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Faculty support and students' academic motivation

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This study investigates the relationship between students' perceptions regarding faculty support and their overall level of academic motivation. Other aspects like types of academic motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation or amotivation) grounded in self-determination theory are also addressed. The findings indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between faculty support and the overall level of student's academic motivation. At the same time, the results show that both psychological and functional support, as indicators of faculty support, have influence on different types of academic motivation. In this sense, faculty support has a moderate positive influence on student'sintrinsic academic motivation, respectively a moderate negative influence on academic amotivation. These results can be of interest for faculty decision makers. In other words, any educational policy or strategy adopted by faculty-level decision makers designed to help students improving their academic performance must include elements and activities related to providing support (at social, psychological, and functional level).

KEYWORDS

self-determinations theory, types of academic motivation, faculty support, academic motivation survey, survey

Introduction

Understanding academic motivation and the antecedents of the educational motivational process is necessary for identification and implementation of different actions that would contribute to the increase of students' academic performances. The process of motivating students represents an important concern for academics, an issue that possibly is one of the most important sources of professional frustration. Students need guidance and help regarding their personal and academic development, and this requires, among other things, a significant involvement of universities/faculties in students' learning environment, providing the necessary support that would lead to a better academic motivation and a high level of engagement in learning. The importance of faculty support for students' academic success cannot be denied, as this support plays an important role in promoting students' learning process, with major impact on their academic performance (Watt and Richardson, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). Here, two major aspects should be considered: (1) the overall level of students' academic motivation (level of motivation intensity), and (2) the types (forms) of students' academic motivations. In this sense, academic motivation should be analyzed from a differentiated multidimensional perspective because both the overall level of motivation (as a component) and the different types of motivations could influence student's learning activity and subsequently their academic performance.

In this paper we analyze students' perceptions regarding the relationship between faculty support and academic motivation. In other words, the study investigates and analyzes the extent to which students' perceptions of faculty support influence both their overall level of

academic motivation and the diverse types of motivation. Furthermore, we argue that it is necessary that any educational strategy adopted by faculty-level decision makers must include support actions in order to improve academic performance and ensure better educational outcomes. This support must include social, psychological and functional support.

Literature review

Academic motivation

While motivation as a concept involves a multitude of definitions, academic motivation implies a more specific definition, and it is related not only to those aspects that determine a more enthusiastic school attendance but also an increased engagement in someone's own learning process and academic development. It is important to examine the factors that can influence students' academic performance in order to identify the low academic performances that can have a negative effect on the number of students who graduate.

If we take into consideration that the number of students graduating (relative to the number of enrolled students) is, for many universities, a quality and performance indicator, we could argue that students' academic performance is one of the factors that influence the quality indicator of the university systems. That's why, in our opinion, the educational strategies must concern very seriously students' academic motivation.

One of the most common approaches regarding the academic motivation process involves the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). For Deci and Ryan (2013) self-determination is a capacity but also a need, underlining the importance of three basic human needs in intrinsic motivation – autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-determination theory focuses on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic factors that may increase or decrease intrinsic motivation. For example, in education, in proper conditions, teachers may channel intrinsic motivation of students toward the promotion of learning using extrinsic factors (learning climate, the use of rewards or punishments, supportive teachers' behavior, trusting interpersonal context etc.).

Academic motivation may be one of the most important psychological aspects that influence learning and personal development of students. While some studies identify academic motivation as one among other significant factors that positively affect student performance (Froiland and Worrell, 2016; Madison et al., 2018), other studies consider motivation the only factor that has a direct impact on academic achievement; the rest of the factors influencing the students' performances are achieved through motivation (Ünal-Karagüven, 2012).

