

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Attitude & Motivation towards Learning: A Study from Bahrain Polytechnic

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that impact students' attitude and motivation towards learning. The current study was conducted to improve the understanding of the factors that contribute towards academic progress of a student. The problem is that there is a knowledge gap due to limited studies related to students at risk. Previous research has focused on attitude and motivation in different contextual settings, but none of them really focused on the attitude and motivation of students that are identified at risk. Additionally, this research will fill the knowledge gap by studying how attitude and motivation can minimize the number of students at risk. Hence, the research question is what are the challenges faced by students at risk in learning? What factors contribute and lead the students to be identified at risk? This topic has been selected because it contributes towards the development of the learners, it will enhance the understanding of the academics on what attributes and factors will impact the students that are at risk of failure or withdraw, as it is a phenomenal that all the academic institutions are facing. Yet, there is a knowledge gap in research about the topic, furthermore this paper suggests a method composed of surveys and a comprehensive review of existing literature to fill the gap. Studies reveal that attitude is one of the central elements along with motivation in determining success in learning. To guide this study, attention will be directed toward the factors and attributes responsible for attitude and motivation.

Keywords: *Achievement Goal, Active Learning Strategies, Attitude, Learning Value, Motivation, Performance Goal and Self-efficacy.*

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Introduction

Researchers have conducted significant amount of literature about students whom they defined as at-risk, students could be at-risk of failure or at risk of dropping out of school. Additional literature reveals that at-risk students could be defined based upon a series of factors such as internal student behaviours i.e., low self-esteem, low motivation, etc [1].

Scholars and educators are defining who is at-risk as "Those who fall behind, whose school attendance is uneven, whose basic skills are limited, who are bright out bored, who are in trouble with authorities, who are on drugs, who are pregnant, who have failed the competency exams, who are behavior problems, who speaks English as a second language, or who reflect a depressed socio-economic status" [2]. Another definition has been identified as those students who come to school at-risk of failing...or at-risk of failing at school...from unstable, fractured families

and low socio-economic status" [3]. It could also be defined as, "Students who, because of learning deficiencies, lack of school readiness, limited English proficiency, poverty, educational or economic disadvantage, or physical or emotional handicapping conditions face greater risk of low educational achievement and have greater potential of becoming school dropout" [4]. Though each definition provides various aspects and traits of the at-risk student, all definitions have one similarity: at-riskiness rests entirely within the student.

It has also been suggested that students' characteristics or behaviours are valid predictors of being at-risk. For example, a student's level of self-esteem will have an influence on how s/he performs in the schooling environment [5]. A low degree of motivation also appears to place students at-risk [6]. A student's attitude and motivation has frequently been reported to be the most

critical factors for success [7]. The study of motivation has been a prominent area for research in psychology and education for many years [8]. One of the most significant current discussions reflects the widespread perception of classroom teachers who tend to regard student motivation as the most important factor in educational success in general [8]. Contemporary research begins to emphasize on the effectiveness of affective components in studying students' motivation and attitude [9].

Learning motivation studies revealed that there are variety of motivational factors, such as effort, self-perceptions of ability, self-regulated learning, intrinsic goal orientation, task value, self-efficacy, test anxiety and learning strategies [10]. Many motivational researches were conducted by educational psychologists [11], the above-mentioned indicators were mainly developed by educational psychologists who were interested in the domains that will impact the students' general learning motivation. Based on constructive theory [12], students take an active role in constructing new knowledge.

When students perceive valuable and meaningful learning tasks, they will actively engage in the learning tasks, using active learning strategies to integrate their existing knowledge with new experience. When the students do not perceive the value of learning tasks, they use surface learning strategies such as memorization to learn [13]. Studies also illustrated the importance of the students' learning goal in motivating students to construct their knowledge based on the learning value and learning strategies [14].

