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Motivational Factors on Learning: A Case of Students in Albania

Abstract

This study examined high school and university Albanian students' motivational factors on learning while they pursue education. In this paper, the factors that motivate the students on their learning during their education in different schools and universities in Albania are investigated to create a broader understanding of their purpose in improving their academic progress. The data are obtained from a close-ended survey in a Likert type scale with adequate validity and reliability. The sample consists of 145 students ($n = 104$, 71.7% female and $n = 41$, 28.3% male) who were high school and university students studying at public and private schools in Albania.

The results revealed that there were no significant differences between male and female students; 10th grade high school students and 1st year university students; and between private high school students and private university students on motivational factors on learning. However, the findings show that there is a significant difference on "My voice is being heard at school or university and this motivates me" ($p = .044$); "I find interesting the students club that can entertain me and improve my skills" ($p = .015$); and on "I find learning at school a fun activity" ($p = .013$). At the end conclusions and recommendations are provided for the pre-university and higher education institutions and other policy makers on education.

Keywords: *High schools, university, students, motivation, learning.*

Introduction

Education is perceived as a key determinant in our personal development and intrinsic growth. In a world of capitalism, education is considered an important indicator of economic and professional success not only for the individuals but for their families as well (Teowkul, Seributra, Sangkaworn, Jivasantikarn, Denvilai, Mujtaba, 2009). Students who have motivation for learning use higher cognitive processes in learning (Driscoll, 2000; and Pintrich, 2003).

Motivation is one of the most important elements of our mental life, playing a significant role in learning and achievement (Taheri, 2011). Motivation is among the most powerful determinants of students success or failure at school (Stipek 2000; and Ryan & Deci, 2002). There are different categories of motivation, that identify the individuals' reasons for motivation such as: self development, career development and success and environmental factors. It is well-established in research that student's academic achievement does not happen by chance, but it involves the partnership of several parties who contribute to this process. Student achievements are not the result of simple cause-effect relationships, but there rather are results of regular interactions of factors that include the different characteristics that students can bring to the educational setting.

Psychologists and other scientists have proposed a number of different ways of thinking about motivation, including the one that involves looking at whether motivation arises from outside (extrinsic) or inside (intrinsic) the individual. People can be motivated by various things and in different ways, but the most well-known types of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to a psychologist (Kendra Cherry), extrinsic motivation occurs when we are motivated to perform a behavior or engage in an activity in order to earn a reward or avoid a punishment. Examples of behaviors that are the result of extrinsic motivation include: Studying because you want to get a good grade; Cleaning your room to avoid being reprimanded by your parents; Participating in a sport in order to win awards; Competing in a contest in order to win a scholarship. In each of these examples, the behavior is motivated by a desire to gain a reward or avoid a negative outcome. On the other side, intrinsic motivation involves engaging in a behavior because it is personally rewarding; essentially, performing an activity for its own sake rather than the desire for some external reward. Some example behaviors of intrinsic motivation include: Participating in a sport because you find the activity enjoyable; Solving a word puzzle because you find the challenge fun and interesting; Playing a game because you find it exciting. In each of these instances, the person's behavior is motivated by an internal desire to participate in an activity for its own sake.

One of the most common places where motivation is manifested earliest in students is the classroom setting. The classroom is that context in which we can find different types of students all motivated by different combinations of factors. Different motivational factors and levels can have different results on student achievements. As mentioned before, different students have different factors of motivation: some rely too much on external factors and if those factors are not very favorable, they

immediately become demotivated and lose their connectedness to school which results in directly influencing their goals in their lives. The other individuals who rely on internal factors, their inner strengths and determination help them balance their level of motivation. The decline of learning motivation is a growing problem among children in this everyday changing world. Research shows that learning motivation decreases during adolescence (Maeher & Anderman, 1994) and especially during the transition period from middle school to high school (Slavin, 2001).

The theory of human motivation

According to Maslow (1943), among other basic needs in human being, individuals have desires to know, to learn and to understand. Acquiring knowledge and systematizing the universe have been considered as, in part, techniques for the achievement of basic safety in the world, or, for the intelligent man, expressions of self-actualization. Also, freedom of inquiry and expression have been discussed as preconditions of satisfactions of the basic needs. True though these formulations may be, they do not constitute definitive answers to the question as to the motivation role of curiosity, learning, philosophizing or experimenting. Curiosity, exploration, desire for the facts, desire to know may certainly be observed easily enough. The facts that we acquire, if they are isolated or atomistic, inevitably get theorized about, and either analyzed or organized or both. This process has been phrased by some as the search for 'meaning.' We shall then postulate a desire to understand, to systematize, to organize, to analyze, to look for relations and meanings.

