

Stress management among university students during face-to-face and online evaluations.

التعامل مع التوتر أثناء الامتحانات الحضورية والامتحانات عن بعد

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to deal with an important element in students' academic careers, namely stress during face-to-face and online evaluations and its influence on their results. We start with a few definitions, then look at the psychology of students during face-to-face and online evaluation and the differences between the two, the signs of stress in students during evaluation periods, as well as mentioning the types of evaluation considered less stressful. We distributed a questionnaire to 3rd year students French at University of Batna2 to know their opinions about this subject. Then, we suggest a few ways in which teachers can help them to reduce stress during face-to-face and online evaluations, as well as strategies for students to better manage their stress during the evaluation.

Key-words : stress, psychological state, student, face-to-face evaluation, online evaluation.

ملخص :

الهدف من هذا المقال هو تناول عنصر مهم في مسيرة الطلاب ، ألا وهو التوتر أثناء التقييمات المباشرة والإلكترونية وتأثيره على نتائجهم. وقد بدأنا ببعض التعريفات، ثم تناولنا سيكولوجية الطلاب أثناء التقييمات الحضورية والتقييمات عبر الإنترنت والاختلافات بين الاثنين، وعلامات التوتر لدى الطلاب أثناء فترات التقييم، وكذلك ذكرنا أنواع التقييم التي تعتبر أقل إجهادا وقمنا بتوزيع استبيان حول الموضوع على طلبة سنة ثالثة فرنسية جامعة باتنة 2 لنعرف آراءهم. ثم اقترحنا بعض الطرق التي يمكن أن يساعد بها الاستاد في تقليل التوتر أثناء التقييمات الحضورية وعن بعد ، وفي النهاية اقترحنا استراتيجيات للطلاب لإدارة توترهم بشكل أفضل أثناء التقييمات

الكلمات المفتاحية: التوتر، الحالة النفسية، الطالب، التقييم الحضوري، التقييم عبر الانترنت

1. Introduction

The evaluation is an important moment in the school and university career of students. However, it is also accompanied by stress for many of them. Indeed, the stakes of a good grade, the fear of failure or of not being up to par create significant psychological pressure.

Stress during evaluation is a complex phenomenon which depends on many factors such as the student's personality or academic background. Situational aspects, linked to the form of the evaluation, its modalities or its context, also play a role. While a certain level of stress can have a positive effect by stimulating concentration and motivation, excessive stress becomes harmful. It can affect performance, harm the mental health and well-being of students.

Understanding the sources of stress and its impact is therefore crucial to supporting them as best as possible. Educational adjustments and appropriate psychological support can then help reduce exam-related anxiety.

It is this problem of student stress in the face of evaluation that this work aims to focus on. We will explore its manifestations, factors and consequences, as well as avenues for prevention and possible help.

2. Definitions

2.1. Definition of evaluation

According to the Didactics dictionary learning evaluation is « a process which consists of collecting information on learning, making judgments on the information collected and deciding on the continuation of learning taking into account the initial evaluation intention.» (J-P Cuq, 2003, p90).(translated from French)

It is therefore a structured process which consists of evaluating what students have actually learned and acquired. It is then a matter of making a critical judgment on this information.

The objective is to be able to adjust educational activities according to identified needs. This entire process is done in accordance with the initial evaluation intention.

In summary, evaluation is a reflective process which aims to help students progress optimally based on a detailed analysis of their acquired knowledge.

2.2. Definition of stress

Stress is a negative emotion felt by many students during evaluation, caused by the pressure to succeed and the fear of failure, and can influence their results. Stress is defined according to Xavier Soler as: « a vital adaptation function of the individual, a reaction on their part to constraints, an environment or a situation which can alter or endanger their well-being. » (Xavier Soler, 2011, p15) .(translate from French)

It is therefore a physiological mechanism to cope with dangers and challenges. It manifests itself as a reaction of the body to external factors which can destabilize the well-being of the individual, whether physically or psychologically.

In summary, we can say that stress is a normal and necessary physiological and psycho-emotional answer to cope with internal or external demands that may disturb the individual. It is a vital adaptive mechanism.

These two notions are, generally, linked to each other; where we have evaluation we find stress.

3. Student psychology during the evaluation

3.1. Face-to-face evaluation

Evaluation is a difficult situation for many students. The stress of failure can disrupt their ability to think. Fear of the unknown and not knowing exactly what will be asked or evaluated can cause apprehension. It is important that the teacher clearly explains the criteria of the evaluation.

