



Academic motivation and information literacy self-efficacy: The importance of a simple desire to know



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ABSTRACT

Considered essential to lifelong learning, information literacy skills and information literacy self-efficacy are associated with higher levels of student academic motivation. However, little is known about the interrelationships between the different types of academic motivation and information literacy self-efficacy. This study investigates the relationships between these constructs. Data were collected using a questionnaire comprising existing scales. The questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students in an Australian higher education institution with a response rate of 58%, resulting in 585 completed questionnaires. Both intrinsic and extrinsic academic motivation were found to be positively related to information literacy self-efficacy, while amotivation was negatively related. The most important predictor of information literacy self-efficacy was intrinsic motivation to know. Overall, all academic motivation types increased over time, including, unexpectedly, amotivation. Differences were apparent by gender. The need for higher education institutions to actively identify academically amotivated students and facilitate intrinsic academic motivation is discussed.

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1. Introduction

Educational systems are charged with teaching students how to educate themselves throughout their lifetime beyond the confines of formal education (Bandura, 1997). More particularly, universities and other higher education institutions are expected to be facilitators of lifelong learning, as well as discipline-based knowledge and skills (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994). Argued to be central to the development of lifelong learning are information literacy (Candy et al., 1994; Price, Becker, Clark, & Collins, 2011) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Although few studies consider information literacy and self-efficacy in combination, a relationship between these constructs has been established in the literature (e.g., Carson, 1993; Kurbanoglu, 2003). The resultant information literacy self-efficacy construct has been associated with higher levels of motivation in students (Pinto & Sales, 2010) and also with academic success (Bayram & Comek, 2009; Pajares, 1996, 2003). However, there are very few studies that examine the interrelationships between general academic motivation and undergraduate students' more specific information literacy self-efficacy, which is important for facilitating lifelong learning. This study explores the influence of general academic motivation among university students on levels of information literacy self-efficacy, as a specific outcome of the undergraduate education process.

2. Literature review

2.1. Information literacy

To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information (American Library Association, 1989) within an environment of rapid technological change (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000). This broad definition suggests that information literacy (IL) can be viewed as a set of competencies that both enable individuals to identify the problem of lack of information and provide an understanding as to how to address this. People who are information literate are thought to be prepared for lifelong learning (Candy et al., 1994) because they have the ability to find relevant information required for any task or decision at hand (American Library Association, 1989).

To some extent, education systems have viewed IL as a separate subject area, reliant on the teaching resources embedded within the operations of a library (Campbell, 2008; Ferguson, 2009; Wright & McGurk, 2000). However, increasingly, IL is considered a core ingredient in the academic curriculum, and the development of IL competencies is thought to enhance student learning (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2005; Scales, Matthews, & Johnson, 2005; Virkus, 2003). Whereas the IL concept was initially associated with traditional education (Bruce, 1995), it has now developed beyond this and is associated with the development of individual competencies for learning and social responsibility (Boekhorst, 2003). Ahl (2006) argues that the development of

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these competencies is of increasing importance to industry and government. IL is considered to be an appropriate mechanism to facilitate the development of these competencies, as it enables individuals to learn how to evaluate, synthesize, and utilize information appropriately (Kurbanoglu, Akkoyunlu, & Umay, 2006), particularly in the current information-dense social context.

Despite the importance placed on the development of IL competencies, within the higher education (HE) sector, many students fail to acquire adequate IL skills by the completion of their academic programme (Holman, 2000; Maughan, 2001). For example, a study of approximately 3000 U.S. college undergraduate students revealed only 13% were considered information literate (Foster, 2006). This finding may reflect students' levels of broad academic motivation, which is considered an important antecedent in the development of IL competencies (Crow, 2007; Mortimore & Wall, 2009), while Bruce (2000) argues that a variety of factors, including self-efficacy and gender, may impact IL levels. Moreover, Bandura (1997) argues that self-efficacy is an independent predictor of student competency over and above capabilities, perhaps because self-efficacy predicts interest in and positive attitudes towards learning in general, whereas mere ability may not.

