

ENHANCING ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY THROUGH POSITIVE ATTITUDE ON AN ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATIONAL PROGRAM: A SIMULTANEOUSLY STUDY IN THREE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of students' attitude towards an achievement motivational program and its effect on academic self-efficacy. An achievement motivational program with the theme of "Strive for Excellence: Achieving Your Academic Goals" was conducted on the same day in three different secondary schools. The program's contents were similar for each school and were delivered through various structured activities (e.g., motivational talks, shared academic experiences, motivational videos, small group discussions, and motivational games). A total of 268 students took part in this program, each completing a questionnaire that consisted of three sections. Section A measured the participants' demographic profile (8 items); Section B measured the students' attitudes towards the achievement motivational program (9 items) and Section C measured their academic self-efficacy (3 items). The questionnaire was given to the participants after they completed the one-day program in each school. The study shows that the students' attitudes towards the achievement motivational program have an effect on their academic self-efficacy. The students' attitudes towards the achievement motivational program contributed to 2.5% of the variance on their academic self-efficacy ($\beta = .16$, $t(268) = 2.60$, $p = .01$). These findings show that the students' attitudes towards the one-day program can increase the students' academic self-efficacy in various ways, such as believing that they can complete the hardest academic tasks if they try and that they can learn new things taught in school. It is suggested that the students' positive attitudes towards various activities in the achievement motivational program can help to increase students' academic self-efficacy.

Key Words: Achievement motivational program, Academic self-efficacy, Rural.

INTRODUCTION

In today's academic world, teachers face many challenges when it comes to promoting excellent academic achievement in their students. There are many factors that may affect students' academic performances, such as achievement motivation, mentoring programs, students' academic self-efficacy, learning strategies and teachers' self-efficacy. In regard to achievement motivation, teachers have put a lot of effort toward implementing educational programs such as achievement motivational programs, which aim to increase students' academic self-efficacy (Van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). Achievement motivation program is something that all members of the school community emphasise as being a strong support for their students (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011). The achievement motivational programs that were

conducted at schools helped to increase students' academic self-efficacy. Vanthournout, Gijbels, Coertjens, Donche, and Petegen's study (2012) revealed that academic motivation predicted persistence and academic success among first-year university students and this was not influenced by their demographic factors (e.g., gender & prior education). An individual with high motivation is more motivated and persistent to do something compared to an individual with low motivation (Waqar, Shafiq & Hasan, 2016). Motivation can empower people to achieve high levels of performance and overcome difficulties. Motivation is of particular interest to educational psychologists because of the crucial role it plays in student learning. (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2011).

In this study, a one-day achievement motivational program was conducted with the theme of 'Strive for Excellence: Achieving Your Academic Goals'. The achievement motivational program was conducted simultaneously in three different secondary schools. The program modules were similar for each school and were delivered through various structured activities, such as motivational talks, shared academic experiences motivational videos, small group discussions and motivational games. All these activities were run by the trained university students. Vanthournout et al (2012) stated that one strategy that can be used to confront educational difficulties, such as drop out and academic success among students is through motivation. Motivation can be a positive predictor of academic achievement. The perception of competency among students with low intrinsic motivation can be increased through academic self-efficacy (Buch, Safvenbom, & Boe, 2015). We believe that one way to increase students' academic self-efficacy is by providing them motivational activities and exposure to a program which may help boost their perception of competency. As stated by Van Dinther et al. (2011), students' self-efficacy beliefs can be enhanced through higher education intervention programs.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This study examines the effects of students' attitude towards an achievement motivational program and its effect on academic self-efficacy.

CONTENT OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATIONAL PROGRAM

Before the achievement motivational program was conducted, the program coordinator contacted each of the three participating secondary schools to obtain approval and arrange a suitable date for the one-day achievement motivational program. Once approval was obtained, three groups were formed, each of which comprised 20 to 25 university students and was led by two lecturers. Several meetings were conducted by the coordinator to plan appropriate structured activities aimed at instilling achievement motivation in secondary school students from the three different schools. The selected participants were fifth- and sixth-form secondary students who will sit the Malaysian Certificate of Education, the national examination commonly known as the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*, and the Malaysian Higher School Certificate, known as the *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*. The three groups were monitored by one coordinator to ensure that the program content was similar for each group. To achieve this goal, lecturers were given the main content of the achievement motivation talk; moreover, two university students in each group,

who shared their experience of academic life at university, were given a guideline regarding how to format the delivery of their academic sharing session.

