

Learned helplessness in the educational environment and its effects on student's mental health and academic achievement

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Received: 22 / 09 / 2025

Accepted: 24 / 11 / 2025

Published: 30 / 11 / 2025

Abstract:

This study addresses the issue of learned helplessness, a psychological state that affects students' mental health and academic achievement. The condition is defined as a feeling of hopelessness that develops in an individual as a result of repeated failed experiences, leading them to believe they are incapable of success regardless of their attempts.

The study reviews the concept of learned helplessness, its explanatory theoretical models, various dimensions, and how it manifests in the educational environment. It also analyzes the underlying causes of this condition and its impact on student's mental health and academic achievement, clarifying its relationship with disorders such as depression and academic anxiety.

Keywords: Learned helplessness; Educational environment; Mental health; Academic achievement.

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1. Introduction

Life experiences-whether social, academic, or professional- are pivotal in shaping an individual's feelings, beliefs, cognitive structures, and behavior. These situations and experiences can be stressful due to the influence of multiple factors, some of which are internal to the individual and others external, leading to feelings of boredom and low self-confidence. The individual perceives himself as incapable of overcoming difficulties and challenges because he believes his abilities are limited, even though he possesses the necessary skills and competencies to overcome obstacles. This state of emotional and cognitive disorganization has been termed learned helplessness, which refers to a state of resignation that an individual exhibits after experiencing successive failures, where resignation is the response that follows the belief in low competence and loss of control over events (Seligman & Maier, 1967).

From this perspective, students, like other individuals, are affected by a series of situations and experiences that lead them to acquire helpless behavior, which may negatively affect their performance and academic achievement, as reflected in their academic achievement. This psychological and educational concept is one of the most important challenges facing the educational process, as it negatively affects student's motivation and academic. This paper addresses the concept of learned helplessness in the educational environment, its causes, consequences, and how to deal with it.

2. Research Problem

Students are influenced by their experiences in all areas of life in general and in the academic field in particular. These experiences shape their perceptions of studying and learning, which in turn determine their goals. Other parties, such as family, teachers, peers, and others, also contribute to shaping these perceptions. Among these perceptions is the irrational belief among students that they are incapable of achievement and expect failure. These students feel helpless despite having sufficient qualifications and abilities to do what is required of them. This leads them to think negatively about their abilities and potential and to evaluate themselves incorrectly, creating a conviction that no matter how hard they try, they will fail because they believe they are incapable of making any improvement. Such false cognitive accumulations ultimately lead to a cognitive-emotional state known as learned helplessness (Abu Alia, 2000).

Martin Seligman is considered the originator of the theory explaining how individuals develop learned helplessness. He conducted a systematic study of this concept, stating that learned helplessness is

a psychological state resulting from the inability to control the outcomes of failure or success, leading the individual to believe that they are incapable of controlling variables. Seligman also argued that an individual's belief that their attempts to change outcomes are futile and that their responses to obtain reinforcement are ineffective leads them to withdraw and become apathetic, and then to feel learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975).

Haddad's study (2001) indicated that students differ in their assessment of their self-efficacy and personality and their knowledge of their abilities, and therefore they fail to make an effort and become anxious and frustrated. Non-helpless students, on the other hand, attribute their failure to a lack of effort, so they respond to failure with more effort and thus overcome some of the crises in their academic lives. A student's belief in their inability to control situations and their expectation of failure causes them to give up, which may hinder their learning. This is not limited to a particular group. Hanem (2005) confirmed in her study that learned helplessness is higher among males than females. However, this does not negate the existence of helplessness behaviors among girls, as Williams (2004) found that females are less able to cope with difficulties. Repeated academic failure is a pattern of learned helplessness that in turn affects subsequent performance (Qadri & Qanduz, 2018).

Al-Zamli's study (2001) also confirmed that there is an interaction between learned helplessness and an individual's cognitive structure, where students with learned helplessness are characterized by several traits, most notably expectation of failure, inattention, self-negativity, low motivation, attributing success to chance, withdrawal, low self-esteem, and difficulty in problem solving (Al-Rifai, 2003).

Khater (2012) also pointed out that learned helplessness has negative and serious consequences for the individual, lowering the student's level despite their ability to succeed, which may lead to a decline in academic performance as a result of their feeling of inability to perform. In the same context, Al-Zawahra (2006) confirmed the existence of a negative relationship between learned helplessness and academic achievement, considering that an increase in the level of learned helplessness is a predictor of achievement, the higher the level of learned helplessness, the lower the academic achievement of students.

