

The Law School Experience: Adopting Regulation Strategies

Maryrose C. Macaraan, De La Salle University, Philippines

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Abstract

Law school is the training ground for all future lawyers. While the law profession can be a compelling career opportunity, developing the necessary skills required for the profession can be tough a tough journey, and can be overwhelming. Experience of psychological distress among law students is evident in various research studies. The aim of this paper is to explore the literature on regulation strategies that would help law students survive the rigors of law school focusing on both academic and emotional regulation approaches. Self-regulated learning promotes and sustains behaviors that help an individual maintain motivation to achieve goals. Regulating emotions enables a person to manage emotional experiences effectively. The capacity to regulate learning and emotions are essential skills for law students to help them survive the challenges they encounter in law school.

Keywords: Law School, Law Students, Self-Regulation Learning, Emotion Regulation

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Introduction

Training law students to think and act like lawyers happens in the law school. The legal training entails years of persistence and hard work. The rigors of law school can provide a stimulating and yet stressful climate. Various studies on the rigors of law school, its corresponding stressors and its effect on mental health conditions have been looked into. With that, interventions have been recommended at both the institutional and organizational levels. The aim of this paper is to explore various literature on law students' experience in law school and how regulation strategies would help in managing the difficulties that they would experience along the way. Recommendations would likewise be discussed.

The law school atmosphere may be a daunting and alienating experience for some law students which can make a student question their purpose for pursuing the profession. Research studies indicated that law students are ill-prepared before going to law school in areas of analytical, research, writing and study skills (Bloom, 2013). The competitive nature of law school causes distress among law students exacerbated by the lack and appropriate method of giving feedback (Sheehy et al, 2004). Fear of failure among law students leads to a fixed mindset as a student and as a professional. Having a fixed mindset can be paralyzing, leading to fear of trying new skills in cases of uncertainty (Bishop, 2017). The difficulties in managing academics coupled with the lack of feedback about their performance makes the students' experience in law school challenging which can be exacerbated by a fixed mindset in times of uncertainty.

Whereas, effective and efficient academic strategies adopted in law school leads to exemplary work performance as future lawyers. Working conscientiously on academic tasks, effective organization strategies, regular evaluation of academic performance and personal responsibility translates to the production of excellent work output, effective work management, professional growth and personal improvement respectively (Jarmon, 2011). The challenges that law students will encounter in law school, if they were able to navigate successfully, would train them to be more adept in handling the difficulties that they would encounter as a lawyer in the future. Likewise, this leads to both personal and professional growth.

Aside from academic struggles, law students would also deal with mental health concerns that goes along with their training. Elevations of psychological distress was reported among law students who are in their final in an Australian university (Kelk et.al., 2010). As compared with students of medicine and psychology, law students have significantly higher levels of distress (Leahy et.al., 2010). Depression and anxiety are also correlated with academic demands, career pressure, social isolation and study/life balance whereas life satisfaction is related to career pressure, social isolation and study/life balance discounting academic demands. Feelings of isolation and lack of social connectedness affected well-being (Bergin and Pakenham, 2015). Significant increase in depressive symptoms and health problems were likewise observed among first year law students in an Australian university (Lester et.al., 2011).

The University of Michigan law school found that students' level of depression is comparable to the norms of the general population upon their entry, but the level of emotional distress elevates and persists as they go on with their training. Therefore, persistence of emotional symptoms cannot be merely attributed to the transitioning life in law school which suggests that other factors might be involved. It is noteworthy that levels of distress reported is similar

people who experienced major life trauma such as death of spouse and marital separation (Reifman et.al, 2001).

Declines in psychological need satisfaction and well-being were also observed over the course of 3 years' study in a study done in the United States. Perceived autonomy support buffered the decline in need satisfaction accounting for better wellbeing, higher GPA and better performance in the bar exam (Sheldon and Krieger, 2007)

Fines (2007) emphasized not only identifying, reducing and eliminating stressors in law school but more so helping students manage what cannot be eliminated. There are various factors contributing to psychological distress but still the strongest shield is one's ability to withstand whatever life throws at him.

