7th World Conference on Educational Sciences, (WCES-2015), 05-07 February 2015, Novotel Athens Convention Center, Athens, Greece

The influence of reasons approving on student motivation for learning

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Abstract

The present study is based on the importance of social approving reasons in the development of academic motivation. This research intends to investigate the effect that they have reasons for social approving on academic motivation of students. For this the study aims to observe the differences that appear in the ability to retain a list of words by students and general motivation that they have in the presence of social approval (provided by the teacher and peers) in the absence of social approval. It is a descriptive case research based on our teaching experience in higher education. Was analyzed the population of students, aged between 18 and 28 years in university in Romania. The results of analysis of available data, students consider as fundamental the need for approval in the development of academic motivation. The need for approval is a positive factor in point of view of social integration, it supports social behavior as one possible predictor of how a person will relate to others, depending on the axis between the existence of maximal and minimal existence of this needs at a certain person.

Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

Keywords: Motivation, learning, Higher Education, efficient communication, teacher-student relationship.

1. Introduction

The present study is based on the importance of social approving reasons in the development of academic motivation. Motivation has also an important influence on a learner’s attitude and learning behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000, in Hakan & Munire, 2014) and academic motivation is a key determinant of academic performance and deserves closer attention (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002).

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doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.382
2. Theoretical perspectives

We took into consideration the contributions of Harre (in Hayes, Orrel, 2003) which argues that one of the fundamental reasons for social behavior is social respect (which you can fall also within social reasons, affiliation), “none of us wants to appear stupidly in front of others”. Harre supports the idea that people want to be respected for what they are, obstinately avoiding the perception that they might be ridiculous in some aspects; according to the author that motivation is one developed from childhood (children on the playground, they “give air” posing in various hypostases), requiring more research of this field of action.

For Watters and Ginns (2000) mood can be beneficial for involvement in pregnancy and the sadness or the happiness felt by individuals can continue to influence the cognitive functioning and Palmer (2005) says that “students may have a range of personal goals, including social goals (eg, gaining the approval of teachers or peers)”. Thus, approval motivation is a very important factor for developing academic motivation. The quality of interaction between teacher and their students and between the child and entire academic group (classroom's mates) is balanced by a lot of dimensions of extrinsic motivations. In this context, approval motivation is one with big impact (because of the teacher - a figure with authority at early age of pupil and, secondly, because of evaluation necessity through person’s evaluation of adolescent or young adult/social evaluation. These can influence positively or, contrary, to destabilise academic motivation.

In fact, Rook says that the damages produced by social stress are, in general, bigger that the stress produced by non-social stress. Also “negative social interactions have more potent effects on well-being than positive interactions” (Rook, 1984, p. 1106).

Social approval needs is well connected with affiliation needs, needs which a student have in school because he tries to adapt himself at educational space, but also at educational group.

The first ones who investigated this motivational area are Crowne and Marlowe; they identified different behaviours between the subjects with different scores – extremely high or extremely low at social desirability scale (considered indicator for approval need according to authors). For example, the level of conformism was very high at those subjects which high need of approval and the results were opposite at those with low conformism (in Bourne, Ekstrand, Dunn, 1988).

There are another researchers (Herbert et all, 1997) who linked these two concepts „social desirability (the tendency to respond in such a way as to avoid criticism) and social approval (the tendency to seek praise) are two prominent response set biases evident in answers on structured questionnaires”. (Herbert et all, 1997, p. 1046).

So, „approval motivation refers to the desire to please others and to avoid disapproval” (Boyle, Saklofske, Matthews, 2015, 454). Naturally need of approval represents a positive factor stimulating social integration, sustaining social behaviour and being a possible predictor of the way of acting in different groups. The need of social approval is biased acceptance, which also brings in discussion the concept of conformism. Individuals are tempted to be conformist not only to general norms of a certain group, but also the secondary ones (how to be dressed, hair cut etc.).

The approval needs can be developed in larger conceptual area – social support (support concept also for social approval). An interesting hypothesis on social support is those that it has the role of buffer. A series of studies remarked that social support becomes important, especially in the situations in which persons are experiencing anxiety or it is influencing by a stressful factor. „People who are highly motivated to obtain social approval and avoid disapproval are predisposed to experience social anxiety, presumably because they are motivated to control how they are regarded by others” (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, 111-112).

