Impact of the Level of Learning Motivation on Primary School Students' Academic Achievements. Parents' Perspective Analysis

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Abstract

Motivation for learning must be a priority for every educational system, because we constantly need to implement new strategies of improving the quality of the educational process. In this conditions, the aim of this article is to identify the motivational factors involved in learning activities related with parents' perception, in order to build up strategies to increase students' learning performance.

In order to provide a comprehensive image on learning motivation as perceived by parents involved in the research, we established several strands of action that will provide a basis for the investigation of the phenomenon that is specific to the educational environment. In this respect, a series of aspects have been designated, as follows:

- the identification of factual reasons triggering students' learning motivation, from parents' perspective;
- the highlighting of basic characteristics of the educational environment built within the family;
- strategies identified by parents relating to the increasing of learning motivation in students;
- the level of homework done for the next school day, as perceived by parents;
- the importance given by students' parents to motivated learning.

Keywords: motivation; motivational strategies; learning environment; school performance; motivated involvement

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Zusammenfasung

Motivation zum Lernen muss eine Priorität für jedes Bildungssystem, denn wir müssen ständig neue Strategien umsetzen in der Verbesserung der Qualität des Bildungssystems. In dieser Bedingungen, das Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, zu identifizieren, die motivationale Faktoren beim Lernen Aktivitäten im Zusammenhang mit den Eltern die Wahrnehmung, um Strategien zur Erhöhung der Studenten lernen Leistung. Um ein umfassendes Bild über das Lernen Motivation als wahrgenommen durch die Eltern, die in der Forschung, haben wir mehrere Aktionsbereiche, dienen als Grundlage für die Untersuchung des Phänomens, die sich spezifisch auf die pädagogischen Umfeld. Eine Reihe von Aspekten benannt wurden, wie folgt: Hervorhebung der grundlegenden Eigenschaften des pädagogischen Umfeld integriert in der Familie; strategien identifiziert durch die Eltern in bezug auf die Steigerung der Lernmotivation bei Schülerinnen, das Niveau der Hausaufgaben fertig für den nächsten Schultag, als durch die Eltern; die Bedeutung von Studierenden Eltern motiviert zu lernen.

Schlüsselworte: Motivation; Motivationsstrategien; Lernumgebung; Schulleistungen; motiviertes Engagement.

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Introduction

Our research was mainly aimed at identifying the perception of parents of primary school students on the relationship between the level of motivation in their children and their educational achievement. We consider that by addressing the education phenomenon not only from teachers and students' perspectives, as entities involved directly and on a daily basis in the process of teaching and learning, but also from parents' points of view, since they are secondarily involved in coordinating and supporting their children's extracurricular learning activities, we will have a more coherent portrait of the student as a whole. We think this is a more useful approach than the usual routine that only grasps a partial prospect of the student, being exclusively based on observing the student in the school environment.

Major resource coordinates

The parents' focus group comprised 200 parents of primary school students. Meetings were held each semester during joint teacher-parents activities, conducted as lectures delivered to parents for each class separately. In order to provide a comprehensive image on learning motivation as perceived by parents involved in the research, we established several strands of action that will provide a basis for the investigation of the phenomenon that is specific to the educational environment. In this respect, a series of aspects have been designated, as follows:

- the impact of learning motivation on students' school achievements, according to their parents' perception as well;
- the identification of factual reasons triggering students' learning motivation, from parents' perspective;
- the highlighting of basic characteristics of the educational environment built within the family;
- strategies identified by parents relating to the increasing of learning motivation in students;
- the level of homework done for the next school day, as perceived by parents;
- the importance given by students' parents to motivated learning.

The questionnaire designed to be filled in by parents was developed in relation to the preliminary discussions held with parents during the first meetings we attended. The questionnaire contains four subsections: the way a parent relates to the learning activity their child is involved in, information regarding the time spent by the parent(s) in supporting their children with preparing homework and other school activities, identifying the ways and means children spend their leisure-time (outside school environment), or the level of motivation shown by students in relation to school-oriented learning activity.

Presentation and interpretation of the results

Knowing the fact that the educational process cannot exist outside the influence of motivation (Pintrich, Schrauben, 1992; Pintrich, 2003), or of teacher-student-parent inseparable triad, we aim at identifying the parents' attitudes and manners of relating to the school achievements of their children, but most of all, to the motivational component involved in this process. The results and potential strands of action to be taken are presented further bellow.