Methodology

This paper would look into various literature sources on regulation strategies that could be helpful for law students as they navigate their life in law school. Recommendations will be presented as well.

Findings and Conclusion

Assessing student's motivation is an important concept in understanding and enhancing student's learning experience and academic self-regulation is strongly linked to the foundations of self-determination theory (Gomes et al, 2019). Self-determination theory stipulates that students need to have a sense of control and ownership over their learning experience and helping the students understand the purpose of their learning in order to succeed (Svinicki, 2010).

“Self-regulation refers to thoughts, feelings and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals” (Zimmerman, 2000). In a study with high school students, self-regulation moderated the relationship between perceived stress and psychological well-being (Kadzikowska-Wrzosek, 2012). Armstrong and Sanson (2012) emphasized the need to help law students achieve independence and self-regulation strategies in the first year.

Self-regulated learning is a cyclical framework which shows how students manage their behavior, motivation and thinking process as they engage in academic tasks. Self-regulated learners recognize that learning is a constructive process where they take on a more active rather than a passive role in their learning. These types of learners employ strategic learning skills. They are self-starters, they have the ability to effectively set goals, follow through, monitor, evaluate their learning and make the necessary adjustments in order to improve their academic performance (Schwartz, 2008).

Zimmerman (2000) postulated the three phases of self-regulated learning: the forethought phase, the performance phase and the self-reflection phase. The forethought phase consists of the thinking process that a student goes through before engaging in the academic task including the ability to perceive and classify the task, invoke interest, set goals and planning for strategies. The performance phase consists of focusing attention, implementation and self-monitoring. This phase includes the motivational control strategies that the learners employ to sustain their attention. Lastly, the reflection phase consists of being able to evaluate

themselves, identifying the causes of the results, invoking emotional feelings about the result of their performance and making the necessary adjustments (Schwartz, 2008). An effective learner is measured by one's ability to monitor the progress of their learning and making the necessary adjustments (Ertmer & Newby 1996; Bjork et al. 2013). The ability to self-regulate is a strong predictor of academic performance (Pintrich & Degroot, 1990). The goal of self-regulation training is to give the students a sense of ownership and control in their own learning experience (Svinicki, 2010).

Emotion regulation is the ability to manage impulsive and inappropriate behaviors at the onset of an intense emotion (Linehan, 2014). This refers to the ability to influence emotions (Gross, 1998). This can significantly affect one's physical and mental health and difficulties in regulating emotions can contribute to depression and anxiety (Hu et al, 2014). Regulating emotions contributes to one's well-being and over-all functioning (Amazue et al, 2019). This is a skill that needs to be practiced (Nigg, 2016). Urges to act on emotions in times of psychological distress is quite common. Self-awareness helps lawyers deal with the demands of the profession and be efficient in their work and this is an essential component of emotion regulation. In order to effectively regulate distressing emotions among lawyers, the following activities are recommended: engage in regular physical exercise, healthy sleep habits, engage in meditation and mindfulness practices. (Austin et al, 2016). In addition, mindfulness practices allow the person to be aware of thoughts and emotions. This strategy would help students to improve physical and mental health and improve academic performance (Lewinbuk, 2016).

Law school is indeed a challenging experience given the kind of training that law students have to go through. Training law students to adopt regulation strategies, both at the academic and emotional level is an effective strategy to help them navigate the challenges in law school and eventually lead to professional and personal growth and development.

Self-regulated learning involves using the cyclical model as the students intentionally accomplish their academic tasks. This consists of carefully assessing and planning for a given task, consciously maintain and sustaining attention, and objectively assessing their performance so as to make the necessary adjustments. Collaterally, emotional distress may be experienced by law students during their training. Awareness of the ability to regulate emotions by way of adopting a healthy lifestyle and engaging in mindfulness practices would be helpful in managing distressing periods.

A whole school approach to providing awareness, campaign and training programs can be utilized in order to promote these strategies. Institution and faculty buy-in is an essential strategy for this to be effectively carried out. Guidance and counseling programs can likewise be geared towards using this strategy.

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