

PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the oversimplified assumption that psychology focuses its interest on topics pertaining to individuals' feelings (emotional) and driving forces for behavior (motivational), the truth is that it is quite broad in scope. For years, psychology exercised a profound impact on our everyday activities attempting, among others to provide the best methods of educating people. Since education is admittedly the most important investment it is necessary that e-learning is supported to provide opportunities for well-designed, learner-centered, interactive and successful learning environments.

This study meaning to investigate teachers' perception about anxiety and resistance in education sought answers to questions like: "Which are the stresses faced by students?", "How can you reduce your students stress?", "Which are some unhealthy ways of students dealing with stress?" As a result of the interviews the common stressors included conflicts with parents, exams participation, limited budgets, bodily image issues, time management and romantic relationship conflicts.

Keywords: E-learning, education, Psychology, anxiety, resistance.

INTRODUCTION

It is claimed that psychology is rooted in early philosophical traditions. In parallel, physiology concerned with brain and behavior has contributed a lot to psychology development. The difference between philosophy and psychology is that the former relies on observation and logic for human behavior whereas the latter draws conclusions about human thought and behavior through the utilization of scientific methodologies. There is a misperception, though, about what psychology is.

An accepted definition is that psychology is an applied and academic field which studies the human mind and behavior seeking to understand and explain thought, emotion and behavior (Cherry, 2009).

According to Ilona Roth (2000), over the years some important ideas from psychology have had such an impact on our thoughts and behavior that we are barely aware of their origin. Regardless of the controversial opinions of scientists and/or laymen as regards the reliability of the dimensions of psychology, it is beyond any doubt that its effect on our contemporary development and welfare is dynamic.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

There are many areas in which psychology provides a practical resource, the beneficial effects of which few would deny (Roth, I. op.cit). Our era is characterized by extreme specialization. For example, not all psychologists are clinicians and not all of them use clinical techniques. In fact, nowadays, psychology is divided

to two major categories, the *Academic* and the *Applied Sciences* totaling to 19 branches classified as clinical, social, guidance-and-counseling, industrial/occupational, behavioral and other.

As a result, psychology is behind any sector of everyday life, not limited to understanding of how people think and behave, but, also, contributing to the development of individuals and is involved with the reasons people succeed or fail in their endeavors.

In our highly competitive society people strive for success, with an eminent fear for failure.

Even after almost seven decades the hierarchy of needs, as categorized by Maslow (1943) in his pyramid-like taxonomy, is still valid and very highly influential. (Figure: 1)

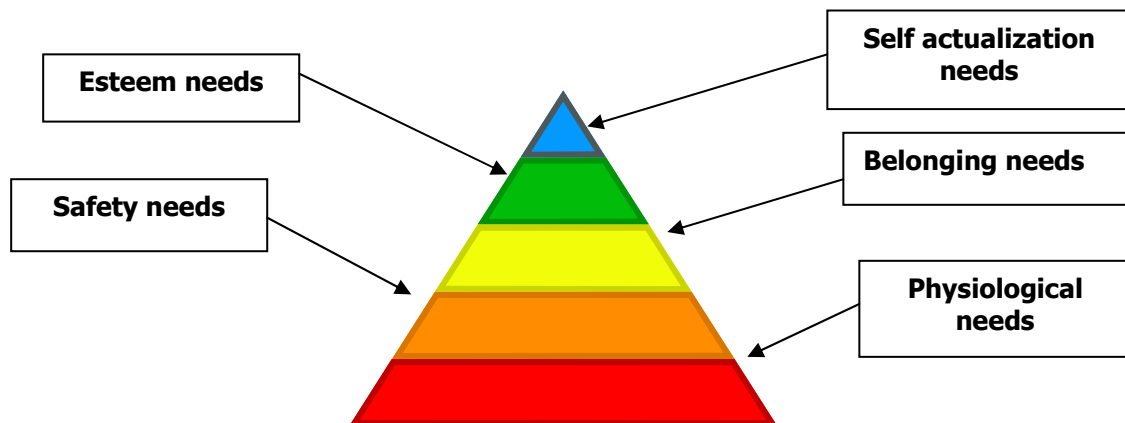


Figure 1
 Maslow's taxonomy of needs

The basic concern of people, in general, is to satisfy their *physiological needs*, actually the basic requirements in oxygen, food and water. When these needs are controlled people shift to *safety needs* involved with protection and security. The following needs to be satisfied are the *social needs* relating to activities which involve being with other people (relationship) feeling of liking (affection).

