Review of: "The Positive Impact of Dropping the Lowest Test Score on Academic Performance and Stress Levels in MathBased Graduate Courses"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The article covers an interesting topic, however, there are some issues that are worth addressing:

Title / Abstract

The title is not appropriate: You do not measure stress levels, so you cannot conclude anything about the impact of dropping the lowest test score on stress levels. The same is true for the abstract: You write that „the study results suggest that the strategy of dropping the lowest test score does have a positive impact on both the academic performance of students and their stress levels during exam periods.“ However, no results regarding stress levels are reported in the article.

Introduction

The introduction addresses several topics that are only loosely related to the study. The section on suicide is irrelevant. Also, I am not sure if it is a good decision to cover math anxiety. Math anxiety sure is an important topic, but is it related to the current study? Having the opportunity to drop the lowest test score might be a worthwhile option in all kinds of classes, not just in math related classes. If you get into the topic of math anxiety, you might want to examine if students with math anxiety especially profit from dropping the lowest test score – however, for such analyses your sample size is too small.

Methods

Your sample size is very small. Also, a description of the sample is missing (gender, age). Are there students who failed the course and then took it again in the next term resulting in them being analyzed twice? I also found Table 1 quite confusing. The reason was that you label the exam weeks „Week 1“ and „Week 2“. This somehow implies that you mean week 1 and 2 of the semester which of course is not the case.

Results

How did you calculate the average exam score? Also, instead of using the normalized scores it would be interesting to see the actual scores. An increase of 7 % or even 18 % might not be much in that regard. Since Figure 1 and Table 2 give the same information, you could just add the numbers from Table 2 to Figure 1 and then delete Table 2. Since only about half of the students took the second exam, your results are based on a very small sample size.

Discussion

In my opinion, it should be discussed if repeated exams (with the opportunity to drop the worse result) really are a blessing, or if they are more of a curse. If you implement repeated exams, students learn more exactly what is expected of them in the exam and can tailor their learning strategies accordingly. But does a such-earned better grade in the exam really reflect a higher competence? Does repeating an exam really eliminate stress and as such brings to light the real potential of the students, or does it just reward good memory skills? Also, the discussion mentions several topics that need references and / or connection to the current study, e. g. possible language problems of international students (no literature is cited regarding those), and the mentioning of missing acknowledgment in teaching about „how the brain learns“ (what exactly does that have to do with the current study?).

Conclusion

In the conclusion you label the studied exam schedule as an implementation of an innovative teaching technique. I cannot follow you there. You studied a modification of an exam schedule, not an innovating teaching technique.

Besides that, the article needs revision regarding spelling / grammar; there are some sentences with errors.