Vâlas (2001) found a relationship between learned helplessness and self-perceptions of academic achievement, with the results of the study showing that helplessness behavior was more prevalent among males.

Although the concept has been addressed in psychology, the problem lies in how it is formed in the classroom and its negative impact on students' academic and achievement trajectories. The problem centers on the following questions:

- How did theoretical and research models explain learned helplessness?
- What factors contribute to the emergence and exacerbation of learned helplessness in students, and how do educational practices reinforce it?
- What is the relationship between learned helplessness and student's mental health, especially with regard to depression and academic anxiety?
- What educational and psychological strategies can be used to reduce its negative effects and promote a sense of control and self-empowerment among students?

3. Objectives of the study

This paper aims to:

- Identify how theoretical and research models have interpreted the phenomenon of learned helplessness.
- Analyze the factors contributing to the emergence and exacerbation of learned helplessness among students, and explore the role of educational practices in reinforcing this condition.
- Reveal the relationship between learned helplessness and student's mental health.
- Propose effective educational and psychological strategies to reduce the negative effects of learned helplessness and develop student's sense of control and self-empowerment.

4. Importance of the study

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it addresses a recent development in positive psychology, namely learned helplessness, which is one of the obstacles that prevent individuals from controlling the situations they face in life, whether psychological, cognitive, social, or educational. The importance of the study also stems from the possibility of using the information to develop strategies and plans to treat or reduce learned helplessness among students, as well as to utilize teaching strategies that

raise the level of academic achievement. The importance of this study also lies in enriching the field of knowledge about learned disabilities.

5. What is learned helplessness?

5.1. Definition of learned helplessness

The concept of learned helplessness is one that has become firmly established in the field of mental health, and its definitions have varied and diversified according to the different perspectives and interests of researchers on this concept. The following is a presentation of a group of definitions of this term by specialists and researchers.

- Seligman defines learned helplessness as "a psychological state that results when events are uncontrollable" (Khalaf, Mikhael, & Abdul Rahman, 2020, p. 417).

He also believes that learned helplessness is manifested in an individual's perception that their responses will not affect the outcome, which appears in three aspects:

1- Motivational helplessness: manifested in the loss of motivation to learn through the individual's voluntary response as a result of their belief that they do not have the means to control the mechanisms of learning, after repeated experiences of failure.

2- Cognitive helplessness: the learner's inability to learn from previous experiences.

3- Emotional helplessness: manifested in negative emotions such as tension and anger, as well as feelings of depression resulting from a loss of hope in controlling stressful events and situations (Ashour, 2014).

- Rif'a and Al-Zagoul (2015) define it as an individual's realization that they are incapable of achievement no matter how hard they try, and therefore cannot avoid failure, which leads to feelings of guilt (Rif'a, & Al-Zagoul, 2015).

- Learned helplessness is also defined as "a state of mind in which individuals feel that they lack the ability to control their circumstances, causing them to feel that failure is inevitable, which negatively affects their cognitive abilities and hinders their performance in various academic subjects (Nenty & Ogwu, 2009).

- Abu Halawa defines it as “a learned conditioned response that creates or leads to cognitive, motivational, and emotional deficiencies in those afflicted with it, causing them to enter into a general state of behavioral apathy” (Abu Halawa, n.d., p. 3).
- The Standardized Guide to Disability also states that learned helplessness is a state of helplessness that is not present from birth, but occurs at a later stage in an individual's life, developing a sense of loss and deprivation because the person has already gone through experiences and developmental stages (Al-Khatib, 2001).

Based on the above, we conclude that learned helplessness is a complex psychological state that arises when an individual realizes that their efforts and responses do not affect the outcomes of events, especially those that they perceive to be beyond their control. This negative perception is not innate, but rather the result of repeated experiences of failure and frustration, and it manifests itself in three aspects: motivational helplessness, where the individual loses the desire to try or learn, believing that any effort is a waste of time; cognitive helplessness, which weakens the ability to learn from past experiences or find new solutions; and emotional helplessness, which manifests itself in strong negative feelings such as tension, anger, and helplessness, which can develop into depression. At its core, learned helplessness is an acquired resignation that prevents individuals from adapting to their environment or achieving their goals, causing them to feel guilty and hopeless, which negatively affects their academic and social performance.

