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What Effect Does the Psychological Condition Play on Students' Performance?

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Abstract

There are so many factors that affect students' academic achievement and performance during their studies. Some have minor effects, while others play a major role in keeping students in or out of the academic institution where they study. The question to be raised here is: how far do students' psychological conditions affect their academic achievement? In order to fathom the depth of this matter, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among (22) Information Technology (IT) majors at Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman. The results show that the psychological state has a very major role in affecting student's achievement, especially during the final exams. Explanations, discussions, and recommendations will be highlighted in detail throughout this study.

Keywords: achievement, anxiety, depression, interpersonal relationships, negative, psychological conditions, self-esteem

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Introduction

Almost all societies have prominent cases that show a strong relationship between the psychological condition and academic achievement. Some of these cases are related to daily pressure, anxiety, interpersonal relationships, lack of self-esteem, etc. Moreover, there are some family factors that directly influence students' academic performance on top of which are: divorce and death of one or two parents. This puts students in a very severe atmosphere, and negatively affects their lives- personal and/or academic. And that is why academic institutions—schools, colleges, and universities do have psychologists and social workers to deal with such cases. They offer help, guidance, contact parents, etc. This paper uncovers the effect of psychological conditions that affect students' achievement at Ibri College of Applied Sciences.

Study Problem

This study identifies the psychological issues that affect students' academic achievement at Ibri College of Applied Sciences. It goes in depth to reveal certain issues and cases some students suffer from such as anxiety, depression, interpersonal relationships, pressure of final exams, and the role played by specialists- psychologists- in order to treat these problems.

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Study Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Identify the psychological issues that hinder, or influence students' academic performance at Ibri College.
2. Determine the extent to which this study is seriously considered by the College psychologist with the cooperation of faculty members and staff.

Study Questions

1. How far do psychological problems affect students' performance at Ibri College?
2. To what extent do psychologists seriously tackle this problem, and what are the possible outcomes that help students be in a healthy –mental and physical –environment that ensures success for all students, regardless of their backgrounds—social, race, color, or interests?

Literature Review

> The word stress brings about the thoughts of depression, anxiety and other potentially life-threatening conditions in the mind of an individual. Every person is exposed to stress at some point in their lives, and it is an inevitable part of a student's life as it takes a toll on their emotional well-being, academic performance as well as their physical health. (Hachinto & Kasisi, 2022, Para. 2).

Stress plays a very important role on all kinds of performance, whether negative or –to some extent- positive. It can affect the person in particular, and the others around him/ her. Imagine a family member suffering from a psychological issue and receives no proper treatment, it is possible that he/she will affect all the family members and, maybe, the neighbors. In the academic institutions, the problem becomes worse; this individual affects his classmates and hinders their performance and- maybe-comprehension. All psychological issues do affect students' performance and achievement on top of which is the academic pressure. "Academic pressure is defined as "an experience in which a student is burdened by the demands of time and energy to achieve specific academic goals" (Pacific Teen Treatment, (n.d), Para. 1).

Since "students" are our concern in this study, the researchers have noticed that this group of people can be easily affected by psychological problems. This could be called a "fragile" group—they cannot bear stress and that is why many are lead to negative behavioral patterns.

> Most students are unable to cope with stress. This leads to different behavioral patterns such as alcoholism and substance abuse such as "dagga" (marijuana) and codeine in order to escape the harsh reality. This eventually leads to absentia in school and an increased number of schools drop outs. (Hachinto & Kasisi, 2022, Para. 2).

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One of the main reasons that puts students under profound pressure and anxiety is due to school systems- directly or indirectly. Prestigious academic institutions do their best to cope with the highly ranked schools, colleges, and universities. The whole staff –principal and teachers-work very hard to prove they are the best in the region. Consequently, students pay the price; they work under pressure to get the best results.

> Schools have placed emphasis on the grades of its [their] students hence students having stress and anxiety to produce good results. Schools, principals, teachers, and communities are judged on their test scores and students' results often drive decisions such as school funding or student promotions to the next grade level (Hachinto & Kasisi, 2022, Para.9).

So much pressure on students leads to bad results and categorizes them in what is arbitrarily called the "Risk Group" that imposes so much pressure on students' psychological states. "In fact, students in high-achieving schools have been designated an "at-risk group" by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, due to the negative health impacts of chronic stress created by academic anxiety". (Newport Institute, (n.d), Para. 5).

Other factors that affect students' psychological and mental states occur when academic achievement has the priority over daily and personal activities like sports, social relationships with colleagues and classmates. Once this happens, students start suffering from a number of issues such as anxiety, psychological disorder, depression, isolation, etc.

