LEARNING MOTIVATION: A SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Basma FARAH-JARJOURA

Moldova State University

In recent years, a renewed interest in raising motivation amongst students in academic settings has emerged. This has led to a great deal of research that aimed to shed light on diverse theories of motivation, in order to increase the learning motivation amongst students. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is one of the most comprehensive and empirically supported theories of motivation available today, that aims to promote students' curiosity in learning.

The purpose of this article is to make an overview of learning motivation from a SDT perspective.

Keywords: self-determination theory, psychological needs, motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, autonomy support, interaction student-teacher.

MOTIVAȚIA ÎNVĂȚĂRII DIN PERSPECTIVA TEORIEI AUTODETERMINĂRII

În ultimii ani reapare interesul față de problematica dezvoltării motivației studenților. Fapt ce a condiționat necesitatea realizării unui şir de cercetări care au abordat motivația din perspectiva mai multor teorii, cu scopul eficientizării acesteia în rândul studenților. Teoria autodeterminării este una dintre cele mai comprehensive teorii testate empiric, care au ca scop promovarea curiozității studenților în procesul de învățare. SDT se concentrează atât pe nevoile umane, cât şi pe procesele cognitive în contextul cărora apare motivația intrinsecă. Scopul acestui articol este de a prezenta motivația învățării din perspectiva teoriei autodeterminării.

Cuvinte-cheie: teoria autodeterminării, nevoi psihologice, motivație, motivație intrinsecă, motivație extrinsecă, susținere autonomă, interacțiune profesor-student.

There is clearly a renewed interest surrounding the study of motivation. Human motivation is being more intensively studied today than ever before, and it is clearly obvious today that motivation is a central and essential concern including work, education, psychotherapy, and sport [25, p.10]. Motivation represents one of the most important mysteries in science, besides its importance in the practical field. The importance of motivation among students in academic settings is becoming well established [22; 25, p.466]. Several researchers discussed this issue [e.g. 29; 21; 27]. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: the next section defines motivation. Then, different motivational theories and approaches are briefly described followed by a detailed overview of the learning motivation from a Self Determination Theory perspective. Finally, a summary of the paper is introduced.

Motivation Definitions

Various definitions for "motivation" have been presented in the scientific literature. Although there is disagreement about the precise nature of motivation [27, p.4] an important theoretical theme of this discussion involves the division between actions that are intentional, and actions that are non-intentional. This dichotomy has been described in terms of personal versus impersonal causality, voluntary responding versus helplessness, and internal versus external locus of control [11; 16].

Motivation is defined broadly by Ryan et al., [24 p.197] as "that which moves people to act", and it is determined by both the *energy* of the move and its *direction* [23]. The origin of the word *motivation* comes from the Latin verb *movere*, which translates in English as "to move". Motivations is what moves people to behave, something that gets us going, keep us working, and help us fulfill tasks [27]. According to the authors, Ryan [23] and Ryan and Deci [24], a person who feels activated toward an end, is considered motivated, whereas *amotivation*, which they refer to as lack of energy or desire, can be found when an individual does not see the importance, benefit, or value of an activity, or when the individual is not interested in the activity. The second source of lack of motivation is lack of perceived competence [24] or positive efficacy beliefs [3], which both are essentially needed for an individual to act.

Motivational Theories and Approaches

The long history of motivational research has given rise to a large variety of different theories which have been presented in several review articles and books [e.g., 33; 17, p.63-84; 12]. Therefore, this section will not discuss all of these theories, but it will briefly present the historical background of motivation. This will be followed by a review of self-determination theory.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, motivation was not a separate topic of study as it is today but rather was ill-defined and fell under the purview of the newly emerging discipline of psychology. Views of motivation and psychology in general, were rooted heavily in philosophy [27; 25, p.4]. The first views have defined motivation in terms of will and volition. Another early view emphasized instincts that are reflected in behavior. Behaviorist emphasized the association of stimuli with responses. Drive theories stress internal forces that seek to maintain homeostasis. Other theories link motivation with level of emotional arousal. Psychological and humanistic theories suppose that qualitative inborn differences in psychological processes emerge with experience and development. Cognitive consistency theories focus on motivation as a result of congruence between behaviors and cognitions. Current theories examine the effect of motivation in achievement settings and the cognitive processes underlying motivation [27, p.4].