5.2. The Evolution of the concept of learned helplessness

In his study of the development of the concept of learned helplessness, Seligman and his colleagues (1978) suggested that this phenomenon can be understood as developing in stages, beginning with efforts to influence outcomes, followed by the perception of uncontrollability, and culminating in negative expectations and reduced motivation. At first, the individual tries to influence the results they obtain through their responses and behaviors. However, after undergoing a number of experiences that end in failure despite their attempts, they begin to realize that they have no control over the factors that determine the outcome. This realization gradually leads them to form entrenched negative expectations about their loss of control in any new situation they encounter. As a result of these expectations, he develops cognitive, motivational, and emotional impairments, where his ability to think positively is affected, his motivation declines, and he feels frustrated and hopeless, which deepens his sense of helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978).

From the above, it is clear how an active and enthusiastic student can become passive and resigned. Initially, the student is in the first stage of the model; he makes an effort in his studies, participates in classroom activities, and completes his assignments, thereby attempting to influence his academic results (grades, understanding, success). However, when the student faces a series of repeated failures (such as consistently getting low grades despite studying, or not understanding lessons despite following along), they enter the second stage and begin to form a firm belief that they “can't do it” and that their efforts will not change their reality. This negative perception causes them to develop negative expectations. Before taking any new test or attempting to learn new material, they anticipate failure, believing that it is beyond their control. The process reaches its peak in the final stage, where these expectations are reflected in their behavior and performance. He loses his motivation to try, becomes passive in class, avoids participation, and may even develop academic depression. This sequence shows that learned helplessness is not just a weakness in performance, but a deep-rooted psychological condition that develops in stages and requires comprehensive intervention that is not limited to improving academic performance, but focuses on rebuilding the student's self-confidence and changing their negative expectations.

5.3. Models explaining learned helplessness

5.3.1. Seligman and colleague's model

This model shows that learned helplessness stems from the lack of correlation between response and outcome, through the individual's perception of the independence of the response from the outcome in the situation. The individual then interprets the outcome negatively, and this interpretation influences their expectation of the independence of the response and outcome in new situations in life, i.e., there are negative reinforcements for the event in the future, and ultimately, the nature and type of helplessness behavior is determined. This theory focuses on the emergence of learned helplessness behavior in individuals on the issue of the individual's style of interpreting events, which reinforces learned helplessness behaviors. This expression, in turn, is manifested in symptoms such as Low self-esteem, lack of understanding, and low expectations for future success, contribute to a disorder resulting in learned helplessness through motivational and emotional cognitive structures within the individual. For example, when an individual repeatedly fails to accomplish a certain task, they realize that their failure is the result of their weak abilities, which leads to negative experiences and low self-confidence, and thus expects to perform poorly in similar tasks in the future (Al-Nahi, & Ali, 2017).

Seligman and his colleague's explanation of learned helplessness can be summarized in the following figure:

Figure (1)

Seligman and colleague's explanation of learned helplessness behavior



The figure above illustrates this theory's explanation of learned helplessness in individuals, focusing on how they perceive a situation and use that perception to generalize and interpret future events. Seligman and his colleagues also developed a modification of learned helplessness theory—cognitive theory—based on attribution theory and the theories of Fritz Heider, Harold Kelley, and Bernard Weiner, which became approximately clear predictions of helplessness. According to the modified theory of helplessness, when people find themselves helpless, they ask why. Attribution is the creation of a cause for this apparent helplessness and the determination of expectations of helplessness in the future in the same situations or in many different situations (Al-Zahrani, Badawi, & Salem, 2015).

Seligman explains how we make three interpretive errors that lead us to learned helplessness:

- **Generalization:** (specific or comprehensive) where students view a bad event, such as failure in a particular field, as something that will continue in all situations in their lives. "I failed French, for example, so I am a failure in my studies... in all subjects.
- **Permanence:** (permanent or temporary) Where students believe that the cause of the bad event is permanent. "I failed French. I will never understand or grasp this subject".
- **Personal/subjective:** (internal/external) When a bad situation occurs, students attribute it to their weakness, for example: "I'm not talented... The problem is me, not the competition" (Al-Nahai, & Ali, 2017).

