

FOSTERING ACADEMIC MOTIVATION FROM A STUDENT-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The fostering of the academic motivation of pupils/students by the teachers should represent one of the fundamental and permanent objectives of the instructive-educational activity, all the more so since motivation is assigned the second place in the hierarchy of importance of academic success factors, right after academic intelligence. The quality of the results of the learning activity and the student's academic adaptation are also conditioned by the degree and type of motivation that supports the learning activity. From the set of variables that determine the students' academic motivation, the school can influence or control, through the instructive-educational activity, only the factors that pertain to its own domain: the interactions between pupils/students and teachers; the interactions between pupils/students and other pupils/students; selecting, processing, and adapting the content of the educational process, the didactic methods, the assessment methods of academic performance. Considering the importance of strategies to stimulate the motivation for learning in the context of academic performance, we set out to investigate the perception of a group of students from faculties with a technical profile regarding educational practices that favour the development of academic motivation. The research method used is the questionnaire-based survey. To identify the students' perceptions of strategies that contribute to stimulating their academic motivation, we used closed-ended items in a questionnaire.

Keywords: *academic motivation; learning; education centred on the student; educational strategies*

Introduction

Academic motivation represents the set of factors that prompt the student to carry out activities that result in the assimilation of knowledge, the formation of skills, abilities, competencies, abilities, with a special role in optimizing the learning activity and sensitizing students to the learning content. It determines the increase of effort, the concentration of attention, the mobilization of the mental and nervous energy that are all necessary: to trigger the act of learning, to overcome the difficulties encountered in the learning process, to solve the learning tasks.

Between motivation and learning there is a mutual causal relationship: motivation energizes and facilitates the learning process, being supported at the same time by the effect of the learning activity itself when it materializes into positive results and success.

D. Ausubel and F. Robinson believe that the main components of academic motivation are (D. Ausubel, F. Robinson, 1981):

- the cognitive impulse – belongs to intrinsic motivation, being represented by the need to know, to understand, to operate with knowledge, to formulate and solve problems.
- the strong affirmation of the self – includes the need for success in school, which generates the feeling of self-respect, and the need for prestige within the group to which the child belongs. Often, there are states of anxiety generated by the fear of a possible failure in school, which would cause the loss of prestige and self-respect.
- the need for affiliation – represents the need to obtain and maintain the approval of a person or a group with whom the student identifies and depends upon (teachers, parents, classmates).

The three components of academic motivation can act separately or combined at any moment of the academic activity, their action and proportion being different from one age stage to another and from one individual to another.

Among the causes specific to school activity that can generate a decrease in the student's motivation towards the learning activity, we mention

(L.Tăușan, 2016): the existence of an affective climate that does not satisfy the students' need for emotional security; ignoring the activity of communicating the objectives of the instructive-educational activity to the students;

promoting an authoritarian relationship, based on disciplinary coercion, which transposes the student into the role of a passive listener, a simple object of education, lacking initiative; teachers showing exaggerated indulgence, a lack of firmness and low requirements; the use of a faulty evaluation method, embodied by: the delayed communication of evaluation results; the centring of evaluations on sanctioning non-achievements and difficulties, rather than on the idea of removing them; encouraging the competitive assessment and not the progress assessment through which the student's progress from one stage to another could be appreciated; endorsing a subjective evaluation based on the unfair treatment of students (M.A. Popescu, S.-L.Tudor, 2020).

Centering on the student – a way of stimulating the motivation for learning

The paradigm of postmodernity in the field of education took shape in response to the requirement of adapting the school to the changes and problems of the contemporary world. This paradigm is objectified in the new perspectives and solutions in the educational theory and practice that were developed along the lines of continuity with the paradigm of modernity, restructuring it, but also bringing in new directions and educational projects.

In a study devoted to the analysis of theoretical pedagogical developments from the perspective of the postmodern paradigm, E. Păun (2002) highlights the following characteristics of postmodernity in education:

- education centred on the pupil/student, as a person with individual, differentiating characteristics that must be valued and maximized in the educational act (idea located at the centre of the existential-humanistic paradigm, subsumed by the postmodern perspective);
- the reappraisal of the subjective-affective dimension in the educational relationship, of the subjects' actions and behaviours that all have a unique, situational, contextualized character;
- regarding the educational relationship as an interaction in which the teacher and the pupil/student are engaged in a process of cognitive and affective investment, and in which the teacher works together with the pupils towards their development and building their status as a pupil;

- achieving a sense of balance in school between the fostering of competition and cooperation.

The paradigm of adapting the school to the requirements and training possibilities of the pupil/student, representative of education in the future, but also of educational systems organized according to the network model, requires a diversification of learning situations and experiences and their construction in accordance with the possibilities and needs of all categories of pupils/students, so that it can respond to the principles of: “inclusive education,” “education for all,” “integrated education.”