There are studies that named that even in absence of these factors, social support is important. There are another studies which affirm that social support is important even when these factors are missing. The problem can exists in the type of social support and the benefits which are obtained by the receiver of them.

Karen Rook (in Panisoara, Panisoara, 2005) argued that in the moment in which social contact takes perspective of group fun, humour, affection, the positive impact will be produce even in the non-stressful generated situations. On the other perspective, the actions oriented towards problems such as advice's solicitation, material support, verbal assurance and showing empathy are more useful in the stress-related periods of time.

As we mentioned before, approval motivation is included by specialty literature in category of extrinsic motivation (Sansone, Harackiewicz, 2000). „Extrinsic motivations are calculated more toward gaining attention,
recognition, approval and gratification for others” (Mortensen, 2008, 118). „Although not tangible, praise, recognition and approval are also considered to be extrinsic motivators” (Shaw, Gorely, Corban, 2005, 98).

Much of the recent research indicates that academic motivation is an important component in learning and achievement.

More than that, Deci and Ryan (in Kennedy-Moore & Lowenthal, 2011) are describing three types of extrinsic motivation: motivation based on situation, motivation based on approval and motivation based on values. One of them is valuable indeed for individual (said the authors), the third one. The approval needs lead the children to seeking all around the judgement of peers and adults for feedback about their actions. Their self-esteem depends in big percent by how another person’s evaluate what they are doing. In consequences they will quit rapidly the actions when decide that it is a big risk to be negative evaluated. Approval motivation – „also reported feeling anxious and coping poorly with failure. When they didn't perform well, they worried and put themselves down or denied the importance of the setback”. Not only that, Kohn (in Lavoie, 2008, 120) observe that praise are growing dependence of the child in rapport with adults and approval's adult.

There are opposite opinions. So, Atkinson and Raynor (in Flink et al., 1992, p. 189) observe that „extrinsic incentives, such as social approval or tangible rewards, would have a positive effect on motivation by increasing student’s willingness to pursue an academic activity”. Also Thomas (1989, 89) said “There can be no doubt that desire for the approval of others – parents in the case at hand – can be a powerful motivating factor”. Panisoara & Panisoara (2010) highlight - the social approval acts very strongly, representing an important lever within the teaching “stock”: by means of approval or disapproval the teacher has at her/his disposal one of the most important tools to build up students’ personality.

Positive perspective in educational field is supported also by McInerney (2005): “Among social goals that have been found influential in determining at student’s motivation at school are approval, responsibility, welfare, affiliation and survival” (McInerney, 2005, 41) even if the educational context do not get out approval motivation from the influence of extrinsic motivation: „extrinsic motivations (doing school work for the rewards it will bring in the form of good grades and teachers approval)” (Jackson, 1990, 28).

Putting a balance between perspectives we can say that approval motivation is a factor which is present in everybody's life. It is an important descriptor of life in school and it can have positive or negative impact on every individual life.

Martin-Larsen (1984) proposes like instrument of research Approval Motivation Scale: this takes a more direct approach by focusing on individual differences in need for social approval. Indeed many researches link approval motivation by age or gender. So, the adolescents are more influenced by approval like adults, the girls are more influenced by approval than boys (as studies prove) (Chung and Asher, in Brody, 2001). That's why it is important to investigate and control level of power and influence of approval motivation in our student’s lives. This thing is motivated by the need of understanding why „some students make special efforts to get their parents or occasionally their teachers interested in what they are doing; others are self-motivated and do not need these evidences of adult approval” (Hong and Tomoff, in Hong, Milgram, 2000, 146).

School learning depends not only on external stimulation, teaching style, but also the variables related to students' personality (academic ability, attitudinal, motivational, affective structures, style and learning strategies). (Stanculescu, 2013, 94).

Based on the study of Williams & Williams (2011, p. 2), the five key ingredients impacting student motivation are: student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment (See Table 1).

For example, the student must have access, ability, interest, and value education. The teacher must be well trained, must focus and monitor the educational process, be dedicated and responsive to his or her students, and be inspirational. The content must be accurate, timely, stimulating, and pertinent to the student’s current and future needs. The method or process must be inventive, encouraging, interesting, beneficial, and provide tools that can be applied to the student’s real life. The environment needs to be accessible, safe, positive, personalized as much as possible, and empowering.

