

Take turns reading the paragraphs in this article, then discuss with your group.

Many countries require major exams at the end of high school. These exams determine whether a person will be able to get into the college of their choice. Pressure on students can be intense. Some students talk about how nervous and worried they were before and during the exam. One young man said he felt that he did poorly on the exam because he was so nervous he couldn't think straight.

Parents often put tremendous pressure on their kids to make a high score. One man said he was satisfied with his score but it was several points lower than his older brother's score. His parents were very unhappy that he did not do as well as his brother. It made the boy feel very depressed about a score that was actually quite good.

Another student complained that her parents were embarrassed about her scores. She made a decent score, but the parents felt pressure from their friends whose kids scored higher. They asked her how they could attend parties now. They said everyone would be talking about their kid's score. They would be too embarrassed to mention their daughter's score.

One student said there is too much emphasis on these exams. It is also important to be a well-rounded person. Students should participate in sports and extra-curricular activities, but they do not have time. They spend hours every day studying for exams and that leaves no time for other pursuits.

Finally, one young woman said that she didn't worry too much about her exams. Her parents told her they were not that important. They stressed that you could have a very good life without having very high scores on these exams. As an example, they pointed to a young man who wanted to become a DJ. He did not want to attend college. He spent a lot of time learning to be a DJ. He convinced his parents to buy him the equipment he would need. He found work as a DJ and recently was recognized as one of the top DJ's in India. He achieved his dreams without a college degree.

QUESTIONS:

1. Talk about your experience with exams. Which one of the people mentioned in the article do you identify with the most.
2. Do you agree that parents pressure students too much?
3. Do all societies put too much pressure on young people to succeed, or is it necessary to pressure young people?
4. Americans typically do not pressure children very intensely to score well on tests. We tend to have a more laid back attitude about exams. However, Americans also are falling further and further behind other nations in measures of mathematics and science skills. Is it possible that Americans need to pressure their students more?
5. Is achieving your dreams without a college degree realistic in your country?
6. Just how important are sports and extra-curricular pursuits? How many activities outside of academics did you participate in?

Common errors made by non-native speakers. Read and discuss.

I WAS PRESSURIZED BY MY PARENTS.

This is an incorrect use of the word. She meant she was “pressured”. Something that is pressurized has had its pressure raised artificially. For example, we pressurize our automobile tires by pumping air into them. But we don’t pressurize people.

I HAVE LIVED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR ONE AND ONE HALF YEARS.

We commonly say, “one and A half” rather than “one and one half”.

ALMOST OF THE STUDENTS WERE FROM INDONESIA.

Correct: Almost ALL of the students were from Indonesia.

I’M SCARY ABOUT THE EXAMS.

She means, “I’m scared” about the exams.

I DIDN’T LIKE MY TEACHER. ME TOO.

The correct answer is ME EITHER.

THE STRIKERS DIDN’T COLLECT THE GARBAGES FOR ONE MONTH.

Garbage does not have a plural form. It is an uncountable noun like furniture and money.

MOST OF THE CHILDREN STAYED IN SCHOOL AND PERFORMED WELL. ONLY THE YOUNGEST CHILD ENDED UP AT PRISON.

This student used the wrong preposition. It should be “in prison”. This can be confusing. We say “in school”, “in prison” but “at work”.

SHE HAD TO GO TO HOSPITAL.

This sentence is correct in British English. However, Americans say “go to THE hospital”.