

THE MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTION OF THE GRADE

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Abstract: The grade of students' achievements, with all its weaknesses, is a form of feedback through which the students are informed about the effects of the process of learning and the results of the effort they put. It is assumed that this sort of feedback has a motivational impact on their future work in the teaching process.

In the educational process, the teacher should constantly work on the development of the students' confidence and the development of the motive for achievement, because it is a very important factor that enables proper experience of the feedback on the students' individual achievements. The motive for achievement is an important factor in the student's performance. Taking into account the impact the grade has not only on the students, but on the parents and other entities interested in the students' achievements too, the paper examines the motivational function of the grade through surveys and informal interviews conducted with students and teachers, i.e. an examination of how much the grade as a number, obtained in the teaching process as feedback, influences the students' motivation to learn.

Keywords: grade, motivational function

INTRODUCTION

One of the roles of teaching is to develop the students' desire to learn, stimulate their interest and direct their behavior. The work in the classroom should give the student a sense of satisfaction through understanding the meaning and the purpose of learning, i.e. to motivate him to achieve good results, because the extent of the student's interest in teaching and learning in general depends on his motivation. The goal of every successful teacher is to constantly encourage motivation, to stimulate and develop it, until it becomes part of the student's personality, and this in turn affects the durability and the quality of the students' achievements. He should encourage the sense of curiosity and satisfy the desire for new knowledge, without neglecting the external incentive forms that stimulate the development of internal motivation.

The motive for achievement, similar to the motive for prestige, the one for self-affirmation etc., drives the students' personality towards activity. It is known that the students that have a highly developed motive for achievement want to reach greater success, have good grades, get involved in social activities etc., so that they can one day be experts in certain areas. The positive role of the educational institutions in the development of this motive as an aspiration for achieving socially acceptable goals, should not be particularly emphasized. In the teaching process, students should be encouraged to be independent in the realization of various activities, their successful behavior should be positively assessed and emotionally rewarded, and the satisfaction with the achieved success should be publicly expressed as well as the disappointment with failure.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Researches in the fields of psychology, pedagogy and didactics so far, show that the role of motivation in students' learning, the role of the teacher in developing and maintaining the motivation, and the analysis of the motive for achievement, are frequently elaborated topics. Motivation encourages learning, it is a requirement for successful

learning and successful learning motivates even more, (Danilović, 1998). Motivation is not permanent, it should be encouraged and developed in order to become part of the so-called internal motivation. In order for motivation to exist, certain needs or incentives that will lead to activities aimed at meeting them are necessary. The motivation for learning and the impact that the achieved success has on students' further learning are closely related to the motive for achievement. The motive for achievement is defined as an individual's tendency, in achieving a set goal, to compete with the standard of success, which is considered important and highly valued in the wider environment, (Havelka, 2000). The teacher should encourage the internal motivation, which refers to what the student is interested in, what pleases him, therefore one of the main tasks of the teacher is to develop interest in the material being studied, (Andrilović, Čudina, 1985). In schools where students are pressured to achieve better results, a correlation between the motive for achievement and the student's success does not exist, since that success is not a result of the student's initiative but a result of the school's persistence, (Rot, 1972). Students with a developed motive for achievement realistically select their goals, which leads to success in learning, while students who have a fear of failure set easy or hard goals, since it is not embarrassing to fail in the realization of difficult aims and light ones prevent from failure, (Atkinson in Andrilović, Čudina, 1987).