> When young adults feel they must prioritize academic achievement over everything else—including physical health, positive relationships with peers and family, creative self-expression, and downtime to recharge—they pay a high mental health toll. Academic pressure can lead to depression, anxiety disorders, or high-functioning anxiety.(Newport Institute, (n.d),Para. 2).

Academic pressure should be managed in a way that students stay in a healthy state with healthy conditions: physical and psychological. The earlier the treatment is, the better, otherwise, the institution might lose its academic and social status.

> Without tools for academic stress management, young adults suffer. A 2019 review study found that academic pressure is associated with the following mental health

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> symptoms: anxiety, depression, increased substance use, impaired overall health and well-being, poor sleep quality, leading to problematic coping strategies such as taking sleeping pills, smoking cigarettes, and drinking alcohol to help them sleep, high levels of stress and burnout, which ironically result in lower academic achievement, depersonalization (feeling disconnected from one's body and/or thoughts),poorer quality of life. ((Newport Institute, (n.d), Para. 9).

The performance of daily activities and success depends on human's psychological conditions—that is, good mood, or bad mood. Good mood and peace of mind lead to ultimate success, while bad mood leads to failure and negative consequences. "Psychology is among many things that matters human day-to- day activities. The success and failure we face in various activities we perform each day most often depends on our everyday psychology" (Beharu, 2018, Para. 2). Self-esteem does affect success, as well.

Students with no, or low self-esteem rarely succeed; they have no confidence, nor self-trust. Most of the time they do not accomplish their missions perfectly due to the lack of motivation.

> Self-esteem often seen as a personality trait, which means that it tends to be stable and enduring. It plays a significant role in your motivation and success throughout your life. Low self-esteem may hold you back from succeeding at school or work because you don't believe yourself to be capable of success. (Agrawal, 2020, Para. 13).

Both adjustment and wellbeing play an important role in the behavioral and psychological processes in maintaining students' needs and requirements. On the other hand, the state of *Wellbeing* might be considered as the main factor that promotes students' functioning well; the state that includes physical and psychological matters. "In psychology, adjustment is the behavioral process by which humans and other animals maintain an equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacles of their environments" (Agrawal, 2020, Para. 12).

> Wellbeing refers to our psychological state of feeling and functioning well. However, it encompasses a lot more than that and, contrary to some common misconceptions, it is not just the opposite of stress; nor does it imply that we are relaxed and happy all the time (Matwiejczyk, 2011, Para. 3).

Moreover, *Wellbeing* means that the human body should function well for the benefit of the other organs to flourish. "There are different types of wellbeing such as physical wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing etc. all of which should ideally work in tandem for the entire wellbeing system to grow and flourish". (Matwiejczyk, 2011, Para. 3). "Within education, it is absolutely vital that we care about the wellbeing of teachers, students and other school support staff" (Matwiejczyk, 2011, Para. 4).

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> Wellbeing can have a strong impact on students' academic achievement. Think, for instance, of students who experience high levels of anxiety in class due to an upcoming test or because they have been invited by the teacher to speak or contribute an answer in class. Their anxiety will most likely impact upon their performance in a negative manner (Matwiejczyk, 2011, Para. 11).

Wellbeing is essential for students and teachers alike. In class, personal relationships should be built on reciprocal respect, honesty, and trust. Tackling serious issues in class depends highly on the mutual respect and understanding in solving whatever happens in the teaching domain. "Honesty and trust are core characteristics of meaningful interpersonal relationships in class, which are particularly important for learners' and teachers' wellbeing especially during difficult times" (Matwiejczyk, 2011, Para. 14). Does mental health contribute to students' achievement? Let us see.

In fact, positive mental health and academic achievement go hand in hand and play an important role in the *Wellbeing* of students. With the support and guidance from school, students become more self-confident with high self-esteem and emotional condition. "Positive mental health and academic achievement can also powerfully impact one another! Strong overall mental health, well-being, and resiliency positively impacts students' school performance. If students feel adequately supported and successful in school, this improves their self-esteem and emotional health" (Houri, 2021, Para. 2021).

Collaboration is a must in dealing with students' psychological issues. Faculty members, families, psychologists, social workers, school administrations should cooperate to guide and assist students with such cases—wellbeing.

> The overall mission of New York's School Mental Health (SMH) program is to promote healthy social, emotional, and behavioral development of students, and "break down barriers to learning so the general well-being of students, families, and school staff can be enhanced in collaboration with other comprehensive student support and services." (Barile, (n.d), Para. 5).