The authors emphasize that motivation is optimized when students are exposed to a large number of these motivating experiences and variables on a regular basis. That is, students ideally should have many sources of
motivation in their learning experience in each class. (Palmer, 2007; Debnath, 2005; D’Souza and Maheshwari, 2010, in Williams & Williams, p. 2).

Table 1. Five Key Ingredients for Improving Student Motivation (Williams & Williams, 2011, p. 23)

| Student | Teacher | Content | Method/Process | Environment |
|---------|---------|---------|----------------|-------------|
| • Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation | • Subject knowledge and motivational level | • Students experience success and achievement | • Incentives | • Create an effective environment |
| • Various individual and social factors | • Teacher skills | • Student ownership | • Experiential learning or self-learning | • Individual and learning system design differences |
| • Hierarchy of needs | • Test giving | • Student choices | • Mutual goals or objectives | • Include the study of self-information |
| • Perceived well-being | • Scientific management and human relations | • Build competency | • Verbal conformity | • Empowerment |
| • Efficient use of energy and focus | • Conscious of small details | • Creativity and critical thinking | • Flexible and stimulating just-in-time training and interactivity | • Engagement and considering student and teacher opinions |
| • Purposeful connection with work | • Reach out to students | • Students feel connected | • Different types of framing | • Teamwork |
| • Conscientiousness and achievement | • Know your students and build on their strengths | • Novelty | • Objective criteria | • Structures |
| • Public speaking competence | • Value and build relationship | • Timely and relevant to real life | • Encouragement and praise | • Distance and online learning |
| • Study time and study habits | • Relational turning points | • Variety | • Casework | • Emotionally literate environment |
| • Lecture attendance | • Enthusiasm | • Technology | • Guided discussion | • Storytelling |
| • Comprehensive, long-range educational plan | | And information from the Internet such as websites, Twitter, YouTube, and phone apps | • Reinforcement strategies | • Positive social interactions |

Ashton (1984) asserts that no other teacher characteristic has demonstrated such a consistent relationship to student achievement. A teacher education program that has as its aim the development of teacher efficacy, and which includes the essential components of a motivation change program, should develop teachers who possess the motivation essential for effective classroom performance (p. 28).

3. Methodology research

3.1. The purpose of the research

This research intends to investigate the effect that reasonings of social approving on academic motivation at students. For this the study aims to observe the differences that appear in the ability to retain a list of words by students and general motivation that they have in the presence of social approval (provided by the teacher and peers) in the absence of social approval.

3.2. Participants

There were analyzed subjects - students, aged between 18 and 28 years, in university education. The participants were selected by purposive sampling, a method known in qualitative research (Patton, 1990).

The sample group for this research includes 90 students from various faculties at University of Bucharest.
Table 2. Distribution of population

| Institution         | Variables | Sex | Male | Female | Total |
|---------------------|-----------|-----|------|--------|-------|
|                     |           |     | N    | %      | N     | %     | N    | %    |
| Faculty of Mathematics |          |     | 18   | 20     | 12    | 13,33 | 30   | 33,3 |
| Faculty of Biology   |          |     | 7    | 7,78   | 23    | 25,56 | 30   | 33,3 |
| Faculty of History   |          |     | 11   | 12,22  | 19    | 21,11 | 30   | 33,3 |
| Total               |           |     | 36   | 40     | 54    | 60    | 90   | 100,0 |

3.3. Procedure

The results of the study were obtained by applying a written questionnaire to subjects. For the analysis of the questionnaire data were transcribed the responses.

4. Results of research

The results of analysis of available data, students consider as fundamental the need for approval in the development of academic motivation. The need for approval is a positive factor in point of view of social integration, it supports social behavior as one possible predictor of how a person will relate to others, depending on the axis between the existence of maximal and minimal existence of this needs at a certain person.

Wishing to find out whether significant difference that appear in the ability to retain a list of words by students and general motivation that they have in the presence of social approval (provided by the teacher and peers) and in the absence of social approval, have obtained the following indicators (see Table 3).