At the base of every activity, as well as learning, seen as the most complex form of mental activity, are the motives as driving forces that cause the individuals' activity, direct it and manage it, and accordingly, direct the process of motion of the individuals' activity, aiming the activity at certain objectives, and regulating the activity in achieving specific aims, (Rot, 1972, 213).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In studying the problem of investigation, empirical research of descriptive character is applied, and the methods of scientific knowledge are the causal and the descriptive one. Through qualitative analysis, as an operating method, of the answers of the questionnaires for teachers and students, and through qualitative analysis of the informal conversations or the non-directive interviews with teacher, an attempt is made to consider their views and opinions regarding the importance and the motivational nature of the numerical grades that students receive for their accomplishments. Research procedures and instruments used for collecting data are: surveys and questionnaires to investigate the attitudes and the opinions of teachers and students towards the numerical assessment, and informal conversations with teachers about examining the causal link between the given grade of the students' achievements and their motivation for further work, learning and achieving success in the classroom. Questionnaires for teachers and students included closed and open-ended questions, which offered room for the surveyed subjects to express their opinion on the investigated problem.

The obtained data is qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed, while the quantitative review consists of determining percentage and average value.

In order to obtain more substantial and relevant information on the examined problem, the survey is conducted with the population of students in secondary school, which are expected to easily express their attitudes and impressions of the grades they receive. In that sense, the sample of participants included in the questionnaire is random and consists a total of 100 students and 50 teachers from three high schools in the city of Bitola (gymnasium "Josip Broz Tito". Gymnasium "Taki Daskalo", and technical high school "Gjorgji Naumov"). Informal conversations are also conducted with teachers. The random sample of students consists of ten students from ten classes, from first to fourth year in these schools. Also, the selection of teachers entering the sample is random, by a random choice of numbers

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the teachers' attitudes towards the numerical grades that students receive, shows the following results:

Regarding the question of whether the lower grade encourages the students to work more, the teachers' views are divided, in other words almost 35% believe that the lower grade has a motivational impact on the students, while the remaining 65% believe that it doesn't motivate, it doesn't encourage, i.e. the lower grade does not contribute to students studying and working harder. This data, in turn, is an indicator that the connection of the grade with the increased or decreased students' motivation to learn, or put more effort, largely depends on the individual characteristics of the students' personalities, as well as the individual perception of the teachers. What is also indicative is the high percentage of teachers who believe that the grade does not encourage the student to work more, because that may indicate insufficient quality of the educational practice in all segments of its realization, and the

indifference of the students in terms of the received grade, which, in turn, implies the need to take urgent measures to improve the current situation.

In this sense, the problem of the lower grade has a psychological and didactic-methodical character. Overall, the psychological nature of the grade largely applies to the experience of the assessment, as well as the award and punishment in general, of the individuals in a particular situation, which are all completely individual experiences. To illustrate, we could use the fact that for certain individuals the award for the achieved success plays a very important role in the future progress and further success in learning, whereas among certain individuals the higher grade (usually the highest) causes a pleasant feeling due to accomplishment and in the case of obtaining it, by which they usually mean recognition (and is understood as a reward for the achievements), the need for display is satisfied, the need for acceptance and recognition in the group, status and place in the group is provided, and the need for superiority understood as an opportunity to express their abilities is satisfied. At the core of this response is the individual experience of praise, reward or reprimand and punishment, which, if given according to appropriate merits, timely and in an appropriate manner, lead to autonomy of these external motivators, making them part of the individual's internal motivation and continue as instigators of the activity (the grade accompanied by praise, some recognition and so on, encourages or inhibits activity). In the psychological and pedagogical literature, there is an assumption that in most cases among good and capable students, that satisfy the motive of achievement through assessment, in given situations of achieving lower results than expected, a lower grade will act better than a higher one as a merit of their previous work. Moreover, capable students are expected to reduce the desire for progress and they may lose their interest in achieving higher success by receiving a higher grade in cases with no actual ground for it. For students with low grades the situation is reversed, especially among introverted students with modest abilities who achieved lower results, but through the grade in cases where the grade was higher than the real one, they are encouraged to achieve better results in order to develop self-confidence and faith that they can reach greater success.

Regardless of the students' individual experience of assessment, their success should be constantly evaluated, and the appropriate grade, higher or lower, which is an important feedback by which they are informed about their achievements, should be aimed at encouraging further learning.