According to self-determination theory, applied on the academic field, three forms of academic motivation can be distinguished: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and non-motivation (amotivation); these types of motivation are located on a continuum, and reflect the extent to which the behavior voluntarily adopted by an individual is in accordance with her own interests (Burgueño et al., 2017).In Figure 1 we can see the connection Ryan and Deci (2020, p. 72) made between autonomous, controlled, different types of motivation (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation or amotivation) and regulatory styles. Amotivation reflects the lowest degree of autonomy, amotivated individuals lack the intention to act, while motivated behavior may take various forms depending on the level of autonomy. For example, the least autonomous behavior is externally regulated (individuals' behavior is oriented toward external demands) and if individuals internalize regulations their autonomy will increase.

Several educational research indicated that certain types of motivations (e.g., autonomous motivation) positively influence academic outcomes (Guay et al., 2010; Datu, 2017; Sivrikaya, 2019), and confirms that academic motivation is one of the factors that influence a person's success or failure in the learning process (Moenikia and Zahed-Babelan, 2010; Maurer et al., 2013; Hafizoglu and Yerdelen, 2019; Motevalli et al., 2020). Also, academic motivation was associated both with mental health features of students (Lee et al., 2019) and the attitude towards the learning process (Tasgin and Coskun, 2018). Regarding academic motivations Chakraborty (2016) showed that some of extrinsic motivation types (extrinsic motivation - external regulation and extrinsic motivation - identified regulation) are important dimensions of academic motivation. At the same time, some other studies confirmed that, overall, students are motivated rather by extrinsic motivation (Hegarty et al., 2012; Komarraju, 2013) suggesting the importance of examination grades among other factors. While some research focuses on the role and importance of academic motivation, other studies analyzed factors that influence the process of academic motivation. In this regard, Ryan and Deci (2020) identified two clusters of factors that influence academic motivation: internal factors related to student characteristics (like social class, expectations), or student beliefs and external factors related to social factors (family members), academic related factors (courses, assignments, examination, feedback) or environment.

Faculty support

The faculty support provided to students can be considered one of the aspects that affect not only the level of students' academic performance but also the process and level of school dropout. From another point of view, low support activities negatively influence the attrition rate. According to Pavelea and Moldovan (2020) the attrition rate is one of the most important indicators for universities systems, because financing higher-education institutions is correlated with the number of students enrolled. In this sense the decision makers must include in their educational strategy a suitable level of support for maintain or increase the attrition rate. Einhellig (2015) considers that both financial support and emotional support from supervisors and management encourages students' academic success. Several studies (Hart, 2012; Orsini et al., 2016; Johnmarshall and Sung, 2021) have found that both appropriate and constructive feedback (as a form of support and encouragement to students) and autonomy-supportive teaching influence the persistence and motivation.

Support should not be limited to providing certain activities of relaxation, fun or socialization but involves a series of complex processes and activities aimed at achieving high levels of personal and academic development by students. From another point of view, supportpredicts both students' academic performance and involvement. In this regard, Wilson et al. (2020) showed that faculty support is positively and significantly correlated with all forms of student engagement. In other research, faculty support appears to mediate the relationship between student effort and satisfaction

