

## LEARNERS' ACADEMIC MOTIVATION IN PSYCHOLOGY: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Nguyen Phuc Loc<sup>\*1</sup> and Tran Thi Le Thu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*K38 Ph.D student, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Hanoi National University of Education*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Psychology and Education, Hanoi National University of Education*

**Abstract.** A systematic review was conducted to evaluate the learning motivation of pupils and students in psychology field. The databases in Vietnamese and English were systematically searched for review from the inception in 1981. The result of 36 studies indicated six research categories in analysing academic motivation as follows (1) Academic motivation and academic achievement, (2) Learning motivation by educational levels, (3) Impacting factors on academic motivation such as basic psychological needs, teachers-students relationship, class climate, student mindset, self-efficacy and personality traits, (4) Learning motivation assessment and measurement instruments, (5) Academic motivation development and (6) Prevention and intervention of learning amotivation cases. Further discussion about pupils and students' academic motivation in Vietnam and suggestion for future researches shall be mentioned.

**Keywords:** Academic lotivation, learning lotiation, psychology, learners.

### 1. Introduction

Learning is considered as an essential activity for adolescents. Nowadays, it can be witnessed that educating individuals to become qualified, competent and autonomous is not just a unilateral effort of school or family but also the desire to dominate the knowledge of students themselves. Academic activities are subjectively influenced by the academic motivation of learners. The formation and development of learning motivation plays a meaningful and vital role in studying process. The academic motivation determines the learning goals, promotes the active exploration and creativity in learning as well as helps students to overcome their difficulties and limitations. Without a clear and positive academic motivation, learning activities will be less effective; learners shall not meet the academic requirements in school and achieve long-term goals in their future plans. Therefore, pupils and students need to be aware of this issue so that they shall develop their appropriate academic motivation and foster it more sustainably.

The issue of motivation, especially the learning motivation of pupils and students has been researched by various authors from the different aspects in the different fields. This article focuses on reviewing and analysing the studies on academic motivation from psychology aspects as follows: (1) Academic motivation and academic performance, (2) Learning motivation by educational levels, (3) Impacting factors on academic motivation, (4) Learning motivation

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Contact Nguyen Phuc Loc, e-mail address: [nguyenphucloc29@gmail.com](mailto:nguyenphucloc29@gmail.com)

assessment and measurement instruments, (5) Academic motivation development and (6) Prevention and intervention of learning amotivation cases.

## **2. Content**

### **2.1. Methodology**

The article utilized systematic review method including an extensive search, an inclusion and exclusion process of potential studies. Database and searching tools from MEDline, PsycINFO, PsyARTICLES, Eric, Sociofile, Social Science Citation Index and the local libraries such as the University of Education Publishing House, Vietnam National University Press and the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences were applied to find relevant studies. They are limited to references published in English and Vietnamese languages from 1981 to 2020. The following search terms “academic motivation”, “learning motivation”, “psychology” and “learners” were limited to display in the article title.

The initial search process showed 222 results, after revising the titles and excluding the repeated researches due to searching by different channels, there were 63 articles left. Next, we scan the abstract to choose the articles that satisfy the criteria (a) indicating the concept and structure of learning motivation as well as related factors; (b) basic quantitative research. Finally, only 36 articles that met the given criteria were used to synthesize information is basic for this article.

### **2.2. Results and Discussion**

Academic motivation has been examined by psychologists, educators and researchers over the decades. From various researches and articles of Vietnamese and foreign scholars on learning motivation, major research trends were analysed as follows:

#### **2.2.1. Academic Motivation and Academic Performance**

Comprehending the relationship between academic motivation and academic performance plays an important role in promoting learning motivation of students, assisting students in achieving their personal academic goals. Khăm Phăn Khăm On (1994) indicated that academic motivation had a direct affect on student achievement. The clear and strong motivation were clearly seen in students with good and excellent academic results. Studies on different types of learning motivation (based on the Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory) and academic results showed that only intrinsic academic motivation positively relates and predicts the student achievement within a year (Baker, 2003; Taylor et al., 2014). There was also reciprocal relationship between students’ learning motivation and their academic performance. To sum things up, there is a significant association between academic motivation and learning outcome; academic motivation is essential in learning process and course completion.