Psychologists, social workers, teachers, and local physicians should consider students' learning disabilities as "priority"; they should be diagnosed and treated as soon as possible, otherwise this might affect their lives in the future. "Left undiagnosed or untreated, learning disabilities or psychiatric disorders can lead to an array of adverse outcomes for these students later in life" (Houri, 2021, Para. 2021). Students suffering from mental health problems should not hesitate to ask for help.

An early diagnosis and treatment of mental problems saves time and effort. Seeking help is better than suffering silently. All school staff members should be willing to offer help.

> Seeking help is never easy, but you are not alone! If you or someone you know needs mental health treatment, we strongly encourage you to reach out for help as quickly as possible. It is not uncommon for many mental health difficulties to impact a person's life in long term. Pursuing support at the beginning of one's journey can put the individual in the best position to learn how to manage themselves in a

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> healthy way so they can go on to live happy and fulfilling lives. (Pacific Tean Treatment, (n.d), Para. 5).

Students should adapt themselves or suffer in an isolated environment. They have to fight and stand firmly in the face of negative matters to live problem free.

> Psychological resilience is the adaptation of individual in the face of negative situations and the ability to fight these situations. Since university life has an anxious and stressful feature, university students are considered as a risk group in terms of psychological resilience. (Demir & Barut, 2020, Para. 1).

Not all isolated and silent people are depressed; on the contrary, they might have reached the state of perfectionism and see the world from another perspective. Even some disabled students might be more brilliant than healthy ones. Teachers should pay more close attention to such cases in their classes. "That kid who looks depressed might have more challenges than you could guess" (Barile, (n.d), Para. 1). Not only do teachers teach, but also they take care of their students, whether at schools or colleges. They represent the "First Line" in this arena.

> Mental health awareness is an important issue for all educators, who are often the first line of defense for their students. Education professionals have recognized the impact that a student's mental health has on learning and achievement, and they realize that there's a great deal that can be done to help students with mental health issues (Barile, (n.d), Para. 1).

Many individuals suffer from stress. Take for example millionaires, heads of companies, administrators, etc., they live under pressure and if they do not relax and take things easy, it is possible that they will die of heart attacks. "Stress is experienced by managers, financers, government officials, administrators, politicians, house wives and is most prevalent amongst students nowadays" (Jain, 2017, Para. 1).

When the human body faces some challenges, it naturally reacts accordingly. This stress could be a merit for the body to stimulate more understanding of the issue faced, but too much stress might be fatal. "Stress is the body's reaction to challenge or demand. It can be positive at times; however prolonged stress can lead to severe health conditions" (Jain & Singhai 2017, Para. 1). Stress might not have a negative effect on some individuals—they take it as a trivial matter which leaves no traces in their lives. Normally, religious people take all life problems satisfactorily—they are believed to be people of strong faith who believe in "Allah" (God) and know that no harm will affect them unless it is predestined. "Stress levels can differ on the basis of how one reciprocates to a certain situation. Some people just do not care and do not get anxious; they perceive stress as trivial knock and move on in life on daily basis" (Jain, 2017, Para. 3).

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Bad companions also have a direct effect on their peers, and possibly will lead to bad behaviour. Take, for example, theft, stealing, etc., which are kinds of bad conduct. Drinking, smoking, cheating, behaving as thugs are all bad kinds of behaviour obtained by bad company. "Research has found that in some affluent communities these pressured students consume alcohol and drugs and suffer from addiction at significantly higher rates than the general population" (Wallace, 2019, Para.10)

> Peer pressure is yet another common term that one hears from the teenagers. This could be pressurizing another to drink, smoke, cheat on test, lying etc., the list is exhaustive. Peer pressure can be harmful and compelling. It can help shape the personalities in a positive way for introvert students or can pose as an obstacle and lead to stress (Jain, 2017, Para. 5).

Envy plays an important effect on students, especially in the early stages. The child is still dependent and his personality is formed according to what he sees around him. Anxiety emerges in the form of: stay firm, or go with the flow. All of that leads to depression.

> Some warning signs, like excessive peer envy and cheating, tend to emerge in middle school, but other symptoms of stress are being seen as early as elementary school. When a child's sense of self-worth is dependent on what they achieve, it can lead to anxiety and depression. Anxiety can come from worrying about keeping up with or outshining peers, while depression can be caused by a failure to achieve (Wallace, 2019, Para.6)

Three main factors are mentioned by one of the researchers who has a Ph.D. in Psychology (Dr. Nasra AL Ghafri). She summarizes the issues affecting academic achievement as follows:

> Factors affecting academic achievement:
> -Low self-confidence, which leads to fear of failure and avoidance of risk and unfamiliar situations.
> - Excessive enthusiasm, where the strong desire for success and excessive enthusiasm for achievements lead to negative consequences.

