

ABSTRACT

A Phenomenological Study to Understand the Perceived Impact of Motivational Coaching on the Lived Experiences of Students at an Urban Tutoring Center

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High school students are subjected to rigorous academic testing, which causes exhaustion and burnout in many of them. College entrance exams and district assessments are two examples of high-stakes testing that take place. Burnout caused by high-stakes testing has a negative impact on students and their ability to matriculate into the college of their choice, thereby impeding their academic progression. Students ages 13–18 who are burned out or exhausted are more likely to fail or perform inadequately in school, and this is a growing problem in the learning community (Minzlaff, 2019).

Studies have found a link between high-stakes testing and cases of burnout, which can result in low motivation, exhaustion, stress, and anxiety for those who take part in them.

Burnout, a state of physical and mental exhaustion, is a prevalent issue in society, preventing students from achieving academic success but is preventable. Mentor-mentee relationships are crucial in preventing student burnout. This phenomenological study examined student burnout and highlights the students' perspectives on the mentor and mentee relationship. This study took place at Learnza tutoring center in North Texas that

emphasized motivational coaching. Motivational coaching focuses on resiliency and coping skills, while utilizing motivational interviewing (MI) strategies.

It was possible to gain a better understanding of the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship through students' lived experiences and personal descriptions of stress, anxiety, and burnout, which were combined with a description of mentor support. The Power-Load-Margin Theory developed by Howard McClusky was applied in this study (PLM; McClusky, 1965). The PLM framework served as a guide for this investigation, which demonstrated how balancing Power and Load factors helped to reduce stress. Furthermore, this research looked into potential emotional coping interventions, such as motivational coaching, as a way to better understand and combat stressors in the workplace. It was discovered that students appreciate the mentor-mentee relationship, and that the motivational coaching curriculum assisted students in dealing with stress by providing a calm, supportive, and motivating environment.

Keywords: Motivational coaching, McClusky's theory of Power-Load-Margin theory, community workplace, stress, anxiety, burnout, support, calm mentor-mentee relationships

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A Phenomenological Study to Understand the Perceived Impact of Motivational
Coaching on the Lived Experiences of Students at an Urban Tutoring Center

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MI: Motivational Interviewing

PLM: Power Load Margin theory

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DEDICATION

To my loved ones, including my family and many friends.
To Bobby and Mahjabeen, my devoted parents, whose words of encouragement to
persevere continue to reverberate in my ears.
To my brothers, Nabeel and Zain.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Introduction

High-stakes testing dominates students' lives, affecting their self-esteem and ability to progress to a higher grade or to matriculate into the college of their choice. Students feel pressure to perform solely on merit, which interferes with their learning. Additionally, in the current instructional culture, schools and higher education institutions place heavy emphasis on standardized testing, which is harmful to student academic progress (Long & Robertson, 2016). High-stakes testing pressures leave students with feelings of failure if they perform inadequately, producing grim thoughts of being unsuccessful and rendering students vulnerable in an increasingly competitive academic culture. Studies reveal a connection between an adverse academic environment and the high school student burnout (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009). Subsequently, when students do not balance their daily lives with social and societal pressures, they experience exhaustion leading to burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014).

Burnout is a gradual build-up of stress combined with exhaustion where students reach their limits and are unable to accomplish tasks. Burnout leads to mental health problems, including depression and even suicide (Cramer & Sauer, 2014). The feelings of burnout occur when a student has a lack of motivation, self-esteem, and poor social and emotional health. For instance, these feelings lead to a decrease in productivity and a lack of motivation. Students show signs and symptoms of fatigue as they gradually lose focus and attention to their academic work (Gordon & Reese, 1997). Under the influence of

burnout, students lash out, often feeling alone, helpless, and isolated. Furthermore, this raises concerns for more therapeutic interventions for students as to help them deal with exhaustion leading to burnout.

Coping strategies, including self-compassion, have consistent connections to psychological well-being and the motivational coaching philosophy. When educators, teachers, and mentors model self-compassion, they build deeper relationships, helping anxious students during high-stakes tests (Iskender, 2009). Teaching coping mechanisms such as motivational coaching eases the burden of stress that students, educators, and parents experience. When students learn emotional coping skills, they mitigate burnout's adverse effects (Bardhoshi et al., 2014). Additionally, the bond between a mentor and mentee helps alleviate burnout and aids students with emotionally focusing on coping skills (Blagden, 2012 p. 95).

This study focused on this valuable relationship between the mentor and mentee. The focus of the study was to share student perspectives on motivational coaching. The purpose of this study was to highlight student experiences with motivational coaching at an urban tutoring center in Texas. The result of this study raises awareness of how high-stakes testing induces burnout, adding value to the learning community concerning the adverse effects and dangers of burnout.

Statement of the Problem

Student burnout is a significant problem that impacts high school students and their ability to enroll in the college of their choice. Every year, large numbers of students score low or fail to perform due to stress, anxiety, and burnout induced by high stakes testing. The prevalence and severity of the problem depends on the student's ability to

perform to the best of their ability on these exams. Statistics show that 76% of students have high anxiety levels in a standardized testing environment (Simpson, 2016). The increasingly complex testing environment renders students with daily stress and burnout as they prepare for high-stakes tests.

Stress becomes a part of the students' educational experience as they grow. Students in middle school experience ten high-stakes tests per school year. Then in high school, students have six exams for grades 9–12 with higher stakes involved. Around 62% of high school teachers, 59% of junior high school teachers, and 49% of elementary school teachers agree that “high-stakes testing is a leading source of stress for students” (Simpson, 2016, p.2). These tests generate academic pressure in students, which is “strongly linking to a negative effect on their academic performance” (APA, 2014, p. 1). Moreover, approximately two out of three (67%) public school parents feel their children are spending too much time studying for tests (Simpson, 2016 p. 3). These statistics raised concerns about over-testing and the toxic testing culture that is often utilized to increase funding for schools (Long & Robertson, 2016).

Students become overwhelmed by mandatory testing. Tests such as the state-mandated Texas Success Initiative (TSI) are part of the graduation requirements for students. Similarly, many schools require students to take high-stakes tests in order to receive district and school funding, such as the Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) test. Moreover, college entrance tests such as the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are precursors for college admissions with the student's performance on these exams as predictors for success and

college admissions (Kruger et al., 2007). As a result, these tests create a massive workload for students and have many negative consequences, such as stress.

Stress is the first sign of burnout and comes about when students cannot concentrate on their academic studies (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), high-school students report stress levels during the school year that far exceed healthy stress (APA, 2014, p. 1). The stress students experience in school also correlates with the number of students who fail classes, drop-out, or fall short in meeting or exceeding their performance (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Therefore, these elevated levels of stress have detrimental effects on the students' personal and academic lives.

Larson et al. (2010) argue that the workload on students and the performance requirements throughout the school year is overwhelming, causing negative repercussions. These repercussions take away from the learning process and the student learning experience. During the high-stakes testing season, students have decreasingly available spare time to focus on a more robust curriculum (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018). These negative learning experiences also impede student-teacher professional relationships.

The impact of over-testing creates tension, fear, and doubt in an already fragile student-teacher relationship (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018). Students are afraid of sharing their thoughts due to repercussions from teachers and administrators (Walker, 2014). Educators are over-testing students and students approach testing as another perfunctory process. Complicating matters, the higher the test scores, the more positive recognition

schools receive. Eventually, the importance of the students' scores outweighs their actual learning achievements.

Parents are concerned about their children's well-being, and they become frustrated when students are unable to perform well or articulate their stress levels (Thomson & McLanahan, 2012). Families are concerned that students are being over-tested and that teachers are desensitizing them to all types of testing. In addition, Knekta and Sundström (2019) argue that a good parent's role is to reduce the importance of high-stakes testing. Parents and students agree that high-stakes standardized testing takes up too much time in schools (Simpson, 2016). Yet, families devote a significant amount of time and money to preparing their children for academic success (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018).

Strauss (2014) found that students have trouble explaining their anxiety about high-stakes testing to their parental support systems. Beyond the family's traditional support system, students confide their fears in someone, both academically and personally, with individuals such as teachers and mentors. This reliable support system offers students hope and guidance. Students without this support system often turn to social media, drugs, and alcohol to cope with the harmful effects of high-stakes testing (Pariat et al., 2014). Mentorship provides students with professional socialization and personal support to deal with both academic and personal issues.

In conclusion, student burnout is a significant problem relating to high school students' ability to enroll in college, maintain mental well-being, and achieve high academic achievement. Over testing desensitizes students to tests, and the links between testing and stress become disastrous for students. Thus, the need to look more

intentionally at student burnout is a critical issue in society. The research that exists on the phenomenon focuses on the problem without attempting to address how to support students. To date, there has been little qualitative research on students experiencing the stresses of high stakes testing while proactively seeking a support system, mentorship, and coping skills. This study focused on students enrolled at Learnza, an urban tutoring academy, which provided support and mentorship to students seeking supplemental academic instruction. The students' perceptions and details regarding their struggles with academic stress and mentorship are topics for the learning community to discuss, address, and understand.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study examined the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of high school students on the mentor-mentee relationship as it impacts student burnout at an urban tutoring center. This study raised awareness of the dangers of burnout and suggested the potential positive impact of incorporating motivational coaching practices during high-stakes testing preparation. The results of this study have the potential to guide the research community in understanding how students experience burnout and bring awareness of the inherent dangers of burnout. Additionally, this study added to the literature by suggesting solutions to combat student burnout.

This study's primary research question was: What are student perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship at Learnza tutoring center? This study also investigated two secondary research questions. First, what are student perceptions of their motivational coaching experiences at Learnza tutoring center? Second, how is

McClusky's (1963) concept of Power-Load-Margin Theory reflected in student descriptions of motivational coaching experiences?

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized McClusky's Power-Load-Margin theory (PLM; McClusky, 1965). PLM theory discusses how balancing power as a person continues to age and develop is vital as life stressors come about. The basic formula behind the PLM theory promotes balance and resilience where a marginal increase in Power factors reduces Load factors (McClusky, 1963, p. 1). Howard McClusky (1963) hypothesizes that adults who experience more influential factors in life navigate situations better when a new stressful stimulus arises. Higher Power factors provide reserve capacity to handle load demands. Load factors that the Power-Load Margin theory discusses include external factors, family, career, and socio-economic status (SES). Furthermore, internal factors include both personal and professional goals, along with a person's self-worth. Power factors include physical, social, mental, economic, and general skills knowledge (Trautman, 2004).

McClusky's Power-Load Margin theory informed this research study underscoring the need to understand how students experience motivational coaching to combat testing stress and burnout. The Power-Load Margin theory encourages students to regain control of their academic situation and build more tolerance, reliance, and Power (McClusky, 1963). McClusky's method uses a positive approach to deal with adult life and promoting education and lifelong learning. Since the 1960s, the theory has shown that both academic and personal growth are crucial factors needed in order for people to gain control over their daily lives.

Research Design and Methods

This phenomenological study explained the meaning of different individuals' lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon under investigation (Liu, 2008). Phenomenological research is distinctive from other qualitative research forms because it attempts to understand the essence of the phenomenon from an individual's perspective and experience (Eddles-Hirsch, 2013).

The study's phenomenological approach allowed me to focus on the experiences of the students at Learnza and sought to comprehend the cruxes of individual experiences. Likewise, phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that centers on the commonality of people's experiences within groups (Penley, 2018). The primary aim of this approach was to understand the perspectives and experiences of students receiving support at Learnza.

Definition of Key Terms

Anxiety: The time spent on studying for a test and the high-stakes consequences of the analysis contribute to stress, taking a toll on the student, developing into test anxiety (Simpson, 2016).

Burnout: Includes an acclimation of stress, anxiety, and exhaustion. Burnout causes depersonalization effects, and inefficacy or reduced personal growth of an individual (Walburg, 2014).

Coaching: Guidance and mentoring to help the mentee develop reliance, resistance, and set goals (Robertson, 2016).

High-stakes Testing: A standardized test that collaborates teaching strategies for student learning, but a lot is riding on these tests, they also often narrow the curriculum trivializing education (Christian, 2010).

Load: Load factors are the demand made on self and society, external tasks, such as family, work, and living, affect a person's ability to cope (Trautman, 2004).

Motivation Coaching: Achievement-oriented performance when an individual's actions cause failure or success in standards of excellence (Atkinson, 1964).

Motivational Interviewing: "Therapeutic relationship based on Carl Roger's humanistic theory in which the client is encouraged through directive and self- motivational statements" (CSAT, 1999, p. 3).

Power: Power Factors are self, family, religiosity, spirituality, body, extra-familial relationships, and environment, all of which play a role in balancing life (Hiemstra, 2003).

Resilience: The ability to cope and overcome demanding situations and adapting to adverse environments (Walburg, 2014).

Self-regulated Learning: Learning life skills to effectively grow as learners, all while exhibiting effective learning strategies to grow and develop through goal setting (Hiemstra, 2003).

Stress: A response to a stimulus evokes physical and mental tension (Heissel et al., 2018)

Toxic Testing: Results in students only taught for school profits, revenue, and accolades, not individual student needs, or active learning (Robertson, 2016).

Conclusion

High-stakes testing promotes an inadequate toxic culture where students are ill-prepared to face daily challenges (Long & Robertson, 2016). This high-stakes testing has caused students, parents, and educators to question the usefulness of standardized testing. Furthermore, the adverse effects of high-stakes testing on students leads to burnout, which causes both physical and psychological illnesses. This study explored how motivational coaching, and the mentee and mentor relationship helps alleviate burnout.

This study used the PLM theory, which encourages balancing power and load factors. Moreover, this study discussed motivational coaching and examined its usefulness to reinforce positive behavior among students. Chapter One discussed the concept of burnout and prevalence of high-stakes testing and introduced motivational coaching. Chapter Two surveyed the literature related to high-stakes testing and burnout. The following literature review argues that despite the vast amount of literature on high-stakes testing, there is little known regarding how motivational coaching and mentorship can support students dealing with stress and burnout.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter Two surveys the literature to demonstrate the importance of studying the adverse effects of burnout concerning high-stakes testing. The adverse effects of burnout impact students physically, psychologically, and academically. Despite the vast amount of literature on high-stakes testing, a gap exists in understanding how mentoring and motivational coaching helps alleviate stress and burnout related to high stakes testing. First, this literature review examines four scholarly conversations with a section that explores high-stakes testing and the stress and anxiety leading to depression that stems from the high-stakes testing. Second, this chapter investigates the effects of burnout to demonstrate the fierce urgency of understanding the negative impact burnout has among students. Third, this literature review examines motivational coaching, coping strategies, as well as the mentor and mentee relationship to address the problems of burnout. Fourth, this literature review examines McClusky's Power-Load-Margin Theory (1963) and its potential to prevent burnout. These sections individually investigate the literature to complete a picture of what students experience when they are part of the high-stakes testing culture.

High-Stakes Testing

High-stakes tests have been around for decades as benchmark indicators of student and school performance. The following section argues that high-stakes tests'

initial design was to help students reach academic standards but have, unfortunately, become inaccurate predictors of their abilities. “High-stakes testing was first prevalent in education during the 1960s with Title I programs” (Walburg, 2014, p. 34). These programs provided federal aid to schools in lower-income neighborhoods, helping them progress academically alongside their classmates as equal counterparts (Shepard, 2003). Moreover, high-stakes tests aimed to educate students and give them a baseline in literacy. Fast forward to the present, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test scores and academic standards hold school districts accountable for low-achieving students.

The high-stakes testing culture focuses on teaching to the test, and the financial incentives schools and districts receive (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Long & Robertson, 2016). High-stakes tests have since become closely intertwined with monetary and non-monetary rewards in school districts, thereby influencing the role they play in modern education. Public reporting of high stakes scores leads to both non-monetary and monetary rewards and consequences for academic performance (Supovitz, 2009). Thus, rethinking school funding, incentives, and outcomes for standardized testing is vital to make sure school correctly use finances. Examples of non-monetary consequences for having public test scores are families moving away from areas of low-test scores or society viewing schools with low test scores as “bad” or “failing” schools (Supovitz, 2009 p. 214). High-stakes tests generate monetary rewards productizing funding for school districts when students pass state-mandated tests. Currently, high-stakes tests generate revenue for schools and test makers; testing materials alone sold for \$700 million (about \$2 per person in the US) in 2008 (Supovitz, 2009). Schools that receive

high scores overall receive more funding than schools that report lower than average scores. Frequently, schools lose funding when scores are not at state standards (Supovitz, 2009). These financial incentives have become the central focus of schools for the past few decades. Lazarín (2014) questions the validity of high-stakes tests, “these exams are not practical predictors of actual learning and just ways for school districts to make money” (Lazarín, 2014, p. 1). Thus, the cost of high-stakes tests outweighs the rewards they might bring and the stress they cause students.

High-stakes testing has become a highly tasking part of the college application process. Moon et al. (2007) claim that students depend on high-stakes tests throughout their years in high school to gain college admissions. Tests such as the American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) make students believe that high standardized test scores are the only way to get into the college of their choice. Thousands of students take these kinds of tests each year with many of these tests as a requirement to graduate high-school. In Texas, high-school graduation requirements include passing five end-of-course exams in Math, English, Biology, and U.S. History (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2020). Hence, students depend on high stakes tests for academic advancement.

Assessments are useful for improving teaching and learning, and they help identify where educational institutions should invest resources to help students succeed. Passing high-stakes exams has essential benefits for students, such as scholarships and admissions, into high-ranking colleges (Marchant, 2004). However, the current testing culture requires vast amounts of time; these include eight tests a year and twenty hours of classroom time spent on testing students, in turn decreasing their actual learning

(Waldman, 2015). The time and money spent on testing also deplete valuable school resources for students. Thus, the current culture of high-stakes testing today is established around teaching to the test.

A lack of ample time to understand and learn information in the classroom, along with schools measuring students' learning based on test scores, creates stress, apprehension, and anxiety for students. Walburg (2014) argues that high-stakes tests are the most straightforward predictor of success, but the caveat is the anxiety these tests cause for most students (Lazarín, 2014).