#### **2.2.2. Academic Motivation by Educational Levels**

Academic motivation has been studied on from primary school students to university students. In primary school, Trinh Quoc Thai (1996) stated that learning activities of first grade pupils were driven by a rich and diverse set of motivations. These motivations were arranged in a hierarchy and could be reordered throughout the school year. In another research, examination of leaning motivation between Vietnamese and French primary school pupils indicated that pupils in both countries study due to their own learning interest and desire (Bui Thi Thuy Hang, 2010). This result also was seen in the research on Japanense and North American students.

For secondary school students, learning motivation led to academic passion, self- discipline in studying and then, students would have positive performance (Nham Van Chan Con, 1990). Junior high school pupils also said that they studied in order to gain knowledge, make parents

happy, have stable jobs in the future, become helpful people, know how to behave appropriately, understand themselves and others as well as earn respected by everyone (Nguyen Chi Tang & Pham Van Hieu, 2015) (cited by Vietnam Association of Psychology & Education [VAPE], 2015).

Survey on high school students in Hanoi showed that most students were aware of the meaning of learning and recognize the importance of academic activities. Hence, more than half of the students had positive learning behaviors (Hoang Gia Trang et. al, 2015) (cited by VAPE, 2015). In Ho Chi Minh, high school pupils learnt due to achieving good results in graduation and university entrance exam, finding stable jobs and earning a lot of money as well as improving themselves and earning respect from others (Dinh Thi Kim Loan & Pham Van Luc, 2015) (cited by VAPE, 2015).

Researches on learning motivation of university students showed somewhat similar results to studies on the academic motivation of junior high school and high school pupils. Similar to secondary school students, university students studied because of having great jobs, making paprents satisfied and interest in learning activities (Huynh Mong Tuyen & Nguyen Thi Trang Thanh, 2015) (cited by VAPE, 2015). Much the same as to high school students, Duong Hai Hung (2015) found that the strongest academic motivation of university students was improving themselves and then fostering socioeconomic status when they have good jobs; and earning good grades (cited by VAPE, 2015).

Shortly, learning activities are triggered by a system of different motivations and they are interrelated. Among these diverse academic motivations, some learning motivation are considered more or less important than others.

### **2.2.3. Impacting Factors on Academic Motivation**

#### **2.2.3.1. Academic motivation and objective factors**

Objective factors impacting learning motivation of students contain teachers' teaching styles, teachers-learners relationship and the classroom climate. These features are closely linked together and related to students' motivation.

A number of studies showed the role of teacher-student relationship in improving student learning motivation in two aspects: teachers cared about students and teachers challenged students to develop through talking about their high expectation of achievement from the students (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005; Wentzel, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Research by Wentzel (2012) showed that teachers' interaction and expectations, willingness to help, giving advice, emotional guidance and safety support improved students' motivation, participation in learning activities and achievement. This relationship was seen as more meaningful and effective for students with poor academic performance and those from low-income families. The teacher-learner relationship convincingly contributed to fostering students' motivation and achievement as well as reducing dropout rates. Scheel, Madabhushi and Backhaus (2009) said that a positive relationship with teachers was a valuable factor in bringing successful and enjoyable classroom experiences to students.

Field studies showed that teachers encouraging autonomy was a catalyst for increased intrinsic motivation, greater curiosity and desire for more challenges in students (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman & Ryan 1981; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Ryan and Grolnick (1986) investigated that students who were taught by warm and autonomy- supportive teachers are intrinsically motivated and more confident in school activities. Similarly, Deci and his colleagues (1981) pointed out that when teachers took students' perspectives into consideration first in problem solving, students were more curious, accepting more challenges and more motivated to learn. On the other hand, when students were taught by controlling teachers with the usage of rewards and punishments, or conducting unexpected, random, social comparisons,

external rewards that caused pressure, students showed less academically motivated, less self-efficacy as well as lower self-esteem and self-worth (Deci et. al., 1981).

Regarding teaching styles, teachers who often praised students for their good results, accomplishments, or intelligence were cultivating students' mindset that effort was irrelevant and inadequate and intelligence was innate and could not be developed (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Teachers who focused on mastery approach goal in teaching were more likely to accept that errors were essential in learning process, connecting academic activities with students' interest in their personal lives could nurture the enjoyment on learning for their own sake, the belief that everyone is always able to learn more, and that hard work paid off in school (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Students of these teachers were more likely to develop intrinsic motivation.

Regarding classroom climate, negative atmosphere with classmates reduces learning effort of students. Pupils saw the negative attitude or behavior of other students such as talking in class, not doing homework, disrespect the teacher and so on as a factor that prevented them from sustaining their studying efforts. One student from the research said he was more motivated to learn when his classmates were motivated (Scheel, Madabhushi & Backhaus, 2009).

