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Influence of psychological distance between family members on teenager's motivation for studying

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Abstract

The objectives of the study are to identify the type of the relationship between students and their parents and its influence on academic performance; based on the result analysis, formulate a problem (problems) and suggest possible solutions. The results showed that students who have stronger ties with their parents are generally more motivated to study and demonstrate better academic performance than those who distance themselves from their families. The lack of attachment between parents and children can be a serious problem in adolescence life when mental health is being restructured.

Keywords: School education, Family distance, Teenagers' education, Teenagers and parents, Motivation to study.

La influencia de la distancia psicológica entre los miembros de la familia sobre la motivación del adolescente para estudiar

Resumen

Los objetivos del estudio son identificar el tipo de relación entre los estudiantes y sus padres y su influencia en el rendimiento académico; basado en el análisis de resultados, formule un problema (problemas) y sugiera posibles soluciones. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes que tienen vínculos más fuertes con sus padres generalmente están más motivados para estudiar y demostrar un mejor rendimiento académico que aquellos que se distancian de sus familias. La falta de apego entre padres e hijos puede ser un problema grave en la vida de la adolescencia cuando se reestructura la salud mental.

Palabras clave: Educación escolar, Distancia familiar, Educación de los adolescentes, Adolescentes y padres, Motivación para estudiar.

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues related to the mental health of children at school and at home make up a social problem. Lack of emotional stability leads to the problems associated with increased anxiety-proneness or depression, as well as insufficient self-esteem and effectiveness. In turn, this gives rise to school truancy and low motivation to study in general. As a result, students experience emotional instability, do not control their emotions, as well as demonstrate very poor academic performance and have difficulties in gaining knowledge.

It cannot be denied that the family plays an important role in the physical and mental health of children. In particular, the family has a

significant impact on the mental health of children in infancy and childhood, when children are completely dependent on their parents both physically and mentally. A favorable psychological situation in the family is directly related to the emotional stability of children. In addition, children develop the basis of their social skills through communication with their parents and other family members. They also learn to adapt to interpersonal relationships, which can potentially lead to depression and anxiety. Moreover, children's self-esteem can be improved if parents talk to them and praise them at the right time.

Self-determination skills are sufficiently affected by the psychological state of the child (OMASU et al., 2016; TLEUBAYEV et al., 2019). The involvement of parents from an early age also has an impact on the ability of young children to make decisions. Thus, those children who are closer to their parents and other family members may become more successful in the future. The establishment of a close relationship with relatives allows children to develop harmoniously, which has a positive impact on all spheres of their life. The study is relevant due to the fact that it considers the correlation between family relationships and the motivation of adolescents to study, which allows drawing conclusions that can be used to improve academic performance and student motivation to study. The research is also relevant from the global perspective as the correlation exists regardless of location.

A common understanding of the "family" concept and expectations associated with the behavior of family members inherently do not correspond to modern realities. BAXTER et al. (2015) found that when defining a family, people still mean marriage

with the mandatory presence of children who live together. However, SCHARP and DORRANCE HALL (2018) argue that a post-modern family is characterized by a variety of mechanisms that constantly change throughout life. The concept of a modern family is volatile and dynamic.

According to GALVIN (2014), blood and/or legal ties make up a community. This socially constructed “standard” for those who are considered a family justifies people’s perceptions of family status so much so that deviations create conditions in which members of alternative types of families should spend more time constructing their identities both inside and outside it. This leads to the fact that outsiders cannot understand the interaction within a particular family and the reason they are growing apart. Scharp and THOMAS (2016) assumed that family relationship is based on three criteria: biological parent-child connection (i.e. blood ties), family connection that obliges interaction, as well as historical connection between the members of the same family.