The question of whether the students are trying to master the material and get a better grade after they have received a lower grade than expected, on that same material or specific topics of it, shows that the teachers' attitudes are divided, i.e. according to 50% of the teachers, students put more effort into correcting the lower grade, and according to the other 50%, students show no interest in fixing their grades.

On one hand, this information is, to a large extent, identical with that obtained in the previous issue and questions the quality of the educational process, and, on the other hand, requires significant further research for the lack of interest and the unwillingness of a percentage of students to improve their achievements. Furthermore, the individual experience of the assessment, as stated above, is different among the students, which largely depends on how the given grade will impact the further investment of effort.

The insufficient grade has always been the focus of attention of all direct or indirect participants in the educational system, primarily, because of its specificity. Students with an insufficient (1) grade in a specific subject, are always expected to take measures to correct it, and thus improve their achievements. The teachers' views on whether the insufficient grade (1) encourages the student to work harder, as for the second question, are identical, i.e. 49% of teachers believe that the insufficient grade encourages students to put more effort, while 51% believe that the insufficient grade does not influence the increase of students' motivation for work at all. Although the teachers' attitudes result primarily from their individual perception of the developmental characteristics of the student's personality, as well as the differences that occur among the students, of cognitive, affective and psycho-motor nature, however, the large percentage of teachers who believe that the insufficient grade is not of stimulating influence is worrisome. These data confirm the attitudes of teachers towards the previous question, which is not about the insufficient assessment, so further dilemmas arise, relating to the insufficient motivation and the lack of students' interest to correct the insufficient grade and promote their achievements. Again, the reasons for this situation can be looked for in different segments of the realization of the educational practice. The greater percentage of students, who are not encouraged by the insufficient assessment, indicated the severity of the situation and a certain indifference of the students towards the insufficient grade, so, in this regard, urgent measures are needed to overcome this passive attitude of the students towards the insufficient assessment. The teachers' addition to the answer to this

question, shows the following: about 25% of them state that the only reason students study after getting an insufficient grade is to avoid taking a final exam at the end of the school year, so one can conclude that it is only important for students to get a pass-grade, no matter what it will be; about 20% claim that the insufficient (1) grade encourages improvement; nearly 30% point out that students do not like lower grades and always try to correct them; while 24% claim that some students are motivated to study more, and some are more discouraged. A fraction of the teachers, or 1% of them, say that the insufficient (1) grade makes the students lose their motive for studying.

Teachers are always faced with the dilemma on how to assess their students. In a case where the student's answer is not on a satisfactory level, according to the teacher, it is expected from him to react in an appropriate manner, on one hand, he has to be righteous and fair towards the other students, on the other hand, he has to be objective, and, yet, discover different methods of motivating the students. In this sense, relevant is the data obtained about the question of whether the teachers motivate their students by giving them the higher or lower grade, in cases where they score in between grades. 99% of teachers claim they give their students the higher grade, because, according to them, that encourages students. Some of the teachers say that the grade they give mainly depends on the students, but also the character of the material they have to master. Therefore, it is evident that the number of teachers that encourage their students by giving them the higher grade is greater, and that students prefer getting the higher grade. In this sense, the teacher should be particularly careful not to let his wish to motivate the students to lead to a wrong perception among them that he is a teacher that is very permissive and not strict. Only 1% of the teachers connect motivating the student by giving him the higher grade with his personality and the type of the material he needs to master.

