

PERCEIVED ASSESSEMENT STYLE AND LEARNING MOTIVATION

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Abstract: *The assessment behaviour of the teacher plays a key role in giving students feedback on their performance and enhancing learning motivation. According to orientation of the evaluation and the level of exigency, four assessment styles are described: normative, formative, popular and conventional.*

The research was conducted on 394 students aged 16-18 years, 253 girls and 141 boys, in 16 classes of upper higher secondary schools in the city of Brasov, and the chosen subject was English language. The perceived evaluative styles of five teachers were measured, by students in 2-3 classes for each of them, in relationship with their learning motivation.

The results show that the extrinsic motivation- reward is associated with the perception of the style as lenient, the perceived performance is associated with norm-oriented. There are differences between the evaluative style perceptions of the students in the same class according to their learning performances.

Key words: *assessment styles, motivation, learning performances.*

1. Introduction

Evaluation is a component of the teaching activity having pedagogical functions, such as the fixing teaching process, regulating students' learning and influencing their personalities. At the same time the evaluation has social functions, such as ensuring formal validation of the knowledge/competence and establishment of social safety by a fair hierarchy of the competences (Figari, 2006). Evaluation is never totally rational (Vial, 2006) it has controllable and incontrollable determinants configured in a particular evaluative style which is a component of the learning environment.

Pedagogical practices of teachers influence students' motivation; the structure of the goals proposed to students could be focused on competence and

mastery or on performance, but only the pursuit of competence and mastery is associated with the involvement of the student in learning (Galand, 2006). An educational environment which is not focused on external rewards, punishments and pressure and which proposes moderate difficulty tasks facilitates the adoption of mastery goals and the development of intrinsic motivation. There is a relationship between the structure of goals proposed to students and the teacher–student relationship: performance goals induce feelings of threat, inequity, tensions, competition, but there are differences of gender, age, type of school in this respect (Galand, Philippot & Frenay, 200).

Modern approaches of the learning motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Pintrich, 1999) focused on three general

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types of motivation: the self-efficacy beliefs (judgments of one's capabilities to do the academic task), the task value beliefs (beliefs about the importance of interest in, and value of the task), and goal orientations (whether the focus is on mastery and learning of the task, grades or extrinsic reasons for doing the task, or relative ability in relation to social comparisons with other students).

Viau (2000) uses a model of motivation encompassing the following dimensions: perceived value of the activity, perceived of self-competency in learning tasks, perceived task control, persistence, cognitive involvement, performance, and choice of activity. Amabile (1996) uses a bi dimensional model of activity: intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, with four subscales, two intrinsic (Pleasure and Challenge) and two extrinsic (Acknowledgement and Reward).

Assessment style and its implications

The assessment style is defined (Cocorada, 2004) as a pattern of knowledge, attitudes and procedures coherently expressed at behavioural level as an effect of the principles, norms, and methods of evaluation which are adopted by the educator/ teacher in a particular situation. The author proposes a bi-dimensional model of the evaluation styles, with the axis: orientation of the evaluation (towards persons vs. norms) and level of exigency (high/ over-particular vs. low/ lenient). It results four styles: normative, formative, popular and conventional. Teachers try intentionally to adapt their evaluation behaviour to educational aims, establishing and consequently developing the evaluation strategies. For example, in the frame of formative evaluation strategy, teacher considers the needs, difficulties and the potential of student, while in the summative evaluation strategy he considers norms and standards in order to ensure the comparability of results.

The normative style – The main guiding values in evaluation are "rules", "work" and "necessity". Teacher classifies students, gives frequent or difficult evaluation tasks, and maintains stable assessment criteria and a high "cutting point". He strictly penalizes errors and considers performance as resulting from student's effort and involvement. He shows emotional neutrality and poor empathy. For him, student is rather labelled by grades than perceived as a person.

The formative style - The main guiding values in evaluation are "liberty" and "responsibility". The teacher considers the needs of the students, adapts the objectives, has flexible standards, has in view the progress of the students, but is not lenient. The cutting point is kept high, but he encourages the students to get over it.

