

Chinese Vocational School Students' Achievement Motivation in Different Educational Models

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Abstract. The Chinese government is currently experimenting with a new approach to teacher training to address the shortage of teachers in rural schools. This model is called the free teacher training model. Students enter vocational schools after high school to train as preschool teachers for five years, after which they can get a steady job in a public kindergarten. The researcher sought to explore whether the achievement motivation levels of these teacher-education students would be affected by such an educational model. In this study, it was hypothesized that students would be less motivated to achieve in their studies because they would not need to find a job. However, the researcher's survey data indicated that there was no significant difference between the achievement motivation levels of these students who did not have to worry about employment and those who had to worry about employment. Such results surprised the researcher, and the researcher believes there are several possible reasons for such results. For example, these students did not have employment as their primary orientation to learning. Or these students did not fill in their real situation because they were concerned about the influence of social desirability.

Keywords: Achievement Motivation; Preschool education; Free normal education.

1. Introduction

In China, more and more people are choosing to live in cities because of the often-large difference in living standards between rural and urban areas. Along with this trend, fewer and fewer people are willing to go to work in rural schools. Many rural schools are struggling with the lack of teachers. To solve this problem, the Chinese government has introduced a teacher education program called orientation or free normal education [1]. In this program, high-achieving junior middle school students can choose to enter a public normal school after graduating from junior high school and sign a partnership agreement with the government. After five years of free normal education, they are offered a job as a public-school teacher at the cost of working for at least five years in a township school around their home city, with the freedom to change jobs or continue their education after five years of service. For most students participating in this program, being able to obtain a public-school job after five years of study is a very good deal because becoming a formally employed public school teacher in China often means that people will hardly ever be unemployed [2].

Researchers perceived that these students were less motivated to learn because they did not have to face the pressure of employment after graduation [3]. This is in contrast to students who have to find a job on their own. The students in the free teacher training program were more likely to get a "pass" on the exam rather than a "distinction". This is because for them if they graduate, they will be able to get a government job [4, 5]. Nevertheless, those students who need to find their own jobs often have a stronger motivation to achieve because they need to get good grades in school to build up their resume. Based on this intuition, the researcher wanted to explore such a phenomenon.

This study hopes to explore whether, once students are involved in the program, they have virtually solved their future employment problems. Do these students' motivation for academic achievement then suffer in the absence of employment pressure? Since these students can have a stable job upon successful completion of five years of schooling and without having to compete in the job market, do they relax their academic expectations? Do these students have different motivations for achievement than those who need to conduct their own job search?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Preschool students trained under four different types of academic systems were investigated in this study. The first type of sample is the student who begins a five-year course of study at a vocational school after graduating from high school and is able to obtain a job directly after graduation (Type 1). The second type of student is a student who, after graduating from high school, ends up in a vocational college (similar to a community college in the U.S.) for a three-year period due to poor performance on the college entrance exam (Type 2). The third type of student is somewhat similar to a five-year student in that they enter a different vocational high school after graduating from high school and are required to take a promotion exam after three years of vocational high school. Those who pass the exam can enter a vocational-technical college to continue their studies for two years, but these students still need to find their own jobs after graduation (Type 3). The last type of student is the undergraduate student who enters a university for four years after graduating from high school. These students enter higher education in the same way as the second type of student, through the Chinese college entrance exam. How they differ from the three-year students who entered the vocational colleges because they did not do as badly in the college entrance exam as the Type 2 students. These students, on the other hand, are enrolled in a university and can earn a bachelor's degree because of their good scores on the college entrance exam (Type 4).

In this study, the Chinese online questionnaire website "Questionnaire Star" was used as a tool to administer the questionnaire. A total of 430 questionnaires were distributed in two vocational institutions. There were 130 questionnaires for 5-year free teacher training students (30.2%), 146 questionnaires for 3-year students (34%), 116 questionnaires for 4-year undergraduate students (27%), and 38 questionnaires for 5-year vocational students who need to find their own jobs (8%), as this sample size is smaller than the other three samples. All students surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 19. In addition, in terms of gender convenience, a total of 61 male samples were collected in this study, accounting for 14.2% of the total sample, and another 369 female samples were collected, accounting for 85.8% of the total sample.

In our study, all questionnaires were administered following the principle of informed consent, we provided a preliminary explanation of the questionnaire in the questionnaire guidelines, and the principle of anonymity was maintained throughout the questionnaire. No personal information was collected from any of the subjects except for the demographic information needed for the study.