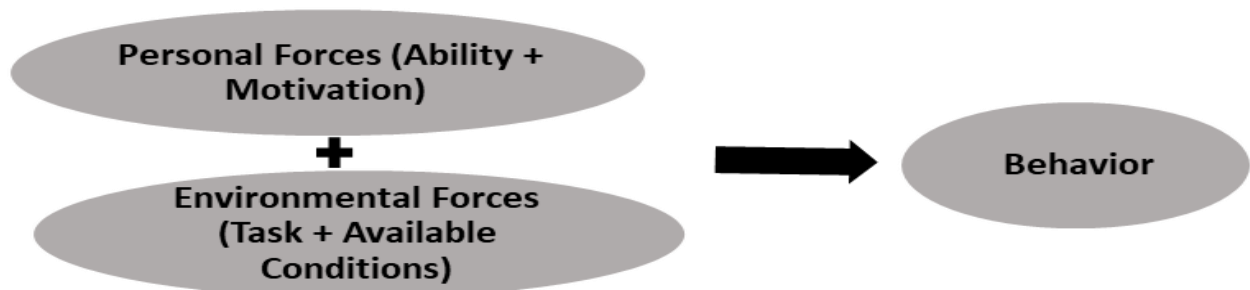
5.3.2. Heider's explanatory model: This model views helplessness behavior as being shaped by the interaction between two fundamental forces: personal forces and environmental forces. Control over outcomes, whether success or failure, is not limited to a single factor, but depends on the extent of interaction between these two types of forces. Personal forces include internal factors such as ability and intelligence, while environmental forces represent external factors such as the difficulty or ease of the task

and the circumstances surrounding it. This model considers that success and failure do not have a single cause, but that the mistake itself can be an influencing factor. Based on this, Haider explains that if one of the two forces (personal or environmental) is weak, the likelihood of helplessness behavior is high. In other words, when an individual perceives that their personal ability is insufficient, or that the task is too difficult and beyond their capabilities, they often give up and fall into the trap of learned helplessness (Al-Farhati, 2009).

The following figure illustrates Heider's explanation of learned helplessness behavior:

Figure (2)

Illustrates Heider's explanation of learned helplessness behavior



According to this model, learned helplessness is not merely an individual problem, but rather the result of the interaction between an individual's personal strengths and the environmental forces surrounding them. In other words, helplessness may sometimes be due to external factors such as the difficulty of the curriculum or exam conditions, and is not limited to the student's own weaknesses. Thus, the model provides teachers with a deeper understanding, guiding them toward developing more effective teaching strategies that focus on modifying the environment and providing support, rather than placing the blame solely on the student.

5.3.3. Kelly's model: This model explains learned helplessness by distinguishing between two basic types of helplessness:

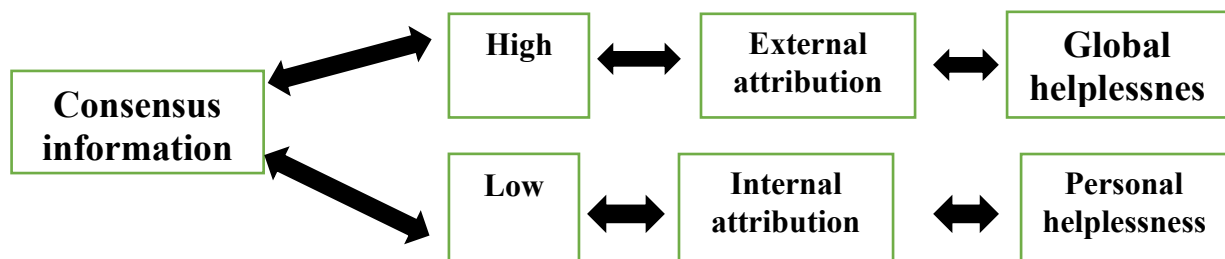
- **General helplessness:** This type occurs when an individual and others together face circumstances beyond their control, and they are unable to control the outcomes of events. In other words, when everyone is in the same helpless situation, it is known as general helplessness.
- **Personal helplessness:** This type is considered more serious because it pertains to the individual alone. Here, the person finds himself unable to control the outcome of events, while he sees others as being able

to do so. This difference in perceived ability between the individual and those around them reinforces their feelings of helplessness and despair (Abramson and Seligman, 1978).

The following figure summarizes Kelly's explanation of learned helplessness behavior:

Figure (3)

Illustrates Kelly's explanation of learned helplessness behavior



This distinction is essential to understanding the dimensions of learned helplessness, as personal helplessness often has a deeper psychological impact than general helplessness. While failure in general helplessness can be attributed to uncontrollable external factors (such as the difficulty of the curriculum), personal helplessness is attributed to internal factors (such as lack of ability or intelligence), which damages self-esteem and leads to feelings of inferiority. This explanation clearly links the attribution style to the type of learned helplessness. If an individual attributes their failure to personal characteristics, they will suffer from personal helplessness, but if they attribute it to external factors, their feeling will be closer to general helplessness.