Obtaining a good grade is an important issue for some, it can block thinking.

Lack of self-confidence is also an important point for some students who tend to easily doubt their abilities, even when they are well prepared. Stress can reinforce this lack of confidence.

Fatigue, also, play an important role in the student's performance on the day of the evaluation. Before the evaluation, intensive revision can lead to fatigue and reduced concentration on the day of the evaluation. Some students may adopt a competitive attitude towards others, which is not conducive to learning, they spend their time comparing themselves with others without being aware of the progress of the lessons.

The meaning of the evaluation in itself has its effects on the students, they must be made to understand its usefulness which is progression, to reduce the stress

linked to the grade. A poor result can discourage the student and harm their self-esteem and motivation.

3.2. Signs of excessive stress in students during evaluation periods

A lot of signs can block the student so that he cannot complete his evaluation, we mention some examples:

The first signs to notice are the physical signs: tremors, sweating, blushing, racing heart.

Sleep disorders (insomnia, recurring nightmares linked to the evaluation). Digestive problems (bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, lack of appetite). Muscle tension and frequent headaches. Avoidance behaviors (absences, difficulty concentrating while revising).

Plus other symptoms linked to daily habits, namely: anger and increased consumption of substances (coffee, tobacco to unwind).

Very negative self-talk and an exacerbated lack of confidence cause a persistent feeling of anxiety, panic, and fear of failure. Also social withdrawal, isolation for fear of judgment from others and recurrent obsessive thoughts about evaluation and success. All this can cause depression, according to Said Errahmani.R and Gahar.S «Stress is also associated with depressive reactions» (2024,p580)

The last sign is the significant drop in academic performance under pressure of deadlines, which can hardly jeopardize the university career of the student who risks missing a year of study or passing but with several modules in debt.

So, we can say that it is important that the teacher offers help and directs the student towards psychological support, if necessary. Positive intervention from the teacher can change a lot of things for the student.

3.3. - Types of evaluations that are less stressful for students

To reduce the degree of stress, we can use different types of evaluation to evaluate students with less stress and more success, for example:

Formative or progressive evaluations which are integrated into the learning process and allow the student to practice without any grade issues.

Project evaluations; they make it possible to present group work or an individual project over a long period of time is less stressful than a table evaluation. This develops other skills.

Oral evaluation which can be less than a written exam because the student can interact with the teacher with less stress and can respond more effectively, especially for students who express themselves well orally.

Self-evaluations: Learning to judge yourself constructively reduces the fear of judgment from others. And also having your work evaluated by your classmates is destabilizing but often positive for the learner and draws their attention to several important points.

Contractualization of criteria: Involving students in their definition empowers them and reassures them.

3.4. Suggestions for teachers to help reduce student stress during evaluation

The teacher, as the main actor in the teaching/learning process, can find techniques and follow paths allowing him to help the student overcome his difficulties and cope with stress on the day of the exam; the teacher can:

Explain clearly to students the evaluation methods and criteria as well as the correction scale to remove doubt and apprehension and make things clearer.

He can also, diversify the forms of evaluation (written, oral, project, dissertation, etc.) to adapt to learning styles and give students more opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.

The teacher must devote sufficient time for the evaluation to avoid rushing and time pressure while taking into consideration the type of questions and sufficient time for each.

Create a calm and serene environment on the day of the exam by avoiding surprises and stressful remarks that can disrupt thinking and cause a feeling of fear.

Remember students that the objective is to measure progress, not just to obtain a grade and that the most important thing is to prove progress.

Give individual and constructive feedback afterwards, to promote successes and remedy errors and avoid negative remarks which affect sensitive students. Offer individualized support for students in difficulty or who are very stressed, preferably doing so away from their classmates.

Relativize the importance of the grade in relation to learning and regularly congratulate progress rather than only promoting excellent results.

Finally, he offer regular, less formal training to take the drama out of the act of evaluation and even training to do at home to encourage scientific research and open up other avenues for free and at the same time conditioned individual work.

3.5. Strategies for students to better manage their stress when facing evaluation

The student, for his part, can participate in his success and adopt strategies to reduce his stress and go further in his studies and also his evaluations, without fear while getting rid of all stress, according to Franck Bometon: « manage your stress during an evaluation is essential» (Franck Bometon, 2020, p150).(translated from French).