The requirement of placing the pupil/student at the centre of the instructive-educational process and of adapting all activities to their capacities and interests represents a way of approaching education specific to the constructivist paradigm, which, compared to the traditional paradigm, presents a series of essential changes at the level of conception, strategy, and action (M. Maier, 2013).

The fostering of the academic motivation of pupils/students by the teachers should represent one of the fundamental and permanent objectives of the instructive-educational activity, all the more so since motivation is assigned the second place in the hierarchy of importance of academic success factors, right after academic intelligence (D. Ausubel, F. Robinson, 1981). The quality of the results of the learning activity and the student's academic adaptation are also conditioned by the degree and type of motivation that supports the learning activity (L. Şoitu, R.D.Cherciu, 2006). From the set of variables that determine the students' academic motivation, the school can influence or control, through the instructive-educational activity, only the factors that pertain to its own domain: the interactions between pupils/students and teachers; the interactions between pupils/students and other pupils/students; selecting, processing, and adapting the content of the educational process, the didactic methods, the assessment methods of academic performance (Ş. Popenici, C. Fartusnic, 2009).

In accordance with the theories regarding academic motivation and those regarding the paradigm of student-centred learning, we synthesized the following strategies to foster the students' academic motivation, with certain adaptations to allow for the specifics of university didactic activity (courses, seminars):

- the clear formulation of the objectives, the intentions of the lesson/course/seminar/laboratory and the performances expected from the pupils/students at the beginning of the educational activities;
- the accessibility of the professional-scientific language used by the teacher, of the explanations, examples, and conclusive demonstrations;
- the content of the lesson/course/seminar/laboratory has an organized, systematic, and coherent character;
- the lesson/course/seminar/laboratory promotes active-participatory methods, centred on the pupil/student (involvement of the pupil/student in the teaching-learning process, heuristic dialogue, solving problematic situations, simulations, microgroup activities, research projects etc.) (D. Muste, 2020)
- the teaching style and the content used are attractive, interesting, stimulating the desire for knowledge in the subject field;
- the lesson/course/seminar/laboratory successfully uses different modern teaching aids (overhead projector, video projector, computer, etc.);
- the teacher accepts and encourages the students' questions, alternative points of view, constructive criticism, and personal solutions;
- pupils/students are informed ahead of time and unequivocally about the criteria and evaluation methods of their activity and academic results;
- the evaluation tests used are focused on important aspects of the study subject;
- the teacher is easily approachable, available for communication, treats pupils/students with respect and consideration;
- the teacher is responsive to the individual needs of the pupils/students – whether professional, scientific, or personal; the teacher advises them successfully in the elaboration and implementation of their own projects: diploma theses, master's theses, research projects, or personal development projects;

Methodology

Considering the importance of strategies to stimulate the motivation for learning in the context of academic performance, we set out to investigate the perception of a group of students from faculties with a technical profile regarding educational practices that favour the development of academic motivation.

The research method used is the questionnaire-based survey. To identify the students' perceptions of strategies that contribute to stimulating their academic motivation, we used closed-ended items in a questionnaire.

The questionnaire items through which we investigated these aspects are:

The clear formulation of the objectives, the intentions of the course/seminar/laboratory and the performances expected from the students at the beginning of the educational activities contribute to the development of my motivation for learning.

The active-participative, student-centred methods (student involvement in the teaching-learning process, heuristic dialogue, solving problematic situations, simulations, microgroup activities, research projects, etc.) employed during the didactic activities contribute to the development of my motivation for learning.

The attractive and interesting teaching style and contents stimulate the desire for knowledge in the discussed subject field, favouring the development of my motivation for learning.

Accepting and encouraging students' questions, alternative points of view, constructive criticism, and personal solutions stimulates the development of motivation for learning.

The easily approachable teacher who is available for communication, who treats students with respect and consideration contributes to the development of my motivation for learning.

Focusing assessment tests on the important aspects of the subject helps develop my motivation to learn.

The aim of the research was to identify the students' perception of the importance of certain educational practices that are consistent with the principle of student-centeredness within the instructive-educational process and that favour the development of academic motivation.

Research objectives:

Identifying the importance of certain educational practices specific to the student-centred paradigm on stimulating their motivation for learning, from the students' perspective;

Identifying educational strategies that favour the development of the students' academic motivation.

Research hypothesis: we assume that the stimulation of the students' motivation for learning can be triggered by the teacher by using certain educational practices specific to the student-centred paradigm concerning the didactic methodology, the teacher-student relationship, and academic performance assessment methods.

Target group: the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 100 second-year students from faculties belonging to a university in Cluj-Napoca.

