

MOTIVATION AND LEARNING: A SURVEY STUDY IN PREPARATORY AND SECONDARY LEVELS IN QATARI SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have investigated the key role that motivation plays in student performance and academic achievement across different grade levels. Using survey methodology, this study aimed at determining student motivation by exploring the intersection of certain social and psycho-educational factors. The study, which involved preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) school students in Qatar, comprised a sample of 1803 male and female participants. A questionnaire instrument was employed to measure student motivation based on three main indicators: the effort students put in their studies, feeling bored at school, and absence from school. In analyzing the data, correlations were drawn between the three indicators, and gender and parent's involvement in their child's education. The results indicated that a significant number of both preparatory and secondary students exhibit low degrees of motivation. The results also revealed that students' decreasing motivation is associated with their grade levels and that males reportedly displayed lower motivation compared to females. Male students' motivation was also associated with parental involvement in their education. As such, the findings of this study support the results of previous research in the field. Qatar's schools today are confronted with the same challenges that many schools in developed countries face. There is a real need for enhancing student motivation, and this is an essential element of quality education at all different grade levels. This will also aid in ensuring schools enable students to become effective role players in tomorrow's schools.

Keywords: Motivation, Learning, Parent's involvement, Preparatory and secondary level.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scientific research has been witnessing a growing interest in the subject of motivation in general and in the role it plays in the learning process in particular (Anderman & Wolters, 2006; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006; Keller, 2010; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reeve, 2006).

In the light of current scientific research in the sciences of education and psychology of learning, it is no longer possible to be satisfied with a purely cognitive approach, limited to identifying the intellectual factors affecting the learning process. Many recent studies have shown that it is not enough for learners to have acquired a number of knowledge and methods of work, but at the same time they must have the capacity to mobilize and activate their resources sustainably within the framework of a self-project based on strong internal motivation (Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Hidi, Renninger & Krapp, 2004).

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Many scientific studies emphasize the essential role that motivation plays in interpreting students' learning outcomes. Motivation in learning is one of the most powerful factors directly influencing students' scholastic outcomes and developing their cognitive abilities in general (Pintrich, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

We can say that the learning process requires a combination of two essential factors: capacity on the one hand and will, on the other.

While the capacity is the sum of intellectual competencies required by the process, which students must build and develop, the will is the extent of students' motivation and their desire to learn.

Motivation is particularly influential in learners' behavior, as it performs four major functions that can be summarized as follows:

- Direct learners' behaviors towards specific goals, and direct their choices in all the activities carried out, which is confirmed by social cognitive theories as reported in various studies (Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Pintrich, P. R., 2005).
- It enables learners to persevere in activity, exert effort and guide intellectual energies into carrying out activities according to the needs and goals that they control (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Pugh & Bergin, 2006).
- Motivation directly influences knowledge processes and learners' effectiveness during the completion of tasks. Motivation also enables learners to benefit from the learning process and to consider how to use it in their private lives (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Pugh & Bergin, 2006).
- According to all these factors, motivation enhances students' performance and enables them to continuously improve it. Those students who have a strong motivation always strive for excellence and superiority. On the other hand, we note that students whose motivation is weak show a feeble interest in scholastic achievement, which makes them vulnerable to school dropout since the early stages of schooling (Covington, 2000; Lepper et al., 2005).

Although the subject of learning motivation has been a pivotal topic in the literature interested in learning and academic achievement, which has made most of the international educational systems allocate an important measure of their concerns to this aspect, many aspects of this subject remain a source of interrogations.

Our study falls within this framework, which is aimed at clarifying a range of motivational factors in Qatari students and the educational environment in which they interact with cultural and social characteristics in the GCC countries. The results of recent studies by Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (Qatar Study 2012 and 2015) has shown that motivation among middle and high school students is an important source of concern among educators, parents, decision-makers and educational policies in general.

Accordingly, attention to students' motivation and their multiple and interrelated aspects can facilitate our understanding of the psychological and educational factors leading to the failure and dropout of a large group of students during school trajectory. This may enable us to conceive of some educational solutions and answers that will help to keep them in the educational system and avoid dropouts and school failure at an early stage, which would deprive them of contributing effectively to the knowledge economy that Qatar is seeking to achieve as is the case in other GCC countries.

In particular, this study aims at identifying some of the social and psychological aspects that interact in determining the level of motivation among the preparatory and secondary students in Qatari schools.

The focus of the research concerning this stage of study is that it is very important in the formation of students at the psychological and scholastic levels, where they begin to establish the foundations of their personality as separate individuals and embrace a school and future project which would help them become active actors in their community.

