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Students' Motivation to Learn During the Pandemic

Abstract

The pandemic situation in the last year has produced many changes in the academic space, both in terms of the interaction between human factors involved in education and the way and means of teaching, learning and assessment used in the virtual classes. These changes have visibly affected students and teachers' well-being, sometimes with negative consequences on their motivation for learning. In this article, we aim to address the motivation of high-school students in pandemic and online school. We will present both factors that influence the motivation for high school students' learning and the effects that we have found on school progress and may decrease learning and students' performance.

1. Introduction

Regarding the influence of motivation for learning on school success, researchers from different periods (Ausubel, 1981, apud Cuciureanu, 2015; Zimmerman, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 2002) consider that motivation is a factor that has a considerable impact on student's school performance, as it can implicitly stimulate and influence the academic performance of students. We agree with these opinions, considering that students' motivation for learning is the force that moves the student's actions, behaviours, information, and experiences in the direction of academic success and achievement.

As specialists in education, we are concerned with both the short-term success that students achieve in their daily school assignments and the long-term success that they can attain in the national examinations at the end of an educational cycle (national assessment, the baccalaureate) or the exams through which the students adhere to a higher education cycle (the high-school entrance exam and the university entrance exam). We also consider that the care shown to stimulate our students' current learning will have medium and long-term consequences; more precisely, these students are expected to obtain good school results at the important exams they will face in the future.

2. Review of Literature

Researching the literature, we found that there is an abundance of motivational theories and models that provide convenient ways to explain and interpret the phenomenon of motivation. A meta-analysis of the terms and theories of motivation conducted in 2000 (Murphy & Alexander, 2000) to:
- theories of motivation associated with learning goals;
- theories of motivation associated with motivational orientation;
- theories of motivation associated with interests;

- theories of self-motivation.

From the multitude of motivational theories, we will focus on two of them, on which we will base our study of students' motivation for learning in the online school. These two theories are:

- Eccles's theory of expectation (1983)
- Nicholls' theory of goals (1989)

Expectation (Eccles, 1983) refers to students' expectations of their success through learning. Students' expectations and their value to the learning task will lead to certain beliefs and successful behaviours. Researchers (Eccles et al., 1983) have identified four components that determine the value of a task: the value of achievement, the intrinsic value, the value of utility and the cost.

- *The value of achievement* refers to how accomplishing a task or activity contributes to confirming or refutation of the students' competence in specific fields. Thus: if learning in History helps students become more competent, then the learning activity has a positive value and will do it with pleasure.

- *Intrinsic value* is represented by the fulfilment of some students' personal needs through learning or their interest in the subjects and contents they study. This value is similar to intrinsic motivation, as defined by Deci and colleagues (Deci & Ryan 1985).

- *The utilitarian value* is determined by how practical the learning task is to achieve the students' present and future goals, such as career goals. The learning activity can have a positive value for students as it facilitates crucial future goals, even if, for the time being, they are not interested in the task itself.

- *The cost* represents the price that students have to pay for the learning activity. It is conceptualized in aspects

such as evaluation anxiety, fear of failure, effort to achieve the task.

All four components identified by Eccles (Eccles & al., 1983) contribute to determining the positive or negative value of learning in students, which will influence their motivation for school learning. Students' expectations and the perceived value of learning tasks directly influence students' perseverance in learning and their school performance.

Students' learning goals (Nicholls, 1989) represent their beliefs about what matters to them in any learning situation.

Students' motives and intentions for learning differentiate between learning for understanding and personal development and learning because of the need to meet others' requirements in school assignments (Entwistle, 1988).

Nicholls (1989) identifies two broad categories of goals:

- learning goals – emphasis on understanding and progress; students motivated by such goals have as main objective the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, the learning being sustained from pleasure;
- performance goals – are intended to measure the students' learning ability; students motivated by such goals have as main objective the validation of their abilities or the avoidance of showing their incompetence.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research methodology with a questionnaire-based survey. This section presents each step of the inquiry to help researchers who want to replicate it and assure its transferability.

The questionnaire used in the present research is a questionnaire based on the students' opinion, conceived by us for the purpose of this research. Before application, the questionnaire was tested in a pilot form on a smaller group of participants. After the necessary revisions, it was applied for study.

