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CULTURAL ORIENTATION, LEARNING PROCESSES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG CULTURALLY DIFFERENT COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The paper presents a theoretical research conducted as part of the doctoral thesis of one of the authors, Ms. Sawsan Shalaby. In this study we presented some theoretical aspects of the influence of culture on academic achievements and life satisfaction. More specifically, the paper presents a theoretical introduction to a future exploratory empirical study, on the influence of cultural membership of Arab and Jewish college students to their culture on some of learning outcomes of the subjects that belong to those two cultures. The main aim of the empirical study is to attempt to answer the question: To what extent does cultural orientation influence the learning process, the academic achievement and life satisfaction? It will also attempt to answer the question of the extent to which self-regulation contributes to the learning process and the improvement of academic achievement. This preliminary theoretical review focus on the factors like culture and learning, academic achievement, self-regulation in learning and learning processes.

1. Introduction

The State of Israel is heterogeneous and dynamic country in terms of population composition, following the absorption of immigrants from many different communities and cultures. The Israeli "cultural mosaic" highlighted ethnic, intellectual, personal, and cultural differences, which is a result of the political and social history of the region. In this culturally composite picture, beyond the other cultural differences that exist in Israeli society, the cultural particularities of two main culturally different groups are perhaps the most prominent: The Jewish majority and the Arab minority.

Some systematic comparisons between these two specific groups could be interesting because there are many factors involved, including cultural-ethnic, socio-economic, political and social factors. The main problems of cultural minorities are the marginalization and discrimination, not only in Israel. For example, the members of minority groups throughout the world are characterized by a lack of representation in the academic world, and those who are already entering it, usually exhibit lower achievements and performance than the members of the cultural majority groups. The cultural heterogeneity may therefore be expressed in differences in academic achievement, which can influence the individual's subjective well-being and his/her life satisfaction. Furthermore, the widespread expectation that academic education cure all the problems of social discrimination and marginalization of minorities is not realistic one, but, on the other hand, the academic education in non-discriminant settings could be a part of the solution to this social discrimination.

Research literature shows that cultural factors are related with teaching and learning (Ho & Hau, 2008). The empirical studies that examined the connection between cultural orientation and self-regulation in learning (SLR), and the finding indicated that socio-cultural and demographic orientations and characteristics influence the achievement, learning and individual's learning regulation (Pintrich, 2004). In this context, it is important to find theoretical and empirical evidences for the main aim of the study: To what extent does cultural orientation influence the learning process, academic achievement and life satisfaction? This theoretical study aims only to organize the research conducted in the last years on the key topics of the PhD thesis of one of the authors.

2. Literature Review

Culture and Learning

Culture is composed by a set of values, perceptions and beliefs shared by the members of social groups and play a key role in shaping perceptions, motifs and behavior of members of those groups.

Hofstede (1997) and Crock (2016) noted that certain cultural patterns of thought and behavior shapes our perceptions, reactions and our behavior from an early age, and that affect our interpretation of the reality that we based our decisions. We inherit these "cultural codes" from our ancestors and teachers and that influence us up to an advanced stage in life and sometimes for all life. Previous studies show culture is one of the factors that shape people's way of thinking and their behavior. It affects their thoughts, actions and feeling (Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Mori, Wang, & Peng, 2009). Cultural background also influences various dimensions of learning: perceptions of learning abilities, sense of self-efficacy, metacognitive regulation, understanding of learning process, learning and academic achievement

(Mih & Mih, 2010). In this context, the relationship between cultural orientation and self-regulated learning (SRL) it worth to be evaluate (Pintrich, 2004). The self-regulated learning refers to the way that the learner manages his learning and his environment, accordingly to the goals he set for himself. The cultural orientation represents one of the outcomes of a cultural background.