In this regard, the study takes into account the motivation of this group of students through a set of indicators. It also seeks the second side to understand the nature of the relationship between student motivation and the extent of parents' involvement in their educational path.

This approach has enabled us to understand an important aspect of the success in school since the early stages of the study. All educational reforms in many countries, and in Qatar specifically, have emphasized _ study in general (Bunglawala, 2011; Stasz, Eide, & Martorell, 2007).

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted during the 2015-2016 school year. The research sample consists of 1803 students, distributed among 24 schools and registered in grades 8 and 9 of the preparatory education, and the eleventh and twelfth grades of secondary education. Students are distributed according to gender, nationality and level of education as follows:

Males: 48%, Female: 52%

Nationality: Qatar 38%, 62% Other nationalities

Grade 8: 529 (29.34%)

Grade 9: 523 (29.01%)

Grade 11: 365 (20.24%)

Grade 12: 386 (21.41%)

Measures and procedure

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed in English and then translated into Arabic by professional translators. After the translation process was completed, the Arabic version was carefully checked and reviewed by researchers proficient in both English and Arabic. The pre-test questionnaire was then tested in four randomly selected schools. The pre-test phase provided valuable information that enabled us to review the questionnaire and improve the formulation of questions, response categories, introductions, separations, instructions for the interviewer and duration of the interview. Based on this information, the final version of the questionnaire was developed and then programmed using the Blaise system for the purpose of data entry.

Indicators of motivation adopted in this research:

Students' motivation was assessed through three indicators:

1. Making the effort during the study (percentage of students who did not do their best in the study)
2. Feeling bored (the percentage of students who reported feeling bored most of the time)

3. Rate of School Absenteeism (percentage of students who were absent from the class twice or more per week)

Statistical Analysis

After collecting the data for students and their parents, it was entered into BLAZE program. This data was then cleaned, coded and saved in STATA format for analysis. After the final responses were weighted, the data was analyzed using STATA 14, a general-purpose statistical program commonly used in social sciences, and the tables and graphs were created in the Excel program.

Results

The students' responses were collected in the first stage according to their distribution at various levels in the preparatory schools in order to ascertain differences in the degree of motivation from the three indicators adopted in this study. In a second phase, responses were grouped by gender to ascertain possible differences between male and female motivation.

Distribution of motivation indicators by different levels in preparatory and Secondary Levels

Student's effort

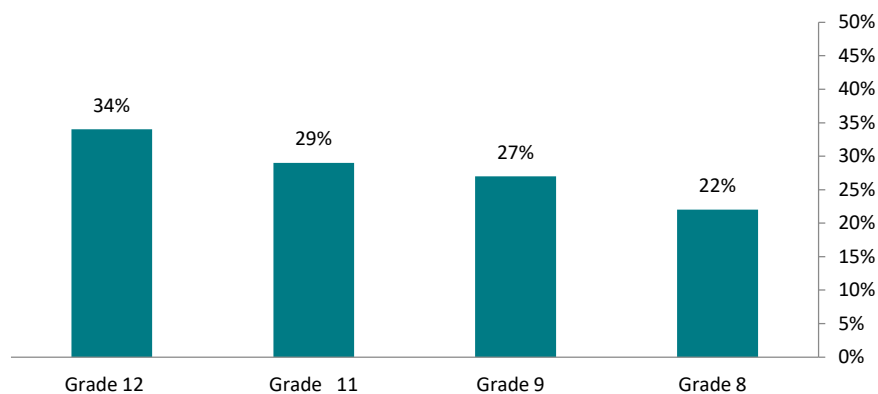


Figure 1: Students agree not to give maximum effort at all grade levels

Given the students' level of effort, the results showed that there is an increasing number of students declaring not doing their best in school as they progress in their studies from the preparatory and secondary school, as shown in Figure 1. These results indicate a general trend of low student motivation related to progress from one study stage to another. This means that progress in the study is accompanied by a decline in the level of student interaction and participation in the learning process since the effort is reduced as the student progresses in the study.

This preliminary result raises some questions about pedagogical trends in preparatory and secondary schools, which push an important class of students, up to 34% in grade 12, to refrain from actively participating in the learning process.