The popular style - Teacher tends towards a relativism of values; he presents himself as a generous person. He tries not to be stressful, avoids difficult objectives, gives easy evaluation tasks, the cutting point is kept low. He/she diminishes the importance of errors and considers results depending on circumstances. He is empathic, very popular with students, overestimates them, requires less effort, and avoids conflicts with students or their families. The cosy climate covers on the underachievement of objectives.

The conventional style - Teacher focuses on conventions such as syllabus, objectives, but standards are of medium importance. He makes evaluations because it is necessary in order to avoid conflicts with school authority or students' parents. The evaluation tasks are of medium difficulty, with rigid criteria and simple evaluation technique. He/she shows poor empathy and does not make personalized assessments. He/she avoids encouraging students too much and feels good when succeeds to be correct in giving rewards and punishments.

According to Galand (2006) and Galand, Philippot & Frenay (2006) the structure of goals proposed to students and the teacher–students relationship influences the learning motivation of students and is involved in generating educational climate. The teacher’s assessment style plays a key role in this mechanism.

The Lewis’s theory (1947) on the perceptual field identifies a connection between students’ perception (climate) and their learning performances (apud Seeman & Seeman, 1976). The dynamics of student's learning leads to readiness for activity as determined by the type and force of the motive, expectancy and incentive value of acting, all put together in a multiplicative relationship (Atkinson and Feather, 1966).

The relationship between the evaluator and evaluated student is moderated by the student’s perception of the teacher in the evaluation situation. Even there is a "core of truth" in social cognition (Yserbit & Schadron, 2002) the perceptions of the students are inevitably distorted by individual and situational factors. Thus, the same teacher gets different labels and issues various reactive attitudes.

2. Research Design

The general objective of the research is to identify the relationship between perceived assessment styles and the students’ learning motivation.

After ensuring them of the confidentiality of their answers, the students were asked to fill three questionnaires – the first concerning the perceptions on the evaluation style of the English teacher, and the last two concerning their learning motivation. All participants received in exchange for their participation a written feedback consisting in descriptions of their motivational characteristics.

2.1. Hypotheses

Four subordinate hypotheses were derived:

H1. The perception of the teacher's assessment style varies according to the motivational dominant themes in students.

H2. The perception of the teacher's assessment style varies according to the grades students received on the topic.

H3. The asserted learning motivation varies according to the grades students received on the topic.

H4. The learning motivation of the students varies according to gender.

2.2. Instruments

The instruments used in the research were the following:

1. Perceived Assessment Style Inventory – PASI (Cocorada, 2004) – a set of 42 items consisting in forced choice between 2 opposite answers, describing behaviours specific to each of the poles of the assessment dimensions: “Orientation of the evaluation” (towards persons vs. towards norms) and “Level of exigency” (high/over-particular vs. low/lenient).

The internal consistencies (Cronbach α) of the four scales of the new version are the following: orientation of the assessment towards persons – 0.45, orientation of the assessment towards norms -0.54, High level of exigency -0.46 and low level of exigency -0.56.

Example of item: When evaluating, the teacher: a) is impartial as the goddess of justice; b) has a generous heart.

2. Intrinsic-Extrinsic Learning Motivation Scale – IELMS (adapted from Amabile, 1996) - a set of 30 items consisting in evaluation on a 4-step scale of the intensity of motivation. The internal consistencies (Cronbach α) of the four scales of the new version are the following: Extrinsic motivation Reward - 0.60; Extrinsic motivation Acknowledgement - 0.67, Intrinsic motivation-Pleasure - 0.71 and Intrinsic motivation-Challenge -0.74.

Intrinsic motivation is associated with positive emotional experiences success, high self-esteem, and effective learning strategies (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield, 1994).

Example of items:

I would rather prefer to have someone to set clear aims/objectives for my learning. More difficult a problem is, more I like to try to solve it.