The studies that have examined learning related constructs and some cultural characteristics of the subjects indicated that socio-cultural orientations and demographic characteristics influences the achievements, learning and individual's learning regulation. In a comparative study examining the implementation of SRL by Korean students (who grew up in a collectivist culture) and the Filipinos (who grew up in an individualistic culture), it was found that socio-cultural factors, such as social expectations, values beliefs about higher education, and respect for authority explain the differences in student's self-regulation skills. The results of the study indicate the Filipinos have a higher level of cognitive, metacognitive and resource management skills than their Korean counterparts (Turingan & Yang, 2009).

In universities and colleges, students belonging to different cultures meet one another and in these circumstances they are exposed to (sometimes significant) differences between them in perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Students from different cultures face similar difficulties and obstacles in coping with the challenges posed by the exposure to the academic framework in terms of learning ability and academic achievement, but their emotional, cognitive and behavioral response differs. As a consequence, in order to understand the student's response to the various tasks and solicitations of the academic framework, it is very important to understand their culture. The unique profile of each culture is the result of different emphases which are given to the type of values in each different culture. The values dimensions are reflected by the various solutions accepted in a particular culture as a way of solving problems and achieving goals.

One of the bipolar dimensions of culture that explored by Hofstede in his cultural model (2001) is collectivism and individualism. These two cultural dimensions could influence the most the learning a lot of learning dimensions. A careful analyse the learning processes of individuals from different cultures shows significant differences in access to general and educational assignments, assessing situations, problems solving and dealing with new challenges. For example, in western cultures, students are focused in their learning process on understanding rather than memorization (Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996, as cited in Ho & Hau, 2008). In fact, this is one of the most effective learning strategy by which Western students are able to achieve higher quality results in their studies. On the other hand, studies conducted in China show that the useful strategy in achieving high quality results in studies is the combination of understanding and memorization (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Kun, 1996, as cited in Ho & Hau, 2008). If so, cultures differ in how they represent and approach learning and this is related with different social and educational issues. Also, cultures differ in their situations assessing and problems solving approaches.

Academic achievement

According to Tao and Hong (2014), academic achievement may have different meanings, depending on the cultural-social context: For example, academic achievement in Western cultures is perceived as a result of personal effort. People formulate goals that focus on their personal needs, individual interests, and individual preferences. In contrast, in Chinese culture, academic achievement is

perceived as a social effort, the personal academic achievement is represented as a means of achieving wealth, power, fame and respect for the family, and not just acquiring knowledge.

Veas, Castejo'n, Gilar, and Minano (2015) claimed that some intellectual and nonintellectual factors such intellectual ability, self-concept, goal orientations and learning strategies have a great predictive effect in college students' academic achievement. Also, Jeynes (2005) and Zuffianò et al. (2013) concluded in their studies that identification and understanding of the personal, motivational and contextual predictors are essential to improving the conduct of the students in the school or in any educational framework. In addition, according to research literature, academic achievement and academic behavior of learners are closely related to their motivation (Yeung & McInerney, 2005). Also, Ali, McInerney, Carven, Yeug, and King (2014) believe that motivation is the important factor influencing student's academic achievement.

Learning Process

The learning process often points to a method of systematic and traditional learning (Frumos & Labăr, 2013). It is a process that every student undergoes during his learning. It requires cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral and motivational abilities. According to cognitive-social theory of learning, cognitive processes of self-regulation which occur mediate between the learner's previous experience and his actual behavior (Bandura, 1991). It is reasonable to assume that the learning process is influenced by personal, cultural and social factors, also by factors were related to the environment in which the student was grew up and educated.

The research literature points to two main models in the field of educational psychology, which are used to explore students' learning processes: (SRL- Self-Regulated Learning) and (SAL- Student Approaches to Learning). Both models include complex structures of actions implemented to achieve students' learning goals, but the ways to measure it are different (Rotgans, 2010).

