***Young students becoming too dependent on the Western education system - and now it’s killing their development***



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“Work hard to become successful.” As a kid I was taught, as I’m sure many others were as well, that by taking the time to work hard at school for good grades, I was guaranteed a successful life. It’s quite straightforward really. Success doesn’t happen overnight and if anything, spending the time and effort to achieve academic goals should motivate me to reach important goals later on such as attending university. Yet I have noticed how many students are taking this mantra too far… and it seems to be doing more harm than good.

School students are being taught the wrong way to “work hard”. We’re too focused on competing with each other, becoming dependent on classwork and overworking ourselves that we are overlooking the simple but fundamental elements such as health and relationships. Now don’t be mistaken, this is not a condemnation of the educational system, but rather a call to recognise the importance of students, and learners of all ages to develop healthy routines and explore our capabilities outside the classroom.

Of course it’s important to develop fundamental algebraic maths skills to perform relevant calculations in daily life, and it helps to investigate many of society’s current issues from classroom learning. Students would build upon their core knowledge whilst manipulating their own skill sets to pursue new opportunities and become a better version of themselves. Unfortunately, this is not useful if students only rely on school as a means to compete with their peers for the highest grades from their teachers. During one week, a quick observation around the school led me to notice how students regularly brought forward the topic of z scores and marks from assignments in their conversations. Everyone would stress about these ‘intangible’ scores that they neglect taking the time to actually implement action to maximise their learning process including actually listening to teacher feedback rather than numerical marks.

It’s easy to underestimate the endless possibilities of developing other skills outside the classroom needed to maximise student learning potential. Activities consisting but not limited to sporting, creative arts, financial studies and leadership events, push us to try new challenges that we would not usually encounter during class period. Yet rather than focusing on various aspects of learning or building upon unique individual strengths, it’s shocking to see how many students solely rely on marks. [One particular student survey](https://www.apa.org/monitor/dec02/selfesteem) from the University of Michigan reported how 80% of respondents **based their sense of self-worth** on academic competence, specifically determined by high grades. Moreover, 66% of the students mentioned that their ability to “do better than others'' was another factor that impacts their sense of self-worth. I can’t help but find it terrifying how we’ve become so dependent on how our peers are performing or how our teacher grades us that determine so little of hidden personal attributes.

It’s straightforward to understand that school stress is prevalent amongst students, yet rather than taking the time to manage the stress, students are continuing to overwork and burn themselves out excessively. But why exactly is this so harmful? [One incident in the 1900s](https://etseq.law.harvard.edu/2010/09/killed_by_overstudy_dont_let_this_happen_to_you/) resulted in a Harvard law school student removed from an exam to go to the hospital, because of an abscess in the brain due to overstudy (he passed away a few days later). In this unfortunate case, stress had induced physiological effects from excessive pressure on the student’s brain. In 2021, Reachout conducted a [national survey](https://about.au.reachout.com/blog/study-stress-impacting-students----mental-health--sleep-and-relationships-according-to-new-research-by-reachout#:~:text=The%20data%20shows%20that%20study,stress%20about%20study%20and%20exams.) for young people aged 18 to 25 in discovering how study stress was one of the biggest concerns listed. The results regarding students’ physical and mental health were severe, such as how 73% of young students experienced difficulty sleeping, and 37% of the participants experienced poor physical health and sickness. At this point, it’s not even a debate where health is concerned.

The next time you find yourself comparing your results with another classmate or pulling out your computer at 12am in the morning to work on an assignment, take a moment to think about how you could better manage yourself. You don’t have to be constantly hustling hard just to get ahead of your peers because if you are neglecting other aspects of your life such as health, essentially you won’t be able to do anything for yourself anymore. So let’s take advantage of the fact that we are still young active students. Now is the time to reframe your mindset in acknowledging other key aspects of your life, before it’s too late to do anything about it.

**References**

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