3. Learning Motivation Questionnaire – LMQ, translated and adapted into Romanian from Viau (2000) consists in a set of 19 items with different types of answers, grouped on 6 dimensions of learning motivation. The internal consistencies (Cronbach α) of the six dimensions of the new version are the following: "Utility" - 0.51; "Competence" - 0.59; "Task control" - 0.29; "Persistence" - 0.54; "Cognitive involvement" - 0.65; "Performance" - 0.902.

Example of items: Generally, do you consider yourself as competent to succeed in school? Mark the number better corresponding to your self-perception. Higher the mark is, higher the competence is. 1 – not at all competent; 2 – less competent; 3 – competent; 4 – competent enough; 5 – very competent.

Task Control - the individuals with the strong sense of internal locus of control will be more likely to involve in academic tasks.

Perceived value of learning activity – the extent to which the learning is useful for the aims of the individual - is considered to be the reasoning the student makes on the utility of the activity with regard to objectives he set (Viau, 1997).

Perceived competence or "perceived self-efficacy" (Bandura, 2003) is a crucial variable for the cognitive involvement and for the performance in a given task.

Perceived performances are observable results of learning, i.e. behaviours that indicate the use of either declarative or procedural knowledge, either learning or self-regulation strategies by the student

Persistence – the time the student assigns to learning activities. Persistence is a good predictor for performance, but, in order to lead to quality results, it is necessary to be accompanied by effort and cognitive involvement.

2.3 Sample

The unrandom sample consisted in 394 students aged 16-18 years, 253 girls and 141 boys, in 16 classes of upper higher secondary schools in the city of Brasov. The teachers evaluated in the research were 4 English teachers, 4 female and 1 male. Their evaluation style was assessed by students in 3-4 classes for each.

3. Results

The personal data of the subjects were solicited by items that looked at age, gender, and the average grades for English.

H1. The perception of the teacher's assessment style varies according to the motivational dominant themes in students.

The present research shows that the Lenient pole is associated positively with Extrinsic Motivation, and negatively with the perceived value of learning activity and the perceived performance (Table 1).

The student's perception of performance is influenced by the teacher's behaviour: the more the teacher is focused on norms, cutting points and student's responsibility, the more the last one perceives his own performance as poor and assigns less time for learning (persistence). The students which perceive the evaluation style as over-particular feel frustrated, have lower grades and are extrinsically motivated, the exigencies of the teacher being incongruent with their personality.

Table 1 *Correlations between perceived dimensions of the assessment style and motivational themes*

| | Extrinsic Motivation-Reward (Amabile) | Perceived value of learning activity (Viau) | Perceived performance Viau) |
|--|--|--|------------------------------------|
| Lenient (versus Over-particular) | $r = 0.108, p = 0.031$ | $r = -0.117, p = 0.02$ | |
| Person-oriented (versus Norm-oriented) | | | $r = -0.147, p = 0.004$ |

H2. The perception of the teacher's assessment style varies according to the grades students received on the topic

The "high-grade" students perceive in a larger extent the teachers as being over-particular, norm oriented than the "low-grade" students (Table 2 and Table 3). The

students with high grades accept the high standards of the teacher ($r = -0.244, p = 0.001$) because these are congruent with personal attributes and objectives/ aims. Our results are congruent with those of Schmuck (1980) and Good (1980).

Table 2 *t test for the significance of independent sample differences for the four poles of the assessment styles*

| | Groups by average grades on topic | N | Mean | t | Sig. |
|-----------------|--|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Person oriented | Low graders* | 123 | 11.68 | 4.07 | 0.001 |
| | High graders** | 271 | 10.45 | | |
| Norm oriented | Low graders | 123 | 9.32 | 4.07 | 0.001 |
| | High graders | 271 | 10.55 | | |
| Lenient | Low graders | 123 | 12.41 | 3.28 | 0.001 |
| | High graders | 271 | 11.41 | | |
| Over-particular | Low graders | 123 | 8.59 | 3.28 | 0.001 |
| | High graders | 271 | 9.59 | | |

*Low-graders: under $m - 1\sigma$; **High-graders: over $m + 1\sigma$.