Here we have some suggestions for student assistance:

Organize and plan your revision time reasonably, without exhausting yourself and take care of your diet, your sleep and take breaks to stay in shape and maintain your concentration.

Discuss your stress with your classmates or a loved one to take a step back and practice different relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation.

Refocus on the learning objectives rather than obsessing over the grade and revise step by step, subject by subject, by practicing regularly using different exercises and previous exam subjects to have a good idea on possible questions and standard answers in order to be methodical in your response.

Set small, realistic goals to gain confidence and accept stress as something normal and temporary and that the student can overcome it without negatively influencing their results.

You must congratulate yourself on your progress rather than doubting and ask the teacher for help in case of difficulties and also ask for help from classmates and perhaps family members, according to Them Entor : « only by overcoming your fears and accepting yourself can you build a solid foundation of self-confidence and mental strength » (2023, p 12) . (translated from French)

You must give importance to your success to activate positive thoughts and distract your mind in the preceding days by changing activities and talking about your stress to those around you which can also be liberating and bring good to the student.

4. Online evaluation

The conditions of online teaching and evaluation are a little strange for the student, according to France Henri and Anthony Kaye, : « Distance learning does not only address the problem of geographic distance. There are other types of distance that it can counter, such as psychological distance.» (France Henri, Anthony Kaye, 1985, p11).(translated from French)

Between the conditions for online teaching and evaluation we have :

The most important point, before starting the online evaluation, is to clearly explain the anti-cheating policy to students and the consequences of any attempt to cheat.

Identity control: It is necessary to ensure that the student taking the evaluation is the one who is registered, for example with webcam or IP control of the PC.

Work environment: The student must not be able to access other tabs or applications during the evaluation. Also monitor the presence of other people to give a certain reliability to the evaluation.

Limited time: Set a precise timing to avoid cheating (external help, internet searches) and at the same time devote a little time before the start of the evaluation in order to allow access to the link and the room. review and resolve any technical issues before you begin.

Live Monitoring: Teachers can monitor students via their webcam or remote supervision. And integrate an integrated Anti-cheat which automatically detects cheating (other tabs, copy-paste, suspicious movements) or any use of intelligent software.

Open-ended questions: Mix with reflective questions requiring multiple lines of writing and make documents non-copyable and non-pastable to give all students more opportunity.

Alternatives to cheating: Offer multiple choice questions, filmed presentations, case studies to analyze in writing. So propose questions in a different order for each student.

4.1. The difference between an online evaluation and a face-to-face evaluation

The face-to-face evaluation differs from the online one due to the conditions in which it is carried out and also the position of the student. The two forms of evaluation differ according to:

Environment: online is at home, without direct supervision, potentially more distractions and the possibility of cheating and help from those around you. In person it is in a controlled room and with less possibility of cheating or help.

Supervision: online is remotely, via webcam. In person, the teacher is physically present to answer questions.

Concentration: more difficult to stay focused alone behind a screen. In the classroom, it is the atmosphere that promotes concentration and a little noise can disturb the student and influence their responses.

Cheating: risk perceived as higher online (external help, internet searches). Less risk in person.

Eye fatigue problem: the eyes can tire more quickly in front of a screen. No such problem in the exam room.

Methods: Writing is more difficult online. MCQs are more suitable. In the classroom, all types of questions are possible and the physical presence of the teacher in the room can make a lot of things easier.

Stress: Isolation and technical issues can cause stress online. The mutual help in the room is calming. Therefore, an internet connection is essential online and any power or internet outage risks reducing the chance of success. No risk of this order in person.

Fairness: The online format raises more questions about equal opportunities among students with the presence of sophisticated software and different cheating techniques.

Face-to-face is often preferable, but online also has advantages such as flexibility.

4.2. The psychological state of students facing an online evaluation

Online evaluation poses technical and also psychological difficulties, given that it is a somewhat recent technique, particularly in our universities, namely:

Isolation: Lack of direct human contact with teachers and classmates can increase loneliness and stress. It can also be more difficult to stay focused and motivated in front of a screen, without being in an exam room.

Non-optimal work environment: It is difficult to be in a good mood if the work space lacks calm and comfort. Added to this problem is the fear of technical problems and internet or hardware failures at the wrong time, which increases the level of stress.

Taking the exam alone at home with remote monitoring is destabilizing and some students may doubt the fairness of an online assessment which they imagine is more cheatable.