Summarily, the teacher-student relationship and classroom atmosphere play a huge role in development of academic motivation. Teachers foster students' learning motivation by enhancing students' beliefs about their own abilities and values, identifying with students about the academic goals that match their needs and capacities, and commitment on implementing and achieving the goals. In addition, teachers give students the opportunity to really participate in learning tasks and allow them to progress at their own pace so that the intrinsic learning motivation will gradually increase.

#### **2.2.3.2. Academic motivation and subjective factors**

Subjective factors influencing students' learning motivation are students' basic psychological needs, their mindset, self-efficacy and personality traits.

Firstly, basic psychological needs including relatedness, autonomy and competency in the relationship with academic motivation have been studied by numerous researchers. They pointed out the association between intrinsic learning motivation and increased interest, curiosity, independence and desire for more challenges in the classroom as well as better cognitive performance in complex tasks (Benware & Deci, 1984; Ryan, Connell & Plant, 1990). Ryan, Connell and Plant (1990) asked students to read a passage and evaluate the level of excitement and interest in the material. The results showed that the level of interest was found to be related to the extent of reading comprehension. With the sample group on college students, Benware and Deci (1984) said that students studied and looked up materials with the purpose of teaching that content to others would have higher intrinsic learning motivation than those who studied to get high grades. Considering three basic psychological needs, students learn what they like with a positive emotion; mastering materials to teach others means that they are fulfilling the need for autonomy and competence.

On the other hand, utilising rewards as a means to create and foster motivation was analysed to hinder the intrinsic motivation. When pupils were randomly rewarded for doing an appealing task, they show less interest than those who are not rewarded (Urduan & Pajares, 2002). They also did not persevere in the task when given the freedom to continue completing tasks. Moreover, threats of punishment, external assessment, fixed deadlines, compulsory goals and symbolic rewards have been shown to weaken intrinsic academic motivation due to reduced autonomy (Urduan & Pajares, 2002).

Secondly, students' self-efficacy is also seen as one of the potentially influencing factors in academic motivation. Self-efficacy was seen as strongly correlated with interest, the intrinsic motivation for learning and reviewing activities. Self-efficacy impacted on academic motivation through choice of activities, level of effort, perseverance and emotional response (Zimmerman, 2000). Regarding choice of activities, students with high self-efficacy were likely to enjoy more difficult tasks than those with low self-efficacy. In addition, pupils with strong self-efficacy often made an effort and persevere with completion of a challenging task, while those with low self-efficacy tend to give up and withdraw easily when facing difficulties. Zimmerman (2000) also found that self-efficacy was an effective predictor of the learning motivation in middle and high school students.

In addition, pupils' mindset is another relating element to their learning motivation. Two typical types of mindset are fixed mindset versus growth mindset. Students with fixed mindset in learning were likely to have "low-effort syndrome" (Dweck, 2008). "Low-effort syndrome" refers to a refusal of effort and hard work when the individual think of the high probability of failure. To protect their egos, students with "low-effort syndrome" did not embrace challenges because they assumed avoiding difficult tasks helped them avoid failure. The research on different types of mindset and the level of intrinsic learning motivation indicated that pupils who lost their academic motivation at the end of school year considered their mindset/intelligence as a fixed entity (Haimovitz, Wormington & Corpus, 2011). It can be said that fixed mindset of learners makes their motivation decline. In contrast, students with growth mindset were not often discouraged and they liked to experience complex tasks even after the failure (Dweck, 2008). With them, challenges and failures were opportunities to learn. Haimovitz, Wormington and Corpus (2011) also claimed that learners' intrinsic learning motivation sustained and even increased when they had growth mindset.

Finally, students' personality traits is a factor that has an impact on their academic motivation. Personality traits had a fairly large driven power toward motivation in learning activities (Raza & Shah, 2017). Researchers indicated that students with openness, conscientiousness and extraversion (characterized based on Big Five personality traits) showed the high level of goal-orientation and motivation in learning activities (Ross, Rausch & Canada 2003; Payne, Youngcourt & Beaubien, 2007; Ariani, 2013). Many other authors also examined the different types of students' academic motivation and their personality traits. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were positively related to conscientiousness (Hart, Stasson, Mahoney & Story 2007; Watanabe & Kanazawa, 2009; Hazrati-Viari, Rad & Torabi, 2012), extraversion and agreeableness (Clark & Schroth, 2010). Moreover, students with intrinsic learning motivation had tendency to be open to the experience (Watanabe & Kanazawa 2009; Clark & Schroth, 2010; Hazrati-Viari Rad & Torabi, 2012). Clark and Schroth (2010) also found that extrinsically motivated students tended to be neurotic and unmotivated students tended to be unconscientious and disagreeable.

