*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
4. Grigorescu, D. (2021). *Motivation and learning. Study on the experience of gymnasium students on exams.* In: Jus et civitas- A Journal of Social and Legal Studies. Vol.VIII (LXXII) No.2. Ploiești: Editura Universității Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești.
5. Guise, S. (2019). *Mini obiceiuri. Obiceiuri mai mici, rezultate mai mari.* București: Publica.
6. Iurea, C., Safta C. (2018). *The Impact of Academic Stress on students' Performance.* In: Violence Prevention and Safety Promotion in Higher Education Settings. IGI Global.
7. Stan, E. (2012). *The role of grades in motivating students to learn*. In Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences. Vol.69.
8. Vasile, C. *Working Memory and the Feeling of Success in Students.* In Procedia SBS – Vol. 33/2012, pp. 781-785.

Paradigma sesiunii, un triunghi al Bermudelor pentru studenți

Rezumat

Studiul de față își propune să identifice cauzele reale care stau la baza asocierii perioadei de sesiune cu stresul. În acest sens, au fost analizate răspunsurile a 97 de respondenți cu vârste cuprinse între 19 și 44 de ani. Stresul resimțit poate fi generat de multiplele roluri pe care studenții le-au dobândit ca urmare a diverselor contexte sociale, a responsabilităților ce derivă din aceste roluri și a lipsei unui rutine destinate studiului.