Goals

The present research started with a few basic questions:

1. How do students appreciate their motivation for learning after a semester of online schooling?
2. How do students rate online school motivation compared to face-to-face school motivation?
3. What are the students' main learning goals?
4. How do students appreciate that they learn more easily: online or face to face?
5. What helps students learn more easily online?
6. What prevents students from learning online?
7. What are the most appreciated advantages of online school?
8. What are the most significant disadvantages of online schooling?

The above questions materialized in the goals of our study:

1 – identifying students' motivation for learning in online school compared to face-to-face school.

2 – identifying students' goals for learning in the online school.

3 – identifying the advantages of learning in online school.

4 – identifying the disadvantages of learning in online school.

Hypotheses

H1. Students' motivation to learn decreased during online schooling.

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H2. The disadvantages of learning in online school are more than advantages.

Variables
- Students' motivation for learning – translated by their desire to learn guided by particular goals.
- Students' learning goals – translated by the reasons that determine students to get involved in the learning activity and give up competing activities.

Methods
The method used in the present study is the questionnaire survey. This technique "is almost always an opinion poll" (V. Miftode, 1995, p.245) through which questions are addressed to the subjects regarding the studied realities. The answers provided to the opinion that questionnaires are subjective. They can be influenced by the respondent's experience and personality, by the survey's topic, by the structure of the questionnaire, and by its application.

Tools
The opinion questionnaire on students' motivation for learning in an online school is a questionnaire conceived by us to observe the reality that students face in learning during the pandemic. The questionnaire includes 19 items, out of which 11 are objective items. Simultaneously, 8 are personal items, aiming to ascertain students 'motivation for learning in an online school, identify students' learning goals, and teaching methods that work to stimulate online school learning and detect inefficient learning methods.

Population
The population on which the research was applied consisted of 109 high-school students from the 9th, 10th and 11th

grades from a national college. The research was attended by both boys and girls from urban and rural areas, majoring in different fields of study, such as mathematics-computer science, philology, social sciences and natural sciences.

4. Results

The motivation of students to learn after almost a year of online schooling (figure 1), according to the surveyed students, is on average for most students (64%), a significant percentage of students (24%) stating they have a high motivation for learning and a minor part of the respondents stating that they have a low motivation for learning (11%) or have no motivation at all for learning (2%).

Starting from identifying the current level of motivation for learning, we aimed to determine the students' opinion about their motivation for learning in online school compared to physical school (figure 2). The students' answers revealed that: for almost half of the respondents (45%), the motivation for learning decreased in the online school, for a large part of the students (42%), the motivation for learning remained the same, and for a small part of students (13%) motivation for learning increased during online schooling.

Trying to identify the goals of students in learning (figure 3), we found that most of the responding students (70%) study in order to build a successful career in the future, less of them (23%) learn because they have to, a small part of the surveyed students (7%) learn with pleasure, none of the surveyed students stated that they do not want to learn.

Regarding the difficulty students face in online learning (figure 4), half of them (50%) say that they have a more challenging time learning online, 23% of responding students find it easier to learn online. In online school, 19% of students say that online

learning is more attractive, and 8% say that they do not learn online.

We went further, trying to identify the obstacles and levels on which online learning is built.

Thus, we found that some students like online school because:

- they have more time to learn by gaining time on the school-home commute;
- classes are more interactive;
- they have the opportunity to document themselves on the spot when they do not know something;
- they have access to the presentation of the lesson before the teaching time through the presentations uploaded by the teachers on the class platforms;
- they can work in their own office, in the comfortable space of the house;
- they can concentrate more quickly because they have all the information in one place;
- they have more time to relax;
- they have more control over the learning environment, no longer being distracted by the noises of classmates.