Eye fatigue: Prolonged screens cause visual fatigue, not ideal for optimal concentration. And for those who have never taken an online exam, the novelty adds stress.

It is more difficult to stay focused than during a traditional exam and harder to manage your time and progress without seeing the others and being reminded of the supervising teacher at any time. According to Them Entor, « During exams, well-thought-out time management is the key to success in studies» (Them Entor, 2023, p 21)

It is therefore necessary to limit as much as possible these unusual stress factors during online evaluations while explaining the procedure, the functioning of the sites and the new methods adopted.

5. Discussion and analysis of results

To better explore our study, we conducted a research with a group of twenty students (third-year French students) at Batna2 University. We chose this level because they worked with the two methods (face-to-face and online) for

different courses and their evaluations. We distributed a questionnaire to them that contains seven questions, which concern their attendance when it comes to an online course, the assessment method (face-to-face or online), the questions proposed, whether they suffer from stress during evaluations, and whether the type and method of evaluation cause them stress and how they react).

5.-1- Question 1: - Do you have online courses? Do you attend them?

Overall, 3rd year students have three courses provided online. And the others are provided in face-to-face. All the students interviewed confirmed that they attend the courses provided online, unless there is really an impediment, they see that the content is interesting, in addition to English, the evaluation of which is done online and often contains elements explained during videoconferences, which obliges them to attend.

5. 2 Question 2: - Are evaluations conducted in face-to-face or online?

All answers were yes, for example: (1-Yes, I have completed online evaluations for several courses. It was difficult, I prefer the s face-to-face exam. 2- Yes, I have taken several online exams, and it was a positive experience. The platform was generally easy to use).

The answers reveal a diversity of opinions on online evaluations. On the one hand, some appreciate the flexibility and facilitated communication, while others prefer in-person interactions and express a desire for more traditional methods.

5. 3 Question 3: - For online exams; are you offered reflection questions or MCQs?

The answers vary between: they use MCQs. Some courses favor direct questions. They combine MCQs and direct questions.

The use of MCQs makes it easy to correct and allows for quick evaluation. Thus, it covers a wide range of topics in a short time, which stresses some students. On the other hand, some teachers prefer direct questions that promote critical thinking and allow students to express their ideas in depth.

A combination of MCQs and direct questions provides a balance, allowing both basic knowledge and analytical skills to be evaluated. This can make the exam

design more complex and require more time to answer, causing stress to some students who have not prepared well.

5. 4 Question 4: - Do you have any difficulties with online evaluation?

Several answers were given, for example: (1- Sometimes, I have connection issues that can affect my ability to participate in online evaluation. This can be frustrating. 2 - I worry and think that online evaluation can reduce my motivation, because it is easier to feel disconnected without the atmosphere of a classroom. 3- Yes, the stress related to using technology during online evaluations can be a problem. I am afraid of encountering technical problems at the wrong time. 4- Personally, I prefer face-to-face evaluation. Online assessment does not suit me.)

Connection issues can affect access to evaluations, creating inequality. The need for human interaction is fundamental to learning, for some students.

Technological stress, too, is a factor that can harm student performance, which can affect results. This shows the importance of preparing students to use digital tools and providing technical support.

These answers show a range of concerns, from safety and fairness to engagement and motivation. They explain the need to improve online evaluation systems to meet the diverse needs of students and ensure an equitable and effective learning experience.

5. 5 Question 5: - Do you feel stressed during face-to-face or online evaluation? If so, who supports you?

Students' opinions vary between yes and no: (1- Yes, I often feel stress during assessments, especially in person. Fortunately, I have friends who support me, which helps me to feel calmer and also my family. 2-I don't feel much stress during online evaluations, because I am in a familiar environment. However, I have a teacher who gives me advice, which reassures me. 3-Stress is inevitable for me, whether in face-to-face or online. I try to manage it, but I also have a friend who gives me a lot of moral support. 4- In general, I prefer online evaluations, but in face-to-face it is more complicated. I have classmates who support each other. 5-I feel stress during face-to-face evaluations, because I am more exposed, I have friends who remind me to take time to think quietly.)

Stress is generally present in some when it comes to an online evaluation and in others in a face-to-face setting. Several answers mention support from friends, which indicates the importance of social relationships in stress management. Academic support plays a crucial role in preparing for and reducing stress. Some answers mention an awareness of the importance of mental health. The idea that classmates encourage each other highlights the importance of the classroom.