Before departing for an assigned school, each group of university students was given a brief introduction to the one-day program. In the first activity, the facilitators (i.e. university students) conducted a self-introduction session with the participants. The aim was to build rapport among the lecturers, facilitators and secondary school students. This activity was followed by a motivational talk delivered by the lecturers, after which a video presentation about university highlighted the academic life and extra-curricular activities at the university. In the second activity, two facilitators, who had achieved excellent academic performance and were actively involved in extra-curricular activities at their university, shared their experience with the program participants in an academic sharing session. The preceding structured group activities were followed by small-group discussions. Each small group consisted of 14 to 15 secondary school students and was guided by three facilitators. In these small groups, the secondary school students had more opportunity to share their views and interact with the facilitators as well as ask questions and seek advice on academic matters, such as learning strategies and examinations. A motivational game called spiderweb was also conducted in the small-group sessions, which helped to boost motivation and promote teamwork among the students in each group. These planned activities were intended to help the students to be more motivated and prepared for their upcoming school examination and national examination.

After all the activities were completed, the students were asked to randomly reflect on the experience and knowledge they had obtained in the one-day program. They also read together a short oath prepared by the lecturers; this served as a promise that the students would study hard for their futures, families and country and always believe in their ability to succeed at their academic pursuits. Towards the end of the program, all participants were requested to complete a questionnaire, which measured their attitudes towards the one-day program in addition to their academic self-efficacy and current academic achievement. Feedback from the secondary school teachers and students was positive, and some of them expressed a wish for the program to be implemented again in the future with different groups of students. Before the program ended, all the secondary students gathered outside each school halls to witness the symbolic closing ceremony of the program, which entailed erecting a university plaque and planting a plant as symbols of the collaboration between the secondary schools and the university.

In each activity in the program, the researchers stressed the importance of attitude change elements, which were assumed to be influenced by the program sources (the lecturers and facilitators), the communication channels (video presentations, games, songs and group discussions) and the target group (secondary school students). The three elements of attitude (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) were highlighted when delivering messages to the secondary school students to ensure that motivational messages could be understood by the participants. The researchers' approach was based on a prominent persuasive communication theory put forth by Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953), which focused on 'who says what to whom and with what effect'. Applying this theory to the current study, 'who' refers to the sources (the

facilitators and lecturers), 'what' refers to the messages, 'to whom' refers to the secondary school students and 'with what effect' refers to the assessment of the structured group activities.

METHODS

Study Design

The survey method was used to collect data for this study. Participants were given a questionnaire consisting of three sections that measure students' demographic profile (e.g. age, gender, academic year, academic achievement), attitudes towards the achievement motivational program and academic self-efficacy.

Participants

Participants in the study included 268 secondary school students who joined the one-day achievement motivational programme. These students came from three different secondary schools located in Keningau, Papar and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The participants' ages ranged from 17 to 20 years.

Procedure

The purposive sampling technique that focused on secondary students from the three different schools was used in this study. Surveys were conducted in groups after all participants had completed the one day achievement motivation program. Before answering the surveys, participants were requested to read the instructions of the questionnaire. Once they completed it, the researcher then debriefed the participants.

Instruments

A questionnaire, consisting of three sections, was used in this study.

Section A: Demographic profile. This section of the questionnaire measured students' demographic profiles, including gender, academic level, ethnicity, number of siblings and current academic achievement.

Section B: Attitudes towards the achievement motivational program. This section of the questionnaire assessed students' attitudes towards the achievement motivational program as well as each motivational activity conducted during the one-day program. To measure the students' attitudes towards the motivational program, the three components (cognitive, affective and behavioural) of attitude were included in an attitude scale. An attitude scale is designed to provide a valid, or accurate, measure of an individual's social attitudes (McLeod, 2009). In this study, the attitude object was the achievement motivational program. Therefore, the items in the questionnaire focused on the content of the program that measured the beliefs, emotions and behaviours of the participants towards each activity in the one-day program, including the motivational talk, the academic sharing session, the video presentation, the small-group discussions and the self-reflection activity. The attitude scale used in this study was designed by

referring to the attitude scale employed by Jacobs and Chase (1989) in their previous study that measured students' attitudes towards school activities. The researchers of the current study believed that engagement in each activity comprised within the motivational program would induce positive attitudes towards the program. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert-type response scale, where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 5 denoted 'strongly agree'.

Section C: Academic self-efficacy

Section C measured students' academic self-efficacy. The Academic self-efficacy scale consists of three items which measure academic self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2005.) There were three items in Section C, one of which was 'I can do even the hardest homework if I try'. The scale employed a four-point Likert-type response scale from 1 Not True to 4 Very True. The items to measure achievement motivation were as following, 'I can do even the hardest homework if I try,' and 'I can figure out difficult homework'. This scale assesses student beliefs about personal abilities to complete schoolwork successfully.