5.4. Components of learned helplessness

Learned helplessness consists of three main interrelated components: association (expectation), knowledge (cognition), and behavior. These components form the vicious cycle of learned helplessness, which is:

5.4.1. Association: This component shows that the relationship between the outcome and the response is objective. Seligman defines association in terms of control, arguing that an event can be controlled when an individual's responses affect the outcome of the event, and that an event is uncontrollable when an individual's voluntary responses do not affect the course of the event.

5.4.2. Cognition: This refers to the way in which the individual perceives, interprets, and anticipates this contingency. The cognitive process of helplessness is as follows:

- The individual perceives the relationship between the response and the outcome.
- Interpretation of this perception.
- When the first two components (perception and interpretation) are used to predict the relationship in the future, if the student believes that his ability is the reason for his failure, he will expect to fail again (Ashour, & Fadloun, 2021, p. 532).

5.4.3. Behavior: This results from the perception of a connection or lack thereof between the response and the outcome. When an individual perceives that their actions do not affect the outcome, they tend to adopt negative behaviors, such as withdrawal and passivity in the face of difficult situations. When faced with a difficult situation, the individual makes no effort to try or overcome the challenge. This negative behavior reinforces the basic belief in helplessness, perpetuating the cycle (Al-Farhati, 2008).

In addition, Al-Rashidi (2014) believes that learned helplessness is clearly formed in three steps:

1. Unfavorable environmental conditions to which the organism is exposed.
2. The transformation of these conditions into expectations.
3. The emergence of behaviors that indicate learned helplessness through these expectations (Al-Rashidi, 2014, p. 33).

From the above, we conclude that learned helplessness in students develops when they realize that there is no relationship between response and outcome, leading them to expect that this relationship will not exist in the future, which manifests itself in behaviors such as laziness and apathy as a result of despair over the futility of trying.

5.5. Dimensions of learned helplessness

Learned helplessness is based on an individual's fundamental belief that there is a disconnect between their efforts and abilities on the one hand, and the results they achieve on the other, which is known as the disconnection between actions and results. Researchers explain this phenomenon through three main dimensions of individuals' interpretations of events, which are:

- **Subjectivity:** This dimension relates to the pattern of self-attribution. If an individual attributes a negative outcome to an internal cause (such as poor personal ability), this increases the severity of learned helplessness. If, on the other hand, they attribute it to an external cause (such as circumstances or other

people), this reduces the effects of helplessness and mitigates its impact.

- **Stability:** This dimension relates to the stability of causes over time. If an individual interprets their failure as resulting from a stable cause (such as “I am a stupid person”), they will expect the same outcome in the future, making the symptoms of helplessness chronic. Conversely, if they attribute failure to a non-stable cause (“I didn't try hard enough this time”), they increase their expectations of future success, which reduces the impact of helplessness.

- **Comprehensiveness and generalization:** This dimension determines the extent to which the cause affects various aspects of life. If the individual considers the cause to be general “I am a failure in general” the impact of failure will extend to multiple aspects of their social, academic, and professional life, increasing the severity of the helplessness. However, if the cause is considered specific or limited to a particular circumstance “I failed only the French exam”, its impact will be limited and will not extend beyond the scope of the situation in which it occurred (Bukhari, 2015).

This three-dimensional model (subjective, stability, and generalization) is at the heart of the theory of learned helplessness, as it goes beyond describing the symptoms to explain why some individuals develop learned helplessness and others do not. The importance of these dimensions lies in the fact that they provide a key to therapeutic and educational intervention. Instead of focusing on directly changing an individual's behavior, the intervention focuses on changing their negative thinking patterns, or what is known as reattribution. Understanding these dimensions enables individuals to develop a positive attribution pattern that protects them from feelings of helplessness and promotes perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges.

6. Learned helplessness in the educational environment

Educational institutions, especially schools, are one of the main sources of learned helplessness. Instead of being an environment that promotes self-confidence and learning, they can become a place where students have negative experiences that hinder their progress. Schools, which are supposed to teach students, develop their personalities and values, and instill in them the self-learning skills to face future challenges, may contribute to their feelings of helplessness if they do not provide them with adequate support. According to multiple studies, some teaching methods used in school environments may contribute to a sense of apathy and indifference among students. These practices, which may include poor organization and marginalization of students, make them feel helpless and lead them to believe that

they lack competence. In this context, **Peterson and colleague's (1995)** point to a striking similarity between the helplessness an individual feels in their personal life and the sense of alienation at the level of educational institutions. Students who perceive that their actions are controlled or restricted by others within the school develop a sense of helplessness, which affects their motivation to learn (Al-Farhati, 2009).