Self- determination theory

According to self-determination theory, student's motivation for academic performance varies in both strengths (amount) and quality (nature), and both variations predict learning ,achievement, and continuation to university (Deci & Ryan, 2002; and Reeve, 1996). So self-determination emerges from the student needs and desires and it is this self-determinant motivation that predicts the success of the students. Students can increase their motivation towards learning process through internalisation. Internalisation is a process of a student adopting increasing choice and value for learning, ownership of the learning process (Ryan & Connell, 1989; and Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). Through internalization process a student becomes highly self-determinant.

Achievement goal theory

As self-determination is very important to student motivation so are the student goals. So are these two characteristics that help to explain why students engage or fail to engage with educational settings. According to achievement goal theory, it is not only the strength but also the nature of students academic goals that influences their approaches to learning opportunities and their consequent learning and achievement (Ames,1992).

Teacher- Student relationship

Teacher-student relationship is one of the most essential factors which help motivating them. Teacher's expectations, trust, care, values, ideals and positive feedback

are the elements that effect positively in the establishment of a warm and healthy teacher-student relationship that definitely enhances the motivation among high school and university students. Some academic factors that have been proved to be effective on students' motivation toward learning are: educational method, learning program or goals and expectations, educational materials, the reward and punishment system set in place, emotional support of students, mutual respect, teacher's enthusiasm and behaviour, teacher and student interactions and assessment method (Taheri, 2011). Most of the parents consider the weakness of childrens' motivation to be due to education and especially due to teachers (Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

Learning Environment

Learning environment is as important as other factors in maintaining a high motivational level, but it is not the primary one. Reflecting on the results of the survey, we can report that a high percentage of the students weren't much affected by the learning environment. But of course the school facilities such as the laboratories, technology, sport areas and comfortable classroom environment were somehow important for the students.

Peer Motivation

Inside the classroom setting, peers are a potential source for motivating one another. Most of the lifelong friendships are formed at school and sometimes peers have been known to stand up for each other even more than siblings. Feelings of belonging to a peer group, sharing knowledge and skills, obtaining better results when studying as in group are crucial elements in peer motivation.

The school system and environment

The school system can influence students either to flourish or to rebel. A school system which is extremely strict can negatively influence the students, the opposite is true; at schools in which the students voice is being heard, the students can share opinions without being worried and their evaluation according to their merits makes possible the flourishing of the students.

Generally students are motivated to learn more when conditions in school are favorable. Their tendency is to reach high academic achievements, good peering, good teacher-student relationships and spend a good time within a classroom environment. Motivation can come from any kind of source but no matter where it comes from, it is that force which pushes us to move forward and to succeed in life. This study aimed at investigating the relationship between the motivational factors on learning and gender, grade level and school level. The following research questions are formulated: (i) Are there any differences in motivational factors on learning between male and female students? (ii) Are there any differences in motivational factors on learning between 10th grade and 12th grade high school students? (iii) Are there any differences in motivational factors on learning between high school and university students?

Methods

Sampling and Procedure

This study was conducted to provide a broader understanding of mainly Albanian students' motivational factors on their learning. It aimed at exploring the factors that motivate them while they are pursuing education at an educational setting and what influences them more during this experience. As shown in Table 1, a total of 145 high school (10th, 11th and 12th grade students) and 1st and 2nd year university students where (N = 41, 28.3 %) were male and (N = 104, 71.7 %) were female representing a group of students who are heterogeneous in nationality especially Albanian and Turkish.

Table 1. Distribution Categories by Gender

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Distribution	Frequency	Percent	
Male	41	28.3	
Female	104	71.7	
Total	145	100.0	

Paper based questionnaires were distributed in person to the students of three private high schools, one public and two private universities found in two different cities of Albania. The students were provided brief information about the aim of the study, they were assured confidentiality and they were thanked about their willingness to participate in this study. The survey took about 10 minutes to be completed during their break time in a classroom environment. Completed questionnaires were collected by the research assistants from each high school and university and they were returned to the research team.