The basic cycle of needs having been satisfied, people attempt to attain the accomplishment of a social and psychological domain, namely, *success* as a final output, which will satisfy *esteem needs* and bring about reputation. The ultimate objective is the *feeling of pleasure (satisfaction)* which will be obtained as a result of personal growth. It is the *actualization need*.

As a result, this will strengthen self-esteem in the persons involved, which according to Nathaniel Branden (2009) has two essential components,

- *self-efficacy*, i.e. confidence in the ability to cope with *challenges*, and
- *self-respect*, i.e. experience of oneself as deserving achievement.

Additionally, according to Susan Heathfield (2010) self-esteem is a self-reinforcing characteristic under which we can persevere when faced with difficult challenges.

It is evident that *success is a multi-dimensional* concept and output. Actually, success is the result of a series of psychological interventions. For any constituent factor of success there is a related psychology branch to support it (Table 1).

Table 1
 Factors of success supported by relevant psychology branches

Factors of Success	Branch of Psychology
Achievement & recognition concern	<i>Cognitive Psychology</i>
Self-improvement	<i>Developmental Psychology</i>
Relationship with successful people	<i>Social Psychology</i>
Studies of differences of peers	<i>Personality Psychology</i>
High level of knowledge and skills	<i>Educational Psychology</i>
Affiliation with work group	<i>Positive Psychology</i>
Good communicative skills	<i>Communication Psychology</i>
Proper reaction to certain attitudes	<i>Behavioral Psychology</i>
<i>Selection of experienced mentors</i>	<i>Counseling Psychology</i>

According to a traditional stereotype there is a difference between men and women as regards achievement motivation. Women often fear of social rejection due to their success. Psychologists believe that women are more interested than men in popularity and approval by others as a result of their need for affiliation (Geiwitz, J., 1980).

Roger Van Oech (2009) supports that when a person fails he/she learns what has not worked and, moreover, the failure gives him/her the opportunity to try a new approach.

There are various factors which are identified as the reason for failure, which could be termed as the “five lack” factors: lack of opportunity, belief, specific target, persistence and planning. However, the catastrophic force causing failure is *anxiety* mainly as a *product of stress*. The term anxiety could be defined as a state of being uneasy, apprehensive or worried about what may happen. It is a feeling of being powerless and unable to cope with threatening events (Lark, S.M., 2010).

James. Geiwitz (op.cit) supports that *stress* has been the interest of scientists involved in psychosomatic illnesses which according to Selye follows a three phase process: (a) during alarm reactions to a *stressor*, which may be physical, psychological or emotional, *resistance* drops below normal, (b) a rather long period of resistance above normal follows and finally (c) if the stress continuous the resistance drops below normal again and the body becomes exhausted (Figure 2).

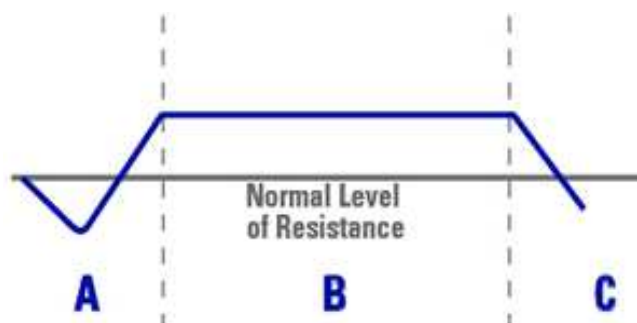


Figure 2
 Selye's adaptation syndrome

In fact, extreme or sustained stress (shortened form of distress) can damage the brain's hippocampus making it difficult to learn new things since it is central to learning and memory (Sapolsky, 1996).

Anxiety is reportedly the most serious disorder which affects the careers of persons at any stage of their lives. Though usually unrealistic or disproportionate to what might be expected it affects normal functions like education, work, social interface through abnormal phenomena such as fear, nervousness, apprehension and worrying.

