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Academic Motivation in Primary and Secondary School Students: The Role of the Perceived Teachers' Motivating Styles

Extended summary

According to the Theory of Self-Determination (TSO), and especially based on the premises of the theories of cognitive evaluation and organismic integration, motivation can be viewed as a complex and multifold psychological phenomenon. The TSO approach to understanding this phenomenon is reflected in abandoning the traditional dichotomy and promoting the idea that, apart from varying in intensity, motivation also varies in type, and that, in this sense, it is possible to distinguish three types: amotivation, external motivation (which is based on the degree of self-determination and perceived locus of control, reinforcement is divided into external, introjected, and identified regulation) and internal motivation. In the dialectical relationship between students and teachers, according to the assumption of the three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and connectedness, three motivational styles of teachers are distinguished - support for autonomy, support for structure and support for inclusion, which are universally (in)effective because they (do not) meet the basic psychological needs of every individual. Most of the research in the domain of motivational aspects of school achievement indicates that there are significant differences in the motivation for learning among secondary school students compared to elementary school students, especially in terms of the lower expression of more autonomous forms of motivation such as internal and identified motivation. Some studies indicate that a particular drop in motivation is evident in the context of learning science-mathematical subjects, and somewhat less so in the context of the social sciences and the humanities. Given that teachers play a significant role in promoting students' motivation to learn, the aim of this research was to examine whether the level

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of education (elementary and secondary level) moderates the relationship between teachers' perceived motivational styles and students' academic motivation in the context of the social-humanistic and science-mathematical subjects. Scales for measuring teachers' perceived motivational styles (support for autonomy, support for structure, and support for connectedness) and for measuring different aspects of academic motivation (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, introjected motivation, and amotivation) were applied to a sample of 494 students (57.9% female respondents) at two levels of education - among students in the final grades of elementary schools (53.8%) and students in secondary schools (46.2%). In order to test the effects of teachers' perceived motivational styles on the academic motivation of students of different educational levels, moderation analyses were conducted. The predictor status included different perceived motivational styles of teachers, the moderator was the level of education, and the criterion status included different aspects of academic motivation. The analyzes were carried out separately for the group of the science-mathematical subjects and the group of the social-humanistic subjects. A simple slope test was used to test whether there were significant interaction effects in predicting the criteria. The results of the moderator analyses indicate that in the context of the social-humanistic subjects, the level of education does not have a significant moderating role, while in the context of the science-mathematical subjects it does. First, the level of education moderates the relationship between support structure and intrinsic motivation. Second, there are no moderating effects in the explanation of extrinsic and introjected motivation. Third, the level of education moderates the relationship among autonomy support, structure support, and amotivation. The results of the simple slope tests indicate that structure support has a positive effect on the realization of intrinsic motivation, especially among younger students, that autonomy support and structure support have an effect on the decline of amotivation in both age groups, but especially among younger students. The results clarified how teachers can influence different aspects of motivation for learning science-mathematical subjects and social-humanistic subjects among primary and secondary school students. Within the framework of pedagogical implications, the results of this research aim to offer some guidelines for the development of pedagogical programs for teachers in order to improve their competences.

Keywords: academic motivation, school level, Self-Determination Theory, teachers' motivating styles.

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