2.2. Self-efficacy

A central element in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy may be conceptualised as an individual's evaluation of their ability to successfully undertake actions designed to achieve desired goals (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b). A multidimensional construct, across activities and contexts self-efficacy can be conceptualised in terms of magnitude task difficulty, generality (transferability across activities) and strength (degree of performance certainty) (Bandura, 1977a). Self-efficacy relates to perceived future performance rather than actual performance (Zimmerman, 2000). However, prior successful mastery of an activity will likely have a positive impact on perceived future performance and hence result in a higher degree of self-efficacy for that activity. Bandura (1982, 1991) links self-efficacy to personal goal setting, suggesting that higher levels of self-efficacy lead to setting of greater personal challenges together with a greater sense of personal commitment and motivation to meet those challenges. Bandura (1999) argues that individuals "function as contributors to their own motivation, behaviour, and development within a network of reciprocally interacting influences" (p. 169). Kurbanoglu (2003, 2009) suggests that individuals who exhibit a lack of confidence in their abilities (low self-efficacy), and who actively avoid challenging activities, are less inclined to develop the IL competencies that promote lifelong learning, whereas individuals exhibiting high self-efficacy are more likely to develop these competencies. Bandura (1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as being "concerned not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances" (p. 37). Moreover, Bandura contends that people with strong expectancy of mastery of a set of skills, that is, high self-efficacy, will continue to persist in their coping efforts in the face of obstacles and disconfirming evidence (i.e., weaker performance) and therefore will be more likely to succeed.

As motivation in humans is a cognitively generated construct (Bandura, 1993), self-efficacy is therefore a particularly powerful force for the determination and regulation of motivation levels (Bandura, 1991; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Within the education sector, and given its strong links to motivation (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1992), self-efficacy has generated considerable interest (Kurbanoglu, 2003; Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). Although detailed understanding of the complex relationships between broad academic motivation in a higher education context and self-efficacy within the specific IL domain remains limited, gender differences are often reported (Pajares, 2003). As facilitating lifelong learning is regarded as an important IL success indicator (Candy et al., 1994) and self-efficacy has been found to be a central construct in motivating

lifelong learning (Bandura, 1986), the relationship between these constructs is theoretically sound.

2.3. Self-regulation and self-determination theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) conceptualises an approach to self-motivation that focuses on personality development and behavioural self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that self-motivation is influenced by the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy as well as social environment. Self-determination theory is considered one of the most useful theories for understanding an individual's motivation levels (Gagne & Deci, 2005) and, as such, has received considerable attention across many research contexts (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

Several types of motivation have been identified, notably autonomous motivation (intrinsic), controlled motivation (extrinsic), and lack of motivation (amotivation) (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). Ryan and Deci (2000) conceptualised these motivations as a continuum with autonomous motivation (intrinsic motivation) and lack of motivation (amotivation) as end points, and controlled motivation (extrinsic motivation) as more or less a midpoint. Intrinsic motivation, defined as the tendency to seek out challenges and explore in order to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000), reflects the pleasure and satisfaction derived from the experience of engaging in an activity for its own sake (Walker et al., 2006). Further defining the intrinsic motivation construct, Vallerand et al. (1992) draw distinction between intrinsic motivation to know (i.e., performance based on an enjoyment of learning), intrinsic motivation to accomplish (i.e., performance based on the satisfaction from accomplishment in learning), and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (i.e., performance based on intellectual or physical stimulation) (Fairchild, Horst, Finney, & Barron, 2005).

Amotivation describes a lack of motivation to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The amotivated individual may perceive a sense of futility in their actions (Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Seligman, 1975), lack confidence (Bandura, 1986), or find an activity to be without value (Ryan, 1995). Extrinsic motivation, autonomous although subject to some form of external influence (Deci & Ryan, 1985a), reflects behaviour more reliant on external demands or rewards through a sense of obligation or as a means to an end (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan (1985a) distinguish between different types of extrinsic motivation including external regulation (i.e., regulated through external reward/punishment), introjected regulation (i.e., regulated through internal reward/punishment in combination with some external influence), identified regulation (i.e., external regulation although considered personally important) and integrated regulation (i.e., similar to intrinsic motivation but pursued for external reasons) as varying in the degree of self-determination evident.

Developing an understanding of academic-based motivation has been of particular interest within the higher education domain (e.g., Bong & Clark, 1999; Dekker & Fischer, 2008). Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of motivation to academic achievement and performance (e.g., Ferrer-Caja & Weiss, 2000; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2006; Vallerand et al., 1992) and to the acquisition of IL skills (e.g., Fairchild et al., 2005; Kuhlthau, 2004; Walker et al., 2006). Both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (integrated regulation) have been linked to positive academic performance (Deci et al., 1991). Benware and Deci (1984) found that students who engaged with course material with the expectation of teaching it to other students maintained higher levels of intrinsic motivation and displayed greater conceptual understanding than those students who learned material solely for testing purposes. Additionally, Ross, Perkins, and Bodey (2013) reported that female students tended to be more extrinsically motivated than male students and that male students tended to be more amotivated than female students.

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