Anxiety is a basic human emotion consisting of fear and uncertainty that typically appears when an individual perceives an event as being a threat to the ego or self-esteem (Sarason, 1988). Social institutions, school systems, along with families, religious organizations and communities bear primary responsibility for providing young people with paradigms that will allow them to be successful in our society. (Huiit, 1999a). Social anxiety occurs when people are motivated to create a desired impression on audiences but they doubt whether they will do so (Schlenker & Leary, 1985). The lack of a relationship between anxiety and computer performance, for example, is due to self-efficacy moderating this relationship (Saande & Kira, 2007). Ways of treatment vary from medication and physiological exercise to psychotherapy. The most effective treatment is the psychological counseling or cognitive-behavioral therapy.

It is to be noted that anxiety is responsible for a great number of failures in school achievements.

MORE ABOUT ANXIETY

A research programme was carried out in a capital city of 154,624 inhabitants some 80 kilometers from Athens. It is an agricultural and commercial city with two University branches and five secondary education schools. The research consisted of three sets of questionnaires: one addressed to 268 secondary school pupils (160 female and 108 male), one in 145 University students (75 female and 70 male) and one in 120 employees (52 female and 70 male). The central idea was to identify whether the members of all three categories have been experiencing anxiety and prioritize the relative reasons. The problem statements varied according to the specific situation of the interviewees.

1. For the pupils of secondary education schools: "Have you been experiencing anxiety problems during your school life? If so, explain the reason" (Table 2).

Table 2
 Stressors for Secondary students

Stressors	Female 160 (%)	Male 108 (%)
YES	113 (70.60)	48 (44.44)
NO	47 (29.40)	60 (55.56)
Lyceum exams	35 (30.97)	12 (25.00)
Pan-Hellenic exams	26 (23.02)	16 (33.34)
Venue of Universities	25 (22.12)	10 (20.83)
Relationships	10 (8.85)	8 (16.66)
Family problems	17 (15.04)	2 (4.17)

2. For the college students: "Are you experiencing anxiety problems during your studies? If so, explain the reason" Table 3).

Table 3
 Stressors for University students

Stressors	Female 75 (%)	Male 70 (%)
YES	55 (73.33)	50 (71.43)
NO	20 (26.67)	20 (28.57)
Achievement	25 (45.45)	10 (20.00)
Graduate studies	10 (18.18)	18 (36.00)
Employment	8 (14.55)	12 (24.00)
Relationships	12 (21.82)	10 (20.00)

3. For the employees of local enterprises the questionnaire was distributed to 122 persons (52 female and 70 male): “Are you experiencing anxiety problems for your career? If so, give reasons” (Table 4).

Table 4
 Stressors experienced by employees of local enterprises

Stressors	Female 52 (%)	Male 70 (%)
YES	42 (80.76)	58 (82.85)
NO	10 (19.24)	12 (17.15)
Permanent job	15 (35.71)	20 (34.48)
Promotion chances	8 (19.05)	16 (27.59)
Better salary	7 (16.66)	15 (25.86)
Relationships	12 (28.58)	7 (12.07)

Findings of these researchers unveiled an annoying situation. Of the 535 individuals interviewed 366 (68.41%) agreed that they are experiencing anxiety conditions. Particularly, 156 males out of 248 (62.90%) and 210 females out of 287 (73.17%) constitute a population which requires proper attendance. Anxiety reduces the ability of persons to work effectively with other people and results to negative effects and poor performance. The research team on the basis of these findings decided to proceed to further research in order to identify the type of treatment which people, vulnerable to the health effects of anxiety, undergo (Table 5).

