



COVID-19: THE ULTIMATE TEST OF ACADEMIC RESILIENCE

Eshan Pua Schleif, MS CCC-SLP, Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders
East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA

Resilience is defined as positive adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Martin, 2005). The resilience “toolkit” includes elements of positive psychology, which enhances satisfaction, motivation, and productivity in the workplace. However, how is the strength of one’s resilience measured? I propose the strength of one’s resilience is measured when encountering difficulty. Consequently, this season of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is the ultimate test of academic resilience. Students can choose to allow the difficult circumstances to determine their academic progress or use this season as an opportunity to establish new healthy strategies.

The global pandemic with high contagion potential and exponentially increasing incidence in the United States led to the declaration of a public health emergency by the Trump administration on January 31, 2020. State governments mandated shelter-in-place orders across the nation. Schools and companies closed its doors to limit the spread of viral infection. College and graduate students were prevented from returning to campuses, resulting in sudden changes in work routines, social life, and family organization (Ornell et al., 2020). Increased isolation, anxiety, and fear were met with decreased access to community and support. Many students respond by withdrawing, becoming stagnant, and disengaging from their schoolwork. These responses are described by Martin (2005) in the “Student Motivation and Engagement Wheel”, where decreased adaptive dimensions and increased impeding dimensions create a negative cycle of decline in motivation and productivity. Students thrive when they believe in their capacity to work successfully (self-efficacy), receive reward for their performance (mastery orientation), feel their work is useful (value of work), and can plan (planning) and manage their work (work management). Nevertheless, students’ motivation decline with increased anxiety, uncertain control, and disengagement.

As a second-year doctoral student, I experienced a declination in motivation and productivity with changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. I struggled with maintaining self-efficacy, value of work, planning, and work management with the changes

in work environment and decreased accountability. As time progressed, I gained awareness of contributing factors to my decreasing motivation. I developed new strategies to restore adaptive dimensions and reverse the declination of motivation. I recognized that I am not alone and began to reach out to other students who were encountering the same struggles. I sought community and accountability with graduate students in my university by creating a group on Microsoft Teams. We committed to daily check-in meetings to create a feeling of “showing up to work” using video conferencing. We shared our goals, struggles, and questions, and received advice from one another. These meetings increased my engagement and value of work. I soon began to establish a new weekly schedule, removing the sources of anxiety and isolation, and establishing positive, adaptive behaviors.

The COVID-19 pandemic can cause setbacks in many students’ academic progress. Yet, I believe this season is a test of students’ academic resilience. Rather than sinking back in fear and becoming overcome by circumstances, it is an opportunity to develop resilience skills. Students and professors must avoid impeding dimensions and increase adaptive dimensions of motivation and engagement.

REFERENCES

- Martin, A. J. (2005). The role of positive psychology in enhancing satisfaction, motivation, and productivity in the workplace. *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, 24(1-2), 113-133.
- Ornell, F., Schuch, J. B., Sordi, A. O., & Kessler, F. H. P. (2020). “Pandemic fear” and COVID-19: mental health burden and strategies. *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*, (AHEAD).

Contact Information:
Eshan Pua Schleif, MS
Email: puae15@students.ecu.edu