Research Article

Exploring Perceptions of Students' Academic Motivation by University Professors - A Qualitative Study

Kobra Ghorbanzadeh [1, 2], Mohammadali Hosseini [3, 4, *], Asghar Dalvandi [2] and Hajar Sadeghi [5]

[1]Critical-care Nursing, Khalkhal Faculty of Medical Sciences, Ardabil University of Medical Sciences, Khalkhal, Iran
[2]Department of Nursing, School of Rehabilitation, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran
[3]Instructor of Nursing, Khalkhal Faculty of Medical Sciences, Ardabil University, Ardabil, Iran
[4]Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Nursing, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran
[5]Master of Nursing, Department of Nursing, Faculty of Nursing, Khomein University of Medical Sciences, Khomein, Iran

Corresponding author: Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, School of Rehabilitation, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Email: mahmaimy2020@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Motivation is the key factor for success and welfare. It is a pre-requisite in the process of teaching-learning and a factor in academic growth.

Objectives: The purpose of the present research is to convey the experiences of medical sciences professors on the educational motivations of students in universities of medical sciences.

Methods: The research was carried out in 2017 in Iran. A purposive sampling method was used and continued until theoretical saturation of data. Sixteen professors and Ph.D. students with teaching experience in medical schools participated. Data was collected with in-depth and semi-structured interviews. All the participants were asked at least two of the following open questions: "What is your understanding of the motivation or lack of motivation for student learning?", "Which factors are effective in motivation learning?", and "Which strategies have you used to promote student motivation in learning?" The conventional content analysis approach was used for data analysis. Validity, acceptance, confirmation and transmission criteria were used for correctness and solidity of data.

Results: By analyzing the transcriptions of interviews, the four main themes of educational motivation for students were determined as "communication between teacher and student", "characteristic traits of trainer and leaner", "Importance of motivation in the teaching and learning process" and "educational skills".

Conclusions: Based on the research findings, professors expressed that the students' educational motivations were not satisfactory and educational and training programs in universities needed improvement. They also emphasized on the teachers' abilities and training skills in sciences for effective communication between teacher and student.

Keywords: Academic Motivation, Amotivation, Perceptions, University Students, University Professors, Content Analysis

1. Background

Mankind is known as a species whose behavior is underlined by motivation. All of his/her activities and works need motivation proportional to that activity and work. Motivation is also required in learning and education which are a student's fundamental activities (1, 2). Motivation is the key to success and welfare (3). Academic motivation is the driving force influencing a person to attend university and obtain a degree (4). Indeed, motivation is one of the necessities of learning, giving intensity and direction, and an important factor in academic success (3, 5).

The word "motivation" is derived from the Latin word "movere" which means to move. Motivation is the impetus of individual inspirations for achieving effective, useful results and creating a positive educational environment for the successful performance of the syllabus (6). Academic motivation is applied to behaviors related to learning and progress in education. Generally, as the key to academic success, motivation is an inner strength and superior factor directing the leaner towards all-out performance, to endeavor for success in performance with the joy derived from success in performance (5). Stimulus is the term that is frequently used as a synonym for motivation (7). Stimulus refers to our stable behavior that consists of our needs, interests and ambitions in life (8). Academic motivation is the durable, comprehensive trend for trying to acquire knowledge and be in command of the relevant learning

skills.