Research also stated that 'motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained' [15], while studies stressed that students' learning goals, values of science learning, and self-efficacy take important roles in influencing students in constructing and reconstructing their science conceptions [15]. In other words, when students perceived that they are capable, and they think the conceptual change tasks are worthwhile to participate in, and their learning goal is to gain competence, then students will be willing to make a sustained effort and be engaged in making conceptual change.

Here, Pintrich et al. add students' self-efficacy and their intention toward learning tasks into a previous constructivist view toward science learning. Many studies have investigated how are the students' perceptions of the classroom goals related to their task choices, attitudes, and beliefs about the causes of success and failure. Of most importance, many studies have focused on how students' perceptions of classroom goals relate to their selection and use of effective learning strategies.

There has been extensive research on classroom climate over the years; much of this research has focused on students' achievement and outcome measure. Findings showed that students' perceptions of classroom climate were related to specific motivational variables that have significant implications for the development of learning. Moreover, current research on student classroom learning stresses the importance of considering both motivational and cognitive components of academic performance [15].

Motivational components include students' perception of classroom environment as well as their self – related beliefs such as personal goals, self-efficacy, interest and value beliefs. Literature revealed that there are specific domains that should be related to the motivation of the students, these domains are part of this current research and have been revealed in many literatures and studies conducted by different authors.

Research on motivational theories and studies of students' learning [16] reveals that self-efficacy, the individual's goals toward tasks, task value and the learning environment dominate students' learning motivation. Combining the constructivist learning and motivation theories we find that students' self-efficacy, science learning value (or task values), students' learning strategies, the individual's learning goal, and the learning environment are important motivational factors that constitute students' science learning motivation.

In the following we discuss each motivational factor in more detail. Self-efficacy refers to the individual's perception of his/her ability in accomplishing learning tasks [17]. Lack of motivation in students create a barrier towards effective learning since motivation determines a student's attitude towards

school work, how he relates to teachers, how much time and effort he invests in studies, how much assistance and support he seeks from teachers and peers, lesson attendance as well as how he ultimately performs academically. Students often have problems sustaining intrinsic motivation towards school work due to lack of personal goals, low self-esteem about their ability to perform tasks or due to affective oriented reasons where personal problems may interfere with present activities, personal problems such as low socio-economic status and unstable backgrounds.

Despite the best school administrators, faculties, curriculum, facilities and materials, how a teacher motivates a student in the classroom often is the demarcating line between poor and good academic achievement. This paper will focus on the attitude of at-risk students that is strongly correlated with their motivation and will be determined through different variables: Self efficacy, active learning strategies, Learning Value, Performance goal, achievement goal and learning environment stimulation. The study exposes the students' feelings, views and beliefs, and explores the characteristics of the factors influencing students' attitudes that will contribute significantly towards a student being at – risk.

Literature Review

An Overview on Attitude & Motivation

Before studying the attitude and motivation for students, it is imperative and essential to start by explaining and defining the concept of attitude & motivation; therefore, a considerable amount of literature has been published on attitude which is strongly linked to motivation which can be defined as the driving force in any situation. The study of motivation has been a prominent area for research in psychology and education for many years [8].

This interest may reflect the widespread perception of classroom tutors who tend to regard student motivation as the most important factor in educational success in general [8]. In their earlier studies, studies found that competency and motivation were the two factors most strongly associated with learners' achievement. Studies drew together the findings from many studies over several decades and developed Gardner's "socio-educational model of SLA".

In the socio-educational model, motivation to learn a subject is viewed as requiring three elements. First, the motivated individual expands effort to learn the course. That is, there is a persistent and consistent attempt to learn the material by doing homework, by seeking out opportunities to learn more, by doing extra work, etc. Second, the motivated individual wants to achieve the goal. Such an individual will express the desire to succeed and will strive to achieve success.

Third, the motivated individual will enjoy the task of learning the course. Such an individual will say that it is fun, a challenge, and enjoyable, even though at times enthusiasm may be less than at other times [20]. Motivation is also examined in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic motives of the learner. Those who learn for their own self-perceived needs and goals are intrinsically motivated and those who pursue a goal only to receive an external reward from someone else are extrinsically motivated [21].