Oftentimes, the time spent preparing for standardized tests is tedious, taking months of preparation and dedication from the student (Lazarín, 2014). "This stressful time usually takes place from January to April, with students experiencing a wide range of high and low emotions" (Simpson, 2016, p. 3). Students experience a spectrum of raw emotions of anger, disappointment, and resentment, continually comparing their scores with their peers. Teachers spend ample time preparing learners for these tests. Students who are unable to spend time learning and engaging with peers tend to experience a huge social-emotional effect on their mental well-being because they spend less time being social with peers and more time testing (Lazarín, 2014). Thus, when students take multiple standardized tests in the classroom, they have an apprehension of learning due to the stress they experience.

The amount of time studying for high-stakes tests correlates with the learner's stress levels, often overlapping with harsh testing conditions. In this regard, Larson et al. (2010) argue that the testing conditions influence students negatively by decreasing their confidence, perceptions, and accuracy regarding testing (Larson et al., 2010). The Parent-

Teacher Association (PTA) for New York State found that 75% of students with test-related anxiety have a worsening of symptoms in a high-stakes testing situation (Heissel et al., 2018). Fleege et al. (1992) question whether both the test and the testing conditions cause stress for the students (Fleege et al., 1992). These high-stakes tests take hours to complete with only a few increments of breaks in-between.

Additionally, testing conditions include small rooms, hours of waiting, poor lighting, and lack of accommodations for students (Fleege et al., 1992). High-stakes testing leads to higher anxiety in students. This disquiet feeling brings other negative symptoms to the learner. High-stakes tests are overwhelming and reduce a student's sense of self-worth, making students feel their score on the exam predicts the trajectory of their academic careers. Students who score low on a test feel they are failures. Low test scores then correlate with students' self-esteem (Hiemstra, 2003). Furthermore, "low self-esteem damages a student's ability to learn effectively" (Simpson, 2016, p. 16). Lack of self-esteem damages a student's sense of self as a learner from an early age leaving the impression only one way to learn exists, which is to score well on a standardized exam (Simpson, 2016). Simpson (2016) again notes, "High-stakes testing puts students in a negative way of viewing themselves, their skills, and their contributions" (Long & Robertson, 2016, p. 1). In addition, students lack a positive belief in themselves due to their low-test scores (Simpson, 2016). Because of the stress during high-stakes testing, their self-esteem and self-worth begin to suffer.

Teaching to the test leads to passive learning when educators lecture students and forget to engage them in the process. Likewise, passive learning is prevalent during high-stakes testing due to the narrowing of the curriculum to make ample time to cram

students for these tests (Christian, 2010). Passive learning makes students lose interest and feel education has no value and is just a mundane task (Long & Robertson, 2016). Thus, teaching to the test is detrimental to students learning and retention.

Stress and Anxiety

When analyzing the literature on the complex issue of stress, the dangers become apparent due to the natural, physical, emotional, and mental responses of stress. Stress is a natural response to stimuli. However, substantial amount of stress is detrimental to an individual's physical and mental health (Winters, 2016). Physical stress is fatigue with a mix of physiological symptoms, while emotional stress is mental exhaustion brought on by a stressor. Consequently, a stressful situation over an extended period escalates into chronic physical and emotional pain. This chronic stress and anxiety can lead to depression and even lead to suicide (Winters, 2016). Stress occurs when an individual's demands outweigh their resources; thus, students experience frustration, panic, and fear of failure due to stress (Kruger et al., 2007). Lesser amounts of stress have a positive relationship with learning performance; however, stress overload negatively affects students' learning, physical health, and well-being (LePine et al., 2004). Consequently, stress is a multifarious issue that causes a microcosm of emotion for students affecting all aspects of their lives.

Additionally, when a stressful condition arises in a school setting, students feel overwhelming confusion. LePine et al. (2004) found stress occurs in a hostile environment by the transfer of challenging tasks and passive instruction without an educator's explanation. Oftentimes this passive learning occurs when a student receives minimum instructions with no feedback or guidance. Passive learning causes students to

suffer since they are not engaging academically in their learning or actively taking part in enrichment (LePine et al., 2004).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) high school students ages 13–17 report stress levels far above the healthy normal average for teens, which is even higher than adults 18 and older. According to a 2014 survey by APA, stress is near-ubiquitous among teenagers: 83% of the teens cite the school as a significant or noteworthy source of stress. Additionally, 69% of teens report their career post-high school graduation, or going to the college of their choice, along with personal financial concerns, contributes to their stress (APA, 2014). These results demonstrate how stress starts at a critical stage in adolescence and gradually increases in adulthood if not addressed, becoming a prevalent issue (APA, 2014). Furthermore, students have difficulty verbalizing their feelings about stress due to the complexity of the emotion (APA, 2014). In a recent study conducted by the American Psychological Association, 36% of teens report feeling nervous or anxious, while 31% feel overwhelmed, and 30% report feeling depressed or sad (APA, 2014).

Stress is a prevalent problem affecting multiple levels of students' psyche (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Stress manifests in both physical and psychological symptoms, causing great pain and discomfort (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). The physical symptoms of stress include aches, fatigue, pains, and insomnia, these symptoms are continuously exacerbated as the stress becomes overpowering. The psychological symptoms of stress include lack of concentration, restlessness, and loss of motivation (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). Excess stress also physically affects the brain. Thus, the problem of stress is prevalent not only because of the physical damage, but the chemical reaction in

the brain keeps individuals from retaining information and gradually deteriorating their psyche (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Sometimes, an excessive amount of stress leads to anxiety.

High-stakes testing often results in fear, loathing, and a sense of failure, eventually undermining any future academic progression (Lazarín, 2014). Prominent levels of stress arise, making students feel derisory, and a lack of healthy coping skills causes emotional stress. Furthermore, students' burden increases due to prioritizing time management skills and balancing heavy workloads alongside these exams (Fleege et al., 1992). Repercussions of not learning adequate coping skills result in a student's level of stress and anxiety growing into somatic system disorders (Murberg & Bru, 2007).

Triplett and Barksdale (2005) mention high-stakes tests increase test anxiety among students. "Anxiety is a natural process, but excessive strain becomes an invisible disability" (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012, p. 35). The comorbidity of chronic psychological and emotional pain is a result of test anxiety. According to Simpson (2016) "high stakes testing causes severe anxiety and a spectrum of symptoms such as vomiting and loss of bladder and bowel control" (p. 7). "Despite the severity of these symptoms, these physical and emotional symptoms are not a unique attribute of the high stakes testing culture" (Long & Robertson, 2016 p. 12).

The solutions and coping skills needed to combat these stressors include mindfulness, sleep, music, and exercise as strategies to mitigate the effects of high-stakes testing. Students must learn how to develop these positive coping skills and employ techniques that guide them in combating stress. "Researchers argue that by changing the

testing culture and altering the teachers' role in exam preparation, exam related anxiety decreases for students" (Triplett & Barksdale, 2005, p. 237).

Analyzing the literature shows the impact of stress on students. Elevated levels of academic stress, test anxiety, and exhaustion worsens, leading to depression and exacerbated anxiety. Anxiety includes psychological and physiological over-arousal, somatic symptoms, tension, fear, and dread (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Anxiety is the constant, persistent worrying about what happens regardless if a stressor or trigger is present. Anxiety creates paralyzed thinkers and prominent levels of chronic anxiety. Chronic anxiety is an overabundance of constant worrying, fear, nervousness, and tension. The symptoms paralyze students and are excessive and deliberating (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Faigel (1991) suggests test anxiety disables students because of the fear of cognitive dysfunction or functional imprisonment, which happens during an exam. Furthermore, cognitive dysfunction is mental impairment, while functional impairment is a disabled like mental and physical state (Faigel, 1991). This cognitive dysfunction then leads to more changes in the student's mental state and psychological well-being.

Certain environmental factors in a school setting amplify the impact of stress and anxiety. A stressful condition occurs when students experience passive learning by docile instruction from an unmotivated instructor and a hostile learning environment. Stress has a detrimental impact on a student's academic achievement, and students' ability to succeed in school diminishes, and they end up with a lack of confidence, self-worth, and with a poor academic record of accomplishment (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011). Stress increases as students experience the rigor of academics; thus, educators must be proactive in supporting students, preventing fatigue, exhaustion, depression, and suicidal incidents

(Walburg, 2014). This buildup of stress leads to burnout, which may academically immobilize a student's progress

In conclusion, stress causes both mental and physical symptoms. While a little mental and physical distress is natural, an overwhelming amount is unhealthy. A permanent change in the student's psychological thought process is dangerous for learners because it affects their personality and mental well-being (Bilge et al., 2014). Excessive worrying contributes to tension, fear, and dread and worsens to chronic anxiety and depression. Excessive worrying hinders a student's progression within the school, leading students to fall further behind. Furthermore, the literature on stress shows the complex issue increases as students experience rigorous academic environments, high-stakes testing, and passive instruction.

Burnout

Burnout results from a combination of prolonged stress and excessive exhaustion and is a complex issue affecting students' academic progression, college admissions, social well-being, and mental health. Kuperminc et al. (2019) define burnout as an escalation of stress and anxiety. Burnout occurs when a lack of motivation, low self-esteem, or poor social and emotional health, leads to a decrease in productivity in the student's daily activities (Gordon & Reese, 1997). The following section argues burnout is a prevalent issue in society with adverse effects on both the students' academic and personal lives.

The existence of burnout in the learning community is a prevalent issue because many students suffer unnecessarily from its symptoms. Burnout affects students' academic progression by decreasing their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Walburg,

2014). Furthermore, major cities in the United States see more than 50% of their student population leave school without graduating due to the exhaustion they experience in harsh school programs (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006). Schools have a lack of resources to engage students who deal with burnout. Burnout causes students to drop-out of school because they are too exhausted to continue their studies (Walburg, 2014).

The development of burnout happens in phases. Hiemstra (2003) argues stress is the first phase of burnout. The three phases include exhaustion, stagnation, and frustration. The loss of motivation, lack of energy, inability to concentrate, and lower grades further fuel the students' development of burnout resulting in psychological clusters that have students fall into maladaptive mental states. Additionally, factors such as significant course load, lack of sleep, no social interactions, and pessimistic behavior lead to the development of burnout (Walburg, 2014).

Burnout has both short and long-term effects. The short-term effects of burnout are exhaustion, loss of sleep, and appetite (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009). In addition, the long-term effects of burnout result in fatigue, cynicism, and exhaustion towards schools (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009). Furthermore, the social ramifications of burnout have both a short and a long-term effect. These include corollaries, such as spending less time with friends and family. Gates et al. (2007) show burnout precures low self-esteem, poor social and emotional health, and lack of productivity in academic life. Burnout also cause students to feel immobile, lethargic, and have other adverse feelings about themselves. These negative mindsets arise in students when they exceed their threshold of coping, experiencing a crippling degree of burnout (Kruger et al., 2007). Students undergoing burnout are on the verge of emotional collapse, and their feelings of exhaustion and

mental prostration are severe (Maslach et al., 2001). Thus, the symptoms of burnout are penitent to grasp in addressing the dangers of burnout in the learning community.

The dangers of burnout cause students to lose focus on their goals in furthering their academic careers. Likewise, another danger of burnout results from a student's lack of resiliency skills, school workload, internal resources depleting their comprehensive resources for stability (Berger & Waidyaratne-Wijeratne, 2019). Burnout is also dangerous in causing students to lose focus and perform everyday tasks in an unreasonable time frame (Kruger et al., 2007). Thus, the dangers of burnout are the lost vitality, feeling of listlessness, and loss of purpose are all serious concerns (Walburg, 2014).

Lin and Huang (2014) argue addressing the effects of burnout on mental health help students develop potential protective factors. The research also mentions screening, prevention, and intervention opportunities help students identify suffering from burnout and direct them to a variety of solutions (Larson et al., 2010). Likewise, correctly identifying early signs of burnout, such as exhaustion, aids with recovery and prevention. Recovery and prevention lessen the effects of burnout.

In conclusion, the paralysis of burnout starts with the accumulation of stress and exhaustion and gradually worsen to depression and even suicide. Thus, burnout increases problems of anxiety and depression, along with an increase in somatic indicators, making it difficult for the student to achieve tasks, focus, and reduces performance (Walburg, 2014). Diagnosing the effects, indications, and dangers that come with burnout help students with many things, from their academic careers to mental health. Consequently, lower levels of burnout occur if teachers provide support to the student through positive

motivation (Walburg, 2014). A teacher or mentor provide a connection with students, thereby benefitting and motivating students in their educational careers.

Motivational Coaching

Motivational coaching entails resiliency training and compassion skill-building assisting individuals in high-stress situations. These situations include life events and transitions from high school to college. A basic principle of motivational coaching is the motivational interview (MI) in which coaches teach their designated protégés self-compassion and mindfulness training (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Cramer and Sauer (2014) discuss motivational coaching bringing balance back into an individual's life by building meaningful relationships. When educators, teachers, or mentors model compassion skills, anxious and nervous students make deeper associations with their coaches. The following section examines motivational coaching along with the significant findings in the literature on the mentor and mentee relationship.

Motivational coaching has a multifaceted use in several different fields, converging on collaboration, purposefulness, and practicality. Motivational coaching training is prevalent in several professions, such as healthcare, academics, and business (Cramer & Sauer, 2014). Motivational coaching, specifically in education, promotes academic success, resiliency skills, viewing clients holistically, and encouraging moral decorum. Motivational coaching is a new practice with a fundamental philosophy of moral etiquette “the client is neither broken nor in need of fixing but is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole” (Newnham-Kanas et al., 2011, p. 10). Miller and Moyers (2006) define the concept of “change talk” as any self-expressive language that creates an argument for change, and “sustain talk” as a person's argument for not changing and

maintaining their behavior. Thus, during the interview process, the coach provides questions in which the student replies in using phrases in change talk, including “I will,” “I could,” “I need to” (Miller & Moyers, 2006 p. 16). These statements help motivate and promote personal insights and the capability and possibility of change. The coach helps individuals get through obstacles.

The process of Motivational Interviewing (MI) builds professional and personal goals by creating a plan of action, developing a vision of future goals, and following up on the clients’ progress to create more social-emotional health (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Motivational coaching has value in promoting moral qualities that “strengthen the commitment to a specific goal by increasing personal motivation and exploring a person’s reasons for change within their atmosphere of acceptance and compassion to change” (Miller & Rollnick, 2013, p. 29). MI builds emotional and psychological growth and guides clients to become more loving, compassionate, and positive.

Motivational Coaching and the use of MI are non-confrontational, client-centered techniques for promoting behavioral change via the resolution of ambivalence and the utilization of intrinsic motivation (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Motivational coaching also promotes autonomy, the independence to self-govern and act in one’s interests, and visualization of a belief of change of normative patterns in an individual through its principles. Autonomy helps individuals make decisions holistically while visualizing their goals and seeking out change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Motivational coaching acknowledges the autonomy found in the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of clients while nurturing a collaborative partnership with the coach and the client (CSAT, 1999).

Motivational coaches often use the five MI principles, emphasizing the need of empowering people to achieve their objectives (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). “These five principles are empathy, discrepancy, avoiding confrontation, encouraging self-efficacy, and promoting optimism” (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment [CSAT], 1999 p. 1). According to the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (1999) empathetic individuals are better able to understand others’ needs and listen to each other in a nonjudgmental manner. Additionally, discrepancy allows the motivational interviewer to help the client identify damaging inconsistencies in their life (CSAT, 1999). Keen awareness of discrepancies thus helps the client form a motivation for change. Arguments are counterintuitive for change, thus avoiding confrontation allows the client to see their coach as an advocate and partner. Additionally, self-efficacy is the self-confidence and determination to accomplish tasks set by the client (CSAT, 1999). MI is a style of communication combining many different principles and approaches to engage and build relationships on trust and honesty. This “Trust is a foundational skill of MI helping form long-lasting relationships and propels students to enjoy the learning experience” (CSAT, 1999, p. 3). Educators can be a vast resource when it comes to MI, providing strong relationships and support to students experiencing stress.

An example of a motivational coaching program is Co-Active Life Coaching (CALC). This collaborative interaction between the coach and client is dependent on the client’s assumption, strengths, and capabilities to determine what is best for them (Newnham-Kanas et al., 2011). This collaboration between student and educator helps the client learn how to strengthen their resolve and become more capable of making the

right decisions and choosing appropriate actions (Kimsey-House et al., 2010). These actions include flexibility, productivity, and a sense of common purpose.

Motivational coaching capitalizes on the power of relationships in the learning process. Relationships help student learning and promote and provide a reliable methodology for building foundational life skills (Cronin & Armour, 2017). These life skills are valuable not just for high stakes testing but for college and the workplace (Snyder et al., 2012). School administrators and educators that prioritize meaningful relationships with students help them with their studies through the coaching philosophy. Thus, students who have valuable relationships become productive scholars, and once they graduate, they become productive members of society.

Collaborative relationships have a large positive effect on the learner. A mentor-mentee relationship encourages collaboration among students and promotes positive coping strategies. Mentorship encompasses teaching students how to successfully implement valuable skills such as vivid dialogue and active learning. Active learning is interaction, engagement, and dialogue between classmates and the instructor (Horn, 2019). These skills are physiognomies held by mentors, who encourage and advise the mentee on their academic and personal setbacks in an active learning manner. The purpose of mentorship guides and influences students through the motivational coaching processes by asking detailed questions, providing feedback, and creating a positive environment of counseling. Mentorship employs a one-on-one tutoring approach to guide students with a curriculum based on each student's unique learning style (Horn, 2019). Mentors utilize the learning style with their mentees.

A vital component of this mentor-mentee relationship is empathy. Empathy provides a practical approach to inspiring students to be adaptable to the thoughts and feelings of others (Lyons et al., 2017). Empathy is essential when motivating students since it helps create connections in the classroom and allows students to understand their peers' thoughts and feelings (Lyons et al., 2017). Empathetical teaching promotes communication, and goal setting where the mentor and student are equal (Horn, 2019)

An active mentor and mentee relationship promotes the critical process of self-regulated learning and reflective practices (Frey & Alman, 2003). Frey and Alman (2003) discuss self-regulated learners who set both short- and long-term goals using specific tools to gauge performance. These tools include communication, collaboration, and creativity (Frey & Alman, 2003). This self-regulated learning and self-confidence is essential for the students' development. Students who have strong self-regulated learning skills pay attention and limit their distractions in the classroom (Frey & Alman, 2003). The literature on self-regulated learning also mentions adopting the reflective practice to shift the tutor training curriculum from a utilitarian approach emphasizing student's professional development and student-centered development (Walburg, 2014). Adopting a professional developmental approach allows teachers to learn new education styles, collaboration with other educators, and, finally, a new robust way of instruction.