Rush (1994) recognized progress motivation as one of the factors that affect learning, such that when the learners are highly motivated they participate in more activities, do more homework and, therefore, are more successful (9). Progress motivation is of special importance for students, because individuals with motivation find the necessary incentive to pursue and complete their education, thus achieving their purpose and gaining a certain degree of competence in their profession. Two general types of motivation for learning and progress are expressed that include internal and external stimuli. People are excited externally when they receive an award or avoid punishment for something they did (10). In contrast, internal excitement happens when people carry out their duties successfully. Research findings indicate that in the learning process, intrinsic motivation is more important than extrinsic motivation (9, 11). Much research has been carried out on the effects of motivation on learning and educational progress. Kist and Koal have demonstrated in their studies that learners with a high level of educational motivation achieve great success (5). The research by Heidari et al. determined the significant relationship between academic motivation and educational progress (12). Indeed, motivation is taken into account as the prerequisite for learning and its effects on learning are rather noticeable (1). Motivation is the basis of human behavior. In addition to being concerned with education, progress, and the happiness of the classroom, school teachers, university professors, and teacher trainers were consistently seeking to find different ways of creating motivation in individuals with more attractive school subjects and teaching-learning processes. The Talebi et al. study indicated that educational motivation in individuals during their education years is reduced as they grow older; also, its orientation changes from internal to external. Academic motivation and its effective factors also differ culturally and socially (13).

Relative factors affecting human motivation such as cultural capital, environmental conditions, comprehensive learning resources, expenses and comprehensive utilities, and trainer characteristics can be different in various societies and groups (14, 15). A qualitative study focuses on efficient causes that increase insight, perception and awareness of the human experience. By concentrating on the importance of individual, social and cultural factors in creating academic motivation, and considering a deficit of qualitative study in this field, the emphasis is placed on the importance of individual and group interviews in this research to explore the related factors, viewpoints, and teachers' experiences of variables affecting academic motivation. For this reason, the qualitative method was used with the purpose of describing the effective factors on the students' academic motivations in the medical sciences universities of Iran in 2017.

2. Methods

The conventional content analysis method was used in this qualitative research in which participants (professors of medical sciences universities) were purposively recruited and with maximum variety. The screening criteria consisted of being a faculty member, willing to do the interview and the aptness to express experiences. Each interview lasted 20 - 40 minutes. Sampling continued until data saturation was reached or until continuing the interview no longer led to extracting new data. Interview settings were appropriate to the qualitative research method, naturally occurring behavior in their usual environment, ease of access to the professors (college or workplace), or the participants' preferences. All the participants were asked at least two of the following open questions: "What is your understanding of the motivation or lack of motivation for student learning?", "Which factors are effective in motivation learning?", and "Which strategies have you used to promote the student's motivation in learning?" The rest of the questions were heuristic. All of the interviews were recorded, transcribed word for word and analyzed according to the "conventional content analysis" technique. The handwritten interviews were read several times and the semantic units were extracted. The analysis units were reviewed several times and categorized on the basis of conceptual and semantic similarity. Main and sub-categories were formed.

Contents were adjusted accordingly and an appropriate category name was given. Finally, researchers and participants reached a common satisfaction and coherence level in the main category and subcategory data collection. Before they took part in the study, the purpose and method of study were explained to the participants and their informed consent was obtained. Permission was received for audio recordings and confidentiality was observed. Data acceptance and solidity were achieved through consistent review and analysis (transcribing interviews on paper and reviewing). Peer reviews and member checks were carried out for standards of quality and performance. A team approach for work evaluation was carried out to ensure the quality of results. The investigative scheme was confirmed by the Ethics Committee of the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences in Tehran and oral and written confirmation was received confirming that ethical considerations had been observed.

3. Results

Out of a total of 16 participants, seven were faculty members at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, six were at the Medical Faculty of Ardabil University of Medical Sciences (ARUMS) and three were Ph.D. students at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, who were also faculty members in other universities of medical sciences. Seven were women professors and nine were men. The majority of participants had more than six years' experience as faculty members. Nineteen sub-categories were extracted from interview data analyses by integrating overlapping codes. Sub-category classifications led to the four main categories of "communication between teacher and student", "characteristic traits of trainer and leaner", "importance of motivation in the teaching and learning process" and "educational skills". The interpretation of every category is as follows (Figure 1).