Results and discussions

Regarding the item discussing the clear formulation of the objectives, intentions of the course/seminar/laboratory and the performances expected from the students at the beginning of the educational activities, we recorded the following results: only 25% of the surveyed subjects agree with the existence of a relationship between the clear formulation of objectives at the beginning of didactic activities and the stimulation of motivation for learning, while 53% of them express partial agreement in relation to this item. A small percentage of the group of surveyed students (19%) disagree with this relationship entirely. (Table 1)

Table no. 1: The clear formulation of the objectives, the intentions of the course/seminar/laboratory and the performances expected from the students at the beginning of the educational activities contribute to the development of my motivation for learning

	Frequency	%
Agree	25	25
Partially agree	53	53
Disagree	19	19
I don't know/No answer	3	3
Total	100	100,0

Table no. 2: The active-participative, student-centred methods (student involvement in the teaching-learning process, heuristic dialogue, solving problematic situations, simulations, microgroup activities, research projects, etc.) employed during the didactic activities contribute to the development of my motivation for learning

	Frequency	%
Agree	59	59
Partially agree	33	33
Disagree	5	5
I don't know/No answer	3	3
Total	100	100,0

Regarding the item discussing the contribution of active-participative methods, centred on the student, to the development of academic motivation, a significant percentage of the group of students surveyed (59%) believes that the student's involvement in the teaching-learning process through heuristic dialogue, solving problematic situations, simulations, microgroup activities, and research projects all contribute to stimulating the motivation for learning. Only 5% of the surveyed students do not consider that the use of active and interactive methods could be a strategy for developing academic motivation.

Table no. 3: The attractive and interesting teaching style and contents stimulate the desire for knowledge in the discussed subject field, favouring the development of my motivation for learning

	Frequency	%
Agree	36	36
Partially agree	51	51
Disagree	9	9
I don't know/No answer	4	4
Total	100	100,0

Regarding the ability of attractive contents to stimulate the desire for knowledge in a field, a considerable percentage of the studied group (51%) expresses only partial agreement, and only 36% of the surveyed subjects recognize this relationship.

Table no. 4: Accepting and encouraging students' questions, alternative points of view, constructive criticism, and personal solutions stimulates the development of motivation for learning

	Frequency	%
Agree	64	64
Partially agree	28	28
Disagree	5	5
I don't know/No answer	3	3
Total	100	100,0

Table no.5: The easily approachable teacher who is available for communication, who treats students with respect and consideration contributes to the development of my motivation for learning

	Frequency	%
Agree	79	79
Partially agree	15	15
Disagree	4	4
I don't know/No answer	2	2
Total	100	100,0

Regarding the teacher-student relationship, expressed by promoting the expression of critical or alternative points of view of the students, as well as by the availability of the teacher for communication, we found that the majority of the surveyed subjects (64% and 79%) believe that these aspects

can influence their motivation for learning. The percentages of those who do not recognize this connection are very small (5% and 4%).

Table no.6: Focusing assessment tests on the important aspects of the subject helps develop my motivation to learn

	Frequency	%
Agree	45	45
Partially agree	32	32
Disagree	20	20
I don't know/No answer	3	3
Total	100	100,0

Regarding the assessment methods used for evaluating academic performance, only 45% of the surveyed subjects agree with the idea that focusing these tests on the important aspects of the subject would foster academic motivation. 20% of the students surveyed believe that the evaluation methods used cannot stimulate the motivation for learning.

Conclusions

Therefore, summarizing the recorded results of the questionnaire, we find that, in the opinion of the students, out of the set of educational practices with the potential of fostering academic motivation, the strategies that are aimed at a relationship with democratic accents between the teacher and the students, where the teacher is available and open to communication and they encourage the students' assertion of their own opinions, as well as the strategies that consider the methodology used in teaching activities with the emphasis on active and interactive methods, have the greatest potential to contribute to the stimulation of the students' academic motivation. Less valued by students are the strategies that concern the way the assessment is carried out, the contents presented, or the teacher's particular teaching style.

Although the fostering of academic motivation is considered an art that depends on the teacher's tact and didactic mastery (D. Sălăvăstru, 2004, p. 90), the knowledge and observance of some motivational strategies can guide the teacher towards the achievement of this desired goal: highlighting the practical

usefulness of the taught material; expressing confidence in the abilities of each student; the active involvement of students in the teaching activities through the frequent use of active-participatory methods, centred on the student, which activate their cognitive structures and operators, turning them into a co-participant in their own training and education and contributing to the valorisation of their psycho-physical potential; specifying the objectives of the didactic activities, which will, in turn, justify the efforts to be made; the use of a stimulating, progress assessment, focused on highlighting the performances and the progress made by the students from one stage to another.

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