In conclusion, this section discusses the basic concepts of motivational coaching, the multi-disciplinary nature, and then finally, the importance of motivational coaching in education. Motivational coaching fosters long-lasting student-teacher relationships. Additionally, the positive outcomes by building on one-on-one rapport with emphasis on mastering specific skills focusing on motivational interviewing (MI). MI serves as a tool

to guide students in building resiliency and coping skills. The essence of mentorship emphasizes building bonds through “an empathic, supportive, yet directive, counseling style providing conditions under which positive change occurs during motivational practices” (CSAT, 1999, p. 3). Frey and Alman (2003) argue the benefits of MI include adaptivity and applicability in social and cognitive psychology and in self-regulated learning. Motivational Coaching (MC) is a viable option in helping students cope with the stress and anxiety of high-stakes tests.

Power Load Margin Theory

Howard McClusky’s (1963) Power Load Margin theory (PLM) explains resources (Power) an individual must possess to offset the demands of life (Load), thus bringing balance back to the individual. The PLM theory formula is $\text{Load/Power} = \text{Margin}$, in which M stands for margin, L stands for load, and P stands for power (Main, 1979). As the formula suggests, when the load increases, it correlates with the lower levels of power (Trautman, 2004). McClusky’s PLM theory is the quintessential theory for the health and well-being of adults, focusing on developing and fostering life-long learning and educational skills (Hiemstra, 2003). According to McClusky’s framework, education is the catalyst guiding an individual’s resources to handle life challenges. The PLM theory also provides valuable lifelong learning skills as a coping mechanism (McClusky, 1965).

The essence of PLM is the balance in an individual’s professional and personal relationships, or the societal demands of life and the resilience of the individual to overcome adversity (Trautman, 2004). Balance means having the power to control one’s situation, while resiliency is the mental toughness to recover from stressful situations (McClusky, 1965). PLM theory focuses extensively on coping strategies such as physical

exercise, health, wellness, and a baseline of education. PLM allows the person to invest in life expansion projects, self-growth, and to learn new experiences (Weiman, 1984). At the same time, the use of the PLM theory develops through various pressures and demands during the lifespan.

Reserve margin helps individuals tackle the Load part of the PLM framework helping individuals fulfill their potential. Individuals create a considerable reserve margin to meet unforeseen tasks by having reserve power. A large power reserve allows individuals to take risks, engage in exploratory activities, and deal with stressful situations (Hiemstra, 2003). A surplus of margin infuses a substantial reserve power back into the individual's life (Weiman, 1984).

Explicitly focusing on the concept of power in the PLM theory shows individuals with substantial amounts of power have a higher chance of dealing with pressures of life. Furthermore, harnessing power factors as energy resources is crucial to young adults' success as they grow to take on more challenging life tasks. Harnessing power helps regain control and create energy resources (McClusky, 1963). Thus, a significant energy reserve means more power factors expanding an individual's control over their daily lives (McClusky, 1965). In this context, having a high margin means the individual is in control of their resources; on the contrary, a low margin indicates the adult is under stress, exhaustion, and fatigue, unable to fulfill or live up to their true potential (Weiman, 1984).

Power is the resource to cope with the load or pressures of life. Thus, power factors help individuals' live life in balance. Power factors include self, family, religiosity, spirituality, body, extra-familial relationships, and environment, all of which

play a role in harmonizing life (Hiemstra, 2003). Likewise, load factors are the demand for self and society, external tasks, such as family, work, and living, affecting a person's ability to survive. Moreover, to have balance means to have power or the ability to have control over the demands of life. When an unpredictable situation arrives, the individual's reserve power helps the mental stamina address the issue, bringing back equilibrium in an individual's life.

PLM theory emphasizes using coping skills to balance life. These examples include resiliency skills individuals need to combat life stressors. According to PLM theory, an overload of negative factors, such as an exam, relationship, and financial issues, causes an individual to reach a breaking point due to the lack of reserve margin. The solution, according to McClusky is education. Education, particularly in postsecondary education is the only equalizer, and it guides students to understand how to balance their power and load successfully (Trautman, 2004). McClusky did extensive research in adult learning, with emphasis on education being of immense importance in increasing individuals' resources of margin. Thus, resources for margin puts the power in the hands of the individual to bear the load of life (McClusky, 1965).

Expanding on the PLM theory and identifying strengths and weaknesses, Joanne Stevenson (1982) in the 1980s developed the Margin-in-Life scale (MIL). The MIL scale assists in identifying power factors and helps students learn effectively how to keep life in equilibrium (Weiman, 1984). The MIL approach helps adult learners manage stress and anxiety by showing them where they lack resources (Weiman, 1984). An example of the MIL scale includes emergency medicine doctors and remediation protocols to help individuals deal with the burnout they experience due to traumatic situations in the

emergency room (Kalynych, 2010). The MIL scale puts PML theory into practice by creating tangible measures to help individuals live fulfilling lives. “The MIL scale has six categories: body and physical health, self-concept, close relationships, spirituality, extra-familial relationships, and non-people environments” (Weiman, 1984, p. 6). The MIL scale provides individuals with the necessary tools to fight daily life (Quinn, 2017). The MIL scale is a practical application of the PLM theory.

Balancing power and load creates margin, which is a surplus of power to deal with life stressors. Everyday stressors are daily life tasks or inputs using energy; thus, PLM is a series of inputs and outputs that happen throughout an individual’s daily life. Inputs are the tasks themselves, while the outputs are the reserve power to deal with the daily tasks. The philosophy of PML gives power back to the individual, while the MIL (Margin in Life) scale increases power by harnessing education and knowledge to accomplish tasks (Weiman, 1984). Harnessing power factors as energy resources are crucial to the success of young adults as they grow and take on challenges in life, power helps them regain control and creates energy resources. These energy resources provide more power reserves, allowing individuals to take higher risks and engage in exploratory activities, thus learning how to handle challenges (Hiemstra, 2003).

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the purpose of high-stakes tests was initially for good, they now have negative repercussions on students’ learning, emotional and psychological health. According to the literature presented in Chapter Two, the impact of stress and anxiety on students further progresses to burnout. The current testing culture causes stress and anxiety that manifests into chronic issues. This study emphasizes the dangers of toxic

high-stakes testing culture and its negative consequences on students. The culture and practice of high-stakes testing have unexplored impacts on students' overall performance and lifespan. This study addresses supports for these issues and contributed to the scholarly dialog about the relationship between high-stakes testing, burnout, and the potential positive impact of the student-mentor relationship within this environment.

This phenomenological study utilized the Power-Load-Margin theory (PLM). The PLM theory guided this study in exploring the mentor and mentee relationship and in understanding the students' perspectives on motivational coaching. Motivational coaching encourages positive behavior among students, and this study explored how the use of mentoring and motivational coaching assisted in alleviating stress and burnout. Chapter Three explains the procedures of the current study in detail, including a description of the research design, data collection, source, and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter explained how a toxic high-stakes testing environment promotes stress and anxiety that can lead to burnout. This burnout affects students' achievement, disrupts their mental well-being, school performance, and personal lives. Specifically, this Problem of Practice focused on students' perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship and how students used mentorship strategies to create defense mechanisms to combat stressful situations as they go through the high-stakes testing environment. These defense mechanisms (Power) supply positive reinforcement by fostering communication skills to help students progress academically and alleviate burnout (Load), which arises from prolonged exposure to stress. Seeking balance (Margin) occurs as part of the PLM theory, which helps combat burnout and has guided this study and informed the research questions.

There is limited qualitative research looking into students' experiences with high-stakes testing and their ability to seek out adequate resources or support systems to cope. This study focused on students who enrolled in an urban tutoring center where a mentor provided students with guidance and motivational instruction and support. This support provided students with strategies for working through their academic struggles. The study focused on the students' experiences. This phenomenological study examined the collective feelings, thoughts, and experiences of high-school students concerning the mentor-mentee relationship at a Learnza tutoring center.

This study explored the following primary research questions: What are the student perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship at Learnza tutoring center? This study investigated two secondary research questions. First, what are student perceptions of their motivational coaching experience at Learnza tutoring center? Second, how is McClusky's (1963) concept of Power-Load-Margin Theory reflected in student descriptions of motivational coaching experiences?

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

This section discloses my perspective as the principal investigator, my relationship with Learnza, the community workplace setting, and explains my positionality and connection to academic and motivational coaching. The selection of this topic was inspired by my relationships as an educator, mentor, and lifelong learner. My professional experience as a tutor and coach with students is extensive. I founded Learnza on November 6, 2018. Learnza has tutored around 70 students in mutually exclusive private coaching sessions, small group settings, and online through the ZOOM platform. Learnza's mission is to support students on their educational journeys and to promote the value of tutoring through a motivational coaching curriculum. Students frequently associate tutoring with people who lack education or skills. I aim to shift this stigma by offering educational coaching to all students eager, inspired, and excited about lifelong learning.

As an academic and educator with years of tutoring or coaching experience, I aspire to transform the educational landscape, which extols standardized testing. Mentorship, entrepreneurship, and leadership are all disciplines that I hold dear. I take pride in upholding the principles of these disciplines while teaching, tutoring, and

training young adults. I have assisted students in increasing their ACT/SAT scores, obtaining college admissions, scholarships, and, most importantly, academic confidence. I hold bachelor's and master's degrees in developmental psychology and gerontology. As a result of earning these degrees, I developed a strong foundation in motivational psychology and a comprehensive understanding of the tutoring and coaching processes. I have seen students suffer from stress and anxiety, which can result in burnout, and I have a vested interest in the well-being of the students at Learnza.

Furthermore, I pride myself on establishing a diverse, bilingual, and multicultural community at Learnza that promotes inclusivity (Learnza, 2020). The unique holistic educational curriculum at Learnza guided my teaching and instruction style to understand students' personal and academic goals and perspectives. I acknowledge the potential for bias and account for them throughout the data collection, analysis, and assessment process. In addition, my work experience at Learnza motivated me to study and explore student experiences with burnout.

Learnza's mission statement emphasizes holistic teaching, educational coaching, and meditational mindfulness. The unique selling point of Learnza focuses on providing a rich professional educational experience for the student learner. I believe when students work in a professional shared community co-workspace, they learn more effectively. These shared community workspaces foster both physical and intellectual learning interactions among students. Working, studying, and mentoring in these shared spaces has provided me with skills such as shared leadership, decision-making, teaching, learning practice, and accountability measures (Carpenter, 2018). As a result, Learnza's shared workspace philosophy promotes community, collaboration, and engagement.

Engaging and inspiring students has proven to be a difficult task and a roadblock for academic institutions. As a result, Learnza investigated the use of external mentorship and coaching agents to supplement group-based learning.

I feel a tutor should develop an equal relationship with the student rather than an authority relationship. A mentor-mentee relationship assists in the development of stress-coping strategies. Additionally, mentorship assists students in resolving academic, social, and work-life conflicts while balancing personal life obligations (Simpson, 2016). As Learnza's founder, designer, and primary motivational coach, I am cognizant of the possibility that my own biases can influence the analysis. As a qualitative researcher, I am aware that I am the human instrument responsible for data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, in my research, I used a reflective practice, bracketed my perspectives, and conducted member checking to honor the students' voices, attitudes, and experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This phenomenological study used the Power Load Margin Theory (PML) to guide the interpretation and data analysis procedures. The Load divided by Power equals Margin ($M=L/P$). McClusky (1963) defined M as Margin, L as Load, and P as Power. According to the formula, the greater the Power than the Load, the greater the Margin available (Hiemstra, 1981). Surplus Power offers a buffer or Margin to meet Load specifications. The Margin may be raised by either lowering the Load or strengthening the Power. As a result, the larger an individual's Margin, the greater one's chances of coping with sources of Load. Likewise, the less Margin one has, the less likely one is to contend with sources of Load or stressors.

According to McClusky (1963), life is dynamic and ever-changing, with new opportunities and challenges arising as a result of life's highs and lows. As a result, the outside world has an unavoidable influence on a person's life, experiences, and learning, acting as a catalyst for academic and personal achievement (Salyer-Funk, 2012). External and internal loads are two types of loads that interact with one another. The external Load consists of activities that occur in daily life (family, work, community). Individuals' life expectancies, including goals, wishes, and potential ambitions, are internal Load. Learning in a positive educational setting directly or indirectly impacts a learner's ability to learn effectively.

Research on PLM demonstrated the framework applies to young adult teaching and thus applies to the present study at Learnza tutoring center (Main, 1979). PLM helps students manage their Load or daily stressors and tasks, and promotes Margin or balance (Main, 1979). The PLM model is applicable in all areas of adult and young adult learning and encourages autonomy, individual differences and is adaptable to each unique individual learner (McClusky, 1963). In addition, motivation, self-reliance, and grit are critical components of young adult education and direct power sources. As a result, employing Power factors can help lower a person's Load and promote a better life Margin (Hiemstra, 1981).

The PLM theory discusses an individual's Power, which must be greater than the individual's burden (Load) to cope with difficult tasks, such as active learning. In McClusky's theory, Power is defined as available resources such as family support, social skills, economic status, and coping skills. "On the other hand, Load refers to any self-or social demand that causes stress" (McClusky, 1974, p. 330). The terms "power" and

“load” are essential in understanding the balance that must be maintained when focusing on students’ learning experiences and challenges. This study utilized the PLM framework to examine how students dealt with challenges while balancing “power” and “load” regarding high-stakes testing and their experience with the mentor and mentee relationship.

The PLM theory influenced the research questions of this study, which examined students’ perceptions and experiences with their motivational coach and mentor. The research questions examined how the mentor-mentee relationship aided students in navigating their lives by providing social and emotional resources. The research questions also investigated how the mentor-mentee relationship functioned as a source of Power in the PLM theory. The questions explored the students’ perceptions of mentor-mentee relationships and its impact on students. In addition to informing the research questions, the PLM framework was utilized in analyzing student experiences to determine sources of Power and Load.

Research Design

I sought to better understand adolescent student experiences with their mentor, with a particular emphasis on their perceptions of motivational coaching. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenological research approach was optimal for this research study because it focused on the participants’ interactions in their natural environment to provide a comprehensive account of their experiences and the collective essence of that experience (Creswell et al., 2007). This qualitative approach allowed for a more in-depth examination of the mentor-mentee relationship. This qualitative methodology enabled participants to express their thoughts about their coaching

experience. This phenomenological approach enabled me to comprehend the phenomenon under investigation, thereby contributing useful information to the growing body of knowledge regarding the growing value of motivational coaching (Ramsook, 2018).

This phenomenological research is distinguished from other qualitative research in that it seeks to comprehend the essence of a phenomenon through the lens of an individual's perspective and experience (Eddles-Hirsch, 2013). The phenomenological approach of this study enabled me to focus on Learnza student experiences and look for the significance and crux of their experiences.

Site Selection and Participant Sampling

I conducted the present study in a community workplace environment that included private offices, conference rooms, and shared communal work areas where Learnza conducts biweekly tutoring sessions. Learnza is in a community co-working space in Plano, Texas, chosen because of its natural setting conducive to one-on-one tutoring sessions. To recruit participants, I used purposive criterion sampling. Participants needed to meet the following criteria: first, participants had to be current or former Learnza students. Second, these students needed to have completed at least one year of Learnza's core curriculum of motivational coaching, which included at least 20 hours of one-on-one coaching. Thirdly, participants needed to be at least 17 years old. Those who met the criteria were invited to 60-minute one-on-one interviews.

First, I emailed participants inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Second, I distributed a questionnaire to students to determine whether they met the study's criteria. Students were asked about their feelings about exam preparation,

goals, and school pressures, as well as their feelings about burnout. To qualify for the study's face-to-face or online ZOOM platform interview stage, participants completed the questionnaire. Additionally, students self-reported the possibility of experiencing anxiety and burnout via the electronic questionnaire. (For more information, see Appendix B).

The questionnaire elicited information about students' experiences with workload and juggling academic and personal obligations. Students indicated whether they were stressed or burned out on the questionnaire, and I invited students who I believed would have the most insight into the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study sample included current and former Learnza students with an average age of 17 to 20. As of October 30, 2020, Learnza had 30 current high school students enrolled and 70 students from the program's inception. Additionally, I chose 11 participants for this study, with six male participants and five female participants. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any time. The study's size ensured that there would still be between 5 and 25 participants available to achieve data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative Data Collection

The data collection process took seven procedural steps to complete. First, Baylor University's IRB approved this phenomenological study after critically reviewing the research proposal. Second, the building community workplace team for the Learnza office received permission to conduct the research interviews on their premises in private conference rooms. Third, I reached out via email to subjects of age 17 or older directly for their consent to participate in the study. Both students and parents were given assurance of the subject's welfare, security, confidentiality, and privacy in relation to the

responses they provided. Additionally, I informed the participants of their right to opt-out of the study at any time.

Fourth, I took field notes of the interviewees' nonverbal expressions during the interview. These field-notes aided in gaining a better understanding of what the participants experienced (Kensit, 2000). Fifth, I developed a comprehensive interview protocol to elicit data that I systematically clustered for meaning and vetted for significance in relation to the research objectives (Moustaka, 1994). Sixth, I created a composite narrative based on students' collective perceptions of how the mentor-mentee relationship affected burnout and their perceived ability to succeed. The effectiveness of the interview protocol was determined by the order in which the data collection steps were carried out. Each stage ensured that the research study adhered to the APA Code of Ethics for Research and Baylor University's IRB protocols (Creswell et al., 2007).