3.1. Communication Between Teacher and Student

Every participant had a particular perspective on this category and looked at the premise from a special angle. Participants 5 and 12 believed it is necessary to approach the students often, even with respect to their emotional and mental well-being, for confidence building and creating an appropriate atmosphere. Others believed that the relation should be extended further. To achieve this, students were referred for guidance and consultation, flexibility, creating confidence, creating motivation and emotional communication. As a model sample, participant number five commented on the teacher-student communication, saying: "The communication is very impressive. These students should be understood well and can create a cheerful atmosphere for learning with appropriate attitude and respect to student and learning environment is like a second home to them and they feel supported. Student individuality and personality differences should be considered. The teacher should not look down at the students. They must stand by the students, because communication between teacher and student is very important. They should proceed together with the teaching and learning process to achieve all academic objectives."

3.2. Characteristics of Trainer and Learner

The teaching process takes place between two fundamental elements-trainer and learner. Teaching impression is influenced by both parties. Influencing factors include a student's public characteristics and mental and personal abilities, and the teacher's individual characteristics such as appearance, behavioral features and his/her mannerism; the teacher's professional skills consist of mastery of the class, lesson content, and teaching methods. Interviewees pointed out that the use of technology in teaching created academic stimulus.

Participant number one stated: "We should consider the generation gap in training, and the educational content should be appropriate for the level of learning. New teaching methods must be used and the students should self-regulate. Collaborative learning methods are being used. Teachers should promote their own scientific abilities and their expectations must correspond with the classroom. We do not use of appropriate ways in attitude towards the new generation. Nowadays, we confront them with the expectations of past generations. We do not recognize their needs as we should. Teachers should focus on these points. Nowadays, we are faced with the digital generation; students have access to large amounts of information and perhaps traditional teaching methods no longer apply to their needs. We should have a flexible approach to content and teaching methods and consider the learners' needs. Teachers should break out of their outdated mental frameworks".

3.3. The Importance of Stimulus in the Teaching and Learning Process

Motivation is a basic factor in learning and can also affect other behavioral aspects of students in the learning environment. Academic motivation is directly linked to student performance and success, leading to several educational outcomes. In the interviews, the importance of stimulus in achieving educational goals was discussed.

Participant number three stated: "Motivation makes up 50 - 60 percent of the learning process. It brings perseverance. Teachers play a significant part in getting students interested. Indeed, the stimulus is wide-ranging from an interest in the topic, teacher and student character traits, teaching methods, environmental factors, relations, class timetables, work habits, etc. Motivation can vary in different academic degrees. Teachers should have the experience to create motivation in different collegiate programs".

3.4. Educational Skills

Educational skills consist of a range of methods for transferring knowledge from teacher to student. Educational skills in content sharing pertain to teaching methods, determining the lesson content, homework assessment skills, and conducting tests.