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Dr. Nasra does work hard in assisting students who need help and consultation. She concludes that many issues that cause anxiety and pressure mainly refer to stereotypes that negatively affect students' psychological states.

> Stereotypical thinking that is normally governed and controlled by societal and family habits and traditions plays a bad effect on students' psychological conditions, as well as poor time management and teaching methodology, exam environment and, to some extent" Luck". (Al-Ghafri 2019, p. 81).

Questionnaire Analysis

To get more detailed information about the effect of the psychological conditions on students' academic achievement, the researchers distributed a survey among (22) Fourth - Year Information Technology (IT) majors at Ibri College –University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman. The study is conducted by means of a questionnaire consisting of (10) questions: (5) Yes/No, (5) Agree/ Disagree.

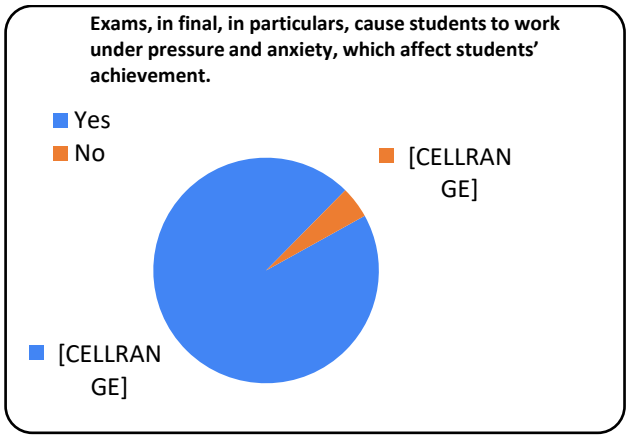
Figure 1:

1. Exams, the finals, in particulars, cause students to work under pressure and anxiety, which affects students' achievement.

(A) Yes

Exams, in final, in particulars, cause students to work under pressure and anxiety, which affect students' achievement.	**Yes**	**No**
	21	**1**
	95.35 %	**4.55%**

(B) B



In fact, almost all students get worried when exams come; they suffer from anxiety and psychological pressures that affect their results, and maybe their physical conditions. (95.35%) are for the option that exams normally, the finals, in particular, cause problems to students.

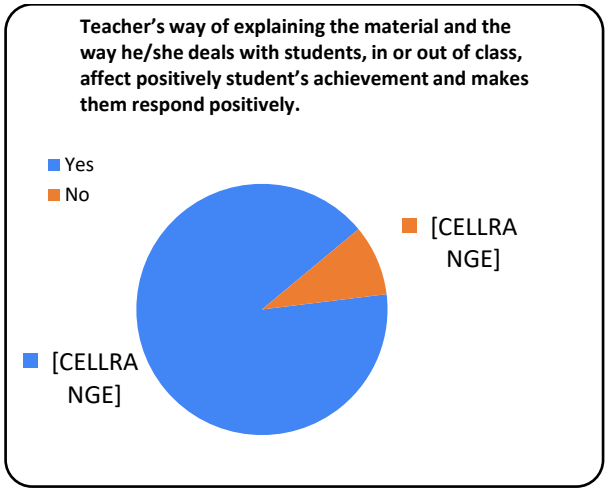
Figure 2:

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2. Teacher's way of explaining the material and the way he/she deals with students, in or out of class, affect positively student's achievement and makes them respond positively.

(A) Yes (B) No

Teacher's way of explaining the material and the way he/she deals with students, in or out of class, affect positively student's achievement and makes them respond positively.	**Yes**	**No**
	20	**2**
	90.91 %	**9.09%**



(90.91%) of students' answers shows that the way and methodology teachers adopt, do play an important role in affecting students' psychological state. With mutual respect and understanding, students can relax in the classroom and do their job flexibly and perfectly. Educators always urge teachers to free their students and build bridges of friendship and reciprocal respect in class.