I sent the screening questionnaire via email to those who agreed to participate in the study (see Appendix B). The questionnaire explored the possibility of criteria for participation and investigated the possibility of burnout behavior without explicitly naming the phenomenon, thereby reducing the possibility of subject bias inducement. In the sixth step, I met students at Learnza for in-person interviews. I conducted one-on-one interviews with participants that lasted up to 60 minutes and were scheduled at convenient times for the participants. In the seventh step, those participants who were unable to come in for the interviews physically chose to use the ZOOM video calling platform. The subjects were asked to turn on their cameras with permission and consent to record the interview. I meticulously took field notes and then transcribed interviews verbatim to capture all the students' narrative responses (Moustaka, 1994). I audio-

recorded the interviews through ZOOM recording and transcription abilities. This data collection method is consistent with Moustakas's (1994) recommendations for the best way to capture and comprehend the collective nature of a phenomenon. For a breakdown of the steps and procedures, see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Procedures

Step Number	Step Procedures
Step 1	Received Baylor University's IRB approval to conduct the study and acquired necessary materials
Step 2	Obtained permission to conduct research in Learnza office premises from the co-workplace management team
Step 3	Contacted, informed, and discussed the purpose of research with the participants for informed consent
Step 4	Contacted students' parents to receive permission form
Step 5	Screened the population that consented for research participation against the inclusion criteria via Student Participant Preliminary Survey
Step 6	Conducted recorded interviews and took field notes at mutually convenient times either in-person or via ZOOM
Step 7	Transcribed the recorded interviews

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedure

I began analyzing and organizing my data after collecting it to begin data reduction. First, I established a naming convention and organized the file folders and documents containing the descriptive field notes according to the specific pseudonyms assigned to each interviewee. Second, I transcribed and coded the study's interviews. I used the data analysis spiral to interpret the data by organizing, memoing, coding,

interpreting, and displaying it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis occurred during and after the study, and the data was organized and saved on a secure external hard drive. Third, I used bracketing to help with data reduction by putting preconceived notions and biases aside to avoid influencing the study's findings (Moustaka, 1994). Fourth, to begin each interview with a clean slate, I set aside all my previous biases, perceptions, and experiences.

Fifth, before coding, I listened to and examined all participant interviews, introductory statements, and quotes, highlighting significant statements that explained how participants encountered the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell et al., 2007). Sixth, I coded the data to serve as a guide for searching for and analyzing themes. I looked for patterns in the data and compared them to participant group responses to determine the collective essence of their experience. The finished data set revealed underlying codes that were segmented and assigned themes. Seventh, I verified the data's accuracy by conducting member checks and reviewing and validating interviews for accuracy and participant-suggested revisions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I examined the verbal statements of the participants and analyzed them to gather a cluster of information to help develop codes in the research (Moustaka, 1994). Following the development of these codes, I carefully examined the relevant meaning from each interview and removed unnecessary duplicate information during the data cleaning process (Moustaka, 1994). These relevant meanings aided in the organization of a cluster of codes to comprehend the perceptions of Learnza students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I examined audio-recorded interviews and field notes several times to ensure that the interpretations were accurate and appropriate, free of bias or misunderstandings, and

aligned with the central research questions and sub-questions (Creswell et al., 2007). Furthermore, I analyzed the data using predetermined categories supported by PLM theory. I utilized the PLM framework to analyze the data and coded data to determine student experiences related to Power and Load factors.

I created descriptions of the participants' experiences using examples and textual descriptions. In addition, I was able to create a composite description that accurately captured what and how the participants' experiences occurred (Moustakas, 1994). This contributed to the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, all of which contributed to the study's validity (Creswell & Poth 2018). I applied three validation strategies including data reduction, member verification, and reporting, as well as disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Poth 2018). I double-checked the field notes for any extraneous information or misunderstood participant statements. In addition, I asked the participants to provide feedback on the data interpretations to avoid bias and removed any incorrect information. I went over the interview notes to provide more detailed information, resulting in an authentic summary of the students' experiences.

The results became more rigorous as the pool of input, responses, and data grew larger, and the answers were consistent across student participants, thus increasing the study's credibility and validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Transparency was provided across the board, including procedures, methods, and data collection to promote trustworthiness, reliability, and confirmability. I also provided an audit trail that detailed each data analysis step to justify my decisions as a qualitative researcher. The audit trail also aided in the establishment of findings and the accurate portrayal of participant responses.

In summary, I conducted semi-structured interviews until all the data was exhausted. I double-checked to make sure the interview questions matched the research questions. Alignment aided in the development of an appropriate instrument for the study. In addition, to reduce bias in the study, I used external audits during the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A research assistant who was not involved in the research process reviewed both the methodology and the research product and contributed to the accuracy or validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, Creswell and Poth (2018) strategies were used to build trust with participants and check for any misinformation. This is consistent with Morse et al. (2002)'s claim that qualitative researchers should use additional verification strategies. I double-checked that the interpretations were objective. Finally, I set aside my personal experiences while collecting and analyzing data.

Ethical Considerations

This section described the ethical considerations adhering to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures, which oversee this study. I was mindful of the participants' privacy. Before sampling the population, I built trust with the participants and obtained consent via email, then requested hard copies of signed consent forms before collecting data. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the study. Prior to data collection, I informed all participants of the study's primary goal. I encouraged participants to ask any follow-up questions they had. I informed participants about the instruments used to collect data as well as any potential risks associated with their participation in this study. I assured participants that the raw data would be destroyed a

year after the study was completed. I made certain that the participants were aware of Baylor University's IRB protocols.

Throughout the research study, I was aware of the power disparity between the interviewer and the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I assured students that their tutoring sessions would not be interrupted or harmed and that their feedback would have no bearing on their future experiences at Learnza. The students were on an equal footing during the interview, giving them control over their own experiences and stories. I kept participant responses private to foster the highest level of trust and honesty. Consent forms, signed forms, and verbal consent from the student was all part of the study's procedures in this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants were free to leave the study at any time and were not required to justify their choice.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this study are that it focused on a specific tutoring center in a specific urban area and may not apply to other schools and academies besides Learnza. Furthermore, the participants are diverse, and they may have different perspectives on their experience at Learnza. The sample was limited to Learnza students; students from other tutoring centers were not included in the study. I was the sole data collector and a key player in the data analysis process. I was aware that I may introduce a hindsight bias, which would reduce the objectivity of the data coding during the research analysis stage. Further limitations included time constraints of this qualitative study that included data collection for a month. Additionally, the sampling method reduced generalizability.

I included delimitations to help define the purpose and scope of the study. The first restriction was that participants had to be enrolled in Learnza tutoring center at the

time of registration for high-stakes test prep. The number of coaching hours gained by each participant was the second constraint. The delimitations of the study are evident since only one small cluster group of students participated in this study. More research is required to gain a better understanding of a variety of student populations.

The study's findings could differ if all students from the Plano and Frisco ISD campuses were invited to participate rather than just Learnza students. For instance, I conducted this phenomenological study in a high-performing district in Plano and Frisco, Texas. Many students in this study come from affluent backgrounds. Therefore, this study may not be as generalizable to other populations.

Conclusion

As described in Chapter One, this phenomenological study raised awareness of the dangers of high-stakes testing-induced burnout and the students' perceptions of the mentor-mentee relationship. The rationale for choosing a qualitative phenomenological research design, the research site, participant sampling, and the data collection process were all explained in this chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This chapter also discussed the data analysis used in this type of study and the study's ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations. Using the PLM theory, this study investigated the mentor and mentee relationship. I was able to answer the research questions through the lens of the PLM framework. The research findings and participants' responses are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

Introduction

This phenomenological study aimed to learn more about adolescent students' real-life experiences at Learnza tutoring center, and their perceptions of motivational coaching and the mentor-mentee relationship. The methodology presented in Chapter Three concentrated on data collection and analysis; Chapter Four focuses on the results and interpretation of findings. I gathered data through one-on-one interviews and the phenomenological analysis revealed high-school students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the mentor-mentee relationship and motivational coaching.

Following the interviews, I began qualitative data analysis for the study, which included data management, theme development, and data visualization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This analysis provided results necessitating the creation of a detailed descriptive narrative, which required deciding what information to include or exclude from the numerous transcribed pages. After deciding which data to use in the research study, I created categories from the recurring patterns into themes and answered the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The primary research question which drove this study was: What are student perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship at Learnza tutoring center? This chapter reveals that the students' perceived their mentor's role as a positive and supportive relationship. Second, I present the study's results, discussion of findings, and implications and answers to the secondary research question: What are student

perceptions of their motivational coaching experience at Learnza tutoring center?”

Participants at Learnza experienced a calm environment fostering motivation while acknowledging stress and anxiety. Third, how is McClusky’s (1963) concept of Power-Load-Margin Theory reflected in student descriptions of motivational coaching experiences? Highlighting how students dealt with Load by having more Power. The chapter proceeds with the following sections: first, participant descriptions and interview summaries, second thematic analysis findings and a framework analysis using the PLM theory. Additionally, the study’s findings are addressed, including the research questions, discussion of the primary results, implications of the study, and the study’s conclusion.

Participant Descriptions and Interview Summaries

The Phase I findings included interview data collected from current or former Learnza tutoring center students. I asked the students questions via a questionnaire (see Appendix B) followed by a series of interview questions. During the interviews, I discovered the following conclusions. First, participants valued the motivational coaching environment; they found the atmosphere calming and empowering. Second, the primary source of stress in the adolescents’ lives was high-stakes testing and the accumulation of pressures brought on by the testing environment. The following section includes the students’ narrative descriptions of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with their mentor and motivational coaching.

Student 1: Alex

Alex lives in a single-family home with his parents, who work in manufacturing and medicine, respectively. In college, he majored in business. Alex decided to change his major to business psychology and return home to Dallas in the middle of his freshman

year, citing a lack of direction and being inspired by his friends to “think differently” as reasons for his decision. Alex has worked in a variety of settings, including restaurants and hospitality. He currently attends monthly coaching sessions at Learnza.

Alex began tutoring at Learnza in the fall of 2018 and has been a student for three years. I interviewed Alex on a Saturday afternoon. “My coaching interactions are an embodiment of how I stay sane,” he said. Alex referred to his relationship with his mentor as the “glue” that held him together for the past three years. “I’ve been through a lot with school and my personal life [the mentor provided structure throughout the curriculum],” Alex explained, “coming back to Learnza has been the only consistent stream of support for me” [Alex left Learnza due to enrolling in college but still maintained his positive relationship with his mentor]. Alex stated that anyone, regardless of age, could benefit from the advice of a life coach [mentor].

Alex believed that the motivational coaching curriculum and co-working environment at Learnza had a significant impact on his aptitude for success, reducing his stress through encouragement and guidance by his mentor through structured counseling.

Being here [Learnza] has relieved a great deal of stress, and the time spent here has increased my positivity, outlook, and mentality toward my upcoming college challenges. I experienced burnout while studying for my SATs, but I survived [did well] because I had a mentor.

Alex stated, “Learnza helped me achieve my objectives [score]. I received a five on my AP test and an SAT score of around 1500 in the office [Learnza], but I was completely stressed about the SAT environment and scored in the low 900’s on the actual proctored test.” Alex explained how he believed in Learnza’s mission statement of conducting efficient research and is committed to analyzing study strategies beyond high-stakes tests to foster real-life skills. “I had a great relationship with my mentor; he

assisted me in improving my study skills and developing healthier study habits,” Alex emphasized.

Student 2: Ben

Ben is a senior at Lewisville’s Hebron High School and will be attending college on the East Coast in the fall. Ben lives with his parents in Frisco, Texas, who work in the business field. Ben is a homebody who excelled in computer science and math but is timid and uncomfortable in social situations. Ben struggled in social conditions and appeared unsure about Learnza’s motivational coaching curriculum when he enrolled in the fall of 2019. “My mom forced me to join; I had no idea what a life coach was,” said Ben. When asked about the role of his life coach and mentor, he said, “I appreciated having someone [Mentor] there when no one else was there for me.” Moreover, Ben stated that “my professional relationship included working on homework and discussing issues from boy scouts, school, family, and high school peer pressure.” Ben communicated that these experiences provided a sense of empowerment and alleviated stress and anxiety, partly due to the pressure to score high on his high-stakes test by his mother.

Ben initially enrolled in American College Test (ACT) prep. Still, he discovered Learnza motivated him to work harder and become more effective in school. Learnza also fostered his life skills. When asked about a stressful circumstance or experience, he discussed his family, specifically his mother, pressuring him to pursue a college career path when he wanted to consider his options for college. Ben regarded the motivational coach atmosphere as “very healthy.” Ben found the environment helpful to his educational endeavors, “Through motivational coaching, I was able to put my stress on

hold and return to work, which is, of course, lower than it should be for school thanks to my tutoring.” Ben acknowledged that stress remains a factor, but he valued returning to Learnza for scholarship essay coaching and guided meditation which helped him manage his anxiety.

Ben spoke about his anxiety several times and how high stress was a big part of his life, especially when studying for high-stakes tests like the ACT. When asked about a tense circumstance involving a friend, Ben said, “I would take a second to calm down and collect myself. If you do not let the stress, get to you, it [calm outlook] will help you get through it [stress]. When I’ve had a hard day, I generally don’t want to do anything.” Ben communicated his description of a stressful day as one in which he forgets about exams and responsibilities.

Student 3: Claire

Claire is a junior at Plano-West High School in Plano, Texas, she excels in English and Math and expects to attend college next year at Baylor University. Claire was raised at home by her parents who work in finance. In high school, Claire struggled to make new friends, so her parents enrolled her in Learnza in the fall of 2018 to help with her social skills, motivation, and leadership. “My parents pressured me to enroll, even though I had no idea what I was doing as a teenager. I stopped coming [to Learnza] for a while, and then resumed tutoring in 2021 because I’m finally mature enough to understand [value of mentor and mentee relationship].” Claire communicated a sense of independence at Learnza.

Claire conversed about becoming a mentor herself, and she understands that developing a meaningful relationship with a mentor requires time and a great deal of

responsibility. “My working relationship with my mentor is admirable,” she said.

Likewise, Claire said her mentor was her “best friend,” and she enrolled in Learnza for ACT Prep because of her connection and friendship with her mentor who advocated for her progress and continued success at school. Claire discussed how motivational coaching has assisted her in navigating personal and academic life, as well as the ACT. “Waiting for my ACT scores is causing me stress,” she claimed.

Claire spoke about how she appreciated the fact that her motivational coach was always available for her at any time of day or night, saying, “I am so grateful that I can text my coach at eleven o’clock at night and he will respond first thing in the morning.” Claire valued how coaching helped her become more focused on what she cherished in her life, and how coaching helped her rethink both her short-term and long-term goals. Claire also talked about how she was concerned about her high school workload, which caused her undue stress. Claire’s school stress came from a barrage of high-stress situations which involved due dates, exams, and deadlines. Furthermore, she found value in the community culture of Learnza, which she described as “calming.” Claire conversed about Learnza as a “safe space” away from the pressures of school and personal life.

Claire mentioned, “my stress levels are extremely high, and school is the most stressful part of my life. I don’t have a clear way [coping mechanism] for dealing with my stress, but I find it helpful to take problems [life and school] one step at a time.” When asked how motivational coaching in the classroom setting affected her ability to excel, Claire replied, “when I am here [Learnza], my stress levels are low, and I work harder.” Claire mentioned how she learned valuable life skills that will support her in the

future. When asked about the effect of motivational coaching on her mental health, she mentioned coaching helped her feel more positive and in charge of her future.

Claire cited school stress as a major cause of anxiety, saying, “I have a million finals or AP exams, and I try to cram everything; at the last minute, I end up suffering burnout from no [inadequate] sleep.” When asked about scenario A (see Appendix E), Claire conversed about how she would recommend that her friend takes a minute to be mindful, relax, and meditate. In addition, when asked about scenario B (see Appendix E), the student went into detail about her stressful day. Claire explained:

I wake up late and run to school without having eaten breakfast or lunch. I am late for the first period, and I’m going to test and prepare for it because I was so exhausted the night before, and then I’ll go to bed and try to sleep. Doing as much work as I could, but the workload is typically too much for me to do it all in school. After school, I work until 10:00 p.m. And then I go home, do not need dinner, try to do my homework, and then collapse in tears.

Claire enjoyed the motivational coaching experience and described Learnza as a relaxed and calming atmosphere. Claire communicated how she cannot think of a time when her motivational coaching training did not help her academic performance. She found the motivational coaching environment to function at a slower and quieter pace a more conducive environment which assisted her in coping with her anxiety about math and history. Claire stated that while ACT prep work was laborious at first, “nothing stressed her out more than school and academic coursework.” Claire’s course load is overwhelming because it is significant busy work that she found difficult to manage. “I’m concerned about school and keeping pace,” emphasized Claire.

Regardless, Claire felt “quite good about how she’s performing.” I believe “the curriculum and culture here [Learnza] contributed to my aptitude for success by being calm, helpful, understanding.” Claire spoke about how she has evolved due to her ability

to adapt and learn how to deal with unpleasant circumstances. She enjoyed the “cheat sheets” she received with tips and methods for dealing with test anxiety and school bullying. Finals represented a prolonged period of tension and anxiety for Claire.

Student 4: Hanna

Hanna is a junior at Lewisville’s Hebron-High School. She lives at home with her parents and older sister who also attends Learnza. Hanna’s parents are both in information technology. Hanna enrolled at Learnza in Fall 2020 to prepare for high-stakes exams. Hanna said she enrolled in Learnza because she needed tutoring, and motivational coaching to assist her in becoming more motivated. She trusted her professional relationship with her mentor because they are “awesome” and “kind.” Hanna exclaimed, “my mentor plays a vital role because I put my trust in him/her.” When asked about her beliefs and insights into the role of her life coach, the student stated the following,

Motivational coaching has inspired me to work harder, but what is stressing me out is not getting a good ACT score and waiting for my scores to come back at the same time. I just have so much pressure from my parents to become independent. It stresses me out!”

Hanna spoke about motivational coaching and the environment and found that it motivated her to work harder even when her scores were low. Hanna communicated her experience of burnout when she was at Learnza but did feel stress when studying math and science in preparation for the ACT exam. Hanna said:

I feel successful, and managing my stress at school, I get all my homework done and accomplish all my tasks, and I think the motivational coach environment is very friendly here [Learnza] because I am not being stressed, and everything is low-key [comfortable]. Regarding my well-being, I feel the motivation coaching experience is nice because it reminds me to be motivated and being motivated is good because I want to be more successful when I’m motivated, but I get burnout, especially at the end of the year [preparing for high-stakes tests].

Finally, Hanna communicated how much she appreciated her life coach and the bond of truth and honesty they shared. “Sometimes it [work] makes me even more stressed because all I want is for people to be honest with me and working a part-time job after school is extremely stressful and demanding. The people at work are rude.” Hanna reflected on a time when she had to balance school and work. “I do it [mindfulness] and meditate alone, but my life is too hectic. I’m doing everything I can to stay organized and manage my tasks day by day.” Hanna said. Finding balance and staying organized are very important for Hanna.

