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Perception of academic success among face-to-face and distance students during the covid period

Jean-Marc Meunier⁽¹⁾, Elisabetta Zibetti⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Laboratoire Paragraphe, Université Paris 8 & CY Cergy Paris Université, Paris-France

⁽²⁾ Laboratoire CHART-LUTIN, Université Paris 8, Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, Paris-France

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Abstract: The successive confinements in France during the Covid-19 pandemic have disrupted the work modalities of all face-to-face students. In this paper, we also question the impact on distance students. With a survey of 108 students from the University of Paris 8, we show that anxiety and motivation profiles differ between these two populations and that, paradoxically, the perception of academic performance decreases for the most anxious or least motivated distance students. We propose to relate these results to the absence of specific support and the deterioration of study conditions at home to explain these results and to resituate them within the framework of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and distance learning (Hartnett et al., 2011).

Introduction

With the closure of universities between March 2020 and March 2021 during the Covid 19 pandemic, distance learning became the unique modality of study for all. The health crisis was a source of anxiety (Arsandaux et al., 2020) that degraded motivation (Duraku, 2021) and the sense of autonomy and increased feelings of isolation (Roux et al., 2021). While confinement has imposed on face-to-face students a radical change in study modalities, for distance students it is a continuation of chosen modalities. It is therefore reasonable to assume that distance students are less affected by lock-in than face-to-face students.

Methode

To verify this, we conducted a study with 108 undergraduate (N=76) and graduate (N=32) psychology students at the University of Paris 8 using an online survey. The sample is composed of 10 men and 97 women, aged 17 to 62 years (M=27, SD=10.3). We measured their level of anxiety-trait (STAI-FormeY; Langevin et al., 2012), situational anxiety (Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD-7; Williams, 2014), motivation (SAFAD; Poellhuber, 2007), autonomy (self-directed learning readiness scale, Fisher et al., 2001) and the feeling of social isolation (Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale; Russell et al., 1980). In parallel, we measured their perceived academic performance before the onset of the pandemic, during the 1st confinement (March 17 to May 11, 2020, not included), during the 2nd confinement (October 30 to December 15, 2020, not included). Data were collected during the 3rd confinement (March to May 2021).

Results

Overall the two categories of students show similar levels of motivation ($\chi^2(1)=2.78$; $p=0.095$; $\varepsilon^2=0.02$) and anxiety-trait ($\chi^2(1)=2.14$; $p=0.143$; $\varepsilon^2=0.02$). However, face-to-face students were more anxious about the situation ($\chi^2(1)=4.56$; $p=0.033$; $\varepsilon^2=0.04$), perceived themselves to be more autonomous ($\chi^2(1)=17.94$; $p<.001$; $\varepsilon^2=0.16$), but also more lonely ($\chi^2(1)=4.75$; $p=0.029$; $\varepsilon^2=0.04$) than distance students.

A factorial analysis carried out on these variables shows an organisation of the variables into three dimensions explaining two thirds of the variance: anxiety (trait and situational), motivation - autonomy and the feeling of loneliness. A hierarchical analysis carried out on the factorial distances allows us to draw up a typology of the subjects in three balanced groups (N=36) : Those with low anxiety, but high motivation-autonomy and feeling of loneliness (cluster 1), those with low anxiety, autonomy-motivation and feeling of loneliness (cluster 2) and those with high anxiety, motivation-autonomy and feeling of loneliness (cluster 3). The clusters did not appear to be related to educational level ($\chi^2(2)=3.82$; $p=0.148$). In contrast, distance students were overrepresented among motivated non-anxious students (cluster 1) and face-to-face students were overrepresented in the other two clusters ($\chi^2(2)=9.86$; $p=.007$). Does this result indicate that distance students are better protected from the consequences of Covid-19 on their studies?

Overall, the succession of confinement periods does not affect students' perception of their academic performance ($F(2,204)=0.882$; $p=.415$; $\eta^2=0.001$), but appears to be related to grade ($F(1,102)=18.270$; $p<.001$; $\eta^2=0.000$) and not to teaching modality ($F(1,102)=2.875$; $p=0.093$; $\eta^2=0.007$) but these claims need to be nuanced. Among motivated non-anxious (cluster 1), perceived performance remains constant for both teaching modes, while it decreases for distance students for both non-anxious-unmotivated (cluster 2) and motivated anxious (cluster 3) ($F(2,204)=11.770$; $p<.001$; $\eta^2=0.017$). Distance students, over the confinements, are thus less confident about their academic performance.

Discussion

This last result could be explained either by the absence of specific measures for distance students, particularly concerning assessment methods, or by the deterioration of study conditions at home. These initial results, interpreted within the framework of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and distance learning (Hartnett et al., 2011), open up ways for reflection on the metacognitive strategies to be reinforced with students in a situation of constrained distance learning and not to exclude from this reflection students who initially chose distance learning.

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