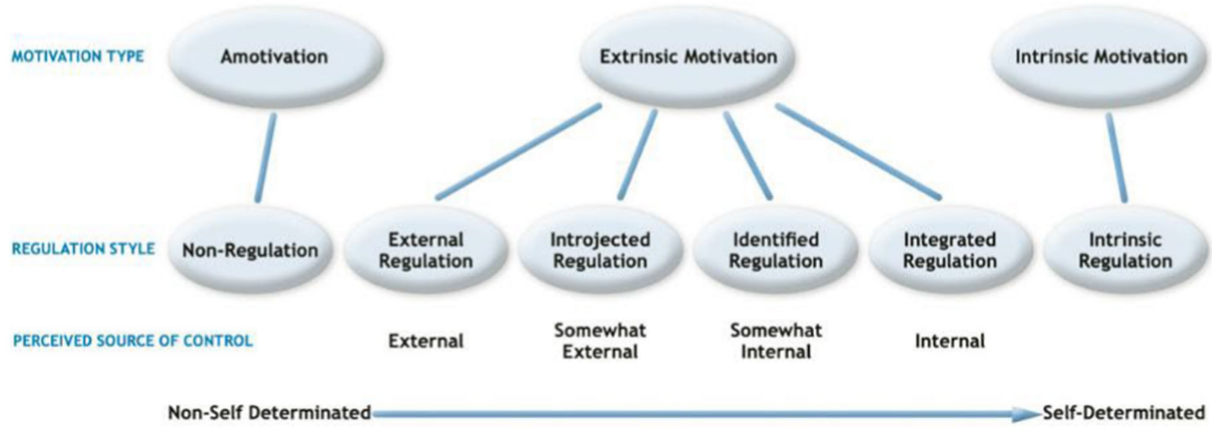

FIGURE 1
Different types of motivation and regulatory styles. Source: Ryan and Deci (2020), p. 72.

(Fredrickson, 2012). From the perspective of student-faculty interaction, some studies confirm that there are several specific types of student-faculty interactions that can be seen as predictors of student performance and academic success (Komarraju et al., 2010).

Also, Henderson et al. (2020) indicates that the way in which faculties are concerned about their students along with setting a propitious learning environment influences not only the students' intention to graduate but also their level of motivation for learning. The reinforcement and faculty social support were also positively associated with the level of students' academic results (Wen and Li, 2022; Hassan et al., 2023). At the same time, a better understanding of students' needs and preferences by faculty (or university) is related to enhanced student satisfaction regarding courses and better attitude toward learning (Snijders et al., 2021).

Finally, Holland et al. (2020) showed that the development of a wide range of support strategies for students, including academic support, pastoral support (social orientation) and employability counselling encourages learning and contributes to improving academic performance.

Faculty support takes many forms and depends on the institution's ability to understand the needs and desires of the students, the amount and types of resources that the institution has, and the capacity to allocate support. In terms of activities, a large part of the faculty support is oriented toward the development of a student-faculty relationship based on respect, courtesy, accessibility, and empathy and on promoting processes and activities that may help and guide students in the field of personal and academic development.

In fact, faculty support can be defined as the support resulting from teacher-student interactions (Goodwin et al., 2019). Thus, the support of the faculty can be materialized through a series of counseling activities, especially psychological counseling, and personal development, tutoring and academic development activities, support and social support activities, actions for faster integration of students and finally the organization of various recreational or socializing activities. Therefore, the range of support activities is extremely varied, and it is not limited to the main learning activities but should also cover different other interrelated educational activities.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of the surveyed population.

Year of study	No. of students (%)
Year 1	46 (39,3)
Year 2	71 (60,7)
Total	117 (100)

Method

In this study we investigate the extent to which faculty support influences the overall level of motivation and different types of academic motivation, based on a quantitative method of research – survey.

Sample

The surveyed population consists of 117 students enrolled in FSPAC's master programs in public administration at the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, from a total of 130 students enrolled. The ratio of teachers to students is 1:18, indicating small classes and possibility for support providing. The response rate was 90%. The demographics of students are 60% female and 40% males, from the total survey population, with more than 90% representing working students. Ethical aspects include voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, potential for harm, results communication for each participant in the study. Due to the large number of working master students, the courses are organized on Monday to Friday afternoons (from 16:30 to 20:10), to give them the possibility to work and come to school. The master program offers teaching classes but also provides direct mentorship to students for research and thesis.

Masters students have been chosen for this study because they have specific characteristics (many responsibilities, more academic experience and work engagement) which make them different from undergraduate students, in terms of motivation and support required.

Most respondents were in the final year of the master program (Table 1).

Instruments

For evaluating the level of academic motivation, we used Academic Motivation Scale - AMS (Miulescu, 2019), often applied to measure motivation according to SDT. Although we used all 28 items from the original instrument, we operated a series of changes and adjustments to fit the questionnaire as well as possible to the context and specificity of the master program in public administration offered by Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences (FSPAC). We applied AMS because this instrument measures motivation in a multidimensional approach considering also academic context (Barkoukis et al., 2020). On the other hand, AMS has, from the point of view of psychometric properties, a high level of reliability and validity (Miulescu, 2019). AMS evaluates academic motivation on 7 subscales: 3 types of intrinsic motivation (intrinsic motivation related to knowledge, achievements, and stimulation), 3 types of extrinsic motivation (identified, introjected, external motivation) and amotivation.