Student 5: Kate

Kate is a senior in Dallas, Texas, she plans to major in marketing and attend college in Austin, Texas in the fall of 2021. Kate lives with her parents who work in real estate, and she also works part-time as a babysitter and as a barista. Kate spoke on the insights of mentorship and how it has helped manage her busy schedule and provided another perspective and extra support during academic struggles and life in general. Kate communicated her professional relationship with her mentor entailed helping her improve her SAT score and having an active game plan [road map] for the future. “I know motivational coaching gave me a different perspective on things [school, relationship, life] that my mind was set on,” Kate said. In addition, Kate’s coping strategies to deal with stress included working out and other forms of self-care to help her deal with her anxiety.

Kate’s thoughts on her mentor are that “my motivational coach has helped me manage my busy schedule, as well as provided me with another perspective and additional support in my academics and life in general,” Likewise her professional

relationship entailed an improved SAT score and making a future post high school. Kate explained:

I was anxious about school, the SAT process, assignments, and tests. I was going to fail. I just wanted to quit and leave everything. However, I adore the Learnza culture. The environment encouraged and motivated me, as did my general desire to succeed in school and beyond. Since my SAT scores are gradually improving, I can say that the motivational coaching was effective and it [tutoring] did boost my confidence, and my mentors supported me and calmed my nerves.

Additionally, Kate's active fitness routine helped her deal with high stress and anxiety. "I handle day-to-day problems by focusing on one day at a time." Kate believes she is doing well in dealing with her school-related stress. Even though she feels overwhelmed at times. As she describes in her experience, Kate is able to cope and deal with pressures fairly well. She attributed her success to the motivating coaching environment, which provided an extra level of support to challenge and push herself in a positive manner. Kate spoke about how she suffered from burnout as a result of the stress of not meeting her goals, and this is the main source of concern for her mental health. "Motivational coaching for my mental health helped me clear my mind and organize my thoughts," she added. She self-reported experiencing burnout after a few practice Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) because she was practicing "so much," but still couldn't get the desired score. In addition, when asked about a stressful day, Kate stated:

I wake up a little late and don't have time to do my morning yoga, I rush to school to take numerous tests and difficult classes, and then I return home to do more homework and study. And collapse into sleep. Then the next few days I'm immobile unable to get out of bed or do anything.

Kate communicated her struggles with stressful days and the environment at school which causes her anxiety.

Student 6: Frank

Frank lives in a single-family home with his mother and father, who both work in health professions. His father is a psychiatrist, and his mother is a nurse. When Frank joined Learnza a year ago, he was in his first year of college at Texas A&M and planned on studying accounting in college. Frank changed his major to psychology after enrolling in online remote learning for both Learnza and college. He communicated that online learning is “hard.” He feels his professors are not providing adequate attention and feedback to him and his classmates. In addition, Frank has held a variety of part-time jobs over the years and attends Learnza on a bi-weekly basis. On a Sunday afternoon, Frank began talking about his interactions with his peers and school and expressed great concern for his mental health in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite his difficulties adjusting to the online learning environment, Frank communicated that his motivational coaching experience kept him “sane” and on track to complete college. He spoke about his greatest challenge. He felt the friendship and bond he had formed with his mentor help support him. Frank said:

Friendship with my mentor provides me with a lot of inspiration I feel I have made a lifelong friend that is helpful when significant issues arise, and I need life experience. I still struggle with stress and anxiety, but I’m hopeful since coming to Learnza. I have not been as depressed I think it’s because I feel safe, and I have a routine now. Even though I’m online I have a physical place where I can work and study.

Frank went on to describe his difficult school year, which included taking college classes and then transferring them online. “It’s been a storm transitioning from Texas A&M dorms to online, as well as with schoolwork and dealing with my parents, but returning to Learnza has kept me cool and calm.” Following that, Frank discussed his stress levels and how the amount of insight he received while coaching influenced his

ability to succeed. Frank said that tension [high-stakes testing] exacerbated his anxiety. Planning for the SATs was difficult for him, and his stress levels would rise and fall. However, he said, “My mentor was a tremendous help to me in determining how to do better in the long run.”

Frank communicated his displeasure with his current situation in life. “It’s difficult to figure out how to be a hard worker. I put in too much time and effort, but I still understand the result. I have regrets I don’t have a long list of goals for my life, but I suppose it is a work in progress.” As a result, Frank talked about his life and how hard he continues to work.

Student 7: Gloria

Gloria lives in a single-family home and was interviewed on a Saturday afternoon. Her parents were immigrants from Mexico, and she currently lives with her mother and grandmother. She is a senior in high school and plans to major in business in college. Gloria was in the middle of her senior year and struggling with math and science when she enrolled in Learnza in the fall of 2020 and was a student for six months. Likewise, Gloria worked as a barista in a local coffee shop before she enrolled in Learnza’s bi-weekly coaching sessions. Gloria communicated both a positive mindset and perceptions of her outlook on life and relationship with mentor. She spoke about how her tutor helped her gain a better understanding of her academic studies, social abilities, and to learn better strategies to support long-term math and science retention.

I enrolled in Learnza so that I could get better at math and science. I want to get better at penny boarding and boxing as well. I want to also work on my mental health, find myself, and true calling. Motivational coaching has helped me open to finding a suitable college and having exceptional grades. I want to continue to learn languages, and I want to improve my relationships with my friends and

family and go to school full-time so that I can spend more time with my abuela [grandmother].

Gloria communicated how she is stressed out by the rigors of school and the SAT, but she finds the environment at Learnza to be welcoming, relaxing, and calming. “I overcame significant hardships from Mexico to the United States, so it is helpful to have a safe space for me to work and grow,” she declared. Gloria’s ability to see the bright side of life is attributed to her descriptions of her working relationship with her mentor as a constant stream of positive communication to keep a steady job.

Student 8: Jake

Jake is a senior in high school with plans to attend college on the east coast. Jake now lives in a single-family home with his mother who works in finance. He has been enrolled at Learnza for a year and has seen significant changes as he completed his senior year, graduated, and obtained college admissions. Jake overcame obstacles such as coming to the United States as a junior in high school and not speaking English as his first language. Jake explained,

The most dynamic struggles of my life have been frequent travel from overseas to the United States from Pakistan, as well as the mental health issues I have faced growing up with anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia.

Jake expressed his appreciation for his mother, for her encouragement in his ongoing success. Jake spoke about his mother and how she is “very bright and hardworking woman, she inspired me” Jake sees his mother as a role model who motivated him to keep working hard even when school was challenging. Jake communicates how he would frequently “zone out in class” unable to concentrate, especially when he was learning online.

Often, I feel confused and under-motivated, and then I struggle, but motivational coaching supported me enormously as I overcome my fear with a huge move into the US from the Middle East to start a new life. Motivational therapy has improved my chances of performance. I've progressed in math and time management, and my anxiety has significantly decreased. I have improved concentration and a higher level of time.

When Jake was younger, he saw a speech language pathologist and attended motivational therapy workshops focused on his English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum. Jake spoke about how he was admitted to his dream school in New Jersey with the help of his mentor. He said Learnza was a calm supportive place to study for his high-stakes tests and his mentor well equipped him with the knowledge to guide him through the college application process. Jake communicated how he valued his relationship with his mentor. Jake learned to relax and is now able to cultivate meaningful interactions with his peers. Jake said he learned how to work hard and keep his personal priorities in order such as staying active, safe, and fit and to play soccer both in high-school and in college.

Lastly, Jake communicated that motivational coaching aided his mathematical knowledge, time management, and anxiety reduction. "I now have better listening skills and more time to spend with my friends." Thus, Jake felt he had more free time outside of school.

Student 9: Larry

Larry is a high school sophomore who plans to attend college but is not sure where. Larry currently resides with his small business owning parents. He has been enrolled Learnza for six months and feels he has seen noteworthy results in his academics. Larry enrolled in Learnza in fall 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The student described how his mentor provided him with new experiences and lessons that he

would not have learned in a classroom setting. “My mentor was always there for me even when I was unsure,” proclaimed Larry.

Larry described his mentor’s connection as mutually respectful; his mentor is someone in whom he could depend, as they often exchanged ideas and listened to one other. He met his mentor for the first time at Learnza for SAT prep and was immediately drawn to his mentor’s passion, love, and persistence for teaching. Larry spoke that his mentor cared about him and his fellow classmates and taught students testing techniques and life lessons.

Larry communicated that he remembered the support of his mentor and how he assisted him in reflecting on his errors and helped him gain confidence. “I’m more inspired than ever to go all-in for the next exam,” said Larry. Larry communicated that he found solace in the guided meditation techniques taught at Learnza to cope with daily stress, succeed at tasks and challenges he would have previously found too difficult. “I am mostly good at dealing with stress from school and life but being in the motivational coaching community makes me want success [high SAT score] even more the ever,” said Larry.

Larry spoke about the Learnza curriculum in detail, “I read our curriculum book and attempted to meditate and reflect daily. I’m inspired to keep going because whenever I feel like I can’t go any further [dealing with school], but I know I have my mantra to follow,” Larry said. Larry communicated that he valued mindfulness and practicing repeating his daily mantra.

Student 10: Emily

Emily is a junior at a private high school in Dallas, Texas. She grew up in Texas with her parents who both work in medicine, and she has been in motivational coaching since junior high school. For the last six months she has been enrolled in Learnza to improve her grammar and rhetoric skills. Emily considered her mentor to be a life guide and helping her navigate issues that would arise. Emily conveyed these would include social high-school issues and maintaining a 4.0 GPA. Emily prides herself in her academic performance calling it her “identity.”

Emily communicated her thoughts and feelings about her mentor. She feels her mentor is someone she can rely on to listen to her problems and feelings, and she considers her mentor to be a pivotal figure in her achievements in both school and personal life.

He is someone who provides me with a fresh perspective that helps to steer me in the right direction. I enjoy coming every week and meeting on ZOOM. He is always available, even at midnight when I forget I have an assignment or paper due. When I’m feeling overwhelmed, it makes me feel so much better. I really don’t know how anyone can navigate issues like applying to college. It is so stressful just like the whole college process. I don’t know why they must make it so stressful.

Emily met her mentor for SAT prep and was not only happy with her academic results, but she also developed a positive friendship with her mentor and felt more optimistic about her future. Emily described how she gradually told her mentor about her problems. Her main sources of stress were her parents’ pressure, college applications, and selecting the best college that was “prestigious” enough for her to attend. Emily expressed her pride in her ability to guide others through motivational coaching. She also claimed that the SAT and final exams were the most stressful times of her life because they made her feel “not smart enough.” Emily also mentioned that her mentor assisted

her in making significant academic progress, maintaining her 4.0 GPA without compromising her extracurricular activities, and even broadening her interests. Emily attributes her success to her positive attitude toward learning, which she claims is the key to her success.

Finally, Emily commented on the atmosphere at Learnza. She described how the atmosphere made her feel special from the moment she began coaching. When she felt overly nervous or anxious, she felt the positive environment helped calm her down. “The snacks and fruit water were delicious. It was always different daily, which was very refreshing,” Emily explained. These factors, combined with her running hobby, have enabled her to feel more optimistic and to better balance her life. Emily believed that motivational coaching increased her chances of success by motivating her to take better care of herself, set goals, feel less alone, and, most importantly, discover her true calling and purpose in life.

Student 11: Andrew

Andrew joined Learnza in the fall of 2019 and is currently a university student on the west coast. Andrew grew up with his parents in Frisco, Texas, where his parents both work in business and finance. Andrew has coaching sessions with his mentor once a week via ZOOM. Andrew described his relationship with his mentor as “very special,” and he believed that having a mentor benefits everyone, regardless of age. Andrew knew he was improving academically as he prepared for his SAT but found the high-stakes testing material and environment very daunting. Andrew did not like the standardized testing culture, but he quickly fell in love with Learnza’s teaching philosophy. He

referred to Learnza as “family.” He continues to meet with his mentor for motivational coaching weekly. Andrew said:

I found a true lifelong friend in my mentor, it [Learnza] was more than getting ready for the SAT, this was a relationship that I would value and hold for a long time. I knew that my relationship with my mentor is something that would keep me motivated and out of trouble. I find myself getting caught up and burnout all the time. At Learnza I’m able to find peace in what I do and keep focused on my larger goal of graduating college and getting a full-time job and really focusing on my personal growth.

I honestly give Learnza all the credit for my change in how I look not only about school but learning. My relationship with my mentor became so important that at times I didn’t think I could do anything without the support. But my mentor helped me over that and gave me more self-confidence than I could ever believe.

Andrew discovered motivation through his mentor’s relationship as the most significant influence on his ability to trust himself. When Andrew was stuck on an assignment, one of the most important things he worked on was visualization. While he is always worried about procrastination and failure, he has made more time for himself to grow and develop. Andrew had struggled to control his anger and calm down, but he had always tried to keep going. This helped him cultivate a more positive attitude and see his success as progressively improving. Nonetheless, Andrew admitted that reducing the amount of tension he faced was “very difficult.” “I feel so much pressure to do better and be better but I’m trying my best. I feel like sometimes I’m drowning in assignments or looking at my MacBook for hours at a time without a break,” communicated Andrew. He also talked about how the school environment is difficult now that hybrid learning is being used at his college.

Thematic Analysis

In this section I discuss the thematic analysis I conducted after interviewing the student participants. Again, the purpose of this study was to determine which themes best

represented the participants' collective experiences and their perceptions of their mentor-mentee relationship at Learnza tutoring center. First, I conducted a thematic analysis compiling codes and significant statements that captured the essence of the students' collective experiences.

The two most prominent codes for each participant are demonstrated accordingly (see Table 4.1). Second, these codes were categorized into thematic statements. Third, the thematic statements demonstrated that the participants at Learnza tutoring center experienced four primary themes: calm, stress, support, and motivation (see Figure 4.1). These themes were described collectively by participants at various points in their narratives (see Table 4.2).

First, the theme of “calm” meant the participants collective experience was relaxed and welcoming at Learnza. For instance, participants valued the compassion of their mentor, the amenities in the office, the ambiance of the environment along with the constant positive feedback helping students feel at ease (see Figure F.1). Participants' impressions of the décor, furniture, and aesthetics at Learnza were positive and directly related to the purposeful relaxed teaching style at Learnza (see Appendix F, Figure F.4).

The tranquil environment at Learnza allowed students to collectively feel peaceful. A participant in the study shared “Learnza helps me study more and worry less about school and life hassles.” Ben Hannah, Frank, and Jake all had similar sentiments regarding the atmosphere at Learnza, with Jake describing it as “a location with minimal interruptions—a peaceful, pleasant setting in which you can concentrate and finish your job while de-stressing” (see Appendix F, Figure F.3). In addition, participants in the study shared how much they appreciated the amenities, such as snacks, ample lighting,

and the modern style (see Figure F.4). For instance, participants valued simplicity and attentiveness to their specific needs.

I like the office. We have snacks and its always a good stop right after school. It's so relaxing to come into the office after a long day of school. I wish school could be like Learnza. I wish teachers were more flexible and have a more modern office like Learnza. I feel so productive here and enjoy getting my work done before I head home for the day.

We must wear masks in school, but here [Learnza], it's a lot cozier. I love the big windows, a floor lamp in the corner of the room, which help its chill and makes me feel relaxed. When I need a break, I can go to the meditation room. I am always in a good mood, and my energy level is higher here [Learnza]. I like that the tutor keeps it simple. I think in an office space, less is always more, and they do a good job.

They treated us like we were valuable, like we had a lot of positive things. They provided small stuff for us. Because of this attitude and mindfulness training, I can conquer a lot of the hard stuff.

Participants stated that the mentor's mindfulness training based on the motivational coaching curriculum assisted them in overcoming anxiety and that the calming effect they experienced at Learnza tutoring center was almost therapeutic because students felt very productive in the environment where the motivational coaching curriculum helped them prioritize their tasks (see Table 4.1).

The motivating coaching environment had a "quiet" environment and the numerous conveniences made studying easier for high-stakes tests (see Table 4.2). Students shared that the aesthetics at Learnza tutoring center was engaging and they particularly appreciated the personalized furniture, the updated facility, and the friendly and personable tutors. Together Learnza created a welcoming and appealing experience. Likewise, participants Ben, Emily, and Andrew expressed how the environment was engaging in their learning (see Appendix F, Figure F.4).

Second, students described the “stress” they faced in their academic, personal, and support networks. The students expressed they felt increased anxiety, stress, and burnout which led them to Learnza. Participants explained that the SAT exam preparation was a significant source of stress. However, some participants suggested that their stress levels fluctuated. For instance, some participants explained that school, studying and preparing for high-stakes tests, and finding time in the day to have quiet study time is a challenge. Gloria, Jake, and Claire mentioned schoolwork as their primary concern. To illustrate, several participants stated that social issues along with applying to colleges were of concern. Participants discussed how social life is such an important aspect of school. Their anxiety is being exacerbated by the fact that they are applying to colleges.

School is stressful and its shocking that teachers do not give us a break. I hate applying to college. It’s such a waste of time. I wish they could make it easier or at least something we could do in a few steps but it’s a whole process, I guess.

I am always stressed about what my parents expect me to do in school and on the SAT and applying to UT Austin. It’s my dream school, but I sometimes don’t even want to go because the application process takes so long and I’m always constantly struggling to finish. I wish I could just take a break from all the stress and anxiety.

I feel so lost sometimes when applying to college and that increases my anxiety. I wish the SAT weren’t required to apply to college and we could just apply based on our performance in school and not on this test. I am good in school just bad at the SAT and that causes me a lot of stress.

Some participants, Hannah, Claire, and Ben expressed that their parents high-expectations of themselves caused them stress. They feel overwhelmed at times at the responsibilities that they are expected to do and often had difficulty dealing with the pressure (see Figure 4.1). Participants also expressed that they “blank out” due to the underlying stress, anxiety, and expectations (see Table 4.2). At some point during their

time at Learnza, all the participants felt stressed. However, the mentor and parental support participants received helped them deal with the stress.

Third, students described the “support” they experienced. Students valued their mentors and parents as they play supportive roles. The support provided by mentors built meaningful professional relationships (see Table 4.2). The theme of support emerged from the students’ collective description of their mentorship relationship. The mentor encouragement increased their capacity to cope with challenges (see Table 4.2). Participants, for example, emphasized their learning experience by describing how their mentor assisted them in learning about themselves and determining how and where they should focus and orient their goals to achieve the best results. Larry, Emily, and Andrew, for example, shared similar sentiments in that Learnza tutoring center assisted them in juggling school, work, and personal life challenges.