Some students say that online learning is complex because:

- the teacher is not physically with them, and then they can get distracted by the assignment very easily;
- the board is minimal, and visibility is difficult;
- they are tempted to use class time for other personal interests and not for school;
- their attention is very easily distracted by what is happening around them;
- it is very tiring to sit in front of the computer for 6-7 hours a day;
- some teachers do not deal with technology or take little interest in creating online lessons;

- the connection between the student and the teacher is much weaker;
- the internet connection is sometimes fragile and creates difficulties;
- there is no possibility to socialize with colleagues, to make jokes during breaks, a rich source of energy for learning;
- having fewer emotions during the assessment in some subjects, the pressure necessary for development decreases;
- they focus much harder because they are not in class physically, with colleagues and teacher;
- the factors that can distract students at home are more numerous than in the classroom;
- it is not possible to perform physical and laboratory experiments from which to learn;
- do not have the opportunity to complete their notes when they cannot keep the rhythm.

We have also identified some aspects of why online schooling is more enjoyable than face-to-face schooling:

- learning takes place at home, in a comfortable environment;
- learning on their means that students can deepen their knowledge as and when they want;
- physical and mental pressure is lower;
- the use of videos and various applications enhances learning.

The reasons why students say they do not learn in online school are:

- they have internet access at any time, and it distracts them;
- lessons do not always draw their attention;
- connection problems;
- they do not feel motivated enough by the teacher.

5. Discussions

The students' motivation for learning in the research group has a medium and even high intensity. It should be noted that the students involved in the study group are part of an educational institution that has benefited from a particular learning platform since the beginning of the pandemic, and students also benefit from computers and adequate space for learning at home. The students' main characteristic from this high school is represented by the increased learning performances and the generous per cent of the Olympic students from the available number of students. We tend to believe that in other high schools with lower learning performance, the level of motivation for learning during online schooling may be much lower.

During online schooling, the motivation for learning did not increase. For most students, the motivation to learn decreased or remained the same. An introverted and shy student who had a hard time expressing himself in the larger group of the class, in the physical school, but who felt more secure in the online school to communicate with the teachers, had a slight advantage during the online school. We assume that this category of students perceived that the motivation for learning increased during online school.

Most of the students surveyed find it harder to learn online than face-to-face. Among the obstacles that hinder the activity of students in online school are: poor internet connection that sometimes prevents the clear reception of knowledge transmitted by the teacher; lack of natural social and emotional connection with the teacher and colleagues; physical fatigue and headaches from using prolonged computer interruptions; frequent disturbances and distractions during class hours caused by family members or the discretionary use of the internet during classes.

For some students, learning in the online school is a total failure, meaning they cannot learn. The reasons that prevent them from learning are: the inability to connect and concentrate during

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class because of the games and applications that capture and gain their attention in parallel with the teacher.

6. Conclusions

Online schooling has been a real challenge for students, parents and teachers at the same time. This phenomenon, utterly unknown in the pre-university environment until last year, brought a revolution in education that involved reorganizing teaching, preparing lessons, achieving learning and evaluating students.

Students felt differently about the changes that took place through online schooling: most of them were negatively affected by all these changes, which denied them the right to socialize and get closer to their teachers and colleagues in a natural meaning; others, fewer of them, were positively influenced by these changes, which gave them a more significant proportion of time per day, spared from the time spent on the way to school, and others, who were shyer before, offered the opportunity to assert themselves during online classes.

What is certain is that students' learning and motivation have been negatively affected by most students, and this should be a wake-up call for teachers. We consider it necessary to rethink the teaching activity to consider the stimulation of students' motivation. Capturing students' interest through interactive teaching methods and the increase in teachers' interest in students' problems are two ways that can help stimulate students' motivation for learning.

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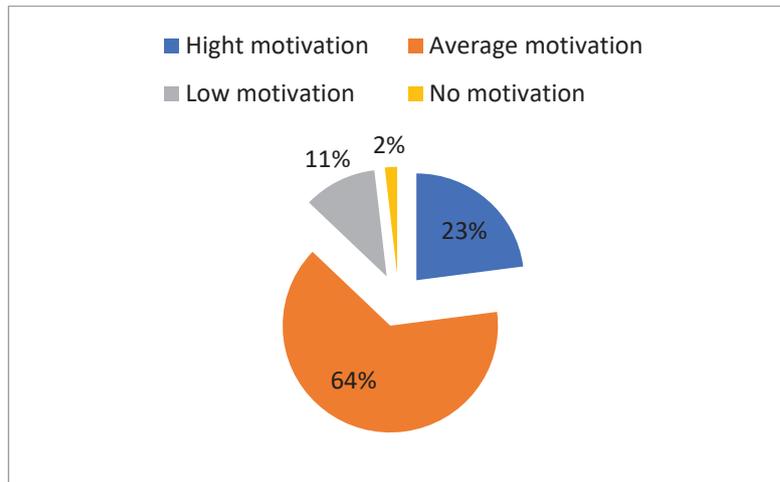
Tables, figures and appendices