If the learners' motivation is high then the attitude towards learning is more positive. At the beginning learners are very excited about learning subjects but they are unaware of the demands that will be placed on them. Motivation is important because students' motivation plays an important role in their conceptual change processed critical thinking, learning strategies [22].

Concept of Attitude

Attitude can be defined as a set of beliefs developed in a due course of time in each sociocultural setting. It has been proved that positive attitude facilitates learning [20]. If the learner is reluctant and unwilling to learn or he/she does not have a positive attitude, he/she does not produce any result. Motivation is considered as one of the significant backbones of the learning process in student life, a lot of studies place a high value on attitude.

Tutors are reporting that motivating their students to learn is one the most difficult challenges [23]. Some students seem self – motivated to learn, other show very little interest in learning, gaining new skills, or improving their abilities. Many students do not develop their academic abilities or talents because they lack the desire to do so. Concerns about the quality student motivation have received very little attention

in recent debates about school reform. Many authors argue that motivation in education is very difficult to measure; this is because motivation to learn is not easy to describe and explain in the operational reality, and to measure the motivation a correlation must be made with the attitude [24].

Previous research findings into motivation revealed that tutors can easily identify learners who are highly motivated in their work and progress; these learners are characterized as enthusiastic and committed to their education/course. Studies found that the UN motivated learner may well be the student for whom life in the classroom is not meeting their perceived needs [28]. Added to that, previous research showed that for learner to be successful there must be attention and interest; however, motivation is a significant aspect in education.

Concept of Motivation

Motivation is the energy to study, to learn, to achieve and to maintain these positive behaviors over time [25]. Motivation is what stimulates students to acquire, transform and use knowledge. It has been the centre of attention among educational researchers throughout the years because it constitutes the backbone of the learning process.

Motivation is identified as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal which leads to a conscious decision to act and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and or physical effort to attain a previously set goal [26]. Authors defined motivation as the force that energizes, directs and sustains behaviour [27].

It is the driving force that encourages an action or behaviour to occur. Motivation is defined as an internal state and condition that serves to activate or energise behaviour and give it direction [25]. Motivation is a process; it is neither an aim nor a product. On the contrary, it is a tool that helps individuals to reach their respective aims. First, there is need for the student to feel an interest in the subject at hand, set a goal and then decide to take an action accordingly [29]. What is of even more significance is the ability to maintain that interest as one

struggles to realize his/her previously set goal. Researchers describe this process in a general sense: "...motivation is what gets you going, keeps you going and determines where you are trying to go". As it is obvious, motivation provides students with a direction to follow. It is a concept revealing the reasons why people act and think as they do [31].

These aspects of motivation are supported by Brophy who says motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of a behavior, especially goal-directed behavior. In the classroom context, the concept of student motivation is used to explain the degree to which students invest attention and effort in various pursuits, which may or may not be the ones desired by the teacher [32].

As it is obvious, motivation constitutes one of the significant backbones of the learning process in student life; hence a lot of studies place a high a value on this concept. However, lack of motivation still constitutes a serious problem both for teachers and students in the classrooms.

Relationship between Learning & Motivation

Worldwide, education advocates have dedicated huge amounts of time and energy to improving student achievement. Usher in his research at the George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human development noted that even with the best administrators, faculty, curriculum, and materials in place, if students are not motivated to learn and excel, achievement gains will be difficult, if not impossible [33].