Social support is essential in times of stress, whether from friends, family or teachers. This shows the importance of creating support networks in academic environments (which we recently saw at Batna2 University with the opening of a clinic to meet this objective). Educating students on stress management techniques could be beneficial.

These answers show the variability of stress depending on the evaluation mode and the importance of social support. They also show the need for tools and strategies to help students better manage their stress, which could improve their academic performance and well-being.

5. 6 Question 6: - Do the type of questions or technical issues stress you out during face-to-face or online evaluation?

Answers range from Yes to No (1-Yes, the type of questions can stress me out if they are unexpected. I often feel unprepared, which puts me under pressure. 2-No, I try to stay focused on the subject and manage my time. 3- Technical issues, such as an unstable internet connection, can stress me out, but I usually feel comfortable. 4- A little, technical challenges teach me to be more adaptable. - If I feel prepared, the type of questions doesn't stress me out as much. 5- Yes, especially online. It would be helpful to have practice tests to familiarize yourself and reduce stress.)

All of the answers show the impact of the questions on the individual's confidence. This may indicate a need for additional preparation. A few students seem to have good stress management.

Some answers show that technical problems are considered a source of stress, which is relevant in the context of online evaluations.

Overall, the answers reveal attitudes towards stress during evaluations. Some ones show vulnerability and a need for support, while others express confidence.

5. 7 Question 7: - Do you prefer face-to-face or online evaluation, and which one does not stress you?

The answers generally touched on the following points: (1-I prefer face-to-face evaluations because they allow me to interact directly with the teacher and clarify my doubts at the time. In addition, I find that the classroom atmosphere helps me to concentrate. 2- Online evaluations are my preference because they allow me to work in a familiar environment. This reduces my stress. 3- I enjoy both. Face-to-face are more engaging, but online evaluations give me the flexibility to better manage my stress. 4 - Online evaluations stress me out less because I can reread the questions and take the time to think before answering. Face-to-face, the pressure of time and other students stresses me out. 5-I prefer online evaluations. This reduces my stress.)

The answers show a diversity of preferences influenced by personal factors, with some students preferring direct interaction with the teacher, and others disliking the pressure of being around other students. And some combine the benefits of both formats, allowing for interaction and flexibility. Students who prefer face-to-face value the immediate support, while those who choose online enjoy a less stressful environment. A hybrid approach could potentially maximize the benefits of both formats while minimizing the drawbacks.

6. How to help students to manage stress when facing an online evaluation?

The role of the teacher is essential to enable the student to better manage their stress when it comes to an online evaluation, they must:

Clearly explain the evaluation process in advance to remove questions and carry out training simulations beforehand to familiarize yourself with the tool (platform), the method and the environment.

Check the quality of the internet connection and computer equipment well in advance of the deadline and recommend that students take the exam in a quiet room without distractions.

Authorize breaks if necessary to get away from the screen and provide reassurance about remote monitoring arrangements during the test.

Specify that a blocking technical problem will not penalize the student and provide access to a psychological and technical support chat during the evaluation and in the event of any breakdown provide students with a telephone

number to obtain information and to report any technical problem in time, with the aim of proposing solutions to resolve it in a short time and not to fail the entire exam.

Suggest stress management techniques: cardiac coherence, breathing, etc.

Give kind feedback afterwards on the strong points, not just the mistakes and highlight the success of each person rather than the competition.

The student must consider this experience as learning and not a failure in the event of difficulties.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that face-to-face evaluation remains more familiar for students and more conducive to concentration. However, online evaluation is gaining popularity. Stress is generally higher during remote evaluation, due to isolation, potential technical problems and fear of cheating.

To reduce this specific stress, increased preparation and support are required: simulations, clear instructions, technical and psychological support available. Offer suitable online evaluation formats such as multiple choice questions, case studies or filmed presentations to limit difficulties related to writing. Teachers, for their part, must demonstrate understanding in the face of hazards and reassure them of their benevolence in the event of difficulties. Constructive feedback, valuing progress more than the grade, is essential to re-motivate students afterwards and group or individual psychological help sessions can help certain students who are vulnerable to the stress of remote evaluation.

The challenge is to reap the benefits of digital technology while limiting its anxiety-provoking impact on learners. Good support is the key to overcoming this obstacle.

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