Current perspectives of motivation differs in important ways, but they all share the following hypothesis: motivation involves cognitions; motivation depends on several complex factors such as: personality, social, and contextual factors; motivation is correlated with other achievement outcomes such as learning, self-regulation, and performance; motivation is not stable, but rather changes with development; and also cultural, group and individual differences are reflected in motivation [27, p.248].

Researchers have used various motivational approaches in order to examine the link between academic motivation and school performance, such as: Expectancy-value theory by Eccles, Wigfield and their colleagues [e.g., 36; 38], according to this theory an individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about their ability to compete the activity successfully; Goal theory [e.g., 5; 20], that states that definite and challenging goals, besides a proper feedback contribute to higher and better task performance; Self-efficacy theory derived from social cognitive theory [e.g., 1; 2; 3] which is the person's belief in his own capability to perform and execute an activity; and self-determination theory [e.g., 7; 8] which identifies the core principles underlying sustainable motivation [e.g., see 7; 23]. This perspective is one of the most comprehensive and empirically supported theories of motivation available today [27, p.248]. In fact, this theoretical perspective has generated a large amount of research in the field of education [see 11]. It has been used recently to better understand important educational outcomes such as dropout behavior [31; 32], personal adjustment in the school context [4; 28], as well as learning and school performance [see 14; 18]. This theory is further discussed in the following section.

Self-Determination Theory

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Over the past 3 decades, two researchers, Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, have developed a theory of human motivation, called self-determination theory (SDT). SDT is mainly interested in promoting students' curiosity in learning, growth in competencies, and well-being [26]. People are viewed as having inherent and deeply evolved propensities to receive knowledge and develop new skills. However SDT argues that these natural propensities can be either supported or diluted by social contexts. Classroom strategies such as the use of grades, evaluations, rewards and external pressures, are therefore a particular interest within SDT as they influence our human potentials for learning and development [26].

SDT distinguishes between *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation* [7; 23; 26]. *Intrinsic Motivation*: when a person is intrinsically motivated, in other words, the person is involved in a certain activity because of interest or satisfaction [23]. On the other hand, *Extrinsic Motivation*: is when a person does an action in order to fulfill his/her society expectation, avoid sanctions or to comply with external control. In other words, it is doing an activity for its instrumental value.

The researchers Deci, Ryan, and their colleagues [11] did not settle with a dichotomous definition of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, rather defined a continuous process in their discussion of internalization. According to their new definition, "internalization is a process of transferring the regulation of behavior from outside to inside the individual". This process is necessary for the regulation of extrinsically motivated behaviors that are consistent with social norms to be transformed into personal values [7]. The process of moving from external to internal regulation involves several levels defined according to Deci, Ryan and their colleagues as:

External-regulation: factors and circumstances outside the individual which affect their motivation;

Introjected-internal regulation: where the individual feels that he/she should or has to do the behavior;

Identified-internal regulation: which is based on the utility that the individual will gain from doing the behavior (e.g. as given by the authors: studying hard to get grades to get into college);

Integrated-regulation based on what the individual thinks is valuable and important to the self. Even though the integrated level is self-determined, it still does not reflect intrinsically motivated behavior. Intrinsic motivation only occurs when the individual autonomously controls the behavior, which may not be the case even at the integrated level of regulation [37].