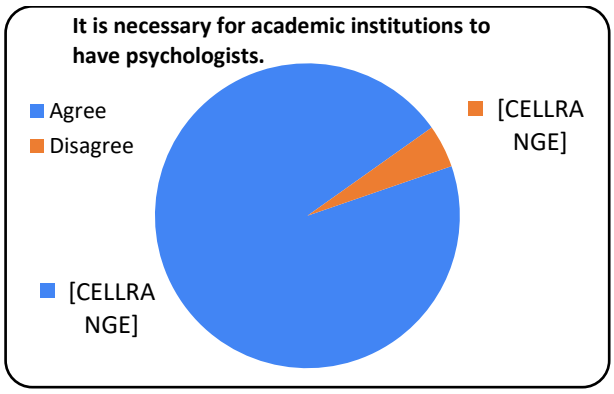
Agree/ Disagree

Figure 3:

3. It is necessary for academic institutions to have psychologists.

(A) Agree (B) Disagree

It is necessary for academic institutions to have psychologists.	**Agree**	**Disagree**
	21	**1**
	95.45 %	**4.55%**



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Regarding having psychologists at academic institutions, (95.45) agree that it is required. This can assist students who suffer from some mental or psychological problems before the case becomes uncontrollable.

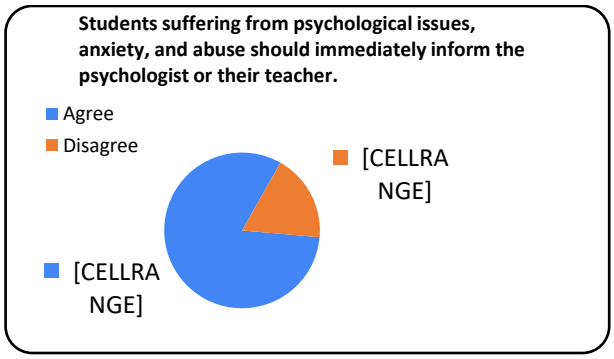
Figure 4:

4. Students suffering from psychological issues, anxiety, and abuse should immediately inform the psychologist or their teacher.

(A) Agree

Students suffering from psychological issues, anxiety, and abuse should immediately inform the psychologist or their teacher.	**Agree**	**Disagree**
	18	**4**
	81.82 %	**18.18%**

(B) Disagree



Students suffering from psychological problems should be frank and inform the local psychologist about any problems they suffer from, or face. The psychologist, on the other hand, should always support students and follow up their cases, especially if they get abused and badly treated by their classmates or colleagues. (81. 82%) agree that students should immediately speak up and inform the body concerned in the academic institution.

Population of the study

The researchers have referred to a group of Omani students at Ibri College. They are all in the Fourth year, aged between 22-24. They study Information Technology (IT) and come from different parts of the Sultanate of Oman: some come from rural regions, others from cities and coastal regions and Muscat- the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman.

Recommendations

-there should be a powerful and frequent connection, cooperation, and mutual understanding between students and staff.

-a sense of healthy belonging to the academic institution for all students should be developed and valued.

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-teachers should be aware of students who suffer from psychological issues and deal with them accordingly.

-academic institutions should conduct training sessions for new faculty members regarding psychological matters, and how to deal with certain cases.

-psychologists at the academic institutions should provide faculty members with possible ways how and who to contact when encounter certain cases with psychological problems.

-academic institutions should establish counseling services offices for managing emotions, promoting critical thinking, and preventing depression and mental deterioration.

-workshops, meetings, seminars should be held for new student intakes to be aware of psychological issues that may happen around.

-an online platform might be of great importance to deal with some special cases that feel shy or embarrassed to talk openly in the presence of crowds.

Conclusion

The researchers, led by the College Psychologist Dr. Nasra Al Ghafri, are proud to say that this study represents an excellent work that has uncovered crucial problems some students at Ibri College encounter. What makes this study so distinguished is the role she plays in contacting faculty members, students, and parents enquiring about limping cases that need quick treatment. Throughout the past years, Dr. Nasra treated many cases suffering from anxiety, stress, lack of self-esteem, etc. The sample the researchers have studied shows that there are still a number of cases existing in some departments to reach and treat quickly.

Acknowledgment

The researchers would like to express their deepest thanks and gratitude to all students who participated in this questionnaire without whom this would not have been done this way.

About the Researchers

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Nasra AL- Ghafri Assistant Head of the Student Services Center at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Sultanate of Oman. She holds a PhD in Social Psychology from Mohammed the Fifth University in the Kingdom of Morocco. She has 21 years of experience in student services and psychological counseling. Her interests are many: conducting workshops for government bodies, schools, colleges, universities, and families in the local community. She plays an excellent role in the Social Media, Mass Media, as well, and has been invited by the Omani channel to talk about diverse matters related to Psychology.

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Hilal Alshandudi is an ESL/EFL instructor at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Department of English- Ibri College of Applied Sciences - the Sultanate of Oman. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Management and Leadership from the University of Reading- UK. He has been teaching English at a number of schools, colleges and universities in Oman; including the Ministry of Education, College of Heath Sciences. His research interest is ―Educational Leadership and Management.

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