Parents were asked about their perception of the relationship between academic success and thorough learning. Thus, it appears that parents are aware of the major implications constant academic effort has when it comes to the learning effort their children put in throughout the entire schooling period. Constant positive attitude towards learning provides consistency to the defining elements of the teaching and learning process, while parents' support is vital in such situations, and is moreover emphasized when students of young age need support and stimulation in making intellectual acquisitions and many other achievements.

Regarding the meaning of the term *thorough learning*, parents believe that their children's sustained effort in view of their personal development through participation in educational activities provide a strong basis for academic success. They noted that given the specific structure and peculiarities of the educational environment, a constant positive attitude and willingness to learn are required in order to be able to correctly relate to school and the learning process as a whole.

Item 2 directly connects two other terms that are commonly used in the teaching and learning environment: a high level of knowledge is strongly related to a high level of professional achievement. Thus we discover that most parents are aware of the role school and education have as the main way of ensuring success in a future profession.

Table 1. Parents' attitude with regard to the relationship between the high level of knowledge and professional success

Response scale	Percentage
strongly agree	80 %
partially agree	9 %
neither agree, nor disagree	4 %
partially disagree	3 %
strongly disagree	4 %

A favourable attitude in general and the awareness of the impact students' momentary actions can have on their future professional evolution and development is a big step forward in shaping constant positive attitudes towards learning (Pintrich, DeGroot, 1990). Since parents play the role of adults as a position of authority over the children, the teaching staff should always maintain contact with the former, in order to establish priorities and strands of action according to of children's age and level of development. By introducing the third item in the questionnaire, we intended to acquire some information on the parents' perception with regard to students' basic activities. We could easily notice that *total agreement* is a variant chosen by most of the parents in the focus group investigated in this regard. This aspect implies multiple benefits from a teaching and pedagogical perspective, since on the one hand, it provides the student the support they need in carrying out their work, and on the other hand, points out to the need for a constant effort, when we are referring to patterns of behaviour in every student's life.

Through the introducing of item 4, we found that most parents are partially satisfied with the academic performance of their children. This attitude may be rooted in parents' constant willingness and inclination to instil a sense of challenging their children's own limits, in the underestimating of their real capacities, but also in parents' erroneous perception and misinterpretation of performances put in by school-age children. As a result, the scheduling of pertinent discussions is required within the lectures delivered to parents, with regard to the existence of clear criteria to evaluate school performance in primary school students.

Item 5 is designed as a filter question aiming at differentiating between two groups of parents: those who engage in complementary educational activities with their children and those who do not engage in such activities. This differentiation is important precisely because it helps us identify the need of additional support, but also the manner in which parents understand to provide it. Thus, we discovered that 62% of parents answered they engage in such activities with their children, while the rest do not consider these activities important, they do not have enough time to put them into practice or they simply cannot find an appropriate way to do so. By identifying the so-called deficient areas in the strategies used by parents, we intend to investigate further aspects concerning the time spent by students, along with parents, in learning activities. We will be able, therefore, to make valuable judgments and appropriate assessments on the quality of time spent by parents with their children and also, we will be able to propose a series of strands of action in this respect.

When allocating learning time into hourly time slots, we noticed that most parents spend up to 5 hours every week engaging in school-type activities along with their children, being followed by those spending 6 to 10 hours per week involved in this type of activities. With the increasing number of hours allocated to school-activities, the number of parents who meet the criteria decreases, leading down to minimal percentages. We can thus conclude that within our lectures to parents, a comprehensive approach on appropriate techniques to effectively manage time, as well as on the proper functioning of the parent-child relationship within learning activities would be welcome.

Table 2. Number of hours per week spent by parents in learning activities with their children

Number of hours/week	Percentage
< 1 hour	5 %
1-2 hours	25 %
3-4 hours	18 %
5-6 hours	20 %
7-8 hours	7 %
9-10 hours	11
>10 hours	14 %

The data we gathered allowed us to observe that most of the time spent by children outside of school is devoted to studying and doing homework, but also to leisure activities. Other activities are ranked in descending order, according to their importance and frequency. Among these activities we can mention herein computer work/play, household chores, watching TV, sports activities, engaging in activities with friends, resting, etc.

Table 3. Activities students commonly engage in the afternoon, ranked according to importance and frequency

Activities students commonly engage in	Rank
doing homework	I
leisure	II
computer (games)	III
sports	IV
watching TV	V
reading	VI
household chores	VII
resting	VIII
artistic and cultural activities	IX

Among these activities, we must specify that studying, doing homework and preparing for the next school day, overall, but also playing, recreational and sports activities are the most appropriate for the age group primary school students participating in the survey fall within. Nonetheless, these activities should alternate so that students be able to use their spare time for both preparatory activities and recreation.