Psychological needs

SDT emerged from a humanistic perspective on human motivation. The main tenets of SDT focus on human beings having three inherent psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy [7-10]. **Competence** is the need to feel that one is effective in performing the requisite actions. **Relatedness** refers to the need to feel that one is related to others and a sense of belonging to a social group. In the case of teacher-student relationship, relatedness support means providing acceptance, respect, and a feel of caring. Autonomy refers to the need to express one's authentic self and to feel that self is the source of action. Autonomy is not independence or total freedom, but rather an internal acceptance of, and engagement with, one's motivated behavior. **Supporting autonomy** means taking the student's perspective, providing choice, and providing a meaningful rationale when choice is not possible [7]. According to SDT theses three needs, when satisfied, promote psychological well-being [13].

If the three needs are satisfied, an individual's motivation, growth and well-being will be enhanced. In contrast, if the three needs are not supported, motivation, growth and well-being will be diminished [9]. In other words, the satisfaction of these psychological needs will result in the formation of different motives, which can range from intrinsic to extrinsic.

Behavioral regulation: controlled verses autonomous

Within SDT, extrinsic motives are further differentiated into those that are *controlled* versus those that are more *autonomous*. SDT-based research has always demonstrated that more autonomous forms of motivation are related with a mass of positive outcomes from better academic performance, creativity, and persistence, to enhanced learner wellness. In terms of social contexts, SDT suggests that autonomous motives, and the energy and engagement associated with them, are supported by contexts that enhance experiences of *autonomy, competence,* and *relatedness*. In this view, the effects of classroom events such as examinations, teacher feedback, or the introduction of a new curriculum on students' motivation are determined by the *functional importance*, or meaning, of these events with admiration to these three basic needs [23]. Similarly, the meanings of policies that reward or punish teachers or schools also have a practical importance as they will form the type and focus of consequent manager and teacher motivation. Particularly the functional importance of any incident can be either *informational, controlling,* or *a motivating* [26].

Autonomy support

As discussed above, SDT emphasizes the importance of the environment in satisfying the three basic needs: autonomy, relatedness and competence. While other theories have highlighted the importance of relatedness and competence, SDT specially concentrated on the need for autonomy [19, p.253].

Several studies were conducted on autonomy support in academic setting [see 16; 19; 34]. SDT is an approach to human motivation in which autonomous motivation is deemed essential for optimal functioning. Autonomous motivation refers to the experience of choice in initiating behavior. Teachers are autonomously motivated when they perform their job for the intrinsic value of achieving meaningful and interesting goals or because they personally grasp the value of their work activities.

Humans have a need to be autonomous and engage in activities because they want to [27, p.248]. The concept of autonomy support contained within self-determination theory [7] describes a person in an authority role (e.g., a lecturer, a pedagogical supervisor) taking the other's (e.g., the student's) perspective, acknowledging the other's feelings and perceptions, providing the other with information and choice, and minimizing the use of pressure and control [39].

Garcia and Pintrich [15] studied the effects of autonomy on motivation and the performance in the context of a college classroom. They found that autonomy, while not directly facilitative of higher course grades, strengthened intrinsic goal orientation, task value, and self-efficacy. This research provides further support for the benefits of fostering autonomy within academic settings.

In several studies [11; 13; 14; 15; 16; 18; 19; 32; 39] self-determined motivation has been linked to various educational outcomes across the age span, from early elementary school to college students. Some of these studies [e.g., 6; 30] have shown that students who had more self-determined forms of motivation for doing schoolwork were more likely to stay in school than students who had less self-determined motivation.

Interaction between teacher- student and students' motivation

There is a growing body of literature that shows how the affective relationships teachers have with students impact students' motivation and achievement in school. Teacher's emotional support of students produces higher school-related perceptions of competence, clearer positive social and academic goals, and readiness to take on school activities. Research measuring support from all three kinds of socialization agents (teachers, peers, parents) shows that teacher support is mainly important for academic motivation and adjustment [25].