In brief, subjective factors including students' basic psychological needs, mindset, self-efficacy, personality traits possess a major effect in academic motivation, especially intrinsic motivation. Supports for autonomy, competency and relatedness help students develop their own potential, promote intrinsic academic motivation and internalize values from learning activities. Conversely, unsatisfying the basic psychological needs leaves students inadequately equipped to cope with learning challenges. In addition, it can be seen that the learning motivation and the subjective factors are in two way interaction; these features are not always a prerequisite in the relationship with the academic motivation. The learning environment such as the classroom or school is also important because students' needs and other subjective elements are influenced.

#### **2.2.4. Academic Motivation Assessment and Measurement Instruments**

Assessment tools of academic motivation applied in numerous researches are according to many theories such as self-determination theory and achievement goal theory. Conforming to achievement goal theory, there were some popular academic motivation measurement instruments, namely Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley et. al, 2000) or Achievement Goals Questionnaire (Elliot, Murayama & Pekrun, 2011) with the different versions corresponding to the trichotomous framework (Elliot & Church, 1997) and the 2x2 framework (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) (cited by Putwain, 2013). The factor structure, reliability and validity of these instruments have been well examined and showed the close relationship between different goal dimensions and interest, motivation and achievement.

Based on self-determination theory, Vallerand, Blais, Briere and Pelletier (1989) established Academic Motivation Scale with the purpose of measuring motivation in education. This instrument is categorized into 7 subscales including 3 intrinsic motivation subscales, 3 extrinsic motivation subscales and a demotivation subscale. There were also various authors examining the scale in their studies on the learning motivation such as Deci and Ryan (1985), Vallerand and his colleagues (1992), Amabile, Hill, Hennessey and Tighe (1994), Reeve and Sickenius (1994), Guimarães, Bzuneck and Boruchovitch (2003) (cited by Leal, Miranda & Carmo, 2013). This scale, later standardized by Vallerand and his co-workers (1992), has strong validity and reliability, reinforcing the accuracy of the scale structure. The Academic Motivation Scale were used in a few studies on the sample of students in Brazil and North East America. Importantly, results from these researches indicated that the evaluation and measurement of learning motivation could be performed accurately and reliably.

In short, tools for learning motivation measurement are built on fundamental theories such as self-determination theory, goal-oriented theory and other theories. Adaptation and application in research in various places shows the high level scholars' interest on the issue of learning motivation; at the same time, emphasizing the reliability and validity of these tools. This research orientation also emphasizes the role of intrinsic learning motivation in promoting learning activities in learners.

#### **2.2.5. Academic Motivation Development**

Academic motivation can be established and encouraged based fostering several impacting factors. Teachers need to pay attention to characteristics that highly foster learning motivation and minimize the characteristics that reduce academic motivation in all aspects: students' types of motivation, teachers-students relationship, class climate, students' basic psychological needs, mindset, self-efficacy and personality traits.

Teachers could boost the positive teacher- learner relationship by looking at students' positive points, encouraging and motivating together with listening in order to sympathize and sympathize pupils, as well as fostering students' self-efficacy, self- worth and confidence (Nguyen Thanh Binh, 2015). In teaching, teachers needed to clarify the goals and evaluation criteria to assess accurately and objectively, as well as innovated the evaluation process to motivate students. The author emphasized that the teachers themselves necessarily maintained a positive belief in education and students to be able to implement these issues. In addition, building an environment where students could expand social interactions, students' performance and efforts were recognized by their teachers and friends also assisted improving academic motivation (Nguyen Thanh Binh, 2015) (cited by VAPE, 2015).

Concerning personality traits, there was a note for teachers and educational forces that teachers' behavior, teaching and learning methods should be based on the needs and personality traits of each individual student (Raza & Shah, 2017). In order to improve teachers' awareness, schools should have training sessions for teachers on how to work with students with different

personality traits so that teachers realise the extent to which they encourage each pupil to develop learning motivation (Raza & Shah, 2017). Simultaneously, schools and teachers shall also provide students with a balanced learning environment so that students can easily adapt to their personality traits, maintain and foster their learning motivation (Raza & Shah, 2017).