Learning is an active process that needs to be motivated and guided toward desirable ends. For effective learning to occur, the learner must be motivated so that his interest will be directed towards a definite objective, which will spur him towards further learning Motivation has several effects on students' learning and behaviour. Firstly, motivation directs behaviour towards goals. Motivation also leads to increased effort and energy directed towards tasks. It determines whether a student will pursue a task with

enthusiasm or a lifeless attitude. It also increases the initiation and persistence of activities, it increases a student's time on a task and is an important factor in affecting their learning and achievement. Motivation enhances cognitive processing. It affects what and how information is processed because motivated students are more likely to pay attention and try to understand the material instead of simply going through the motions of learning in a superficial manner. More and more teachers are reporting that motivating their students to learn is one of their most difficult challenges [24].

While some students seem self-motivated to learn, others show very little interest in learning, gaining new skills, or improving their abilities. Far too many students do not develop their academic abilities or talents because they lack the desire to do so. By the time a student has reached adolescence, poor motivation has become one of the chief contributors to underachievement [33]. However, fostering a motivated student requires expertise and creativity on the part of the teacher. Developing a student who will have a long-term commitment to learning is also an important educational outcome itself, the most important attitude that can be formed in a student is that of the desire to go on learning [27].

The problem however is that teacher education programs still give only minimal attention to the subject of student motivation. Many teachers, therefore, begin their teaching careers with little working knowledge of how to motivate students [8]. Teachers are left to improvise. Concerns about the quality of student motivation have received very little attention in recent debates about school reform. The focus of policy at the state level is often on district-level incentives for increased test scores and sanctions for low test scores, with little consideration of the kinds of impact such policies might have on teachers and, ultimately, student motivation [25].

A review of learning motivation studies revealed the diversity and variety of motivation factors, such as self-perceptions of ability, effort, intrinsic goal orientation, task value, self-efficacy, test anxiety, self-regulated learning, task orientation and learning strategies [22]. The studies highlighted the diversity of learning

environment and showed how researchers' interests influenced the approach taken to aspect of motivation. Research and theory on motivation [23] indicate that learners are most motivated when they believe the tasks they're involved in are relevant to their personal goals. Authors hypothesize that human beings operate from a hierarchical structure of needs and goals: they must satisfy basic physical needs (e.g., food, shelter) and psychological needs (e.g., acceptance, safety) before being able to form goals-to decide what they are "consciously trying to accomplish" [35].

From this perspective, working to develop a positive mental climate, discussed in the previous section, focuses on meeting students' psychological needs. A growing body of research indicates that when students are working on goals they themselves have set, they are more motivated and efficient, and they achieve more than they do when working to meet goals set by the teacher [35].

This research strongly implies that if educators expect students to be motivated to succeed at classroom tasks, they must somehow link those tasks to student goals. Some powerful ways of doing this include allowing students to structure tasks around their interests and allowing students to control specific aspects of tasks. In addition, it has been stressed the importance of investigating students' motivation when studying specific subject content areas because that may express different motivational traits in these areas. Hence, it is important to develop a questionnaire to investigate students' learning motivation.

Relationship Between Attitude & Motivation

Attitude is a mental set, nature or character, readiness to respond and the psychological basis of attitudes, their permanence, their learned nature and their evaluative character. It includes object things, people, places, ideas or situations. Attitudes are not just a passive result of experience; instead they impel and urge behaviour and guide its form and manner. There are many components of attitudes such as an affective component (emotional component of like or dislike, an action and readiness to respond) [36].

Found Attitude includes relevant beliefs, behaviour and attitudinal or emotional reactions. Research indicates that there is a positive relation between attitude and achievement [37]. A researcher in study, used a sample of thirty-three countries found that each dimension of attitude alone was positively related to achievement for almost all the thirty – three countries, some of these variables were achievement, intelligence and motivation [38].

Motivation on the above study was referred to “A student’s willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in the learning process” [39]. There are many students that are highly motivated and do anything their teacher asks. However, the number of poorly motivated students in substantial and seems to be growing. In some high schools, these students seem to be poorly motivated because their lack of effort keeps them from gaining the skills needed to take more advance learning. Educators have considered the effect of motivational factors in learning performance of students is highly correlated. Research showed that there are positive and significant relations between attitude, academic motivation, intelligence and academic achievement [40].