In answer to the second question of "teacher experiences and approaches to creating motivation…", creating an emotional communication with students, a respectful approach, giving responsibility, and providing content
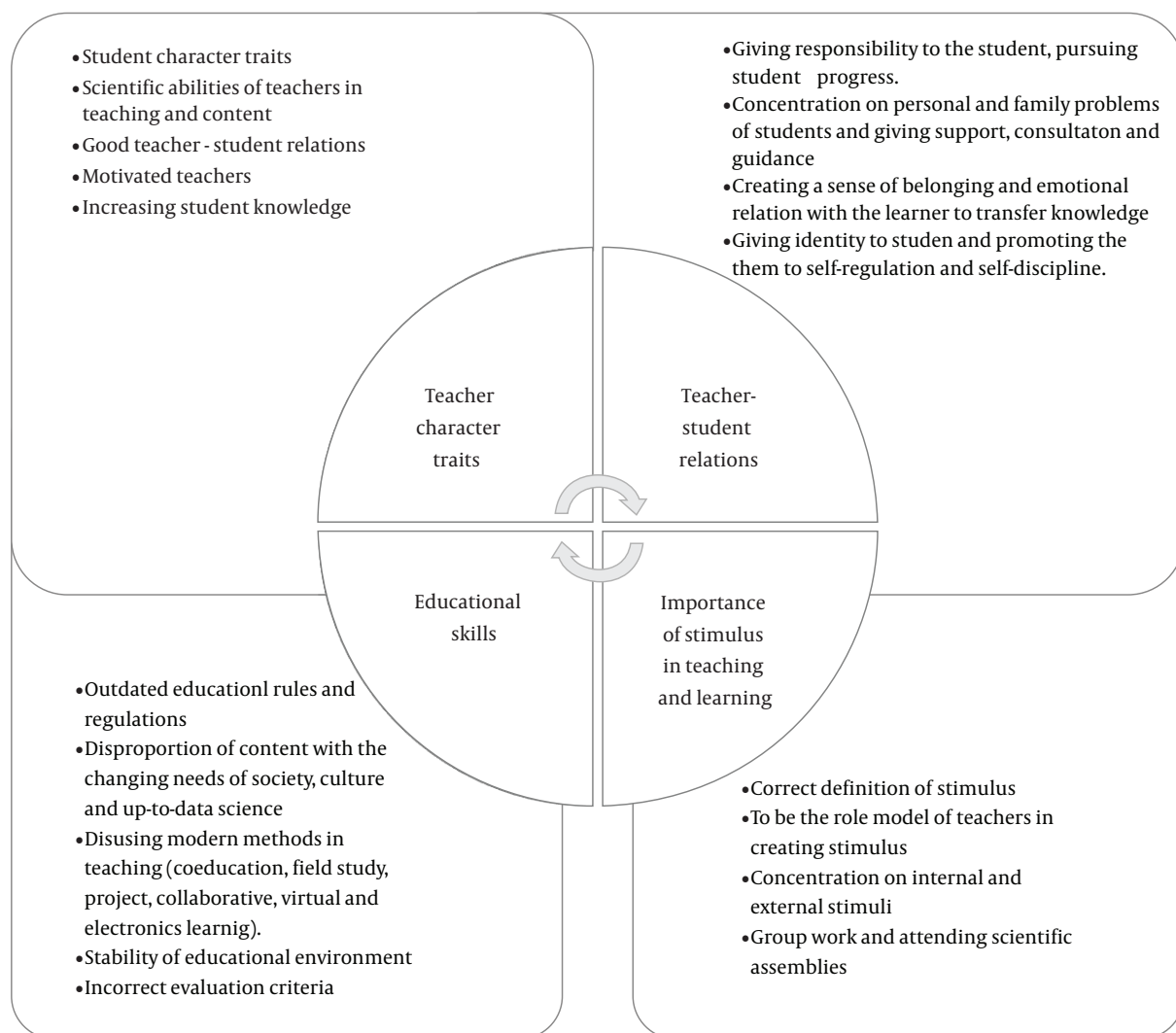
Figure 1. Category and subcategory improvements in educational motivation

and teaching methods on the basis of the learner's needs were cited.

Instances mentioned were:

- Concentrating on student individuality and any family and personal problems,

- Guiding students towards self-regulation and self-discipline,

- Providing consultation and personal counsel,

- Providing welfare and disport facilities,

- Providing a cheerful scientific environment,

- Giving hope for their professional future,

- Motivated teachers in the classroom with cross-curricular skills,

- Correct evaluation of students and discrimination be-

tween active and inactive students to create a competitive environment,

- Improving the educational process using motivational and communicational theories,

- Teacher familiarity with training and investigation elements,

- The physical appearance of teachers,

- Speaking tone and literature of teachers,

- Teacher training workshops,

- Nonverbal communication,

- A suitable physical environment (light, temperature, location).