Wentzel [35] noted that studies showing how teacher-student relations impact student achievement, to a great extent, tested relations and discussed mixture of designs and measurement issues that should be considered in future research. These incorporate the complexity of these relations and the need to examine students' impact on teachers beside teachers' impact on students. As well, researchers need to take the "nested" nature of these relations into consideration; teacher-student relations occur in complex classroom settings and the kinds of relations teachers have with individual students is probably influenced by the relations they have with others in their classes. Wentzel [35] argued that there is a need for a clearer understanding of the mechanisms underlying these relations of teacher emotional support and student motivation and achievement.

The present article identifies motivation and the perspective of SDT in promoting learning motivation. SDT is one of the main theoretical frameworks of motivation that has been applied to educational settings [7; 9]. It is a macro theory of human motivation concerned with the development and functioning of personality within social contexts. It has emphasized the central role of basic needs: autonomy, relatedness and competence. I hope that the literature review shed light on the extensive activity in motivation field. I believe that in order to improve students' achievements promoting learning motivation should be given high priority in educational setting. The key element is autonomy support in the interaction teacher-student. Primary emphasis should be on the quality of learning and on student's emotional and social life rather than achieving high scores on standardized tests.

Further research directions can include deeper understanding of SDT in promoting learning motivation of minorities and populations with different socio-economic characteristics, and in studying the interaction of these factors with the students' psychological needs.

Bibliography:

1. BANDURA, A. Self-efficacy. In: V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (vol.4, p.71-81). New York, NY: Academic Press, 1994.
2. BANDURA, A. *Self-efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
3. BANDURA, A. *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman, 1997.
4. CONNELL, J.P., &: WELLBORN, J.G. Competence, autonomy and relatedness: A motivational analysis of self-system processes. In: M. Gunnar & A.Sroufe (Eds.). *Minnesota symposium on child psychology* (vol.23, p.43-77). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1990.
5. COVINGTON, M.V. Goal theory, motivation, and school achievement: An integrative review. In: *Annual review of psychology*, 2000, no.51(1), p.171-200.
6. DAOUST, H., VALLERAND, R.J. & BLAIS, M.R. *Motivation and education: A look at some important consequences*. Canadian Psychology, 29(2a), 172 (abstract), 1988.
7. DECI, E.L., & RYAN, R.M. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self- Determination in Human Behavior*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985.
8. DECI, E.L. & RYAN, R.M. A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In: R.A. Dienstbier (Ed.). *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (p.237-288). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.
9. DECI, E.L., & RYAN, R.M. The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. In: Psychological Inquiry, 2000, no.11, p.227-268.
10. DECI, E.L., & RYAN, R.M. *Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains*. Canadian Psychology, 2008, no.49, p.14-23.
11. DECI, E.L., VALLERAND, R.J., PELLETIER, L.G., & RYAN, R.M. Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. In: *Educational psychologist*, 1991, no.26(3-4), p.325-346.
12. ECCLES, J.S., & WIGFIELD, A. Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. In: *Annual review of psychology*, 2002, no.53(1), p.109-132.
13. FILAK, V.F., SHELDON, K.M. Student psychological need satisfaction and college teacher- course evaluation. In: *Educational Psychology*, 2003, no.23(3), p.235-247.