Furthermore, literature revealed that many indicators of motivation are behavioural in nature, such as choice of tasks, level of efforts on tasks, and persistence at tasks, these three behaviours are all good indicators of a student who is motivated for the task. Both attribution theory [41] and goal theory [42] suggest that students' perceptions of the task and themselves, as well as their achievement behaviours, have implications for future cognition, motivation, and affect. For example, in goal theory, two students may both demonstrate high levels of effort and persistence on an academic task, but if one is mastery-oriented and the other is performance-oriented, then these qualitative differences in goal orientation can have a dramatic effect on subsequent cognitions, attributions, motivation, and affect [42].

When students have high self-efficacy, they believe they are capable of accomplishing learning tasks, whether tasks are difficult or easy. In constructivist learning, students take an active role in interacting with the Environment; they use active learning

strategies to retrieve existing knowledge to interpret new experiences to construct new understanding. Students’ learning strategies depend on the nature of motivation and learning goals. An individual’s goal toward tasks refers to students’ attending the learning tasks for performance goal or achievement goal [33]. When students have an achievement goal, they are intrinsically motivated, they intend to accomplish something to satisfy their intrinsic needs for improving their own competence [36], and they believe this kind of participation will help them achieve valuable goals [39].

If the students’ goal towards tasks is for performance, they will be concerned more with performing better than their peers and impressing their teachers [32]. The learning environment comprises teachers’ teaching strategies, class activities, and student–teacher and student–student interactions that would influence an individual’s motivation in learning [32].

Researchers found students with different motivation would have different perceptions of the learning environment [43], teachers’ teaching, and student-teacher relationships would influence students’ motivation. Based on the findings, students’ learning goals, self-efficacy, learning strategies and perception of learning values were identified as important domains in students’ learning motivation [44].

Researchers found out that students’ lack of motivation in learning were caused by: lack of responsibility, low self-esteem and students’ family dysfunction. Other researchers [33] identified factors influencing students’ motivation towards learning, which included: students’ own interests toward the subjects and the grades they received in class; students’ interpretations of the nature of the task; students’ success or failure to make progress; students’ general goal and effective orientations and achievement of understanding.

Besides students’ own reasons, other factors influencing students’ motivation were teacher’s expectation of students’ learning, feedback, curriculum and social goals [44]. Based on these findings, students’ learning goals, self-efficacy, learning strategies and perception of learning values were identified as important domains in students’ learning motivation.

Motivation has also been shown to have several effects on students' learning and behaviour. Firstly, motivation directs behaviour towards goals, motivation determines the specific goals toward which people strive, thus it affects the choices students make, for example whether to allocate more time to a subject, at the expense of other subjects.

Motivation also leads to increased effort and energy. It determines whether a student will pursue a task, even a challenging one with enthusiasm or uninspiring attitude. Motivation also increases the initiation and persistence of activities; a motivated student always increases the time he spends on a task.