4. Discussion

The study aimed to explore effective factors of academic motivation in medical schools. Research results led to the formation of four main categories consisting of "communication between teacher and student", "characteristic traits of trainer and leaner", "educational skills" and "importance of motivation in the teaching and learning process". Although many factors affect student performance in universities, academic motivation is one of the most significant ones (16). The results are consistent with Meens et al. that autonomous motivation is positively associated with student achievements, and controlled motivation is negatively associated with student achievements (17). In the Taheri et al. study, according to the students, factors affecting motivation consist of: Environmental factors (culture and social values), individual factors (attitude towards the school), and scholastic and family factors (socio-economic situation) that correspond with the results of this study (9). One of the prevailing problems in the educational organization of many countries is the low level of academic motivation among the learners; hence, governments and families are faced many scientific, cultural and economic harms every year and their educational organization is doomed to failure (7). The key findings of a study by Clark et al. suggest that types of intrinsic academic motivation are mediated by academic integration in their relationships with academic performance. Although, intrinsic motivation for accomplishment was the only motivation type that made a unique contribution to academic performance through academic integration (4). In a study by Najafi Kolyaee et al. nursing students know that cultural-social, educational, managerial, investigative, communication and background problems are effective in reducing motivation in their own major. Also, the results of this research indicate that student motivation is influenced by different factors which can be adjusted and reformed to increase student motivation (18). Different studies confirm the link between academic motivation and different factors such as educational and demographic factors, the level of parents' education, and future jobs (8, 19). A study was conducted by Roohi and Asayesh among medical sciences students of Golestan University with the purpose of finding academic motivation levels and factors affecting it. There was a weak relation between motivation and occupational future, and there was no significant relation between welfare factors and educational factors (16). In the Roohi et al. (2), Ross et al. (20), and Barkoukis et al. (21) study, there was a positive relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and self-regulation. Teachers in this study also expressed self-regulation as one of the effective factors of academic motivation. In the study by Rezakhani, factors such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-respect, self-discipline and communications and support for individual traits and behaviors considerably contributed to academic progress (11). The Roohi et al. study showed that as students progressed through university, their motivation decreased with passing years (2). Teachers participating in the study also expressed that students had higher academic motivation during their first years at university as compared to the last years. Therefore, the importance of prevention programs to avoid academic failure increases with more time spent in collegial programs.

4.1. Conclusions

The findings of this research indicated that four main categories comprising "communication between teacher and student", "characteristic traits of trainer and leaner", "importance of motivation in the teaching and learning process" and "educational skills" play significant roles in student motivations. The educational organization of the country consistently continues to shoulder the responsibility of educating students. Thus, in addition to keeping the existing standards, it must increase its efforts to reform and promote factors contributing to motivation such as the learner, trainer, and educational and welfare facilities. With a proper educational program, students can be motivated, trained and prepared for the job market.

4.2. Suggestions

Considering the importance of academic stimulus in the learning process, student perspectives, ideas and interests in this area can also have a great impact. Making allowances for these was recommended as a complementary backup in subsequent researches. To sum up the findings of the research, operational suggestions were summarized as below:

1. Emphasizing on effective communication between teacher and student.

2. Considering the characteristic traits of trainer and learner in developing academic motivation.

3. Reinforcing the teachers' educational skills and considering generation differences.

4. Encouraging selected teachers to share their experiences and practical approaches to improve academic motivation. The findings of this study also increase our awareness and knowledge of factors affecting academic motivation from the teachers' perspective.

5. The study also has some limitations. The first one is that it was carried out in Tehran and Ardabil province, in Northern Iran, with the approach of content analysis and

its results were not extendable to other groups. It was suggested that factors affecting academic motivation for both teachers and students be studied in different universities.

Acknowledgments

Footnotes

References

1. Alambeygi A, Amiri R, Sahebdel S. [The role of employability skills in agricultural students educational motivation in Imam Khomeini Higher Education Center, Iran]. *J Agr Educ Admin Res*. 2016;**8**(37):49–62. Persian.

2. Roohi G, Asayesh H, Bathai SA, Shouri Bidgoli AR, Badeleh MT, Rahmani H. [The relationship between self-efficacy and academic motivation among students of medical sciences]. *J Med Educ Deve*. 2013;**8**(1):45–51. Persian.

3. Yardimci F, Bektas M, Ozkutuk N, Muslu GK, Gerceker GO, Basbakkal Z. A study of the relationship between the study process, motivation resources, and motivation problems of nursing students in different educational systems. *Nurse Educ Today*. 2017;**48**:13–8. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2016.09.017. [PubMed: 27697677].