2.2 Measures

A Chinese revision of the Achievement Motivation Measure developed by Elliot and Church was used in this study [6]. This questionnaire was developed in the form of a five-point Likert scale (16 items). And in this form, 1 means "very non-conforming" and 5 means "very conforming", with the degree increasing from 1 to 5. There are three dimensions in the questionnaire: mastery goal, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance. The mastery goal (5 items) refers to how motivated students are to learn in order to acquire knowledge. In this dimension, one of the questions is "I like that the class provides really challenging content so that I can learn something new." The performance-approach (6 items) refers to how strongly students are motivated to "perform as well as or better than others" in the learning process. The representative question for this dimension is "It is important for me to perform better than others in my studies," which means that the main purpose of this dimension is to measure whether students have as their learning goal to outperform their peers. The performance-avoidance (5 items) refers to how strongly students feel resistant to their own underperformance. In this dimension, students were asked, "My goal is to not be too far behind in my class?" This indicates that in this dimension, the researcher tried to measure how strong the students' willingness to avoid failure in their studies was. The internal consistency coefficients for each dimension of the questionnaire were 0.89, 0.91, and 0.77, respectively, which proved that the reliability of the scale was good and suitable for this study.

The main demographic variable information collected in the study lies in the type of school system, grade, and gender of the students. In the collected sample, most of the students were in the second grade of their school system. A total of 430 students from Shangrao Preschool Education College and Zhejiang Normal University were surveyed. 130 of these students were the free preschool pedagogy students who became public school teachers directly after graduation, as described in the previous section. The other three kinds of students were students who received a regular preschool pedagogy education would be enrolled in the school, and these students would need to find their own jobs after graduation.

After the questionnaires are returned, this study will investigate whether there are significant differences between the four samples on the three dimensions of achievement motivation. To investigate whether the free teacher training policy established by the Chinese government has an impact on the achievement motivation of free teacher training students in preschool education.

2.3 Data Analysis

The researcher used SPSS version 25.0 software to analyze data. Firstly, descriptive statistics was conducted to analyze the main variables. Secondly, the correlation between the three dimensions was analyzed to corroborate the internal validity of the original questionnaire. Finally, an ANOVA was conducted between the educational models and the three achievement motivation dimensions in order to understand whether there is a difference among vocational school students' achievement motivation in different educational models.

Also, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test between the variable of schooling and students' achievement motivation in order to investigate whether the factor of schooling is an influential factor in students' achievement motivation. Since the age of entry into school is not the same across school systems, it is not meaningful to make cross-sectional comparisons for the same grade.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

A total of 430 valid samples were collected in this study, 369 (85.8%) were females and 61 (14.2%) were males. The descriptive results of students' gender and student types are shown in Table 1. However, the results of correlation analysis illustrated that the type of schooling students received was not correlated with their achievement motivation. The Pearson correlation coefficient between them showed weak or even negative performance. In addition, there was no significant difference between students of different genders on different dimensions of achievement motivation. This disproves our previous research hypothesis. Students do not affect their level of achievement motivation because of whether they need to find a job or not.

Table 1. Descriptive results of different studenttypes

	N	%
Free normal students (5 years)	130	30.2
Normal students (3 years)	146	34.0
Normal students ("3+2" years)	38	8.8
Normal school with bachelor degree (4 years)	116	27.0
Total	430	100.0

3.2 Achievement Goals for Different Student Types

After conducting an ANOVA on the students under different students' types. The results found that no significant differences in mastery goals, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance produced between students who underwent preschool education through different academic systems

(see Table 2). The academic system was not a major influencing factor for students' achievement motivation.

Table 2. ANOVA analysis of three achievement motivations of four student types

		N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Mastery goal	Type 1	130	3.54	.73	1.107	.346
	Type 2	146	3.66	.68		
	Type 3	38	3.59	.78		
	Type 4	116	3.51	.73		
Performance-approach	Type 1	130	3.31	.84	.149	.930
	Type 2	146	3.37	.81		
	Type 3	38	3.29	1.01		
	Type 4	116	3.33	.85		
Performance-avoidance	Type 1	130	3.45	.81	.211	.888
	Type 2	146	3.39	.83		
	Type 3	38	3.35	1.02		
	Type 4	116	3.41	.79		

3.3 Student Pool

Since the students in both Type 2 and Type 4 were enrolled through the general entrance examination for higher education in China. We also analyzed the performance of Types 2 and Type 4 because they differed in those students in type 4 had much higher scores on the college entrance exam than those in Type 2. The comparative analysis between Types 2 and Type 4 revealed that the students in these two types differed significantly in their “Nationwide Unified Examination for Admissions to General Universities and Colleges” cores. However, there was no significant difference in their levels of achievement motivation. This seems to be telling us that although these two groups of students differed in their levels on a cognitive ability test like the exam, their achievement motivation was not affected by the difference in performance.