Here, the relationship between educational practices and negative student behavior becomes clear. This relationship can be analyzed from the perspective of learned helplessness theory, which suggests that repeated negative experiences over which the individual has no control lead to resignation. In the educational environment, feeling alienated or marginalized by the educational institution is a constant negative experience that students cannot control. Therefore, learned helplessness is not just an individual problem for the student, but may be the result of an educational environment that does not promote the student's sense of independence and control over their educational path.

7. Causes of learned helplessness

Several factors interact to cause and exacerbate learned helplessness in students, whether environmental or personal, as follows:

7.1. Environmental factors: These include:

- **Ineffective teaching methods:** where the teacher delivers content without interaction, does not relate the content to the student's life, or relies solely on dictation and rote learning.
- **Negative school environment:** characterized by strict rules, lack of flexibility, and disregard for students' psychological and social needs.
- **Excessive competition:** This creates an atmosphere of tension and anxiety and causes students to focus on grades rather than learning.

7.2. Personal factors: These include:

- **Negative attribution style:** Students interpret failure as a result of a lack of ability (an internal and permanent factor), while they interpret success as a result of luck or ease (an external and temporary factor).

- **Lack of intrinsic motivation:** Students have no passion or interest in learning, and their primary goal is to get good grades. - **Lack of self-confidence:** Students do not trust their abilities, fear failure, and feel inferior to their peers. (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) .

- **Physiological causes:** In his theory, Seligman links helplessness to symptoms of depression, believing that individuals experience depression as a result of life circumstances and their feeling of loss of control over all aspects of their lives and lack of immediate response. He attributes this to a biological factor resulting from a decrease in certain brain chemicals, particularly serotonin.

- **Psychological causes:** The main reason why individuals feel helpless is their communication and relationship with their families, as they have to accept what others say about their self-worth. In the absence of support, frequent contradictory messages, and a significant decline in achievements, children become victims of learned helplessness (Al-Farhati, 2009).

From the above, it can be said that learned helplessness in the educational environment stems from several factors, most notably school factors. Unfair or harsh assessment may make students feel that their efforts are fruitless. In addition, teaching methods that focus on final results rather than the learning process itself, negative comparisons between students, and insufficient support for students with special needs are all factors that contribute to this feeling of helplessness. On the other hand, there are fundamental personal factors, such as negative thinking patterns known as a “fixed mindset,” where students believe that their abilities are unchangeable. Feelings of inferiority, loss of self-confidence, stress, and excessive anxiety can also hinder academic performance and increase students' feelings of helplessness and inability to control stressful situations.

8. Symptoms of learned helplessness

Learned helplessness manifests itself in several motivational, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions identified by **Martin Seligman (1975)** in his theory. These symptoms are:

8.1. Motivational disorder

Motivational symptoms are among the most prominent manifestations of learned helplessness, as they directly affect an individual's desire to try and achieve. This is clearly evident in low motivation, where the individual loses the desire to take any initiative or make the necessary effort to achieve goals, which leads to a decline in performance and achievement. In addition, they develop a fear of challenges,

completely avoiding difficult tasks or new situations because they believe that failure is inevitable and unavoidable.

8.2. Cognitive disorder

Cognitive symptoms center around expectations of failure and a pattern of negative interpretation of events, where the individual expects negative outcomes in the future, even in situations where opportunities for success are available, with a tendency to interpret negative events as personal (due to a deficiency in themselves), fixed (unchangeable), and comprehensive (affecting all aspects of their life).

8.3. Affective disorder

Affective symptoms manifest as feelings of hopelessness and depression. The individual feels hopeless about their ability to control their life, which can lead to symptoms of depression. Hopelessness is considered one of the most prominent features of learned helplessness.

8.4. Behavioral disorder

The behavioral symptoms of learned helplessness appear in inactivity and quick surrender, where the individual stops trying when faced with an obstacle, even if it is solvable. They show a negative response to negative situations and make no effort to change or improve the situation, thus giving up quickly instead of trying to overcome difficulties because they believe that any attempt will be futile (Seligman, 1975).

Therefore, it can be said that learned helplessness is a multidimensional disorder, with symptoms appearing in several aspects. Motivational-wise, the individual loses the desire to try and achieve, and avoids challenges for fear of expected failure. Cognitively, they are dominated by negative thinking patterns, expecting failure and interpreting negative events as personal, permanent, and comprehensive. Emotionally, individuals suffer from a deep sense of hopelessness that can develop into depression. Finally, on a behavioral level, learned helplessness manifests itself in the form of passivity and quick resignation, where the individual stops making an effort as soon as they encounter any obstacle, believing that any attempt to improve the situation will be futile.