For analyzing the support level of the faculty, we used the Perceived Faculty Support Scale (SPFSS). In this sense, support provided by the faculty was measured on two dimensions (Wilson et al., 2020): (1) psychological support (involving the encouragement, support, and promotion of a sense of competence among students); (2) functional support (which involves activities that help the student to complete different tasks and achieve their proposed objectives).

Procedure

S.P.S.S analysis was conducted, namely statistical correlation analysis, between variables that were inserted in the questionnaire. The survey was conducted based on a face-to-face procedure, with questionnaires being completed by students directly.

Results

The influence of faculty support on the overall level of motivation

In analyzing the relationship between the faculty support and the level of academic motivation we used statistical correlation analysis, and the results (Table 2) show two major aspects.

First, the results confirm that there is a statistically significant relationship between the overall level of academic motivation and faculty support, significance level of $p < 0.000$ and 001 indicates that the correlation is strong. Second, psychological support, as a dimension of faculty support, seems to influence more the overall level of academic motivation compared to functional support dimension.

The influence of faculty support on different types of academic motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)

We used statistical correlation for analyzing the relationship between faculty support and different types of academic motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic). The results confirm that faculty support (functional and psychological) has a different influence on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In this sense, functional support tends to influence more intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, compared to psychological support (Table 3).

TABLE 2 Relationship between the level ofacademic motivation and faculty support (statistical correlation analysis).

		Academic motivation
Academic motivation	Pearson correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	117
Psychological Support	Pearson correlation	0.565**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	117
Functional Support	Pearson correlation	0.508**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	117

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The faculty support has a certain negative influence on amotivation; although only the psychological support negatively influences this type of motivation (correlation is also weak). Thus, given that academic amotivation (AMOT) represent the lack of students' motivation in learning engagement, one method for reducing this form of academic motivation is to provide psychological support to them. Still, offering only the psychological support may not help too much in decreasing academic amotivation among students if it is not supplemented by other measures.

Second, regarding academic extrinsic motivation, faculty support has little influence; only functional support seems to influence certain types of extrinsic motivations. In this sense, the findings confirm that there is a relationship only between functional support and some forms of extrinsic motivation: (1) Extrinsic motivation – introjected regulation (EMIN); and (2) Extrinsic motivation– identified regulation (EMID). Although the relationship is statistically significant, the correlation between them is weak. Instead, the third form of extrinsic motivation - Extrinsic motivation – external regulation (EMER), is not influenced by any of the two dimensions of faculty support.

Third, the results of this study indicate that faculty support is more associated with intrinsic academic motivation, compared with extrinsic motivation, and can be seen as a factor that positively influences different forms of academic motivation.

Indeed, a series of forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (IMTK - Intrinsic Motivation to Know; IMTS - Intrinsic Motivation to Stimulate) have a direct and statistically significant relationship with functional support, although the correlation is moderate. At the same time, we could observe that Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish (IMTA) is not influenced by any of the two dimensions of the faculty support.

Discussion

In order to achieve a high academic performance it is necessary to take into consideration the role of academic motivation. In fact, the

TABLE 3 Relation between the types of academic motivations and the faculty support (statistical correlation analysis).

		Psychological support	Functional support
AMOT - Amotivation	Pearson correlation	−0.374**	−0.154
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.098
	N	117	117
EMER - Extrinsic motivation, external regulation	Pearson correlation	0.096	0.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.302	0.342
	N	117	117
EMIN - Extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation	Pearson correlation	0.148	0.197*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.110	0.033
	N	117	117
EMID - Extrinsic motivation, identified regulation	Pearson correlation	0.169	0.194*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.069	0.025
	N	117	117
IMTA - Intrinsic motivation to accomplish	Pearson correlation	0.090	0.159
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.332	0.086
	N	117	117
IMTK - Intrinsic motivation to know	Pearson correlation	0.407**	0.516**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.001
	N	117	117
IMTS- Intrinsic motivation to stimulate	Pearson correlation	0.207*	0.483**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.025	0.001
	N	117	117

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

causal chain between motivating factors and student performance is understandable. If factors that contribute to academic motivation of students aren't properly identified, the entire process will suffer leading to students' lower performances and finally to school dropout. Perhaps that is the reason why research on the factors that affect students' academic motivation continue to be an important topic for education.