4. Discussion

The researcher believes that there are several possible reasons for the emergence of such a phenomenon. We believe that there are several possible reasons for this phenomenon.

First, the results may be due to the fact that the subjects were influenced by socially desirable motivation in the process of completing the questionnaire. For example, suppose the students believe higher achievement motivation is better than lower achievement motivation. In that case, they will tend to choose those answers that allow them to show higher achievement motivation in completing the questionnaire [7]. Therefore, the level of achievement motivation shown by the sample in the questionnaire tends to be higher than her true level of achievement motivation. Due to the lack of lie detector and reverse scoring questions in this scale, there is a lack of effective means of monitoring the validity of students' scale completion [8].

Second, our alternative speculation about this occurrence is that it is possible because these students' achievement motivation levels are indeed unaffected by their employment stress. Such a conjecture is based on two main reasons: first, it is possible that it is because the subjects did not recognize the relationship between achievement motivation and their employment prospects [9]. In the researcher's hypothesis, the subjects' level of achievement motivation and the level of learning motivation brought about by the level of achievement motivation are supposed to be correlated with the external learning pressure that the subjects are under. However, it seems that many of the samples did not have such a perception. They may not believe that their level of effort in learning should be

related to the employment pressures they face [10]. In other words, they maintain similar levels of achievement motivation in their learning whether or not they have to face the challenges of job search. They are not studying to improve their level of labor capital [11].

The second possible reason is that students do not realize that their present learning is relevant to their labor capital in future employment [12]. The difference between these two reasons is that - the former is aware but does not care, while the latter lacks this awareness. These students may be faced with a learning task with only the thought of completing the learning task at hand and not thinking about the impact their performance in the present vocational skills training will have on their future job search [13].

The researcher also suggested another possibility to explain the insignificant variability in achievement motivation levels. That is, the students in type 1 were more competitive for places because they could get a job as a public-school teacher if they graduated successfully, and the students who were able to enter the program were the better students in their hometown, and their achievement motivation levels were already higher. On the other hand, students in Type 2 may have been pushed by the difficulty of finding a job to increase their achievement motivation so that they could outperform others and become better in the competition for jobs. These two different reasons finally lead to a common result, which is that the level of achievement motivation between Type 1 and Type 2 reached equally high levels.

In addition, the comparison between Type 2 and 4 in this study also leads us to believe that for a student, there may not be a strong correlation between her achievement motivation and the level of achievement she achieves. A student can maintain a strong motivation to achieve but not be able to achieve a good grade because of differences in learning methods, learning resources, and other objective factors. Again, this is a noteworthy element found in this study [14].

Furthermore, researchers also believe that it is possible that this is because of the students' entry into vocational education institutions. The relaxed environment causes students to ignore the pressure of their future employment and thus start to enjoy their college life. So, for the different groups of students, as they collectively choose to spend more time on matters such as clubs, recreational activities, and relationships in college, ignore the pressure they will face in the future job market [15]. The end result is that whether or not a stable job awaits them, they do not let the pressure of their employment affect their motivation to achieve.

5. Implications

The relevance of this study is to provide us with an understanding of how the current free teacher training policy in China may affect students' achievement motivation. Based on the data from our survey, we argue that there may not be a significant correlation between the level of student achievement motivation and the difficulty students face in finding employment. This proves that our previous concern that students would stop working hard for their studies after securing a job may be redundant, and this finding is beneficial for the promotion of the free teacher training policy [16].

The most important insight we gained for the follow-up study was that when conducting quantitative research, one should not expect 100% of the respondents. This is because respondents may deliberately choose answers in the questionnaire that are favorable to their image because of their need for impression management or their need to gain social approval. The result of such behavior is that his choice can contaminate the results of the survey and lead to a decrease in the reliability of the survey. The next insight is that a more rigorous sampling method is necessary if a more in-depth study is to be conducted. In this study, nearly 400 questionnaires were distributed and collected by random sampling. However, the sample size of each school system was less than 100 students when divided into three different school systems. If we want to discuss the achievement motivation of students in different school systems by grade level, the sample size of each grade level is even smaller. Therefore, in the follow-up study, the sampling process was intervened to ensure a more rational and scientific sampling process that would support a more detailed and in-depth data

analysis. Moreover, more studies need to be conducted about the impact factor on future student achievement motivation.

6. Conclusion

In the current study, a student's job prospect or academic program does not have an effect on her level of achievement motivation. Therefore, China can implement the policy of free teacher training without worrying too much about whether such a model of assigning jobs to graduates will frustrate students' achievement motivation levels. This also means that we can look at other influencing factors to study students' achievement motivation development. It also demonstrates that there is room for improvement in the choice of research methods in this study. We should try to minimize the interference and contamination of the data by social approval factors in the process of conducting the study.

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