9. Learned helplessness behaviors and their consequences

According to Seligman, the characteristics of an individual suffering from learned helplessness are a set of negative patterns that affect their view of themselves and the world. When they fail, they tend to

blame themselves excessively and attribute their success to uncontrollable external factors such as luck or chance, which makes them live in a state of constant expectation of failure. In addition, they adopt a negative attitude as a result of their distorted cognitive interpretation of positives, exaggerating the negatives and downplaying the positives. This pattern causes them to withdraw when faced with any difficulties and reinforces their dependence on others rather than relying on their own abilities. Such individuals are also characterized by an exaggerated pursuit of personal perfection, which puts them in a vicious cycle of frustration when they fail to achieve this unrealistic goal (Ghosn, 2017).

In the educational environment, learned helplessness is a psychological phenomenon that profoundly affects student's performance and behavior, leading to profound negative effects on the student and the educational environment, causing a decline in motivation and academic achievement, so that the student stops making an effort and experiences a deterioration in their academic level. It also makes them inclined to withdraw from difficult tasks and avoid any new educational challenges for fear of failure. The constant feeling of learned helplessness can lead to isolation and introversion, making students feel ashamed of themselves, isolate themselves from their peers, and feel helpless and hopeless. This feeling contributes to the formation of a negative self-image, which pushes them to stop trying to learn and thus fall into academic failure. As a result, students begin to withdraw from educational situations and exhibit behaviors such as truancy and absenteeism. This problem is exacerbated, leading to poor academic achievement, then falling behind, failing, and repeating the year, which may end up with them dropping out of school and abandoning their studies completely. This negative trajectory makes them hate learning and school as a whole, and they lose the desire for any form of academic achievement.

10. The relationship between learned helplessness and students' mental health

Learned helplessness is closely linked to student's mental health. It is not just an academic problem but a psychological condition that affects many aspects of their lives. This constant feeling of inability to control outcomes can lead to depression, as despair and hopelessness cause social withdrawal and disinterest in life. Learned helplessness also exacerbates academic anxiety, which manifests itself in the form of tension, insomnia, and other physical symptoms resulting from fear of failure. In some cases, learned helplessness can lead to personality disorders, such as avoidant and dependent personalities, which negatively affect the student's relationships with those around them (Seligman, 1975).

A series of studies have addressed the complex relationship between learned helplessness and student's mental health, providing a deep understanding of how this phenomenon develops and its impact. The study by **Seligman, Maier, and Geer (1968)** is considered the cornerstone, as their basic experiments on animals showed that repeated exposure to uncontrollable failure leads to a state of hopelessness and lethargy, similar to the symptoms of depression. This initial understanding was developed further by Abramson, **Seligman, and Teasdale (1978)**, who presented a reformulated model of learned helplessness, focusing on attribution style. Students who attribute their failure to internal, fixed, and universal causes ("I always fail at everything") are more prone to depression and academic anxiety because they believe that their efforts are futile.

Learned helplessness is therefore deeply related to student's mental health. It is not just an academic obstacle, but a psychological condition that leads to despair and hopelessness. This helplessness arises from repeated exposure to uncontrollable failure, which convinces the student that their efforts are futile. Studies, such as those conducted by Seligman and his colleagues, show that this perception leads to depression-like symptoms, such as social withdrawal and loss of interest. Learned helplessness also exacerbates academic anxiety, as students adopt a negative attribution style, attributing their failure to internal, fixed, and universal causes ("I always fail at everything"). This belief traps the student in a vicious cycle of stress and failure, which in some cases leads to personality disorders such as avoidant or dependent personality, which affect their relationships and performance.

11. Treatment of learned helplessness

According to Abramson, **Seligman, and Teasdale (1978)**, treatment of learned helplessness relies on changing individuals' negative thoughts, focusing on three basic pillars to help those with learned helplessness, which are

- Understanding the components of learned helplessness in order to treat it.
- Helping individuals discover their core beliefs and distorted perceptions, thereby reducing their distress.
- Providing methods and tools to help individuals eliminate these distorted beliefs, thereby reducing their distress.