In terms of class climate and school climate, academic motivation could be developed based on the living values and living skills. The positive living values such as love, respect, honesty, cooperation, peace and so on; living skills such as listening, sharing, caring and so on played an important role in reinforcing, enhancing the desired behaviors and fostering positive and sustainable intrinsic learning motivation for each student (Tran Thi Le Thu & Tran Thi Cam Tu, 2020). Moreover, teaching self-regulation skill was argued as another approach to address the problem of decreased academic motivation and achievement in middle school students (Dembo & Eaton, 2000). By identifying personal interest in learning, possessing tools and resources to aid their learning, students should have a sense of responsibility in academic activities and a sense of their capacity to succeed.

In short, educators, teachers, their teaching style, the teacher-student relationship, classroom structure, self-regulation skills, and satisfaction of other impacting factors can help learners participate in and maintain learning activities positively. The studies in this direction focus on examining the extrinsically and intrinsically boosting approaches on academic motivation.

#### **2.2.6. Prevention and Intervention of Academic Amotivation Cases**

With the argument that drop-out is one of the symptoms of lacking academic motivation, two typical programs used in prevention and intervention for high-risk students appropriate to a multi-school settings are the Tools for Tomorrow and the Check and Connect. The Tools for Tomorrow was based on the premise that many teenagers at school were disorientating (Kenny et. al, 2000). The program basically aims to help students find out their purposes in learning. Specifically, the program was designed to help participants clarify their living and career goals, understand themselves better, integrate ethnic and racial identity as well as improve their ability to work at home and school. The Check and Connect which was run by Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo and Hurley (1998), relied on the premise that students drop out of school by many times of nonparticipation and gradual abandonment rather than a dramatic event. Therefore, the program was designed to maintain contact, not ignore any students and assist them in solving problems during stressful times.

In the case of amotivated students, scholars have used different interventions to improve their learning interest and performance. Hadraba (2011) studied three 13 year-old students in six Motivational Interviews session during three weeks. They were then assessed on their academic performance in math, language arts and social studies. Results of the study indicated that two out of three students experienced an increase in performance after the motivational interview therapy (Hadraba, 2011). The performance was increased because their psychological needs were addressed and students found interest in the subject he or she loves.

Another case study by Ro (2013) on extensive reading techniques for an amotivated reader who viewed English as a second language. When joining the study, she personally selected reading materials based on her interest and stopped reading if the book was no longer interesting or too difficult. After 8 weeks, the results showed that reading with comfort reduced fear and increased the motivation to read second language materials. Factors that enhanced motivation included convenience, comfort or ease, satisfaction and enjoyment, and usefulness/ meaning of reading (Ro, 2013).

It can be witnessed that prevention and intervention programs for students with learning motivation problems are concerned with basic aspects of the intrinsic academic motivation such

as satisfaction and enjoyment, autonomy when participating in activities, making their own choices. These elements play an important role in the formation and development of academic motivation. Also, intrinsic motivation is crucial in the process of motivating an amotivated person step by step to participate and stay active in learning activities.

### 3. Conclusions

It can be witnessed that the researches on academic motivation are extensively implemented on various subjects. There is a small number of studies on elementary school pupils; researches on middle school and high school pupils account for a higher proportion and university students are also examined in many articles. Teachers at all levels and lecturers are also present as research sample of numerous studies on student motivation. In general, the researches in Vietnam are mainly following academic motivation by education levels and development of students' motivation. There are few local studies on influencing factors of learning motivation. However, tools for assessing and measuring academic motivation as well as preventions and interventions of academic amotivation cases have not been really considered for research publication in our country. Furthermore, academic performance of learners plays an important and significant role in many studies on learning motivation.

Results from this systematic review of the local and international research trends in learning motivation suggest several ideas for the future studies as follows: (1) The satisfaction level of the learners' basic psychological needs in school and intrinsic learning motivation, (2) Students' mindset, self-efficacy and intrinsic academic motivation, (3) The goal orientation of learners and intrinsic motivation, (4) Teachers- students relationship, classroom climate and intrinsic motivation, (5) The values that learners relate to learning and the school and academic intrinsic motivation, (6) Students' personality and their intrinsic learning motivation as well as (7) Empirical studies of amotivation cases. These in-depth research directions on intrinsic motivation shall be the basis of evidence for the measures and strategies for formation and development of learning motivation; particularly, intrinsic academic motivation for Vietnamese learners in the context of Education renovation nowadays.

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