



Business undergraduates' perceptions of motivation to learn: Empirical evidence from Pakistan



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 September 2012

Received in revised form 21 October 2012

Accepted 14 February 2013

Keywords:

Learning motivation

Academic problems

Undergraduate students

Business education

Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Motivation to learn is considered imperative to students' academic achievement in higher education. Current research explains the role and impact of personality, peers, faculty, family, and learning aids on business students' motivation to learn. Qualitative data through interviews from faculty is collected which forms the basis of a questionnaire, alongside rigorous literature review. Further, a random sample of 531 undergraduate business students enrolled in a Pakistani university is selected. The role and impact of identified variables on motivation to learn has been presented and explained through qualitative and quantitative measures. Results of the study indicate that all the variables used in this research are validated and considered important to stimulate undergraduate business students' motivation to learn. Research answering the business students' motivation to learn from developing country's perspective is absent where current study intends to fill this knowledge gap.

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1. Introduction

One of the major achievements during university years is successful completion of degree program where the student has enrolled and it is considered possible through student motivation in learning (Leach and Zepke, 2009). However, the dropout rates are alarming as in UK it has been estimated that almost 100,000 full-time and part-time students enrolled in university do not complete their degree programme and dropout (National Audit Office, 2007). This is true in case of developing world as on average, 25 percent of degree students do not complete their degrees in Pakistan and drop-out during first year at the university. The major reason behind this dropout is their inability to meet the 'attendance requirement' that demands basic motivation to learn (Seema and Maryam, 2011). Learning and motivation of higher degree students has been studied extensively and it is believed that 'true learners' are individuals having a sense of 'belongingness' and engagement with class room activities and they are mostly involved in performing some 'purposeful' activities (Krause and Coates, 2008, P.493). These 'true learners' remain highly motivated throughout the degree programme as their motivation to learn is major predictor of their intent to complete degrees with enhanced learning (Vansteenkiste, Sierens, Soenens, Luyckx, & Lens, 2009). Another hallmark of 'true learners' is their goal orientation; they are motivated to set and achieve their goals in academic settings (Frymier, 2007). Frisby and Myers (2008) also highlighted some traits of 'True learners' as having a great habit of cooperation with their peers, accept assignments happily, and keep a great attitude toward class participation. Student motivation and satisfaction has been highly valued in business education (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999). It has been observed that undergraduates lack the engagement and motivation to learn during the course of study (Rynes, Trank, Lawson, & Ilies,

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2003). Lack of motivation and engagement in business students has been due to factors like large class sizes, less individual attention paid to the students, and lesser focus on student motivation and learning in higher education (McIntyre and Munson, 2008). This lack of motivation damages the 'spirit' of being the true learners and knowledge producers which are the desirable characteristics of business students in higher education settings. Students' motivation to learn has been studied by many researchers over the years but most of studies expressed the views of students from developed nations (Hiller & Hietapelto, 2001; Levy, 2007; Vaill, 2007). The students' focus on surface learning rather than deep learning and an overwhelming focus on achieving merely the grades instead of stressing on academic learning has been due to lack of motivation to learn (Hiller and Hietapelto, 2001). It is strongly believed that our knowledge concerning the development of various factors that instill motivation to learn amongst business students has been limited and must be probed further (Debnath, Tandon, & Pointer, 2007). Despite the huge literature available investigating student motivation to learn, studies in the western world are on the way probing this phenomenon (Adcroft, 2010). This entails that some research must be conducted to understand better the reasons that trigger student motivation to learn, especially in business education.

Thorough literature review, faculty interviews, and focus group sessions with students supported the idea that this construct needs to be investigated. There are studies found which explain the construct of 'student motivation to learn' from developed country's perspective but still need further detail-oriented studies to better understand the factors contributing toward student motivation to learn. It is also evident that research focusing on the Asian region is limited and hard to find as per the authors' access and understanding of literature in higher education. However, there have been same learning challenges to both the students; from western as well as Asian world (Rogers and Lopez, 2002). Given the observation of phenomenon that undergraduate students lack motivation to learn, an increasing trend toward business education and absence of literature motivated the research team to conduct this study. Thorough literature review, focus group sessions with students, and faculty interviews directed the research team to focus on meeting the following research objectives;

- a To recognize and quantify the impact of five identified variables on students' motivation to learn among undergraduate business students.
- b To recommend strategies that increase learning motivation among undergraduate business students from developing countries.

The remainder of this article will be presented in four major sections. Literature review will discuss the traditional and modern literature in students' motivation to learn and debates this critical issue from multiple perspectives. Methodology section discusses the qualitative and quantitative methods employed for the purpose of this research. Findings section presents the results of this research and leads to conclusion section where a debate has been developed based on the findings of this study. Finally, some recommendations and then areas of future research have been discussed.

2. Literature review

There has been significant research studies conducted to offer a valid definition of adult learning with a reasonable generalization and acceptability. However, the work of Mezirow (1998, p.190) is notable as he defines learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action". With this definition in mind, it can be inferred that learning process is focused, and outlined by a special frame of reference that includes a broad set of individual predispositions having a definite link with psych cultural assumptions.

There has also been various models and theories used to present the adult learning processes. Mezirow (1981) through his pioneering work in motivation and learning, presented a theory; transformative learning theory. This theory discusses the adult learning process in both formal as well as informal context. Society and individual both are important and an individual cannot be separated from the society while he/she is exposed to some learning situations. Mezirow (1994) presented four stages of the learning process: (a) disruptive happenings in life changes the learner's way of thinking about the world, (b) learner's then focuses on the beliefs and values that change the situating perspectives, (c) the learner then develops new solutions to overcome the discrepancies, (d) and learner then incorporates the discovered solution to his/her life.

Spears and Mocker (1984) described learning process based on three interactive dimensions: the environment is closely observed by the learner and he/she finds some opportunities to excel from the surrounding environment, learner then incorporates existing or new knowledge to better avail those identified opportunities, and further an action is taken to gain some valuable insights. These three stages combine and shape a total learning experience to life.

Globalization has impacted every aspect of our lives and motivation and learning are no exceptions. There have been huge demographic changes in many developing countries which has forced the service providers to behave in more culturally responsive way. For instance, in U.S, students having an Asian background are treated stereotypically as a very high-achieving group of individuals who need little or no help from peers or instructors (Gewertz, 2004). The way students retrieve information, process it, and interpret as part of their learning process varies across cultures (Ramburuth and McCormick, 2001). Biggs (1987) classifies three types of learners with different motivation levels: (a) Surface learners repeat what they have learned without considering the fact as what they have learned already because they want to use 'rote memory' as a learning strategy, (b) Deep learners are individuals who tend to engage in their studies and have the skill to relate paradigms to develop a better understanding of material, (c) Achievers strive hard for grades that is their core motivation and they tend to

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