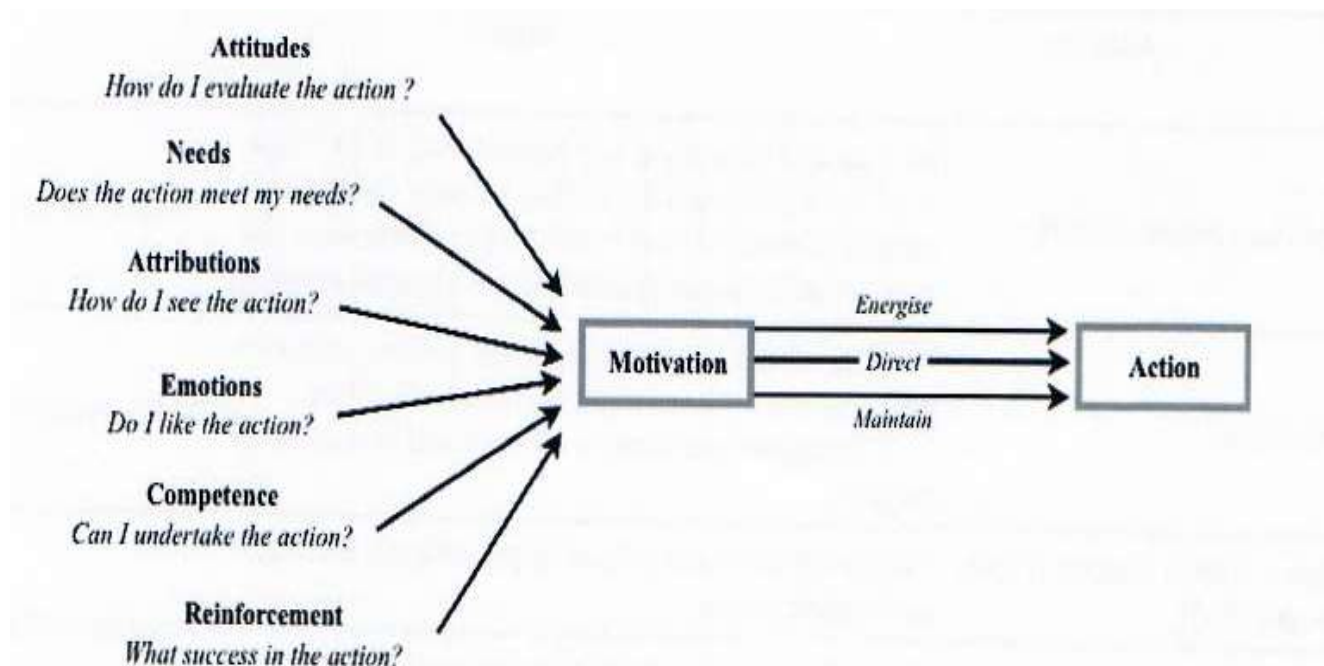


Figure one illustrates how motivation is correlated and influenced with attitude, needs, attributions, emotions, competence and reinforcement [45-46]; therefore, attitude has been set as number one factor that influences the motivation of the students and determines the possibility of at – risk student.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that the motivation and attitude of students contribute significantly to the academic achievement of a student. Additionally, to explore the students' motivation many factors such as self – efficacy, active learning strategies, science learning value, performance goal, achievement goal, and learning environment stimulation do contribute to students' overall motivation.

Moreover, research shows that attitude and motivation are two of the most important factors to predict students' achievement, while student's motivation is the most important factor that affects the students' attitude, followed by learning value. Previous

research indicated that motivation contributed 11.4% of the achievement; furthermore self-efficacy had significant and positive correlation with students' achievement and cognition engagement. Additionally, students with active learning strategies have the capability to perform better and score higher. Many interventions need to be made to better the situation, this can only be done by conducting research to recognize and understand the challenges that students at risk face.

Thus, this research is expected to act as a mechanism for further discussion with regards to the involvement of students at risk that will aid in improving the understanding of the academics towards students with low academic progress and achievement. Despite the expected contribution of the study to the body of knowledge, it has its own limitation.

One the study's focus is only on identifying the factors that impact the attitude and motivation towards science learning. It would be more insightful if the researcher recommended strategies on how the students

that are at risk of failure or at risk of withdraw improve their academic progress. Another limitation is that the research was only targeting students; researcher could target academics and add their insight into the paper. Moreover, literature on students at risk is not very common, as most of the research are targeted towards science and math learning, it would be difficult to find papers collecting background information and comparing the research's results with

the outcomes of studies conducting in different contextual settings. Finally, to carry out the research and fill the knowledge gap, a research method composed of approximately 80 surveys with students and 10 interviews with academics are carried out. In addition to conducting a comprehensive literature review, this will enhance the academic knowledge on how to deal with students that are at risk of failure or at risk of withdraw.

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