The views of teachers from the previous question about the fact that the higher grade encourages students to improve their achievement, are confirmed with their responses to the last question on whether the award in the form of a higher grade motivates the students more for further learning. As much as 80% of teachers believe that the higher grade always motivates students to study more. Additions to their answers indicate the following: the higher grade always encourages students to study more in order to prevent the grade to be decreased, due do various objective and subjective factors; students want to justify high grades; students are more relaxed and communicate more easily with teachers as well as the environment. This indicates that, despite everything, the higher grade is still what increases the students' motivation for studying. Some teachers say that the award in the form of a higher grade can not be generalized to all students, but it depends on the student, individually. Nearly 20% of teachers say that the higher grade does not motivate students, and in addition to this answer they note that students do not pay attention to studying at all, show no interest and that nothing can motivate them. In this sense, from the views of the teachers it is clear that the higher grade encourages students to improve their achievement, but again, caution of the teacher should be stressed, so that the given encouragement is not perceived wrong by the students. On the other hand, the percentage of teachers that suggest that students cannot be motivated deserves a comment too, raising the question regarding this teachers' attitude and the very passive students' attitude towards studying and teaching, in general. It can be said that the reasons for the teachers' views on the indifference towards studying and the whole educational process, should and must be looked for in the realization of the educational practice. Without doubt, further research needs to be conducted on the given attitudes, in order to detect flaws on time, in order to improve the students' achievement and the quality of educational practice.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the students' attitudes towards numerical grades they get shows the following results:

Regarding the question of whether the grade motivates the student to study more or discourages him and reduces his will for further work, most students note that grade is a strong motivational factor for them to put more effort and promote their achievements. A small fraction of them, i.e. 15% say that the grade does not motivate them to study more and to put more effort, whereas a very small proportion of students consider that the grade does not affect their motivation at all. From the answers to this question, one can clearly see that the grade has a motivational function among most of the students, or it influences their willingness and their desire to better their achievements, which is a condition for the quality of the learning process and the quality of the educational practice in general. The percentage of students for which the received grade is not a motivational factor is worrying, as well as the percentage of students who believe that the given grade does not affect their motivation at all. Therefore, further studies to investigate this students' attitude are necessary, although, again, the reasons must be looked for in all segments of the educational work, the student's personality, as well as in the social environment.

It is in the human nature to try harder, invest more in order to express his maximum capacity. The answers to the following question on whether the students study more when they get a lower grade than expected, confirm that the majority of students, or 70% of them are trying to study more once they get a lower grade than expected, and that is certainly in the nature of the human's personality. About 30% of students note that they are not trying to study more, which may be a result of different factors that need further examination.

Regarding the question of how they feel when they get a higher grade than the one they believe to actually deserve, most students say that this teachers' gesture makes them feel happy, satisfied, fulfilled, rewarded, motivated, and even surprised. The students' answers given in addition to their views speak for themselves: getting a higher grade than the one they actually believe to deserve motivates them to study more, in order not to disappoint the teacher who encouraged and motivated them by giving them the higher grade; students connect getting a higher grade than the one they actually believe to deserve with an increased self-esteem and an increased enthusiasm for work; students believe that getting a higher grade than the one they actually believe to deserve makes them feel more responsible in terms of teaching and studying and trying to justify their teacher's trust by putting more effort into studying and promoting their success. It must be noted that, among other things, every teacher's priority should be the sense of happiness and satisfaction of students. Happy and satisfied students motivate the teacher to constantly improve his work and assure him he is on the right track in building individuals who will be able to meet the modern age's challenges. The teacher must know his students well and react even to their smallest impulses, in terms of noticing, assessing, valuing, and reward their efforts, too. A small part of students feel astonished and surprised, but still they try to justify the received grade. From the analysis, it is also clear that students prefer such a teacher, that will value their work and reward them. Only in that way, the teacher will successfully motivate students and contribute to improving the quality of learning and the teaching process in general.

The above mentioned is confirmed by the answers to the following question of whether lower grade encourages students to work and study more. About 54% of students say lower grades motivate them to invest their critical and creative potential in order to improve their achievements. 45% of students say that the lower grade does not motivate them to put more effort, and this is identical to the teachers' attitudes that a large percentage of students are not encouraged and that motivation probably depends on the student's personality. 1% of students note that their encouragement depends on the teacher and the subject itself, which is identical to the teachers' views on whether lower grades encourages students to study more.