At Learnza, I like how well we [mentor] communicate. We don’t waste time or obsess about little matters. I like how quickly we do tasks and how easy it feels. I used to rely on my mentor a lot when I first began. Now I’m able to handle everything on my own for the most part. I can work alone and then contact my tutor [mentor] for help when I need it anytime even late at night, I feel relieved about it [tutoring]. I like how they are always here to help no matter what.

I appreciate how Learnza is constantly there to help us [students]. Showing attention, encouraging, listening, and asking follow-up questions. I get confused a lot especially on SAT, but my tutor understands the material and helps me learn it so much better. It [studying] may be tough at times, and I understand that it [studying] can be challenging, but I have always felt that my tutor is extremely caring.

Learnza gave me what I was missing and that was the ability to know I could do well, despite my feelings otherwise. I feel confident whenever I see something hard come up because I know I can handle it, and I know that anything is worth it if you put in the hard work.

The participants expressed having a positive, beneficial, and supportive relationship that allowed them to experience a period of growth that helped them grow

both personally and academically. Parents and mentors also had a supportive professional relationship between them. As a result, the students' relationship with their parents was also fueled. Participants stated that they had a strong desire to succeed at Learnza because they felt valued, and they credited their mentor's strong encouragement as a key factor in their success. Participants described their relationship with their mentor, as well as the professional relationship and support that enabled them to share their experiences and, in turn, inspired them to set higher goals.

Fourth, students described having 'motivation.' Students perceived the mentor-mentee relationship was a primary force that increased their motivation. Participants in the study shared and expressed their gratitude for their mentor-mentee relationship and how it had aided them in their perseverance and persistence. For instance, some participants described their inability to study in a digital environment or completely online and their experience within person, one-on-one tutoring was inspiring. Kate, Emily, and Andrew preferred mentors who were enthusiastic about teaching, related course material to real-life situations, and encouraged engagement and student reactions. They stated that they

frequently relied on friends and classmates for motivation, and that final exam stress was a common source of anxiety. Furthermore, all of these are exacerbated by the stress of extracurricular activities, work, school events, and a lack of self-esteem.

Everyone who visits [Learnza] is usually cheerful. I enjoy how we all work together as a team. I admire my instructor for persevering with me despite my frustrations. SAT prep is difficult, but I'm always inspired to try again, and even if I fail, I feel like I've learned something for the next time, so I keep trying and continuing.

My relationship provided me with a lot of inspiration. We'd go over my goals and accomplishments at Learnza on a regular basis to keep me on track. I'd always set new goals for myself and strive to improve. When studying becomes difficult, this

helps keep the momentum going. I was always surrounded by positive people, which inspired me.

Thus, students perceived that a supportive mentor and an engaging teaching style was empowering and fueled their motivation.

In summary, the study's findings revealed that the students' overall impression of Learnza tutoring center's motivational coaching atmosphere was peaceful, supportive, and motivating (see Figure 4.1.) The stresses mentioned by the participants included academics, personal issues, and support networks, which induced their anxiety, stress, and sometimes burnout. The participants saw their mentor and parents as important support systems. The mentor-mentee connection was identified as a factor in increasing students' motivation to continuously face their challenges.

Table 4.1

Thematic Analysis Table

Participant	School Status	Years with Learnza	Prominent Code 1	Prominent Code 2
Alex	College	3 Years	Support	College
Ben	Senior	1 Year	Motivation	Calm
Claire	Junior	6 Months	Support	Cope
Hannah	Junior	1 Year	Adult Pressure	Calm
Kate	Senior	6 Months	Support	Burnout
Frank	Senior	1 Year	Stress	Calm
Gloria	Senior	6 Months	Job	Cope
Jake	Senior	1 Year	Support	Calm
Larry	Sophomore	6 Months	Stress	Support
Emily	Junior High School	6 Months	Motivation	College
Andrew	College first-year student	2 Years	Motivation	Support

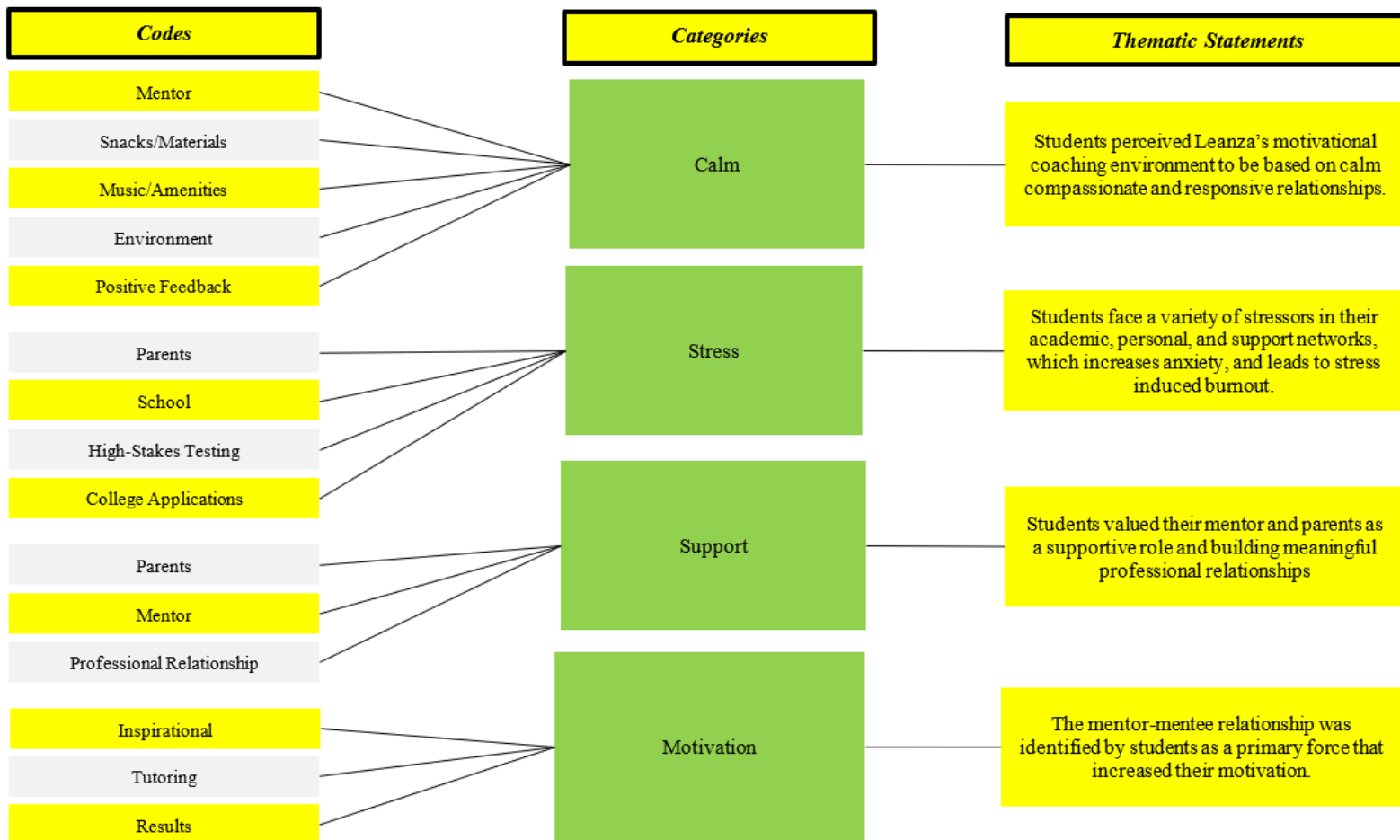


Figure 4.1. Graphic organizer themes at Learnza.

Table 4.2

Themes from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Student Data Samples from Interviews
Calm	“There will be few interruptions – a quiet, relaxing environment in which you can focus and complete your work. I liked that was able to change my scenery from school and develop a relaxing study routine. It was nice to have a quiet place to study.”
Stress	“SAT exams give me anxiety. It is very unpleasant for students like me who are working so hard but just frustrated with tests. Many people are unaware that it is hard for us (high-school students) to study for these exams and have a normal life. I have a lot of stress, anxiety, and nervousness. The stress becomes so strong that it interferes with my studying, and I can blank out on tests.”
Support	“I appreciated it when my mentor was supportive, available to listen, offer advice, and be a part of my decision-making process. It was nice to have someone who was always encouraging and supportive throughout the tutoring process.”
Motivation	“My relationship provided me with a lot of inspiration. We’d go over my goals and accomplishments at Learnza on a regular basis to keep me on track. I’d always set new goals for myself and strive to improve. When studying becomes difficult, this helps keep the momentum going. I was always surrounded by positive people, which inspired me.”

Framework Analysis

The rationale for using the PLM theory in the framework analysis was cited in the literature review (Creswell et al., 2007). The PLM Theory provided a road map for analyzing the data gathered from the study’s 11 participants. Throughout the accounts shared by the participants, Learnza tutoring center was described a positive experience with motivational coaching experiences.

First, I thematically linked the individual data points to the PLM framework (Table 4.3). I transcribed the original interviews and used excerpts to support the

qualitative data in the framework analysis. Second, the participant interviews helped to better understand the nature of the Load and Power variables encountered by students and the impact of motivational coaching (Quinn et al., 2019). Third, I was interested to know how student participation at Learnza tutoring center influenced their higher Margin (balance). After the second reading of the interviews, I conducted the framework analysis to code for three simple categories: Power, Load, and Power and Load (see Table 4.4).

After, I coded and looked for themes that fit into these categories as a part of the subset of my analysis. I analyzed the participant collective interviews to determine what the students attribute to having Power, Load, or both Power and Load. The Power factors revealed in the data were Mentor, Tutor, and Friend. Load Factors, on the other hand, included the SAT and ACT and other high-stakes tests (see Table 4.3). I discovered that the theme of Family and Finances serves as both a Power and a Load for the students because according to the students, “Parents added support and pressure respectfully.” In addition, participants described the aspects of their lives that they encountered that operated concurrently as Load and Power variables.

Table 4.3

Power and Load Variables for Students Enrolled at Learnza

Power Variables	Load Variables	Both Power and Load
Environment	School	Family
Coaching	Balance	Finances
Friends	SAT/ACT	X
Tutor	Grades	X
Mentor	Stress	X

Power

Power variables are those that empower someone to face challenges (Quinn et al., 2019). In the interviews, participants discussed how various aspects of life contribute to Power, such as friends, tutors, and mentors. Participants expressed that the environment at Learnza contributed positively to their experience. Furthermore, participants had a positive relationship with their mentor. Participants Alex, Ben, and Claire reflected on their previous experiences with the mentor and mentee relationship through motivational coaching strategies and found tutoring to be extremely beneficial in increasing their Power over daily challenges (see Table 4.3.). For instance, Alex in the study shared that their thoughts on their mentor and on the Power, they felt when they built their relationship.

My mentor encourages and supports me, assists me in finding answers, and shares information they wish they had known in school. My tutor [mentor] wants me to succeed and achieve my objectives. They want to ensure that I spend my time studying for exams and on things that will make me happy.

I felt oneness, or unity [Power] when I was working with my mentor. It was nothing less than motivating and now I know that when I need more effort to complete a task. I can utilize not only my mentor but all the strategies they taught me to deal with the issue.

I felt like tasks weren't as hard as I thought as they were before I started coming to Learnza it's like all my problems seemed manageable. I felt like just as my tutor would say I have the tools to be resilient and strong when it came to my managing my academic stress, so I defiantly feel I had a lot more Power to handle the challenges.

According to ten participants, SAT and ACT testing was the primary reason students enrolled in Learnza. One participant (Claire) indicated she enrolled for social emotional health. The participants needed guidance preparing for these tests. Some participants shared that their parents support them because they are willing to pay for tutoring, transportation, and supplies. Lastly, as McCluskey described, power includes

the resources (abilities, possessions, position, allies, etc.) which a person can command in coping with load. Power can be physical (energy, health), social, mental, economic, and skills. Thus, parents were a Power variable in these instances because they are support systems during the stressful period.

The theme of Load referred to the expectations placed on a person by self and society, while power refers to the resources a person controls to deal with the load. (Quinn et al., 2019). Some participants showed parents at a Load while some participants showed work as a Load. Alex and Gloria both worked and attended school. In addition, for some participants, financial stress came from difficulties in applying for and receiving college funding. They also demonstrated that adult pressures of life added to their Load (Table 4.4, 4.3). As a result, Hanna, Larry, and Gloria perceived the “balance” they were seeking to be a significant Load variable. Participants’ descriptions of Load variables revealed a greater and more diverse familiarity with Load variables than with Power variables.

Participants identified the SAT exam as a prominent Load variable. For Alex and Ben, the pressure of the SAT was their most pressing concern. Others shared that the “balance” between working enough hours to meet work commitments and maintaining full-time class schedules was difficult as well.

SAT is extremely annoying I’m constantly trying to find time to study, and I never do, but it’s a constant pressure that causes me a lot of stress and anxiety. It’s pointless for me to take the SAT, apply to colleges, and figure out how to pay for college all at the same time. I could use some assistance.

I recently discovered that I have a low GPA, which stresses me out. My grades and school seem to be constantly at odds with each other. I can have a good week and feel on top of things, then get distracted by football and fall behind, and then the semester is over. I’m unable to meet these looming deadlines.

Before enrolling in coaching at Learnza, I was almost ready to give up. I work two jobs while attending full-time school, which no other student in my high school or here [Learnza] does. I simply have far too many family responsibilities. I'm an adult, so there's a lot of pressure to deal with for just one person.

Participants also expressed concern about their college finances. Some participants shared concern about the Load of financial responsibility for college, which frequently resulted in uncertainty, lack of sleep, and confusion. Alex, Andrew, Larry, Emily, and Kate reported that they frequently relied on friends and classmates for motivation, and that final exam stress was a common source of anxiety. Furthermore, all of these are exacerbated by the stress of extracurricular activities, work, school events, and a lack of self-esteem (Table 4.4).

Power and Load Variables

This section includes variables that serve as both Power and Load, such as family and finances. Some participants expressed that the high standards of familial pressures are both overwhelming and supportive parents who put pressure on them to perform to the high academic rigor. Yet, family functioned as a Power as well. Parents were the reason for student matriculation into Learnza. Parents also provided the finances for most students' tuition but held students to high expectations that combined were overwhelming (see Table 4.3).

Participants Claire, Gloria, Hanna, and Frank all saw their parents' influence in their lives as both a source of strength (Power) and a source of burden (Load). For instance, the collective experience showed that students valued their parents' opinion, but some participants perceived parents as a Load.

My parents have put a lot of pressure on my performance, which is very stressful. I enjoy coming to Learnza, but I feel like I have unrealistic expectations from my parents, which is causing me a lot of stress. I understand that they want me to do

well on my SATs, but they don't realize that I'm giving it my all and that I just don't like or perform well on these standardized tests.

My mom is pressuring me to study for the SAT for three hours a day, as she did when she was younger. I understand that our upbringings and cultures are different, but I don't have time in my day to study for three hours. I know my parents are paying a lot of money for me to be here, but I'm not a robot, and when I work too hard and don't take breaks, I burnout.

Participants' descriptions provided understanding of how family Power and Load variables varied between participants. Participants frequently identified family members who motivated them to study hard for high-stakes tests, attend tutoring sessions in preparation for college admissions, and provided ongoing encouragement for their academic pursuits. Participants generalized family members as important sources of motivation, reinforcement, and inspiration rather than expressing behaviorally precise ways in which family members contributed to their Power.

My parents are always encouraging me to study and attend tutoring. Even when I get overwhelmed, I can rely on my parents to help me stay focused. It is a big process to finish SAT prep, apply to college, and get good grades. But I'm happy I have a supportive family because this is really hard and I can't image doing it without them and my friends, counselor, and tutor.

Lastly, while the family was mentioned as a source of support, participants also stated that their parents put significant pressure on them to succeed, almost to the point of increasing their workload. Gloria, Hanna, and Frank all spoke about the pressures from their families to work and earn money while studying for high-stakes exams and working part-time jobs while attending full-time school. Alex, Ben, and Kate relied heavily on the motivational coach because they were concerned about their parents putting a lot of pressure (see Table 4.4). When parents became a Load variable rather than a support system, the mentor became the Power variable and assisted the students in achieving the sought-after balance.

Table 4.4

Themes from Framework Analysis

Theme	Student Data Samples from Interviews
Power	<p>“I enjoy coming to Learnza for tutoring [coaching], and I have a good group of friends who also come, and we all study together. It is critical for me to have a good group of friends because they help me stay motivated, and my tutor is always willing to assist me with math assignments and proofread my papers before I turn them in to class.”</p> <p>“Learnza makes me feel like I have more mental toughness. I feel better when I’m here because I’ve found ways to deal with it and often have more free time to do what I enjoy. I’m getting all A’s, which pleases my parents. I’m feeling much more prepared this semester, and I’m actually enjoying learning.”</p>
Load	<p>“Because we have so much to do both in school and online, it’s difficult to say we’re focused on school. It’s such a difficult situation, and on top of that, we have the SAT coming up, which I always find difficult to study for. Maintaining a high GPA [Grade Point Average] while also studying for the SAT is a lot of pressure and then try to do all my extra-curricular activities all of these responsibilities cause me a lot of stress.”</p> <p>“I can’t balance school, work, and a social life it’s all overwhelming. I want to quit my job but then my parents aren’t going to support me financially. I want to work to save up for college, but I know the SAT is my best shot. It’s just a lot of pressure and a lot of expiations all at once.</p>
Power and Load	<p>“My parents are very supportive, but they can put a lot of pressure on me, especially when it comes to the SAT and tutoring. I get irritated at times because of the pressure they put on me. I understand how expensive college is, but it’s the only topic we discuss at home and at tutoring sessions. I’m worried about repaying loans, the cost of education, and borrowing money for college, and I’m not sure why it’s so costly. It can be quite overwhelming at times.”</p> <p>“School is a burden right now, but my parents are helping me through it since they got me a tutor. I have been so focused on SAT prep that I have no time for anything else but it’s nice to come home and spend time with my mom and dad. I’m grateful for all they do but I feel this unrealistic expiation to do very well. I’m focusing on as much as I can do but it’s all coming down to the wire with this upcoming test and I really hope I do well. Regardless I know my parents will be proud of me. I just want to make them so proud.”</p>

Summary of Findings

The primary research question addressed in this study was: What are student perceptions of the mentor and mentee relationship and its impact on student burnout at Learnza tutoring center?” Student perceptions revealed that students saw their mentor as a positive and supportive role model in their lives. The participants’ common experience was a fulfilling experience with a mentor who actively cared about both their well-being and academic success. Specifically, participants perceived their mentors as providing guidance, motivation, emotional support. Lastly, participants described their mentor, for example, as “their inspirational guide and navigator who assisted in prioritizing activities and compartmentalizing tasks into meaningful and manageable problems that could be addressed.” The students believe they have meaningful professional relationships with their mentors and their mentors are a source of motivation.