Table 5
 Treatment undergone by people with anxiety

Types of treatment	Female 210 (%)	Male 156 (%)
None	55 (26.19)	50 (32.05)
Medication	39 (18.57)	30 (19.23)
Herbs (Omeopathy)	40 (19.04)	15 (9.62)
Physical exercise	30 (14.28)	50 (32.05)
Behavioral therapy	42 (20.00)	9 (5.76)
Drugs (cocaine, marijuana)	4 (1.92)	2 (1.30)

The existence of barriers, like anxiety, early dropouts from school attendance or existence to take e-learning courses, do not facilitate the attainment of the necessary qualifications which would enable people to cope with the market demands successfully Frankola (2001), in her article concerning dropout rates in corporate e-learning courses states that learners most frequently reported lack of time, lack of motivation, poorly designed courses and incompetent instructors as the reasons for their attrition. Studying in personal time can have a harmful effect on employee’s home life and family and may contribute to attrition statistics (Thalheimer, 2004).

These sorts of circumstances force mature learners into non-completion even though they may be performing well in their distance studies (Ozga and Sukhmandan, 1998).

The phenomenon of dropouts from school and the resistance to attend courses constitute serious developmental problems to which careful consideration should be given. The reasons for dropouts fall into four categories (Table 6).

Table 6
 Reasons of pupils 'dropouts

Economic	<i>Educational</i>
Pupils come from low income families	<i>Poor attendance</i>
Pupils have to work full-time	<i>Low grades</i>
Pupils have to work part-time	<i>Language problems</i>
Psychological	<i>Social</i>
Pupils with lower self-esteem	<i>Belonging to ethnic groups</i>
Pupils with physical, emotional disabilities	<i>Poor peer support problems</i>
<i>Lack of motivation</i>	<i>Negative school environment</i>

Weimer, M.(2010 concluded to the following causes which lead to resistance :

- Poor self-image as learners
- Inappropriate level of learning
- Fear of the unknown
- Students' dislike of teachers
- Irrelevance of the learning activity
- Disjunction between learning and teaching styles

In an effort to reduce stress to learners teachers were interviewed in North Cyprus (Nazime Tuncay) and Greece (George Mouzakitis) and were asked to evaluate with a point system (between 5 and 10) behaviors which could reduce anxiety (stress) in a healthy way through a list of ten short-term and ten long-term activities (Table 7).

Table 7
 Teachers' evaluation of stressors treatment

Short-term	Cyprus	Greece	Long-term	Cyprus	Greece
Deep breath	9	10	Lighten up	10	10
Exercise	8	8	Draft agendas	9	10
Relaxation	7	10	Get organized	8	9
Massage	6	9	Invent work plans	7	8
Avoid external stressors	10	7	Set limits	9	10
Meditation	5	10	Assign duties	9	10
Listening to music	8	8	Organize finances	9	7
Get more sleep	9	10	Manage time	9	10
Take breaks	9	8	Link with optimists	10	9
Yoga	5	6	Set goals	9	9

CONCLUSIONS

It is believed that the importance of the impact of psychology in our lives, in general, and the role it plays to success attainment and relief from stressors has been adequately emphasized. However, it is felt that the psychological dimension of the system should be strengthened to implement new strategies to prevent students' drawbacks, such as anxiety, to minimize their resistance as regards e-learning courses delivery or even to relieve them of technophobia.

Interviewed individuals at any level of educational and economic structure have unveiled the reasons of anxiety quite frankly. Anxiety is recognized to be a disastrous causal effect which influences the success or failure in all the sectors of our lives decisively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As supported by Selye, M. (op.cit.) stresses result from catastrophes, major life changes and hassles. Some intervening factors are appraisal, perceived controls and personality.

The stress reaction consists of *psychological, emotional and personality interventions*.

The annoyances encountered by individuals due to anxiety must be treated quite cautiously.

Meditation is supported to be an effective means of dealing with anxiety problems. In case it is properly practiced it decreases stress, cures phobia, strengthens confidence, relieves of feelings of depression, increases motivation and improves social intercourse.

Four highly influential factors in our society which lead to its development and success or to its destruction are families, school administrators, school counselors and teachers at any level.

Parents should keep their children free from emotional and other hazardous disturbances, teach them morals and values, respect their individuality and be actively involved with their school activities. *School administrators* should create the necessary conditions to enable students to become successful lifelong learners and leaders. *School counselors* should help students to focus on academic, personal, social or professional careers. *Teachers* entrusted with the responsibility to educate our future leaders, should play the role of a mentor, of a friend, of a live paradigm of well structured behaviors and develop appropriate knowledge.

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