Feeling bored

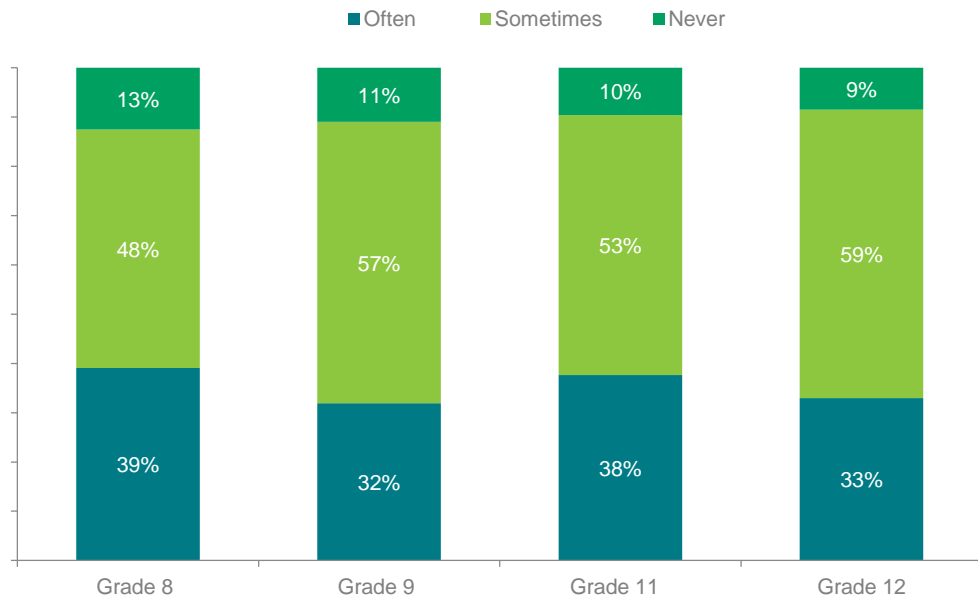


Figure 2: students reporting that they "feel bored" at all grade levels

It is noted that a significant proportion of students, ranging from 32 to 39 percent at all levels of the study in question, says that they are bored in school continuously. These rates range between 48 and 59 percent for students who are bored from time to time. It is also noted that the proportion of students who declare that they do not feel bored at school remains weak, ranging from 9 to 13 percent.

These results show that the lessons offered in both preparatory and secondary schools do not represent, for the most part, a source of enjoyable learning in which the student finds enough meanings and information that satisfy to his/her natural curiosity. It is therefore possible to ask about how to develop the used pedagogical methods and teaching methods to be close to the reality of the student and his/her concerns and questions, and to be a catalyst for the student and not a source of concern and boredom.

Rate of School Absenteeism

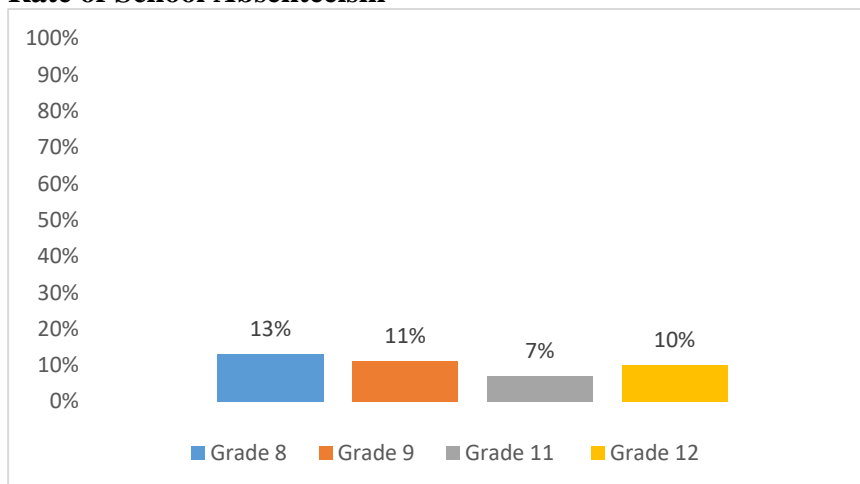


Figure 3: Absenteeism Ratio by School Level

This indicator demonstrates that Rate of School Absenteeism is between 7 and 13 percent, relatively high in the eighth year as a transition year from Primary to Preparatory level.