In response to the second question: What are student’s perceptions of their motivational coaching experience at Learnza tutoring center? The motivational coaching experience revealed that the participants perceived the motivational coaching environment to be calming, supportive, and motivating. The students expressed the environment itself helped them to calm down after a long day at school. They took shelter from their Load variables in the tutoring center space. Additionally, they felt supported and motivated through the motivational coaching experience. For instance, the participants felt motivated because their mentor was available and offered strategies that helped the students not just with their academic needs but with other life stressors as well. In turn, this helped participants to better deal with issues related to anxiety. Through the motivational coaching experience, which encompasses the physical space, the mentor-mentee relationship, and the strategies imparted helped the participants gain clarity on

their tasks. The motivational coaching experience helped students bridge the gap between the goals they were struggling with when they first enrolled in the coaching program.

The study's final question was: How is McClusky's (1963) idea of Power-Load-Margin Theory reflected in student descriptions of motivational coaching experiences? The environment, coaching, friends, and mentor all served as Power variables. The Load variables included school, the pursuit of balance, high-stakes tests, grades, and underlying stress. Family and finances were both Power and Load variables (See Table 4.3).

Discussion

This section serves as a synopsis of the literature review by synthesizing the findings of this research study. First, I sought to address the study concerns about participants' emotions and perceptions of burnout, as well as the perceptions of their experience at the Learnza tutoring center. Second, the data collection method yielded four thematic analysis topics: calm, support, stress, and motivation, as well as the framework analysis themes of Power, Load, and Power with Load. Third, I reviewed prior studies that appeared to be relevant to the phenomenon during the early stages of the study's literature review, the literature presented in Chapter Two align with the findings of the study. The study results showed that students are subjected to a variety of negative stressors, including high-stakes testing and academic demands. In addition, the results demonstrate that students are also exposed to good mentor relationships that teach coping mechanisms to combat the stressors.

First, the results of this study on students' feelings of calm demonstrate consistency with three studies in the literature review. Researchers Miller and Moyers

(2006); Newnham-Kanas et al., (2011); Kimsey-House et al., (2010) all addressed that students thrive in an atmosphere where they feel secure and can do their best work in a calm environment. For example, belonging and enjoyment will motivate students to continue studying even when learning presents difficulties. I linked those findings to the 11 student participants, who all reported seeking assistance from their mentor and tutor to foster a calm, relaxed environment where they could study effectively.

Participant Gloria's narration is consistent with the literature, which shows that learners need to feel supported, welcomed, and respected in their learning environment (Blagden, 2012). The feeling of calm, for example, can be induced through practice and relaxation techniques that help induce a calming sensation (Larson et al., 2010). A student participant, Emily, described how she used mindfulness as a coping mechanism. "I try and meditate every day, even if it is just for a few minutes. It helps me relax, which helps me focus on school." Emily's narrative supports the study's findings that a quiet, positive environment helps students feel more attentive to their tasks.

Participants described Learnza as a stress-free, calming, welcoming, and relaxing atmosphere that boosted their self-esteem. For instance, Gloria's narrative description states, "I overcame significant obstacles on my journey from Mexico to the United States and having a safe space to work and study is beneficial." This is consistent with previous research that links self-compassion to psychological well-being and the motivational coaching philosophy. Students benefit from educators and mentors who serve as role models for self-care (Iskender, 2009).

According to previous research, guiding students through stress-relieving strategies such as motivational coaching can have a calming effect. This can be

accomplished by support figures such as teachers, mentors, or parents (Bardhoshi et al., 2014). This echoes the research study, which shows that students who learn emotional coping skills potentially reduce the risk of burnout. When combined with the mentor's supportive nature, the environment has a calming effect on the student, encouraging them to engage in learning. Ben added to this notion by saying,

I would take a moment to collect myself and calm down when I get stressed. If you avoid allowing stress to consume you, it [coaching] will assist you in overcoming it [stress]. So, when I'm having a bad day, I'm not in the mood to do anything and vice versa.

Ben's narrative expresses the critical nature of a collaborative mindset in overcoming mental frustration, roadblocks, and remaining calm (Kruger et al., 2007; Larson et al., 2010; LePine, et al., 2004; Yasin, 2011).

Second, students perceived various forms of support. According to the findings, students who received adequate mentorship and motivational coaching felt sufficiently supported to deal with a variety of academic and personal issues. Furthermore, the findings of LePine et al., (2004) study on how students perceive a lack of school support are consistent with the findings of this study. When students elaborated on their experiences, an unfavorable environment and variables discussed in the literature study influenced participants' learning in the same way that they described in their narrative descriptions. For instance, students believed that a toxic environment had a negative impact on their learning, and the findings of this study support previous research that shows that when stressful situations arise, hostile environments emerge, and students in a hostile learning environment lack support (LePine et al., 2004).

In the results of this study, students consistently cited both a lack of support and high-stakes testing as their primary reason for enrolling in Learnza and expressed

academic concerns. Researchers such as Cramer and Sauer (2014) and Miller and Rollnick (2013) focused on the importance of a supportive relationship for coaching and adults but did not specifically address the adolescent age group. Walburg (2014) framed their research consistent with the study's findings regarding a lack of support. In addition, Allsop (2007) argued that students should be taught how to engage in student-centered professional development through active learning.

Third, on the subject of stress, this study's findings affirmed those of the American Psychological Association (APA), which found that high school students ages 13 to 17 have stress levels that are significantly higher than the healthy normal range for teenagers and even higher than those of adults ages 18 and up. For illustration, this study's findings indicated that students found high-stakes tests such as the SAT and ACT, as well as the familial and financial pressures they face throughout their academic careers as stressful. The results concur with the literature, which emphasizes the connection between stress and exhaustion, exacerbated by excessive worry, and how excessive worry results in burnout and a lack of well-being (Walburg, 2016).

In addition, I examined the literature on stress and anxiety leading to burnout, which was also discovered to be a pattern. I found a study by Yasin and Dzulkifli (2011) that was relevant to the research. The findings of Minahan and Rappaport (2012) and Lazarin (2014) agreed that stress is caused by a variety of stressors and can be harmful to students if not addressed early in their lives. For iteration, collectively, participants described the stressors they experienced.

According to Triplett and Barksdale (2005), the symptoms of burnout come in many forms and start with a high accumulation of stress. This correlates with the research

study in which half of the participants in the study self-reported signs of burnout that surfaced in their academic and personal lives. These participants spoke about continuing to attend Learnza due to the pressures of high-stakes tests on their academic careers and a lack of resources to cope. Furthermore, as students met with their mentors, they identified various sources of stress, including academic, test preparation, part-time work, and overall life balance. According to previous research, students who do not have enough time in the classroom or at school to comprehend and learn information experience stress and anxiety (Robertson, 2016). Students experience stress, apprehension, and anxiety when their learning is evaluated based on test scores (Heissel et al., 2018).

Students exposed to various chronic normative stressors classified them as annoyances (Pascoe et al., 2020). When it came to studying, the students in the study expressed anxiety. Students also self-reported persistent academic-related stress regularly, according to the results of the study. Their education and academic success significantly influence students' stress levels. For example, high stress levels are associated with low academic performance (APA, 2014). The impact of this constant academic-related stress on adolescents' academic performance and well-being has not been thoroughly investigated through the lens of motivational coaching. This is evident in my research and studies in the literature review, which shows that both the test and the testing conditions put students under excessive stress (Fleege et al., 1992).

Fourth, while prior research has examined the impact of motivation, specifically motivational coaching, on participant success, such as Miller and Rollnick (2013). The students only mentioned mentors as sources of support who encouraged them to keep going. Participants agreed that additional support, such as mentorship, would help them

meet their overwhelming academic, emotional, and behavioral needs (Simpson, 2016). Previous research has emphasized Motivational Interviewing (MI) as a factor in assisting in the validation of motivational coaching for adult learning, but not as much for adolescent learning. However, with the publication of this study's findings, the learning community will glean more about the value of motivational coaching in the realm of tutoring for high-stakes exams and college preparatory coursework for high-school students' ability to succeed both in and out of the classroom. As a result, my research reflected and complemented Miller and Rollick's seminal work on the importance of holistic learning techniques such as motivational coaching and interviewing, and the positive outcomes reported by study participants.

Previous research shows that engagement promotes enrichment and relationships, according to LePine et al. (2004). The findings of this research substantiated the literature; participants showed a high degree of motivation as a combination of many factors. Empathy education encourages mentor-student communication and goal-setting on an equal footing (Horn, 2019). Participants also self-reported an increased motivation (Frey & Alman, 2003; Lyons et al., 2017).

Alex, the first participant, and Claire, the fourth participant, both emphasized the importance role of a positive environment during their interviews. Chapter 2 discussed how environmental factors influenced each participant's experience. One of the participants, Alex, desired to learn more about the "why" behind high-stakes tests. Thus, my desire to learn more about the themes of calm, stress, support, and motivation was fueled by the students' curiosity. These variables were examined because they influence how students behave. Ben, the second participant, discussed his battle with burnout and

how he used his mentor to help him improve his grades. In this study, perspectives on the mentor-mentee relationship were critical.

Framework Connections

The Power, Load, and Power and Load factors found in the PLM (Power-Load Margin) theory presented parallels with the findings in the current study. The study found considerable evidence through the theoretical framework to answer the research questions based on the framework's interpretation (See Figure 4.2). The study results indicated that students have positive and challenging interactions with their mentors through the lens of the PLM framework.

Findings echoed those of Gonzales et al. (2017), Gordon & Reese (1997), Heissel et al. (2018), Knekta & Sundstrom (2019), and Lazarin (2014), all of which emphasized the importance of understanding the relationship between standardized testing and the learning curriculum. This study supported the findings and disputed standardized testing, identifying it as limiting Power and serving as a Load factor. Additionally, students' perceptions indicated that high-stakes exams like the SAT diverted time away from real classroom learning and active learning outside the classroom. Participants' stories reflected their dissatisfaction with high-stakes tests and are consistent with research on the negative effects of an oppressive high-stakes testing curriculum on academic progression and learning. High-stakes tests, as Simpson (2016) points out have a negative impact on students' well-being and cause a disconnect in their learning experience.

Finances, school, and family, according to the literature, serve as both a Load and a Power source for students (Hiemstra, 1981). The study's findings contradicted previous findings, indicating that participants were grateful to their parents for investing time in

them and enrolling them in the Learnza tutoring center. On the other hand, the participants felt pressured to meet their parents and their expenses, as well as the cost of attending college, the burden of debt repayment, the cost of education, the need to find work after graduation, and the intellectual challenge of coursework. As a result, my research findings regarding family both align with and contradict previous literature on the subject matter.

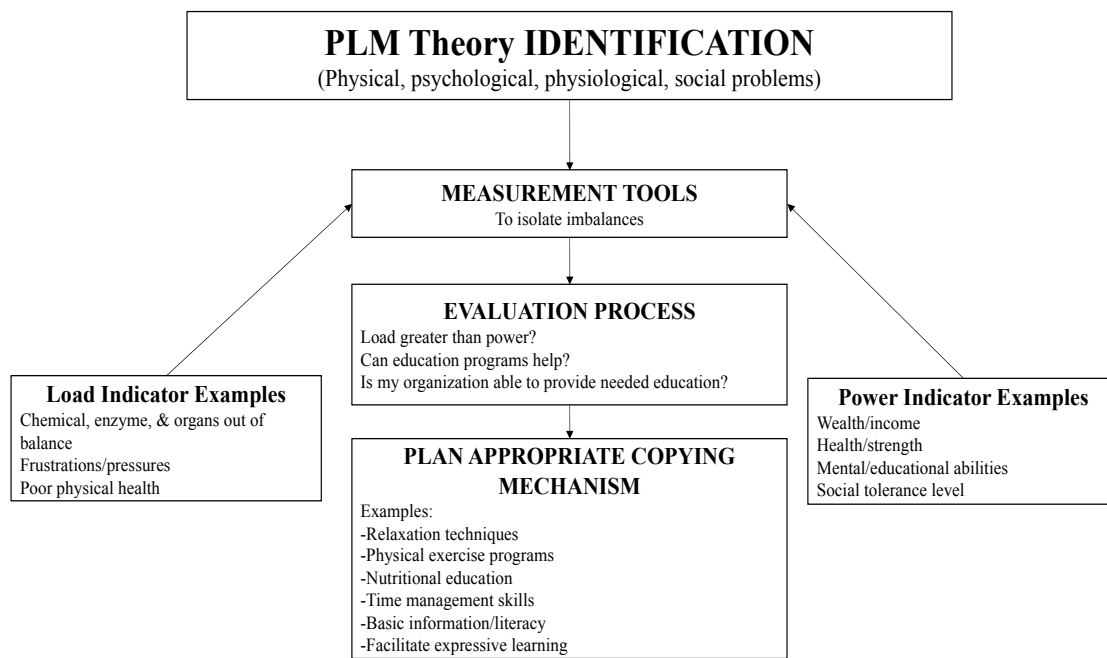


Figure 4.2. Suggested framework for planning educational programs based on load and power balances (Hiemstra, 1981).

Participants described similar experiences in high school with abundant high-stakes testing and little academic assistance. In their interviews, both individuals spoke about environmental variables. They described how their surroundings had a detrimental effect on their motivation, causing dissatisfaction and pressure. These revelations were linked to studies in the literature that explained the rapid rise in student stress (Load) and lack of balance (Margin) due to their description and echoed Hiemstra (1981)

foundational study, which looked at both internal and external Power and load variables (See Figure 4.2).

The literature review topics stood out as logical applications, but the strong ties to the students' experiences and views were a delightful surprise. The study revealed continued consistency with the framework choice as well. The two most essential elements of adult existence are the weight that an adult carries in life and the strength available to him or her to shoulder that burden (McClusky, 1965). Hiemstra (2003) and Kalynych (2010) emphasized the importance of using Power to control margin (balance) to deal with the daily Load. The findings of this study mirrored the Power that participants used, specifically the mentor-mentee relationship, which enabled students to build school support, schedule, and manages their time effectively.

Families that invest a significant amount of time and money into preparing their children for academic success, for example, increase their power factors (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018). However, the findings of Bardhoshieta (2014), Berger et al. (2019), and Bilge et al. (2019) have demonstrated the presence and dangers of burnout (2014). Walburg (2014) refuted the study's claim that parents are concerned about their children's well-being and become frustrated when they are unable to communicate their concerns in stressful situations, leading to burnout (Lin & Huang, 2014; Maslach, et al., 2001; Salmela, et al., 2009; Thomson & McLanahan, 2012).

The Power Load Margin (PLM) theoretical framework proved a strong foundation for the phenomenological research study. The literature confirmed gaps in the research on adolescent stress and anxiety, which leads to overwhelming manifestations of burnout symptoms in preparation for high-stakes exams. The outcomes of this study indicate the

mentor-mentee relationship positively impacted the participants' well-being. The key concepts from Howard McCluskey's PLM theory proved to be a useful theoretical framework for understanding the participants' feelings and perceptions in relation to the themes of Power, Load, and Power and Load.

In conclusion, this section's synthesis explained the study findings of what was already known from the literature review regarding the four themes calm, support, stress, and motivation. Students are constantly confronted with various ongoing normative stressors, such as ongoing academic pressures classified as everyday annoyances. In addition, students frequently self-report ongoing stress related to their education, such as pressure to achieve high grades and fear of receiving poor grades. As a result, motivated students are more likely to deal with pressures in their personal lives, whether academic pressures such as high-stakes testing or a wide range of social and societal pressures. Thus, for students, the mentor-mentee relationship provided a source of motivation.

Implications

This chapter allowed me to reflect on the study's findings and deduce significance from the detailed descriptions provided by the participants. First, stakeholders should consider the calm environment in which a student learns as essential to the student's success. Second, the support a student receives from their mentor is essential in assisting students personally and academically. Third, toxic testing culture increases stress and anxiety, which leads to burnout, which can be mitigated by reducing reliance on high-stakes standardized tests (Long & Robertson, 2016). Fourth, the motivational coaching experience matters and is a legitimate way to investigate increased motivation and resiliency in adolescent students. The research implications revealed how this study

benefits Learnza stakeholders, school districts, tutoring preparation companies, and future research topics. The following implications are grounded in the findings of this study.

The first implication is that a tutoring center's calm environment is critical for students. Students accomplish more when they are relaxed and engaged in their environment and schools need to provide a calmer atmosphere for students. For instance, the study's findings indicated that a calm environment or physical location is conducive to learning, and coaching makes a difference compared to an adverse environment. Thus, creating a calm environment similar to Learnza would include a relaxed tone, soft lighting, quiet areas, and healthy snacks. Previous research indicates that a proactive environment contributes to beneficial learning (Salmela-Aro et al., 2014). Thus, students can benefit from establishing attentive, supportive, safe, demanding, and intellectually rigorous classrooms in local school districts which offer a calm atmosphere.

Second, based on the study's findings, I propose that school districts implement consistent coursework and a curriculum that place an emphasis on a holistic approach to learning that reinforces support and mentorship. Assistance through mentoring and motivational coaching, in conjunction with mentor- and mentee-informed practices, would assist in alleviating any academic burdens by ensuring student engagement. As such, I challenge school districts to provide adequate support to students consistent with Learnza's practices. Include, for example, a curriculum that emphasizes autonomy, self-worth, and self-esteem. While students reported a lack of empathy and motivation from their schools, mentors were tasked with assisting students in coping with stress and anxiety, as described by participants.

Additionally, as an educator, I believe that district-wide expansion of mentor- and mentee-centered programs and curriculum would assist students. Trained motivational coaching professionals in schools encourage support and prevent burnout. I recommend the formation of a burnout task force (Walburg, 2016). Learnza has video vignettes, active dialogue, and the identification of burnout symptoms to help create a more supportive curriculum. Trained individuals engaging in this type of professional development can create supportive environments for the adolescent learner. Again, the study's findings indicated that supportive student-mentor relationships and parental engagement influenced students. Thus, support matters greatly, and when school districts, administrators, and teachers support students in a mentorship model, students will succeed.