Measurement tool

In this study, a close-ended survey was used to obtain demographic information and data about the students' motivational factors on learning. The items of this survey were forced choice and a five-point Likert type scale (from 1 = "Very dissatisfied" to 5 = "Very satisfied") was used to measure the respondent's level of agreement with the motivation factors. The statements included in the questionnaire were clearly stated and aimed at obtaining the needed information about the students' opinion on their motivational factors on their learning. The questionnaire consisted of two parts in four pages. In the first page of the questionnaire, demographic information related items are included. The second part of the questionnaire included 30 items

about students' motivational factors on their learning. A Likert type scale is usually used in this type of questionnaire to measure the respondent's attitude, preference, expectation and subjective reactions.

Scale reliability

For the internal consistency and reliability, we measured the Cronbach's alpha, which is a method of estimating internal reliability. As shown in Table 2, we received a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.662 for the items. Since, the items in the scale have quite different means and standard deviations, we used the standardized alpha. The Cronbach's alpha should be greater than 0.6, so this questionnaire is reliable.

Table 2

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.662	30

Data Analytic Strategy

The data were analyzed by using SPSS 20.0. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample. The responses received from this study were coded as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The data was analyzed using the independent samples T-test of SPSS for windows to compare the level of agreement of the motivational factors on learning, and to check if the difference between the mean values of the test variable for one group differs significantly from the mean value of that variable for the second group with regard to gender, education level and type of school of the respondents.

Results

The results revealed that there were no significant differences between male and female students in the motivational factors on learning in an educational setting. However, as can be seen from Table 3, male students were significantly different from female students on "My voice is being heard at school or university and this motivates me" ($p = .044$).

Table 3					
<i>Comparison of Female and Male High School and University Students on Motivational Factors on Learning (n = 104 females and 41 males)</i>					
Variable	M	SD	t	df	P
Voice heard at school			-2.04	103.01	.044
Female	41.59	192.4			
Male	3.07	.93			

T-test analysis showed that there were no significant differences between 10th grade high school students and 1st year university students on motivational factors on learning. We found that 10th grade students were significantly different from 1st year university students only on “I find interesting the students club that can entertain me and improve my skills” ($p = .015$) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4					
<i>Comparison of 10th Grade Students and 1st Year University Students on Motivational Factors on Learning (n = 30 10th grade students and n = 46 1st year university students)</i>					
Variable	M	SD	t	df	P
Interest Students Club			2.49	74	.015
10 th Grade High School Students	3.30	1.24			
1 st Year University Students	2.61	1.14			

There were no significant differences between private high school students and private university students on motivational factors on learning. As shown in Table 5, we found that private high school students were significantly different from private university students only on “I find learning at school a fun activity” ($p = .013$)

Table 5					
<i>Comparison of Private High School Students and Private University Students on Motivational Factors on Learning (n = 33 private high school students and n = 57 private university students)</i>					
Variable	M	SD	t	df	P
Learning as a Fun Activity			-2.56	56	.013
Private High School Students	3.18	1.07			
Private University Students	107.82	308.39			

Discussion and Conclusions

This study was conducted to reveal more about the motivational factors toward learning among high school and university students in Albania. Motivation plays a crucial role in students’ learning process. Their learning experience is greatly influenced by a set of factors related to the students’ social environment, educational setting, and family environment. However, since students spend most of their time at school, their relationships with peers and teachers has an impact on their motivation about learning and attain a high academic achievement (Lens, 2005). For the motivation system to be successful, the teacher must provide opportunities not only to reward successes but also to make up for the failures. They must insist on establishing positive values by providing successful models, improving existing capacities by training for attributing the successes to attempt and failures to lack of attempt, and developing new capacities by training useful skills and approaches to learning and study; they must also guarantee equal and appropriate opportunities for all the students (Taheri, 2011).

The findings of this study revealed that there are no significant differences among students from different grade level, gender, type of school or educational level on their motivational factors on learning. The results showed that students value more the way how they are treated and the degree to what their voice is heard by the school. Another significant finding was that if school environment is more entertain-

ing and attractive for the students, they are more willing and motivated to learn and highly achieve at school.

This study comes with some limitations that reduce its potential to be generalized and among them we can mention the relatively small number of the respondents, the small number of high schools and universities and especially not being able to include public high school as well. The restricted geographical area where the survey was distributed by including only two major cities such as Tirana and Durrës, points out at another limitation of this study.

Considering these limitations more research is needed to be conducted in the future by using different designs to further investigate practical strategies on how to enhance students' motivational level and improve the potential of motivational factors on students' learning at school.

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