14. FORTIER, M.S., VALLERAND R.J., & GUAY, F. Academic motivation and school performance: Toward a structural model. In: *Contemporary educational psychology*, 1995, no.20(3), p.257-274.
15. GARCIA, T., PINTRICH, P. The effects of autonomy on motivation and performance in the college classroom. In: *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 1996, no.21, p.477-486.
16. GEORGE, M. Autonomy and Motivation in Remedial Mathematics. In: *PRIMUS: Problems, Resources, and Issues in Mathematics Undergraduate Studies*, 2012, no.22:4, p.255-264.
17. GRAHAM, S., & WEINER, B. *Theories and principles of motivation*. Prentice Hall, 1996.
18. GROLNICK, W.S., RYAN, R.M, & DECI, E.L. Inner resources for school achievement: Motivational mediators of children's perceptions of their parents. In: *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1991, no.83, p.508-517.
19. KAPLAN, H., ASSOR, A. Enhancing autonomy-supportive I-Thou dialogue in school: conceptualization and socio-emotional effects of an intervention program. In: *Social Psychology of Education*, 2012, no.15, p.251-269.
20. MEECE, J.L., & HOLT, K. A pattern analysis of students' achievement goals. In: *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1993, no.85(4), p.582.
21. PINTRICH, P.R., & SCHUNK, D.H. *Motivation in Education: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.
22. Reardon, R.C., Bertoch, S.C. Student motivation and program participation. In: *Journal of College Student Development*, 2010, vol.51(6), p.716-722.
23. RYAN, R.M. Motivation and the organization of human behavior: Three reasons for the reemergence of a field. In: R.M. Ryan (Eds.). *The oxford handbook of human motivation* (p.3-10). Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012.
24. RYAN, R.M., DECI, E.L. Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. In: *American Psychologist*, 2000, no.55(1), p.68-78.
25. RYAN, R.M., LYNCH, M.F., VANSTEENKISTE, M. & DECI, E. Motivation and Autonomy in Counseling, Psychotherapy, and Behavior Change: A Look at Theory and Practice. In: *The Counseling Psychologist*, 2011, no.39 (2), p.193-260.
26. RYAN, R.M., WEINSTEIN, N. Undermining quality teaching and learning – A self-determination theory perspective on high-stakes testing. In: *Theory and research in education*, 2009, no.7(2), 224-233.
27. SCHUNK, H., PINTRICH, P.R., MEECE, J.L. *Motivation in Education. Theory, Research, and Applications*. Pearson, Merrill Prentice Hall, 2008.
28. SKINNER, E.A., WELLBORN, J.G., & CONNELL, J.P. What it takes to do well in school and whether I've got it: A process model of perceived control and children's engagement and achievement in school. In: *Journal of educational psychology*, 1990, no.82(1), p.22-32.
29. STIPEK, D.J. Motivation and instruction. In: Calfee & D.C. Berliner (eds.). *Handbook of educational psychology* (p.85-113). New York: Macmillan, 1996.
30. VALLERAND, R.J. *A motivational analysis of high school dropout*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Quebec at Montreal, Montreal, Canada, 1991.
31. VALLERAND, R.J. & BISSONNETTE, R. Intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivational styles as predictors of behavior: A prospective study. In: *Journal of Personality*, 1992, no.60, p.599-620.
32. VALLERAND, R.J., FORTIER, M.S. & Guay F. Self-determination and persistence in a real-life setting: Toward a motivational model of high school dropout. In: *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, 1997, no.72, p.1161-1176.
33. WEINER, B. History of motivational research in education. In: *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1990, no.82(4), p.616-622.
34. WEINSTEIN, N., PRZYBYLSKI, A.K. & RYAN, R.M. The index of autonomous functioning: Development of a scale of human autonomy. In: *Journal of Research in Personality*, 2012.
35. WENTZEL, K.R. Students' relationship with teachers as motivational constructs. In: K.R. Wentzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.). *Handbook of motivation at school* (p.301-322). New York: Routledge, 2009.
36. WIGFIELD, A. Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation: A developmental perspective. In: *Educational Psychology Review*, 1994, no.6(1), p.49-78.
37. WIGFIELD, A., CAMBRIA, J., ECCLES, J.S. Motivation in education. In: R.M. Ryan (eds.). *The Oxford handbook of human motivation* (p.463-478). Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012.
38. WIGFIELD, A. & ECCLES, J.S. Expectancy–value theory of achievement motivation. In: *Contemporary educational psychology*, 2000, no.25(1), p.68-81.
39. WILLIAMS, G.C. & DECI, E.L. Internalization of biopsychosocial values by medical students: a test of self-determination theory. In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1996, no.70 (4), p.767-779.