The treatment of learned helplessness depends on modifying the negative thinking pattern that leads to the individual's feeling of powerlessness. The treatment focuses on three main areas: First,

understanding its dimensions by analyzing the individual's interpretation pattern, whether they attribute their failure to personal, fixed, and comprehensive factors, or to external, temporary, and specific factors. Second, reattribution, which is an essential process that aims to help the individual identify and challenge their negative beliefs and replace them with more realistic and positive interpretations. Finally, providing behavioral strategies that encourage experimentation and the completion of small, achievable tasks, which helps break the cycle of expected failure and boosts the individual's confidence in their ability to bring about change. The effects of learned helplessness can also be reduced through various educational and psychological strategies, namely:

11.1. Educational strategies

These are considered a fundamental pillar in addressing the phenomenon of learned helplessness in the educational environment. Instead of focusing solely on addressing the problem in the student, these strategies offer a comprehensive approach that aims to modify the educational environment itself to be more supportive and motivating. Among these strategies are:

- Improving teaching methods by relying on interactive methods, such as cooperative learning and group projects, which promote a sense of shared responsibility and increase interaction among students.
- Restructuring the school environment by creating a positive environment that encourages self-expression, reduces strict rules, and increases attention to students.
- Continuous and constructive assessment Focusing on the progress made by the student, rather than on final grades, and providing feedback that helps them improve.

11.2. Psychological strategies

- These are an essential component in treating learned helplessness, as they focus on the individual's internal aspects, such as their thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. These strategies aim to help students understand and change the negative feelings they experience, rather than simply treating the apparent symptoms. Among these strategies are:
 - **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**

This helps students change negative thinking patterns and replace them with positive ones. An example of cognitive behavioral therapy is the program designed by **Al-Damen and Samour (2017)**,

which consists of 15 sessions. The program consists of 15 counseling sessions, each lasting 60 minutes, at a rate of two sessions per week. The program aims to reduce learning disabilities and improve psychological resilience in students with learning disabilities.

▪ **Coping skills training**

Students learn how to deal with stress and difficult situations, and how to think positively in negative situations.

▪ **Building self-confidence**

By focusing on students' strengths, providing them with psychological support, and encouraging them to try new things.

12. Educational guidelines to protect students from learned helplessness

- Give students opportunities to respond through a question-and-answer system.
- Encourage students to use their mistakes and failures constructively. As one thinker says: A healthy person is one who learns lessons from their failures, not their successes, and who can extract success from the ruins of failure (Sayed, 1992, p. 17).
- Enhance the sense of self-control by involving students in the learning process.
- Giving them choices in projects or tasks enhances their sense of control over their outcomes, which reduces their sense of helplessness (Reeve, 2012).
- Encourage students to be curious and value curiosity by diversifying teaching methods and opening up opportunities for dialogue and discussion. This is confirmed by Dweck: teachers should encourage students to value learning by enjoying challenges, using mistakes as a means of learning, and rewarding students' efforts, because rewards motivate students to pursue learning goals (Al-Farhati, 2009, p. 370).
- Strengthen self-confidence and build positive expectations.
- Create a model for developing students' motivation to learn and talk to them about their interests and inclinations and how they deal with difficulties.
- Develop students' willingness to engage in the task rather than engage in the ego, as students' anxiety increases when the teacher's assessment focuses on competition and work in any form, and as quickly as possible, rather than on the process involved in education (Bukhari, 2015, p. 85).

Therefore, in order for students to reach their full potential, the educational process must adopt an approach that focuses on developing their personal and cognitive skills in an integrated manner. Failure should be seen as an opportunity for growth and learning, not a stigma, which develops students' mental flexibility and problem-solving skills and removes their fear of experimentation. Encouraging students' intrinsic motivation through curiosity and inquisitiveness makes them learn for the sake of knowledge itself, and this motivation is stronger than any external rewards. In order for students to face challenges with confidence, it is necessary to develop their self-confidence through support and encouragement and by avoiding negative comparisons. In addition, focusing on the process rather than the end result reduces student's anxiety and makes them more willing to develop their skills. Interactive learning is an effective method that ensures student participation and supports their critical thinking skills.

13. Conclusion

Learned helplessness is a serious psychological and educational challenge that affects students' futures. It goes beyond mere academic failure and is formed when students go through a series of experiences in which they feel they have no control over the outcomes, regardless of the effort they put in. Understanding its causes, whether academic (related to educational practices) or personal (related to the student and how they interpret situations), is the first step toward addressing it. By adopting effective educational strategies that focus on supporting students, boosting their self-confidence, and developing a growth mindset, educational institutions can help transform students from a state of helplessness to one of empowerment and motivation, paving the way for them to reach their full potential. Consequently, addressing learned helplessness is not merely a matter of superficial fixes, but rather a comprehensive transformation that requires changing educational approaches, promoting self-awareness among students, and building their self-confidence by giving them the tools to take control of their educational journey. Through these efforts, the way can be paved for their academic success, psychological well-being, and ability to face life's challenges with confidence.

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