Distribution of motivation indicators by gender Student's effort

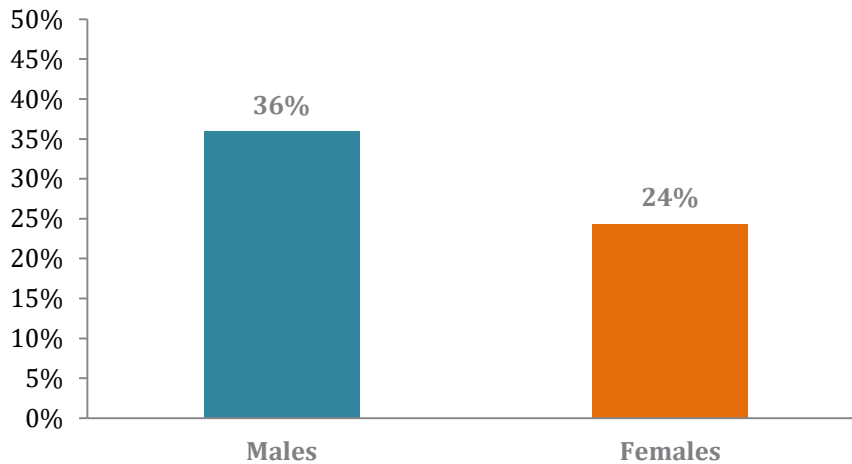


Figure 4: Students agree not to give maximum effort at all grade levels by gender

Given the gender factor, the results indicate a significant correlation between this factor and the level of effort in independent schools. The data show that about 24% of the female students reported that they do not do their best in school, compared to 36% of male students. These results show that female students exert the greatest effort of all students in general, and show a different interaction with the school context.

Feeling bored

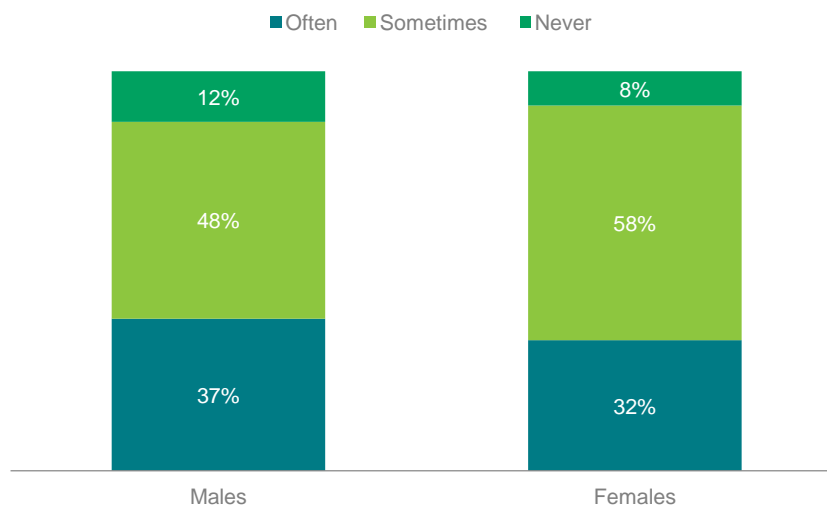


Figure 5: students reporting that they "feel bored" at all grade levels by gender

Comparisons in this area show that differences between males and females are not significant as boredom at school is generally felt by most students and not by a particular group.

Rate of School Absenteeism

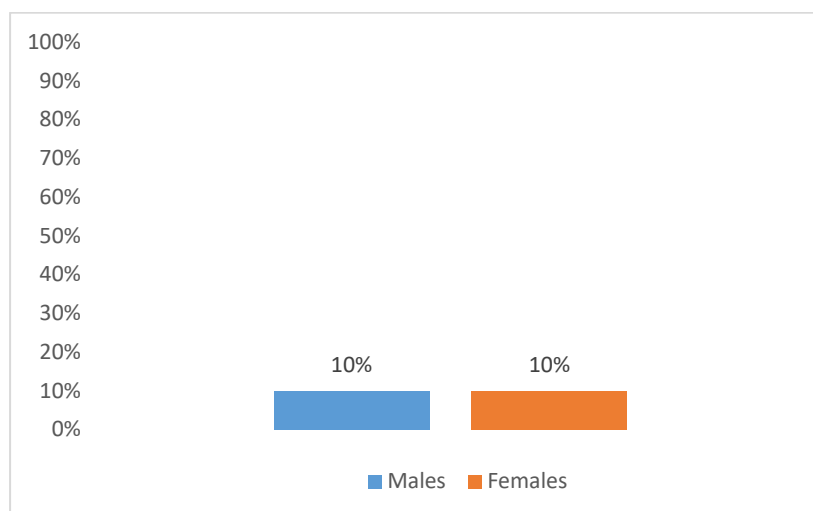


Figure 6: Absenteeism Ratio by gender

The percentage of absenteeism is distributed equally among the sexes, at 10%. There are no statistically significant differences in this indicator among students.