The next item in the questionnaire is intended to identify the source of satisfaction concerning motivated activity and the pleasure children find in doing certain tasks. This item asks parents to identify their children's favourite activities. Thus, from the analysis of answers provided by students who participated in the survey, we discovered that the overwhelming majority of parents are aware of at least one favourite activity of their children which is consistent with their perspective on options of spending leisure time. This item emphasizes a context of great interest to us, as an occasion of tapping into these activities to reward students' positive behaviour and to use children's favourite activities to convey new or more difficult information.

The activities undertaken on children's own initiative have the highest rate of success since there is intrinsic and stable motivation that drives them. In this regard, item 7 is designed to investigate parents' perception of the level of students' involvement in studying, homework and other school-related tasks.

Table 4. Parents' perception of the degree of their children's involvement in school tasks, on their own initiative

Doing homework/school tasks on their own initiative	Percentage
never	22,6%
sometimes	49,2%
all the time	28,2%

The results recorded show that from parents' perspective, more than half of the students involved in the survey have a positive approach to studying, homework and other school-related tasks, most engaging in such activities on their own initiative. The other category of respondents who opted for *never* as an answer to this question is, fortunately, underrepresented, since few parents stated that their children do schoolwork on their own initiative. Item 8 of the questionnaire falls within the same context of

studying and doing schoolwork. Parents are asked to provide an open response as to the reasons determining their children to engage in learning activities. Parents' answers can be included in a large range of reasons, as follows:

- the need to prepare for future careers;
- the desire to get higher marks;
- awareness of the need to acquire knowledge and to learn, as essential activities;
- the need to maintain their position in their class hierarchy;
- fear of repercussions;
- preference for certain subject matters.

With this particular item we can observe a strong presence of extrinsic motivational elements, to the detriment of intrinsic reasons, aspect that we believe needs further clarification. The hierarchy of motives based on these triggering factors helped us identify the fact that the extrinsic motivational elements outweigh the intrinsic, prompting teachers to try to ensure a higher consistency of intrinsic motivation in the educational process, in order for them to gradually replace extrinsic reasons, according to age peculiarities and developmental potential of primary school students.

Knowing the reasons that contribute to the lack of motivation in students from their parents' perspective is equally interesting to us as knowing which situations or circumstances generate and strengthen motivation in the context of students' performing school tasks. Table 5 illustrates a few of the most important sources of demotivation for primary school children.

Table 5. Inventory of demotivating situations from parents' perspective

Inventory of demotivating situations in learning	Rank
high volume of tasks	I
fatigue	II
lack of an appropriate study area	III
computer games	IV
watching TV	V
playing with friends	VI
previous failure at school	VII
lack of parental authority	VIII
incomprehensible contents	IX

Such an inventory is absolutely necessary because it identifies the disturbing aspects to an effective learning and teaching process. Knowing the starting point in developing an ameliorative approach can be viewed as the measure of the process of implementation of a program of motivational enhancement in primary school students. We mentioned above that one of the methods of identifying learning motivation in primary school students is the manner and degree of involvement in doing homework on their own initiative. 36% of parents stated that on numerous occasions, their children refused to do their homework, while the remaining percentage stated they never experienced their children's refusal before. Table 6 illustrates in detail the determining reasons for the emergence of student's refusal to do school tasks.

Table 6. Inventory of reasons triggering students' refusal to do their homework

Reasons triggering students' refusal to do their homework	Percentage
playing temptation	13%
high volume of tasks	11%
physical discomfort	13%
fatigue	14%
incomprehensible tasks	16%
I do not know	33%

Conclusions

Among the reasons parents identified as having a major role in triggering a desirable or undesirable attitude in their children in relation to their homework and other school tasks, we can observe a series of motivational elements stemming from the student's personality structure, preferences and life experiences, while there are also categories of reasons stemming from the potential influence of teachers over students (Renninger, 2000). The increased volume of schoolwork, as well as the presence of difficult or incomprehensible tasks, can be thwarted by constant attention devoted by teachers to the explaining of learning tasks in a more individualised manner. Consequently, we advocate effective and open discussions that can take place both with students and with their teachers in view of ensuring the best approach to develop a positive attitude towards performing homework and other school tasks(Muste, 2012).

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