There is a slight tendency of differentiation of the perceived assessment style according to gender: the girls tend to perceive the teacher's evaluation style as being rather norm-focused, while the boys perceive it as person-focussed ($t = 1.9, p = 0.058$).

There are significant differences of perception between students in

"mathematics-computer science" and "environment protection" programmes.

The students in the first programme perceive the teachers as being over-particular ($t = 6.93, p = 0.001$) and norm-oriented ($t = 3.31, p = 0.001$), while the students in the second one perceive them as being more lenient and person-oriented.

Table 3 *t* test for the significance of independent sample differences for two assessment styles

| Perceived assessment styles | Groups by average grades on topic | N | Mean | t | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|-------|-----------------|
| Populist Style | Low graders* | 123 | 24.0894 | 4.543 | 0.000 |
| | High graders** | 271 | 20.0406 | | |
| Normative Style | Low graders | 123 | 17.9106 | 4.542 | 0.000 |
| | High graders | 271 | 21.9594 | | |

*Low-graders: under $m-1\sigma$; **High-graders: over $m+1\sigma$.

H3. The asserted motivation varies according to the grades students received on the topic.

Students with good performances in English perceive themselves as being more

competent, more persistent, with higher perceived competence (Table 4).

The present research did not identify variances of the perceived value of learning and extrinsic motivation – reward according to the grades in English.

Table 4 *Correlations between students' average grade in English and dominant motivational themes*

| | Perceived competency (Viau) | Perseverance (Viau) | Perceived performance (Viau) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Average grade in English | $r = 0.294$ $p = 0.001$ | $r = 0.220$ $p = 0.001$ | $r = 0.433$ $p = 0.001$ |

H4. The learning motivation of the students varies according to gender.

The scores for the dimensions of motivation were significantly higher for girls than for boys for the following dimensions:

- Perceived value (utility) of learning ($t=5.66$, $p < .001$);
- Personal competency ($t = 3.7$, $p < .001$);
- Persistence ($t = 7.23$, $p < .001$);
- Cognitive engagement ($t = 6.04$, $p < .001$).

The annual average grades in English were also significantly higher for girls than for boys ($t = 7.21$, $p < .001$). The study confirms the results of other researches (such as Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992, apud Viau, 1997) in which the perceived

performance positively influences the actual performance ($r = 0,433$, $p = 0,000$).

The results of our research confirm the previous studies which concluded that the beliefs about competence are influenced by gender stereotypes (Eccles, Wigfield, 2002).

4. Conclusion

The student with poor grades in English and who perceives the evaluation style as over-particular aims to maintain a positive image in the eyes of others and to avoid blame; he will prefer the lenient style. For him, the core steak of success is social acknowledgement. Elliot (ap. Bourgeois, 2006) asserted that the negative effects of performance objectives are the loss of

social esteem; the student tends to adopt the strategy of least risk, avoiding any involvement in situations which could affect his self image and self esteem.

The researches of Pintrich *et al.* (ap. Viau, 1997) prove that more a student believes that he possesses the competences needed for a learning task, more he will persist and will be cognitively involved, even if he find the task difficult or boring, and he will have higher performances.

For the student, the performance becomes a source of influence for the perceptions concerning the self, which are related to the motivation. The effect of the performance on the perceptions of the student may be a positive one, if he is satisfied with his achievements. When succeeding, the student will improve his opinion on his competence and will value more the learning activity.

It is difficult, however, to have an objective measurement of all the evaluative behaviours of the teacher during the year. Accepting this idea involves that teacher's modulation in the evaluative style is actually a strategy. This strategy is good for the formative evaluation, but not for the summative evaluation, in which grading must be based on standards that ensure comparability of the students' performances.

The variance of the perception of the assessment styles could be attributed to perceptual selectivity in students. This could be influenced by internal variables such as gender, dominant motivation themes, and actual school performance.

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