Based on self-determination theory, and the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between academic motivation and faculty support. The results confirm that there is a direct and positive correlation between students' perception of faculty support (described on two levels: psychological support and functional support) and the overall level of academic motivation. These results suggest that a greater concern for providing both psychological support and functional support contributes to students' higher level of academic motivation and eventually to increased involvement in the learning process.

At the same time, results confirm that faculty support is associated differently with academic motivation. Psychological support leads to a decrease of amotivation, even though the relationship is weak. Considering that amotivation could be defined as the absence of motivation and could be linked with a series of negative academic consequences (poor academic performance, higher incidence of problem behaviors, low academic self-esteem, intention to school dropout), faculty support can be viewed as a practical solution for preventing these.

In addition, the study confirms that faculty support has different influence on intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation. In this sense, it seems that the major influence of faculty support is on intrinsic forms of academic motivation. In this sense, the influence of faculty support, especially functional support, on the various forms of intrinsic academic motivation could be considered an extremely important aspect.

Although the relationship is rather moderate, faculty support remains a valuable solution to one of the most acute problems related to academic motivation of students - low level of intrinsic academic motivation. Indeed, one of the problems faced by faculties regards the unbalance between extrinsic motivation compared to intrinsic motivation in learning, and students' tendency to learn only due to factors of an extrinsic nature. Even though extrinsic motivation may stimulate the engagement in learning, a high level of extrinsic motivation without a high level of intrinsic motivation does not help too much on the medium and long term.

The results can be of interest not only for public administration scholars, but also for faculty decision makers. Based on this research it can be concluded that the faculties should better reconsider their educational strategy for a better involvement in providing support to their own students. Obviously, this involvement would contribute to the creation of a much more inclusive, academically stimulating environment for all students.

Secondly, the results of the study can help to outline and develop a set of actions and initiatives to create a series of more effective mechanisms to promote and stimulate students' behavior towards academic performance. For example, the involvement of decision-makers at the higher faculty level in providing of social support will contribute not only to the reduction of school dropout and maintain a suitable attrition rate, but also contribute to changing the behavior and attitude of students towards learning.

Thirdly, the involvement of decision makers (at faculty level) in providing support to their own students can be used as a form of promoting the image of the institution among students. Indeed, any action of support offered to students clearly constitutes evidence that the faculty is concerned and involved in helping its own students, evidence that (sooner or later) is perceived by students as an action promoted by the slogan "the faculty cares about its own students."

All this, in the end, will contribute to maintaining and promoting a good image among students.This image will contribute to the development of a high level of satisfaction among students, but also to an increased interest manifested by potential future students. In this sense educational strategies for higher education need to take into consideration the necessity for increasing faculty support and also for maintaining a high level of academic motivation among students.

Limitations of this research include collecting cross-sectional data, and the particular educational context in which the data was collected (COVID-19 restrictions, class attendance of working students). In addition, generalizability may be limited because the present study has included only Romanian masters-level students; it is therefore recommended that the AMS be employed in other countries with different educational cultures. A different approach to data collection and analysis in further research might provide insights about how institutions can provide support specifically to working students. For example, working students may require different types of support depending on their schedules, family obligations, and financial considerations. It would also be valuable to examine different correlates of academic motivation such as academic performance, graduate outcomes, and future employment. A more qualitative approach might even explore indicators of life satisfaction and career trajectories following graduation, particularly in relation to perceptions of prior faculty support.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

HR: Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. FC: Project administration, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2024.1406611/full#supplementary-material

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