Table 3. The indicators of the importance of social approving on academic motivation

| Social approving on academic motivation | In the absence of social approval | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------|----------------|-----------------|
| In the presence of social approval      | 40                               | 4,07 | 1,074          | ,06877          |
| In the absence of social approval       | 50                               | 3,76 | 1,181          | ,07603          |

Also, we calculated the t tests for independent specimens and have obtained the following statistic data (see Table 4).

Table 4. The results of Independent Sample test regarding the importance of social approving on academic motivation

| The importance of social approving on academic motivation | T       | df     | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------|
|                                                          | -3,109  | 478,029| .002           | -.31376         | .10270                | -.51446, -.11236                         |

Regarding the data comprised in Table 4, a statistically significant difference of average between the subjects belonging to the two groups is noted, differences in favor of the group of subjects (in the presence of social approval). Thus, in terms of importance of social approving on academic motivation, the t test (478,029) = -3,109 for p=0.002, which implies that the respondents from the presence of social approval have felt more motivated to a greater extent than the respondents from the absence of social approval.

Because the answers to the others items from the questionnaire have been varied, were grouped into categories (group the respondents from the presence of social approval and group of respondents from the absence of social approval). The results of analysis of available data, students consider as fundamental aspects - in descending order - what is indicated below:
1. motivation to do even better and interest (40 responses from participants in the presence of social approval and 8 responses from participants in the absence of social approval)

2. the way they have received the feedback positive/negative - "I become motivate/demotivate" (40 responses from participants in the presence of social approval and 45 responses from participants in the absence of social approval)

3. enthusiasm, competition, positive attitude (38 responses from participants in the presence of social approval and 12 responses from participants in the absence of social approval)

4. motivation to achieve a good result (39 responses from participants in the presence of social approval and 15 responses from participants in the absence of social approval)

5. exercise improves motivation for learning (36 responses from participants in the presence of social approval and 10 responses from participants in the absence of social approval) - it facilitates motivation for learning of content where the student becomes an active agent in the educational process itself. “It helps the learning dynamics, classes are more enjoyable and positive attitude”.

6. other answers (6 responses from participants in the presence of social approval and 35 responses from participants in the absence of social approval)

According to the results of the studies conducted by Lipman, 1998, Payne, 1994 (in Sternberg & Subotnik, 2006), a successful teacher is characterized by the following features: "dedicated, aware of the needs of his/her students, attentive to all his/her students during class, always engaged intellectually and emotionally, having high expectations from his/her students, recognizing both the weaknesses and qualities of students”. Motivation refers to “the reasons underlying behavior” (Guay et al., 2010, p. 712). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is motivation that is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure.
4. Conclusion

According to the recent studies, it becomes obvious out that if the social support is formed in the bulk of the its criticism and condescension (and think about how frequent are such manifestations of social support in current practice), instead of increasing self-esteem and sense control of the situation in which the individual is sent to feelings of guilt, sees himself as incompetent, weak and dependent on others and - not the least - the situation. In this way, we emphasize the importance of strategies aimed at providing a positive social support / approving, strategies that can be pursued on a wide range of options.

The need for approval is a positive factor in point of view of social integration, it supports social behavior as one possible predictor of how a person will relate to others, depending on the axis between the existence of maximal and minimal existence of this needs at a certain person.

According to Cotrus et al. (2014) student motivation for learning lies in its desire to find the most appropriate cognitive strategies, which they believe will assist in learning. Whether it's about organizing, repetition the information, monitoring comprehensive level or making connections between new and previously acquired knowledge, each student, in part, establishes their order of priority.

Study of Jurik et al. (2014) clearly highlights the importance of communication between teachers and students, “verbal teacher–student interactions and student characteristics are meaningful for student learning and motivation”. In this study, authors investigated how teacher questions and feedback in relation to individual student characteristics and gender predict cognitive learning activity and intrinsic learning motivation. Another study (Domenech & Gómez, 2014) examines the relationship among students' and teachers' thinking styles, student psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness), and their reports of intrinsic motivation in the Psychology Degree context. They concluded that psychological need satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on student intrinsic motivation. The sources of motivation however are complex.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a result of a research made possible by the financial support of the Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132400 - “Young successful researchers–professional development in an international and interdisciplinary environment”.

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