Parents' participation in children's education

Several studies show that student motivation is determined by a set of social and educational factors, most important of which is parental participation and interest in their children's studies. These studies confirm the primary role played by parents' participation in the process of educating children and their significant impact on their academic performance (Dis s& Buckley, 2004; Eldeeb, 2012; Epstein, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Yan & Lin, 2005).

According to this data, we assume in this study that the level of motivation of the student is related to the degree of parental participation in the studies of their children and in school life in general. Accordingly, three indicators have been identified in which we deduce the extent of parents' participation in the course of their children's studies is as follows:

- Reviewing and checking homework
- Attend classes within the classroom
- Participate in various activities of the Parents' Council

The distribution of the three indicators in the research sample is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Percentage of different parental participation indicators:

Parent Participation Indicators	Percentage
Reviewing and checking homework	39%
Attend classes within the classroom	46%
Participate in various activities of the Parents' Council	10%

Preliminary results show that the percentage of students who reported that their parents make sure they have completed their school assignments at least three times a week has reached 39%. In parallel with talking with their children or helping them solve their school assignments, parents were asked about their participation in various school activities. In this

field, 46% of the parents attended at least one lesson in the classroom and only 10% participated in various activities of the Parents' Council.

Relationship between student motivation and parental participation in the study

In an attempt to ascertain the nature of the relationship between student motivation on the one hand and parental participation in their studies on the other hand, we analyzed the statistical correlation between motivation indicators and parents' participation indicators. The following table shows the significance of these linkages:

Table 2: Linkage of student motivation indicators with parental participation indicators(Pearson correlation)

Parental Participation	Reviewing and checking homework	Attend classes within the classroom	Participate in various activities of the Parents' Council
Student Motivation			
Make the effort	- 2527109	1.902545 **	- 3.244674*
Feeling bored	- 5698998	1.143264	- 2.32473 **
School Absenteeism	- 1.27898	1.241529	- 1.857828

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

The above table revealed that there is a significant correlation between the following indicators:

- Between the effort indicator in the student motivation and the attendance indicator in parents' participation (Positive Relationship)
- Between the effort indicator in the student motivation and the participation indicator in the various activities of the Parents' Council (Negative Relationship)
- Between the students' boredom indicator and the participation indicator in the various activities of the Parents' Council (Negative Relationship)

As for other indicators, the results of the correlation indices did not show any statistical significance.

These results show that parents' participation in school activities has a positive impact on the level of student effort at school. It also contributes effectively to reducing the student's feeling of boredom within the classroom. The more significant parents' participation is, the less bored the student feel. These data confirm that parents' participation is an external factor that directly affects students' success in school instruction, making them more receptive to learning and more aware of the importance of the school in general.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that the subject of motivation among students remains one of the most important challenges faced by the school administrators and the educational system in Qatar today. The proportion of students suffering from chronically low school motivation is relatively high in Qatari schools and is common at all levels of preparatory and secondary education.

It should be noted here that the phenomenon of students' low motivation is not specific to Qatari schools or the Gulf States only, but is a general phenomenon that is related to

globalization and to the transformations that the school and our societies today have in general. The low motivation of students is also reflected in the increasing boredom of classroom courses, which directly affects the learning process and the student's perseverance and effort.

Hence, it is necessary to think about the new teaching methods that will contribute to the diversification of means and methods of education, use of modern technology and to bring the content of study programs in all subjects closer together with real life problems that are meaningful to the student. The teaching of mathematics or history as abstract and isolated from the living reality of students can make these materials in the student's perception a mere study content that has nothing to do with the world in which we live, which prevents the student from using his/her full intellectual abilities in school work.

The degree of motivation among the students is also evident in the absence from classes, which have made a minority of the sample of this research absent from the lessons, sometimes as an expression of weakness of motivation, and dissatisfaction with the school and the lessons in their current form. Although the phenomenon of absenteeism remains within certain limits, it needs to be studied in depth to know the reasons behind it so that we can help the student from the first stages of education to avoid negative behaviors that may lead the student to leave the school altogether.

On the other hand, in general, even if the indicators of low motivation are present at all levels of study and the concern of all students, the results of the study show that males suffer more than twice from low motivation compared to females, and this data corresponds to an important aspect of scientific studies in many developing and developed countries.

The data of the study show that the motivation of the student is influenced by a number of external factors, such as the parents' participation and their attention to the school life. Consequently, educational programs in which parents are an active participant in the learning process, especially for students who show a lack of motivation and poor learning.

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