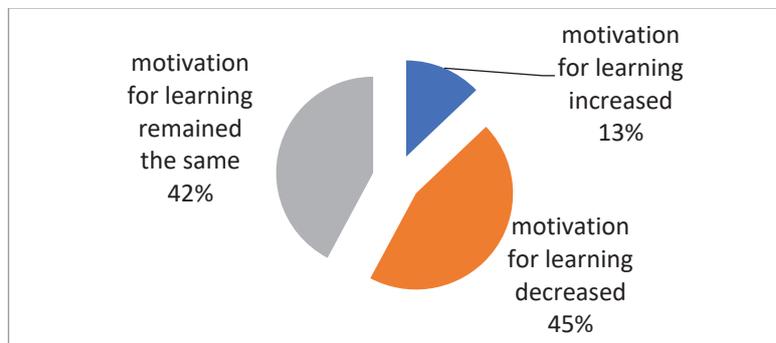*Figure 1 The level of motivation of students in a pandemic*

Figure 2 Level of motivation faced by students in online learning
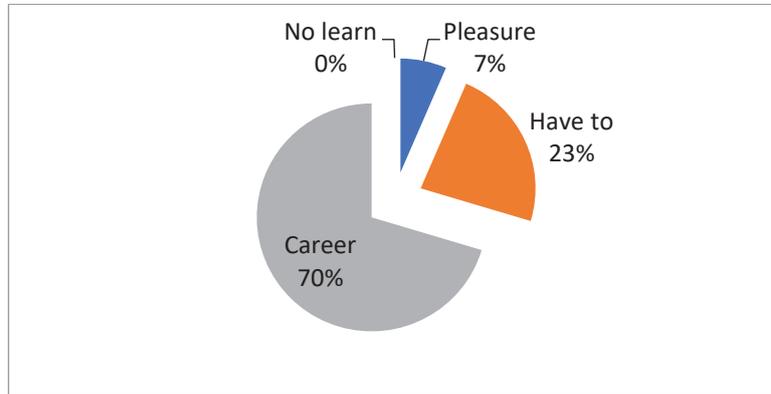
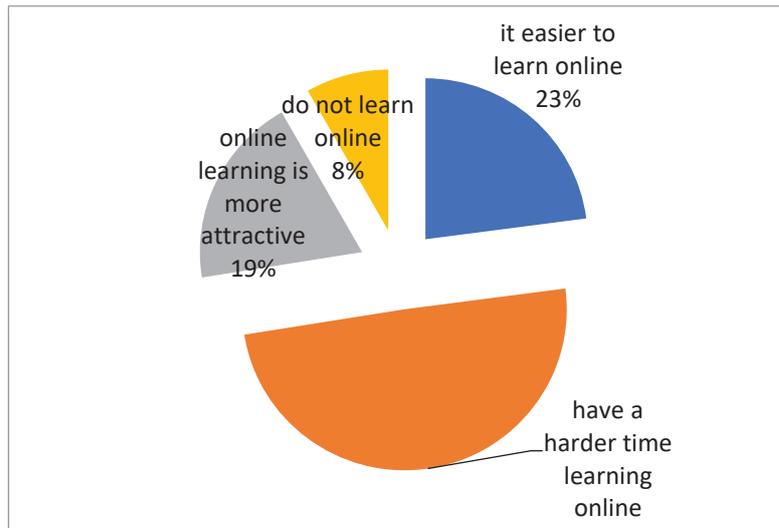*Figure 3 The goals of students in learning*

Figure 4 The level of difficulty faced by students in online learning