Children often try to shift the focus from blood ties to the importance of mutual support and care, love and doing what they love. Parents who want to distance themselves from their children may have an additional burden. In addition to resisting the ideas that parents and children are biologically connected once and for all, parents must also agree that they show unconditional love for their children and that they have a constant role-based identification after taking up parental responsibilities (SCHARP and THOMAS, 2018). According to

SCHARP et al. (2015), most families experienced negative emotions when creating an artificial distance between family members. For example, guilt or anxiety. These negative emotions can subsequently affect children academic performance. They become depressed and lose their motivation to complete the school curriculum.

According to SCHULZE AND LEMMER (2016), motivation is associated with sustainability that is focused on the efforts to study science. Children are interested in learning if they expect success. The motivation to study is influenced by several factors. Psychological factors include cognitive ability, interest and attitude. Individual characteristics include gender, general health, ethnicity, and mother tongue compared to the language of instruction (VICHIE, 2017). School-related factors include resource availability, school location, and school discipline, type of school, teacher characteristics and teaching strategies.

According to VILJOEN (2012), family is another factor that can affect learning motivation. In general, this factor can be defined as family care and emotional support for the child, a family atmosphere contributing to learning, and the provision of educational opportunities depending on the socio-economic status of the family. It should be noted that family experience refers to the social and emotional aspects of bringing-up rather than specific support for learning.

VEDDER-WEISS and FORTUS (2013) found that the goals of parents related to the education of their children have a more

significant effect on the motivation of students to study a particular subject than the school goals. The support of both parents also significantly correlates with the positive attitude of the child to study. However, it should be recognized that the role of the family in the formation of motivation is complex. For example, family attitudes towards education also depend on the gender of the child. Parents are more likely to find science more difficult for girls than for boys; thus, they are more involved in the education of their sons. The motivation of girls to study is directly related to the support of their mothers. According to ASCHBACHER et al. (2010), ethnicity also plays an important role in motivation to study. For example, Asian-American families more actively support their high school children.

Thus, the works mentioned above consider the influence of family relations on motivation to study. However, they do not address more specific cases and mainly describe the general situation.

The purpose of the study is to collect information to track possible correlation between close relationships with parents and student performance. The main research task is the collection of statistical data and their subsequent interpretation. The results will allow us to formulate a possible problem, as well as suggest solutions to it. In addition, it will lay the basis for further more in-depth research, which may involve not only adolescents, but also students of other ages and even adults (work motivation can be considered here).

Thus, the following research tasks can be highlighted:

- to interview seventh- and eighth-graders to identify their relationship with parents and its influence on academic performance;
- based on the survey results, to formulate a possible problem
- and suggest solutions to it;

2. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research methodology was used to collect statistical data. The analysis of the survey data was carried out in the STATISTICA system. This software allows visualization of data in statistical analysis.

The survey involved seven- and eighth-graders. The sampling selection is based on the fact that children of this age group are already well-formed personalities (MANTIKOVA, 2016) who are able to draw conclusions. In addition, the students do not have to pass final exams, which eliminates additional stress. In total, 80 schoolchildren were surveyed, of which 52% were girls and 48% were boys. The participants were divided into three categories by their academic performance: "A" students (10), "B" students (27) and "C" students (43). Since all the respondents are underage, parental permission was obtained before the survey.

The questionnaire consisted of 6 questions related to academic performance and/or the relationship with parents. Five out of six questions

were "yes/no" questions. In the last question, the students were asked to independently speculate on how relationships with parents affect their performance at school. This question is important as it allows us to consider the correlation between their relationship with parents and motivation to study.

The first three questions (Did your parents help you do homework when you were at elementary school? Can you ask your parents to help you with your homework now? Do your parents often ask you about school success?) Were directly related to parental involvement in the educational process.

The next two questions (Is parental praise important to you? Do you often talk to your parents about worries, pleasures, problems, etc.?) Were associated with personal relationships with parents, which can create a psychological situation that affects the motivation to study in a child.

The last question (Describe how the involvement of your parents in school (everyday) life affects your attitude towards learning.) covered both educational and personal aspects. The unavailability of answer options allowed the children to share their emotions and reasoning on the proposed topic.

3. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

First, we derived general indicators for all categories of students regardless of their performance. Thus, 89% of children indicated that their

parents helped them with homework when they were elementary students. This positive indicator demonstrates that parents were able to form the correct attitude towards learning in their young children.

Despite the high involvement of parents in elementary school, the following question results were significantly lower. Only 34% of respondents reported that they can still ask their parents for help with homework. This difference can be explained by increased independence compared to elementary school, the unwillingness of parents to help, or the complexity of tasks. A large number of children (68%) reported that their parents are interested in their academic success. The indicator is also positive: when children realize that parents are interested in their performance, they may have a higher motivation to study; they are more pleased to report success than failures to parents.

Most respondents (95%) admitted that parental praise is important to them. This may indicate a fairly close relationship with family members or a desire to establish it. In addition, to get praised children have to achieve any kind of success, which may also affect their motivation to study. When analyzing the fifth question, it was found that 74% of students talk to their parents about daily issues and can share happiness and experience with them. This also demonstrates a close connection with parents and a positive psychological atmosphere in the family.

At the next stage of the study, the percentage of children from each performance-based category was identified to evaluate the correlation between their academic performance and family relationships. In this

context, only children who chose the “yes” option in each question were considered.

Table 1: Children who chose the "yes" option

Question No.	"A" students	"B" students	"C" students
Parents helped with homework at elementary school	100%	95%	82%
Parents help with homework now	30%	41%	30%
Parents often ask about school	100%	95%	45%
Appreciate parental help	100%	90%	90%
Often talk to parents	100%	100%	54%

The table shows that children whose performance is poorer do not have a close relationship with parents compared to those whose performance is better. The lack of parental involvement could be one of the reasons for poor academic performance. Comfortable psychological development of a child requires communication with adults, especially within the family. We can say that awareness of the importance of parental involvement and praise by parents positively affects children's motivation to study.

The assumption was confirmed by the last question results. Most children reported that parental interest in their school life, as well as everyday problems, is encouraging. The most common phrases were “I like it when my parents praise me”, “I try to learn better to please my parents”, “and it is important for me that my parents understand me

and can listen to me.” It should be noted that children with poorer academic performance mentioned the following phrases most often: “I don’t care what my parents think about my grades” or “I study because I have no choice, but it’s not interesting for me”. Thus, it can be concluded that they have not established close relationships with their parents, which affects their psychological state and motivation to study. At the same time, children who have closer relationships with their relatives are more motivated to study better.

The lack of attachment between parents and children can be a serious problem in adolescence life when mental health is being restructured. It can also affect academic performance. This can be prevented by explaining to parents the importance of establishing a close relationship with the child. The issue can be discussed at school, for example, at parents' meetings. It is important that children understand that they can engage with their parents on their own rather than hide from them. This can be promoted by the introduction of issue-related lessons or psychological sessions at schools. Schools should also conduct special tests to identify families experiencing communication problems.

Research on the correlation between family relationships and student motivation to study is being conducted all over the world. One of these studies took place in 2018; it was aimed at studying family distance and the motivation of adolescents to study.

The study involved 380 ninth-graders from four secondary schools in Pretoria. The sampling selection was based on the fact that it was the last year of compulsory schooling. In addition, early

adolescence is the time when most conflicts with family members can occur, which can affect the motivation to study. The sampling included various types of schools (MCMILLAN and SCHUMACHER, 2014).

Just as in the case of our research, the study was based on a student survey. The age groups in both studies were roughly the same. The authors also asked students' parents or legal representatives for the permission to involve their children in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of several sections. The first section was a brief autobiography, the second one consisted of 35 points related to motivation to study natural sciences. The students answered questions using a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. The third section included 13 points. This section was based on the adaptation of a questionnaire to determine the psychosocial well-being and family experience of adolescents that can affect school behavior (related to motivation) and academic success (VILJOEN, 2012). Nine points out of 13 were focused on the immediate childhood experience (for example, emotional and practical support, care and well-being), and four - on distant childhood experience (for example, parenting).