Third, I believe that preventing unnecessary stress and anxiety leading to burnout for students starts with lessening dependency on high-stakes testing. School districts can reduce the dependability on high-stakes exams and create a positive, stress-free learning environment. According to the research, high-stakes exams are associated with burnout and a toxic testing culture (Simpson, 2016; Walburg, 2016). Specifically, in the study, Alex and Emily cited exam anxiety as a significant phenomenon. Insufficient school assistance has also been linked to student stress and anxiety, leading to high-stakes exam fatigue. School districts need a holistic curriculum based on the student's needs. This will reduce the school's reliance on exams by demonstrating academic development and reducing student stress.

Participants felt motivated (Power) despite being confronted with rigorous academic coursework, academics, and SAT and ACTs (Load). Thus, the findings support

motivational coaching, which assists students in balancing life. For example, tutoring and mentoring programs should develop a curriculum around the PLM (Power Load Margin) theory. A motivational coaching program (Figure F.1) can serve as a guide for future research on success trajectories for students based on the findings of this study.

In conclusion, the previous literature discussed the adverse effects of stress on student burnout (Simpson, 2016). Previous literature also emphasized the critical role of coaching in motivating students (Miller & Rollnick 2013). Thus, the current study's findings and recommendations are as follows: school districts must assist students in creating a calm environment for them to learn effectively. In addition, student support will allow for better coping mechanisms that will combat stressors before they become burnout. Lastly, I emphasize the importance of additional research on this subject, including quantitative and mixed methods studies (Creswell, 2013). Future research may include an increased number of students and a larger sample size. There is reason to be hopeful for future research.

Conclusion

Chapter Four provided an overview of research findings. It also provided an overview of each participant and a discussion of the major established themes and sub-themes related to the research questions discussed in the previous chapter. The data in Chapter Four revealed four major themes: calm, stress, support, and motivation. High-stakes tests were identified as the primary reason for enrollment and a major source of stress in the participants' lives. In addition, students valued their mentor's assistance and the calming effects of the environment. Chapter Five includes an executive summary

with research findings, recommendations for stakeholders, and a plan for distributing the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

First, to reiterate, student burnout is a serious issue that affects high school student's ability to enroll in college, maintain mental health, and achieve high academic achievement. Excessive high-stakes testing causes students to become desensitized to standardized testing, and the link between testing and stress is problematic. As a result, greater attention to stress leading to student burnout is urgently required.

As a result, an increased focus on the stressors that contribute to student burnout, such as high-stakes testing, is critical. This study centered on the experiences of students at the Learnza tutoring center, which provided support and mentorship. This study looked into students' experiences with academic and personal challenges. In addition, the study sought to comprehend students' perceptions of mentorship as a coping mechanism and resiliency builder in the face of adversity.

This phenomenological study investigated high school students' feelings, thoughts, and experiences about the mentor-mentee relationship and the perceived impact the relationship had on them. This study raised awareness of the dangers of burnout and suggests incorporating motivational coaching practices into students' daily lives. For instance, high-stakes testing preparation, which participants described as stressful, could become manageable through the mentor-mentee relationship. The findings of this study have the potential to help future researchers better understand how students experience burnout and raise awareness of the risks associated with the stress leading up to burnout.

This study also added to the literature by recommending ways to combat stressors through mentor-led practices such as a calm environment, structured support, and a stress-free motivational coaching-centered curriculum.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews served as the foundation for data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Central to this work was the importance of hearing the participants' collective accounts in their own words to shed light on essence of their experience of their mentor and mentee relationship and the motivational coaching environment. I gathered participants from Learnza who were willing to reflect on their experiences and offer feedback. Each participant took part in preliminary questionnaire and interview. The interviews were held in person and via ZOOM video conferencing towards the end of the 2020–2021 academic year. The open-ended style of the interview questions contributed to capturing the essence of the participants' experiences with data analysis done the following semester.

Participants in the research study were required to complete 20 hours of Learnza training to qualify. Eleven students met the requirements for the hour-long interview (see Appendix E, Moustaka, 1994). First, I emailed previous and current students who met the interview criteria. Second, students used an online questionnaire to self-report experiences with stress and anxiety leading to burnout (see Appendix B). These participants ranged in age from 17 to 20. The data collection methods closely adhered to Moussaka's recommendations (1994). Third, the ZOOM video and audio conferencing were used to record and transcribe the interviews. Fourth in the data analysis phase, I

manually coded and segmented the data. Four themes emerged from pattern matching in the thematic analysis calm, stress, support, and motivation. The final analysis process examined the data utilizing Howard McClusky's (1963) Power Load Margin theory (PLM). Lastly, informed recommendations were made based on the results of the thematic and framework analysis.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

The study's findings indicated, first, that the students' collective experience was one of a calm, compassionate, and responsive environment at Learnza tutoring center. Second, the study's participants reported encountering a variety of stressors in their academic, personal, and supportive network lives, which increased their self-reported anxiety and stress. Third, participants regarded their mentors and parents as supportive figures in their efforts to develop meaningful relationships. Fourth, the mentor-mentee relationship was identified as a primary factor contributing to students' motivation to combat challenges when they arose.

Finding One

Students perceived Learnza's motivational coaching environment to be a calm, compassionate, and responsive relationship. The first finding focused on the students who stated that their experience at the Learnza was relaxed, encouraging, and memorable. Thus, the Learnza teaching structure, particularly the mentor-mentee relationship based on motivational coaching curriculum served the participants well in fostering a positive environment for engaged learning.

Finding Two

Students face various stressors in their academic, personal, and support networks, which increases anxiety and leads to stress-induced burnout. Participants described their experiences with high-stakes testing. Students were subjected to significant stress, which could potentially result in burnout if proper parameters are not put in place. Several student participants struggled to balance their SAT and ACT studies and personal lives while dealing with a variety of stressors in both their academic and personal lives.

Finding Three

Students valued their mentor and parent as supportive roles. Students saw their mentor and parent as positive role models who assisted them in developing supportive relationships. For instance, since the mentor assigned to each student met with them on a regular basis, they developed a professional bond that went beyond the classroom. This structured mentor experience, combined with the support provided by parents at home, aided in the students feeling successful and in control of their lived experiences.

Finding Four

The mentor-mentee relationship was identified by students as a primary force that increased participants motivation to succeed and challenge themselves academically. The guidance of mentorships positively influenced adolescent participants motivation because students received nurturing and coaching feedback from mentors at Learnza. The mentor-mentee relationship during weekly tutoring sessions was both inspiring and delivered the results students needed to stay motivated long-term post coaching.

Informed Recommendations

This study examined the mentor-mentee connection and offers recommendations for Frisco Independent School District Administrators, Researching Tutoring Preparation Programs, and Educational Policy Makers.

Recommendation for the Frisco ISD Administrators

First, Frisco Independent School District (FISD) administrators must invest in providing sustained and meaningful support to all students through structured school guided mentorship programs. As evident in the findings of this study mentorship provides a key relationship for students as they balance Load and Power. The FISD must ensure that a curriculum based on motivational coaching is effectively in place. Participants stated that their mentor provided them with guidance, and they all expressed a desire for more guidance and support from their teachers and learning community. Thus, FISD can better support students by ensuring that district leadership is fully aware of the district's ability to assist teachers, staff, and students in implementing a motivational coaching-centered curriculum.

Recommendation for those Researching Tutoring Preparation Programs

Second, I make recommendations for tutoring programs and how they can improve their student support. This would require the development of an adaptive and accepting curriculum that emphasize social skills, empathy, and accessibility. For instance, fostering a more inclusive environment that allows all students access to the tutoring and mentoring community that hires mentors that inspire future students. Tutor mentorship programs are critical because they assist students in bridging the gap between academic demands and their ability to meet those demands.

Recommendation for Educational Policy Makers

The third recommendation is for Educational Policy Makers. I believe that policymakers can provide certificate training to establish a long-term support system for the implementation of motivational coaching programs. The Texas Education Agency (TEA), for example, can set up monitoring and reporting systems for local and regional officials on schools that implement a motivational coaching-centered curriculum. Furthermore, the results of the study may assist schools in establishing specific procedures, rules, protocols, and learning and safety quality standards that factor into the students' overall mental well-being. These can include academic accommodations, faculty and staff preparation, and the continuation of diverse interactions among policymakers on implementing a common strategy to collaborate on developing a mindful motivational coaching-centered teaching methodology. These recommendations have the potential to change the identified problem.

Finding Distribution Proposal

This section describes the distribution strategy I intend to employ based on the results of the study. This section begins with a discussion of the target audiences before moving on to the distribution strategy. I will utilize similar distribution strategies for each of the target audience.

Target Audience

The study's findings may be beneficial to a variety of target audiences. The study's primary audience is the Learnza's Board of Directors, staff, community members, professional speakers, and conference attendees. The following sections describe the target audience groups, distribution methods, venues, and materials.

Board of directors at Learnza. One of the targeted audiences of the Problem of Practice is the board of directors and stakeholders at Learnza. This board of directors includes original founders, investors, and patrons who make financial investments and serve as advisors. These stakeholders may offer curricular suggestions based on the research study results to adapt Learnza as to meet the needs of students both enrolled and alumni of the program. Distributing my findings to the board of directors will be through a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the importance of a motivational coaching-centered curriculum on fostering meaningful relationship and enhancing the learning experience. This presentation will provide valuable information for making informed decisions on the professional development needs of new mentors trained at Learnza.

Stakeholders at Learnza. Key stakeholders are the staff at Learnza and community partners such as the local school districts such as FISD. A one-hour professional presentation Lunch and Learn at the Frisco Independent School District will be the distribution method and venue (FISD). The presentation includes a PowerPoint presentation that details this research, the study's purpose, the research design, the data collection process, analysis, and the study's results and implications. The superintendent and his instructional leadership team, principals, and the trustees will be among the invited FISD's attendees.

Professional speaking audience and conference attendees. The last key stakeholder is attendees at conferences and professional speaking engagements. Many school districts, administrators, and teachers attend conferences for professional development. Presentation slides and materials at these conferences will increase ongoing

collaborations. In addition, distributing my findings at local and regional conferences will reach multiple professionals in the field and address the need for more research on mentor-mentee relationships, coaching, and experiences leading to burnout. I will be able to impact the learning community throughout Texas by drawing attention to the results of this study.

Proposed Distribution Method, Venue, and Distribution Materials

I will present these findings to key stakeholders, including school district administrators, school leaders, and professional conference attendees, at a professional presentation. I intend to present to the current board of Learnza, members of the community, and other stakeholders utilizing a PowerPoint presentation. These succinct presentations of findings and implications to schools and other stakeholders may be the most effective way of disseminating information. Furthermore, a summary report summarizing the findings and direct student feedback on their mentor-mentee experiences will be shared. In my presentations, I will outline my research, findings, and recommendations for school administration. Following the presentations, there will be a thirty-minute question and answer period. These presentations will also be adaptable based on the size of the audience.

In addition, both an executive summary and a PowerPoint presentation will help disseminate the findings. Each section of Chapters One through Five of this Problem of Practice will be shared, including: An introduction to the problem, a brief overview of the literature, data collection, analysis, methodology, key findings, emergent themes, and recommendations will be available for the intended audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mentor-mentee relationship supported students' academic and life balance through a positive relationship and environment. In comparison, the high-stakes testing culture exposed them to stress and exhaustion that can lead to burnout. Participants valued mentor-mentee relationships and motivational coaching. This study examined participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. Chapter One introduced motivational coaching with Motivational Interviewing (MI) values, the basis for motivational coaching, and examined burnout and high-stakes testing. Chapter Two examined the literature on the impact of high-stakes testing on students. Chapter Three detailed the current study's procedures, including research design, data collection and analysis methods. Chapter Four presented the results and research findings, highlighting four major themes: calm, stress, support, and motivation. Lastly, this study made informed recommendations based on the study's findings.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Email

Dear [Participant]:

As a current doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Baylor University, I invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting to complete my Problem of Practice Dissertation. My research aims to understand the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of high-school students on the mentor-mentee relationship as it impacts student burnout at an urban tutoring academy. This study also seeks to understand the coping strategies that best help student deal with stress or burnout.

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this research study. If you are a current or former student of Learnza in the past three years and are willing to participate in the study, we ask you to complete a brief questionnaire. I will conduct interviews and on-site at our Learnza office located inside a community workplace or digitally through ZOOM. The attachment in this email should take no more than 15 minutes. The interviews conducted take 45 to 60 minutes (about 1 hour). It is essential to note your name, and we will request any other identifiable information as part of your participation, but this information remains confidential and anonymous. Lastly, a consent document is provided at the interview time for you to sign and date. The completion of the questionnaire at the link below indicates your willingness to participate in the research study.

Yours truly,
Hamza Haqqi

APPENDIX B

Student Participant Preliminary Questionnaire

Table B.1

Student Participant Preliminary Questionnaire

Question	Not Applicable	Never Bothers Me	Rarely Bothers Me	Occasionally Bothers Me	Frequently Bothers Me	
1. I understand my own personal my high-school goals and expectations.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel that I am not fully prepared for my school exams.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am imposing unrealistic expectations on myself.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel pressured for a better school GPA. (Grade Point Average)	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel I have too much responsibility.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
6. I find it difficult to navigate the online school environment.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
7. I find it hard preparing and allocating resources to study.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel I am not prepared for class.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
11. I complete tasks in a rush or haste.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel lost when it comes to taking notes in class.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel I have too heavy a workload, one that I cannot finish during the normal school day.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
14. I feel unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities are in my academic life.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
15. I feel that school takes up too much time.	N/A	1	2	3	4	5

Note: Adapted with permission from Administrator Stress Index Gmelch et al.'s (1982) and McKay (2020)

APPENDIX C

Permission to Use the Administrator Stress Index

From: Walter H Gmelch [mailto:whgmelch@usfca.edu]

Sent: Friday, December 22, 2017, 8:34 PM

To: Hamza Haqqi <Hamza_Haqqi1@baylor.edu>

Subject: RE: Request to use the Gmelch et al.'s Administrator Stress Index (1982)

Dear Haqqi:

Thank you for your message and request to use the ASI in your research. Yes, you are welcome to use it and I would like to stay connected regarding your findings. The study you attached reads well and looks quite interesting. While this is not my research area it is one of personal interest and I encourage you to continue your work in this area.'
Best regards,

Walt

Walt Gmelch

Professor of Organization and Leadership School of Education
University of San Francisco



APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Baylor University School of Education's Department of Curriculum & Instruction,
the Doctor of Education (EdD)

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Impact of Motivational Coaching on Lived Experiences of Students

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Hamza S. Haqqi

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Hamza Haqqi from Baylor University's School of Education, as part of his graduate studies course requirement

I understand the project is designed to gather information about academic experience at Learnza. I will be one of approximately 11 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, that there is no risk or consequence to this choice. Additionally, all my personal information will be upheld with confidentiality and anonymity.
2. I understand most interviewees will find the discussion engaging and thought-provoking. However, if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview immediately.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by doctoral student researcher from Baylor University as part of their graduate studies requirement. The interview will last 45-60 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio/ and videotape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be produced. If I do not want to be taped, I will not participate in the study and will have to terminate immediately.
4. I understand the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure and private. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies that protect individuals' and institutions' anonymity and confidentiality
5. Faculty and administrators from Baylor University will not be present at the interview nor have access to raw field notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent any bias or negative repercussions.
6. I understand this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at Baylor University for research problems or questions regarding subjects, you may contact the IRB through Jessica Trevino at IRB@baylor.edu

7. I have read and understood the explanation provided to me by the principal investigator. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
8. I have a copy of this consent form.

My Signature Date

My Printed Name

Signature of the Investigator

Hamza S. Haqqi, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Baylor University
School of Education



APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Introduce myself
 - a. Welcome student
 - b. Thank them for participating
2. Provide a brief overview of the study and goals for the participant
 - a. I am looking to understand their lived experiences with stress and burnout resulting from their experience at Learnza tutoring center.
3. Provide information about the timeframe, breaks, bathroom locations, refreshments, etc.
4. Discuss question guidelines:
 - a. Participants may pass on a question or questions
 - b. Keep personal stories experiences confidential
 - c. Respecting and voicing all opinions, questions, comments, and concerns
 - d. Any questions or suggestions for additional information?
5. Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (See Appendix J)
 - a. What are your beliefs and insights of the role of your life coach (mentor)?
(RQ2)
 - b. Describe your professional relationship with your mentor? (RQ1)

- c. What was the reason or circumstances that caused you to enroll at Learnza? (RQ1)
- d. How has motivational coaching helped you? (RQ1)
- e. Can you tell me about an experience that is causing you stress? (RQ1)
- f. What are your opinions of the motivational coaching environment here at the Learnza? (RQ2)
- g. Can you name a time when motivational coaching did not help you at all? (RQ1)
- h. Can you describe a time when your motivational coaching experience did or did not help you with confidence or helped you with dealing with stress? (RQ1)
- i. How would you describe the stress levels associated with your school and personal life? (RQ1)
- j. Describe a coping strategy that has helped you dealing with stress? (RQ2)
- k. How do you try to manage the day-to-day challenges? (RQ1)
- l. How successfully do you feel you are in managing the stress associated with your school? (RQ1)
- m. How does the motivational coaching curriculum and environment affect your aptitude for success? (RQ1)
- n. What are your feelings on the motivational coaching experience on your mental well-being? (RQ1)

- o. Describe any periods of prolonged stress that you struggled to manage effectively that may be perceived as experiencing some degree of burnout? (RQ2)
 - p. A scenario: you have a friend, a buddy who is feeling very stressed, and is dealing with a lot of stress in their life, what advice would you give them? (RQ1)
 - q. A scenario: walk me through a typical day, which is like, stressful for you? (RQ1)
- 6. Providing information and results to participants for research, presentation, media, and business data. Additionally, participants will be aware of the recording of their interview and that the attendee will provide transcripts in the video for business mark

APPENDIX F

Artifacts



Figure F.1. Motivational coaching environment at Learnza.



Figure F.2. Learnza student with motivational coach/mentor.



Figure F.3. Students in the Learnza environment.



Figure F.4. Students studying in co-working space of Learnza.

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