FINDINGS

The mean age of the participants was 17.26 years (SD = .69). Of the 268 secondary school students who took part in this study, 94 were male, 173 were female and one did not report gender. The participants in this program consisted of 38 secondary school students from the students participated in the motivational program in School A (96 students); school B (134 students) and school C (134 students). The majority of participants (147) reported Kadazandusun ethnicity (54.90%), followed by other ethnicities, including 85 Bruneian (31.70%) and 8 Bugis (3%); the ethnicities reported by other participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants' Demographic Profiles (N=268)

Variables	Number	Percentage
District		
Papar	135	50.40
Keningau	96	35.80
Kota Kinabalu	20	5.43
Tuaran	7	2.61
Kota Belud	4	1.49
Kudat	2	0.74
Ranau	1	0.37
Missing	3	
Number of participants in each school		
School A	96	35.80
School B	134	50.00
School C	38	14.20

Table 1 (continued)

Participants' Demographic Profiles (N=268)

Number of students in each school		
Kadazandusuns	147	54.90
Bruneian	85	31.70
Bugis	8	3.0
Bajau	5	1.9
Rungus	5	1.9
Malay	4	1.5
Chinese	3	2.10
Bisaya	2	.7
Tidung	2	.7
Kedayan	2	.7
Banjar	1	.5
Iban	1	.5
Jawa	1	.5
Murut	1	.5
Missing	1	.5
Number of Siblings		
1–5 siblings	172	64.18
6–10 siblings	88	32.84
10–15 siblings	6	2.24
Missing	2	0.75

The reliability value for academic self-efficacy was .58 and the attitude towards achievement motivational program was .78. Our study shows that students' attitudes towards an achievement motivational program have an effect on their academic self-efficacy.

Table 2 A Simple Regression Analysis of the Effects of Attitude Towards Achievement Motivational Program on Academic Achievement

Predictor	Academic self-efficacy		
	R ²	β	Sig
Attitudes towards Achievement Motivational Program	.25	.16	.01

The students' attitudes towards the achievement motivational program contributed 2.5% of the variance on their academic self-efficacy ($\beta = .16$, $t_{(268)} = 2.60$, $p = .01$) (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The study findings show that the one-day program increased students' academic self-efficacy in various ways, such as believing that they can complete the hardest academic tasks if they try, that they can learn new things taught in school and that they can figure out difficult homework assignments. It is suggested that the achievement motivational program be implemented in schools to increase students' academic self-efficacy. We believe that this type of program may help increase students' academic self-efficacy in the long-term. According to Redding and Walberg (2012), the strength of motivation can be measured by a person's willingness to engage in an activity and to persist in it. Mixing and interacting with university students and lecturers through activities during the motivational program might also help to increase students' academic self-efficacy. Motivation in education can have several effects on how students learn and how they behave towards subject matter (Tohidi, & Jabbari, 2011).

The participants' positive attitudes towards the achievement motivational program may have contributed significantly to their subsequent academic self-efficacy because all activities in the program focused on the elements of cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviours that complemented the activities and skills they had already learned in school activities. The presence of university students who played roles as facilitators may have inspired the secondary school students to perform better in their academic endeavours and to follow the university students' footsteps in pursuing their academic goals. In addition, through the academic sharing session and small-group discussions, the secondary school students gained better insight about their learning skills, study tips and academic challenges, which may help to boost the secondary school students' motivation to be competent and excel in their academic pursuits. When students feel positive about their academic abilities, more ambitious challenges are pursued, which characterizes self-efficacy. In contrast, when self-efficacy is in doubt, failure is to be expected as an obvious result (Ford & Roby, 2013).

Involvement in structured activities that aim to increase students' achievement motivation can boost students' academic aspirations and help them perform better in academic endeavours. As stated by Jacobs and Chase (1989), students who are involved in school activities appear to have higher educational aspirations. These students are more likely to be in an academic or college preparatory curriculum and to have plans to pursue a college degree. Students in secondary schools face tremendous pressure to perform well in their examinations and attain high grades. The excess pressure on the student in order to get higher marks in the exams may create a feeling of fear if he is unable to get high marks as required by parents. This may lead to the academic failure (Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015).

Therefore, the support and guidance offered to students in the one- day program through participation in structured activities, such as discussing academic matters and playing motivational games with facilitators, may have helped to relieve the students' academic stress.

CONCLUSIONS

Motivational programs for students may enhance the way students perceive their academic competencies. The researcher believe that, in the long term, academic self-efficacy may help students to perform better in all their academic endeavours. Therefore, it is suggested that educational programs, such as the achievement motivational program used in this study, be implemented in other schools as these programs may help increase positive beliefs and behaviour in education among students. When implementing an educational academic program, such as a motivational program, collaboration between secondary schools and institutions of higher education should be developed to lighten the workload of secondary school teachers. A motivational program led by and university students not only helps secondary school students to be motivated, but also gives all parties the opportunity to understand the importance of the motivational component of academic life. In addition, university students have the opportunity to interact with the off-campus community rather than only with people within their academic web at university.

It is hoped that the findings in this study will create awareness within education departments, parent-teacher associations, schools and universities of the importance of organising more achievement motivational programs to help secondary school students be prepared for academic challenges, which may at times increase in line with the new academic revolution in Malaysia. To motivate secondary school students, educators cannot rely only on secondary schools; rather, educators need to work collaboratively with various organizations to assist secondary schools in enhancing students' achievement motivation as they prepare themselves to pursue their academic and career goals.

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