Self-Regulation in Learning:

Self-Regulation Learning (SRL) is a concept that relates to the way which the learner manages his learning and his environment, accordingly to the goals he sets for himself (Pintrich, 2004). Others believed that self-regulation is a complex structure, that includes the ability to control and organize an individual's actions, cognition and feelings, it also includes resource management and goal setting, selecting appropriate learning strategies, maintaining motivation, deep cognitive involvement, monitoring and evaluating the learner's academic progress (Vukman & Licardo, 2010; Cazan, 2013).

The interest in the field of SRL has increased with the emergence of psychological research which deal with the self-control of children and adults (Zimmerman, 2001), with emphasis on the importance of autonomy to promote and raise the learner's awareness of the importance to take responsibility for his learning process (Turingan & Yang, 2009). Many studies have focused on identifying self-regulatory processes in learning, and their relationship to motivational components and academic success. These studies stressed with the cognitive, metacognitive and motivational strategies that could contribute to the student abilities to direct and manage his own learning, and also to achieve their desired academic attainment (Zimmerman, 2002). There is agreement regarding the central impact of self-regulation on learning, and on the construction of knowledge in and out of school (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006). Other

studies have shown that self-efficacy is a central component of the individual's motivation dimension during self-regulation of his learning (Vukman & Licardo, 2010).

Ryan and Deci (2000) believed that students with high self-regulating are motivated to engage in learning activities independently; they also experienced a sense of choosing appropriate strategies for the learning tasks they were facing, they experiencing autonomous coping and a desire to act and invest while engaged in targeted academic activity. Other studies show that self-regulation have a significant contribution to academic achievement. The students who engage in self-regulation processes will achieve a greater success at school (Pintrich, 2000; as cited in Vukman & Licardo, 2010). If so, students who succeed in conducting self-regulation in learning are reporting a high level of academic satisfaction, and they are more likely to face significant challenges (Miller, 2015). It can be concluded that self-regulation in learning has a significant and decisive contribution to the student's academic functioning and to the activities they perform in their learning process.

Satisfaction

Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) argued satisfaction is perceived as a person's subjective assessment of his life and may also be influenced by ethical and cultural worldviews. According to the literature, many studies have focused on determining the most powerful predictors of personal well-being and life satisfaction, as well as factors such as demographic and cultural characteristics, life circumstances, genetics, personality and temperament that can clearly explain the subjective well-being of the individual (Diener & Scollon, 2014; Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Another research finding indicated that personality variables such as self-esteem, optimism, and positive emotional experiences are more likely to predict life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; as cited in Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999). In addition, the relationship between satisfaction and well-being, at the level of individualized differences, was supported empirically. Those who reported high satisfaction of needs felt better about themselves, and this was related to high self-esteem (Deci et al., 2001; as cited in Chen et al., 2015), and in general they satisfied with their lives (Kasser & Ryan, 1999; as cited in Patrick, Canevello, Knee, & Lonsbary, 2007), similar findings were reported in the field of education (Mouraditis, Vansteenkiste, Sideridis, & Lens, 2011). Various studies have shown that cultural differences in satisfying basic psychological needs, and personal well-being can be explained by the distinction between individualism and collectivism (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; Triandis, 1995; as cited in Scott, Ciarrochi, & Deane, 2004). It should be added that various findings of studies in the field of culture indicate that culture contributes to shaping the goals and values of people, and this also affects the level of well-being (Diener & Ryan, 2009). If so, it can be concluded that achieving personal goals is one of the reasons for self-fulfilment and personal sense of well-being.

3. Research Method

Theoretical research: In this study we presented some theoretical aspects of the influence of culture on academic achievements.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

From the literary background, we concluded that the process of self-regulation in learning have a significant contribution to the success of the learning process, and to the advancement of academic achievements in and outside the school (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006). It is also possible to add that the individual who reports on himself who has an individualistic orientation, his self-regulatory process will be positive and will help him in his learning process. This will be expressed in achieving his goals, including positive academic achievements that have active implications on life satisfaction and subjective well-being, which will give the student an opportunity to broaden his horizons and continue, realize his dreams.

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