4. Clark MH, Middleton SC, Nguyen D, Zwick LK. Mediating relationships between academic motivation, academic integration and academic performance. *Learn Individ Differ*. 2014;**33**:30–8. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2014.04.007.

5. Zahiri NAWB, Rajabi S. [The study of variables reducing academic motivation of "Persian language and literature" students]. *Train Learn Res*. 2009;**1**(36):69–80. Persian.

6. Dadashzadeh M, Kosari M, Nobakht MB. [The role of effective factors in creating the motivation of the faculty member of the Islamic Azad University-Astara Brunch]. *Quant Res Manage*. 2014;**4**(4):215–34. Persian.

7. Ebrahimi S, Khaganizadeh M. [Motivation roll in learning]. *Educ Strategeie Med Sci*. 2009;**1**(1):1–9. Persian.

8. Khadivi A, Vakili Mafakheri A. [A survey of relationship between achievement motivation, locus of control, self-concept and high school first grader science students academic achievement the five regions of Tabriz]. *J Instr Eval*. 2011;**4**(13):45–66. Persian.

9. Taheri Z, Delavar A, Ghadampour E, Farrokhi NA. [Factors influencing on the proper model of motivational beliefs in high school students, Tehran, Iran]. *J Fundamental Mental Health*. 2010;**12**(48):83–662. Persian.

10. Erten IH. Interaction between academic motivation and student teachers' academic achievement. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2014;**152**:173–8. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.09.176.

11. Rezakhani SD. [A survey on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and academic achievement of the students in IAU Roudehen Branch]. *Q Innovat Manage Educ*. 2007;**2**(2):85–106. Persian.

12. Heidari A, Asgari P, Saedi S. [The relationship between academic motivation, achievement motive and educational environment for female students of SAMAa]. *Sci Res Q Woman Culture*. 2015;**7**(24):95–107. Persian.

13. Talebi H, Abedi A, Sadrzadeh O. [Construction and validation of students academic motivation scale among Isfahan undergraduates based on self determination theory]. *J Manage Sys*. 2012;**7**(1):137–53. Persian.

14. Amrai K, Elahi Motlagh S, Azizi Zalani H, Parhon H. The relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement students. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2011;**15**:399–402. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.111.

15. Jiang Y, Rosenzweig EQ, Gaspard H. An expectancy-value-cost approach in predicting adolescent students' academic motivation and achievement. *Contemp Educ Psychol*. 2018;**54**:139–52. doi: 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.06.005.

16. Roohi G, Asayesh H. [Students' academic motivation in Golestan University of Medical Sciences]. *Iran J Med Educ*. 2012;**12**(3):152–9. Persian.

17. Meens EEM, Bakx AWEA, Klimstra TA, Denissen JJA. The association of identity and motivation with students' academic achievement in higher education. *Learn Individ Differ*. 2018;**64**:54–70. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2018.04.006.

18. Najafi Kolyaee M, Sharif F, Moattari M, Jamshidi N, Karimi SH. [Decrease in motivation of nursing students: A qualitative study]. *Iran J Nur Res*. 2011;**6**(21):39–47. Persian.

19. Mohamadi E, Banaderakhshan H, Borhani F, Hoseinabadi-Farahani MJ. [Factors affecting achievement motivation in nursing students: A cross-sectional study]. *J Nurs Educ*. 2015;**4**(2):60–7. Persian.

20. Ross M, Perkins H, Bodey K. Academic motivation and information literacy self-efficacy: The importance of a simple desire to know. *Library Inf Sci Res*. 2016;**38**(1):2–9. doi: 10.1016/j.lisr.2016.01.002.

21. Barkoukis V, Taylor I, Chanal J, Ntoumanis N. The relation between student motivation and student grades in physical education: A 3-year investigation. *Scand J Med Sci Sports*. 2014;**24**(5):e406–14. doi: 10.1111/sms.12174. [PubMed: 24433528].