The views of 20% of the teachers about the fact that students do not study at all and nothing can motivate them, are refuted by the students' answers on whether the insufficient grade (1) encourages them to work harder on the material they haven't previously mastered. 90% of students state that the insufficient grade (1) encourages them to work harder and put more effort, and that it is a strong motivational factor for them. Only 10% of students say that the insufficient grade makes them feel discouraged and quit studying and putting efforts. This, once again, shows that the teacher should be especially careful when assessing and well recognize the developmental characteristics of the students' personalities.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the attitudes of both teachers and students gained through the questionnaires and from the informal talks enabled for us to reach significant conclusions regarding the motivational function of the grade. Namely, assessment in the teaching process in its essence understands for the individual to be informed for his/her achievements and the progress of the effort put forward, in such a way that he/she is pointed to the important aspects of what he/she is learning and how far he/she is with achieving the final goal. If the grade has this informative function with students it can lead to them feeling satisfied, stability, trustworthy regarding their own possibilities and inspires them for further work or, in a reverse situation, where because of untimely, or inappropriate grade, dissatisfaction, confusion and uncertainty can appear with the students which reflects negatively on the further learning process and reaching success. Based on that, it very likely that the multifunctional aspect of the grade can be further discussed, of its very important psychological sense and meaning, as well as of it conditionality of the individual perception of the same by individuals. This can be also proven with the analysis where the conditionality of how a grade is perceived is very clear as a reward for the effort invested which depends upon the individual characteristics, which, on the other hand, account to putting additional effort or resignation in the case of being assigned higher or lower grade than expected.

The analysis of the results of the questionnaires for the teachers shows that if the grade, that presents an integral part from the assessment process, is timely, adequate and corrective accompanied by oral feedback, generally, has a positive influence of the motivation for improving students' achievements. In these cases the students perceive the higher grade as an information that they have been successful in a certain activities and it is a direct information to the students that he/she is successful, and indirectly that he/she is a complete, capable and competent personality, while low grade is being perceived as an indicator that the effort showed is not enough. Further on, if the lower grade is accompanied by clear comments from the teacher on the account of concrete aims that need improving so that the achievements can be improved, with concrete pointing out to which activities are needed in order to do that, in which parts of the concrete assignments (where there was significant process noted), it is presupposed that the students won't be confused and insecure, that is, that the student will precisely understand what needs to be done, what needs to be corrected, improved so that he/she can have better results. With this kind of approach good students are being put forward, and students that are not so active, as well as students that show less satisfactory results, with the purpose to develop and strengthen the sense for one's own capabilities with the former, and to inspire the latter to improve and reach better results.

With the analysis of the questionnaires for the teachers, it is also indicative the percentage of the teachers that consider that the grade does not motivate the students to work more, which can point out to insufficient quality of the educational practice in all segments of its realization, as well as, to the detachment on the part of the students towards the assigned grade, that on its behalf, imposes the need of taking the necessary measures for improving the situation and putting emphasis on the grade to improve and increase the determination for reaching further and its connection to the motif of achievement. This situation is helped by the statements given by the students that say that lower grades do not influence them in an encouraging manner which just supports the establishment of the detachment of the grade that needs to be surpassed.

In this sense, having in mind the complex nature of the grade, the question being imposed at the very beginning is what the teacher can do to surpass this situation so that the process of grading can be improved and to enable students to reach better results in the teaching process and to be more motivated through appropriate grading. The answer to this question and to many other connected to the essence of the grade are found in the awareness of the teacher for the multifunctional aspect of the school grade and in solid knowledge of the pedagogical as well as the psychological problems, coming from the fact that the grade beside pedagogical and sociological, has its psychological sense and meaning. Having this in mind, the motivational component of the grade is an essential segment of the realization of the teaching process, and the feedback supported by the constructive interaction can lead to improvement of students' achievement in the teaching process.

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