Similar to our study, the questionnaire included questions directly related to parental approval and the emotions that their involvement in education causes in adolescents. The survey results showed that the more positive the respondents perceived their family

experience, the more they were motivated to study. The family experience examined in the study was associated with both the distal and proximal sizes of the family. Distal and immediate family experience create a social learning environment in the family that affects educational outcomes and mitigates the influence of school and the individual (GUDYANGA et al., 2016; JUAN et al., 2014).

An emotionally stable family (questionnaire points related to love, harmony and general well-being) which provides adequate infrastructure (questionnaire points related to housing and physical care) along with educational capital (questionnaire points related to the accessibility of educational resources and parents' expectations regarding future plans), positively affects student motivation to study. Accordingly, the respondents of both sexes and all racial groups who participated in the study and shared constructive family experience, in particular, close experience, were more positively motivated to study science (MADDOX and PERRY, 2016; REDDY, 2011). The results of the study suggest that family experience can be an important factor that explains student motivation to study (LEAPER et al., 2012).

The findings also demonstrate that parental care can be used as a resource to manage students' academic performance. Taking into account the fact that school experience can hardly be used outside the educational institution, direct family experience and motivation to study natural sciences can be enhanced by the interaction of school and parents (PRITSCHET et al., 2016). The interaction between parents and the school can be facilitated by increasing the interest of parents in

the education of their children; the study shows that improved family experience correlates with student motivation to study. In particular, parents may also be advised to encourage their children to study natural sciences. In this regard, schools can take the initiative to inform parents about the ways to foster scientific curiosity in children by creating a home-based learning environment promoting research activities (SCHULZE and VANHEERDEN, 2015).

Thus, the authors of the study made the same conclusion as us - closer relationships with parents increase student motivation to study a particular subject or in general. Parental involvement provides children with the correct insight into the need for knowledge, discipline, etc., which subsequently positively affect their motivation to study. This is extremely important at the elementary school stage when the child is not familiar with the learning process. Thus, one of the main tasks of parents is to explain the importance of education to children, as well as to help them organize the learning process outside of school.

4. CONCLUSION

The study involved seventh- and eighth-graders in order to identify a correlation between the motivation to study in adolescents and their relationship with parents. To achieve the objectives of the study, three performance-based groups of children were surveyed. The questionnaire consisted of the questions related to the involvement of parents, both in school and in daily life of children.

The results of the study showed that children with higher academic performance have a closer relationship with their parents than their peers who study worse. The adolescents noted the interest of parents in their educational activities, as well as in everyday life. They also said that they often try to get better marks to please their family. At the same time, many children with poor academic performance noted that they did not seek to study harder to make their parents happy; they do not have close family relationships.

It can be concluded that the distance between parents and adolescents can adversely affect student motivation to study.

The problem requires a comprehensive solution. First of all, it is necessary to explain to parents the importance of contact with children and how they can benefit from it. The issue can be discussed at school, for example, at parents' meetings. It is important that children understand that they can engage with their parents, share their experience and ask for advice rather than shrink into themselves. Children experiencing difficulties in communication with parents can consult a school psychologist if such a need arises. Schools should also conduct special tests to identify families experiencing communication problems.

Further research may focus on older or younger children to compare how the distance between family members influences student motivation to study changes with age. The research is practically relevant due to the fact that it allows us to better study the correlation

between family relationships and academic performance and, if necessary, take action.

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Questionnaire Sample

Table 2: Student Questionnaire

Question	Answer
1. Did your parents help you do homework when you were at elementary school?	Yes/No
2. Can you ask your parents to help you with your homework now?	Yes/No
Do your parents often ask you about school?	Yes/No
Is parental praise important to you?	Yes/No
Do you often talk to your parents about worries, pleasures, problems, etc.?	Yes/No
Describe how the involvement of your parents in school (everyday) life affects your attitude towards learning.	



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