

The Efficacy of a Counseling Program in Stimulating the Academic Achievement of a Student with Learning Difficulties (A Case Study)

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Abstract

This study aimed at identifying the impact of a counseling program in stimulating the achievement motivation for a student with learning difficulties who suffers from low-level performance motivation. Thus, he was observed and notes were documented around his situation, knowledge, attitudes and self-concept, then his performance was examined during a whole semester in which he was exposed to an educational counseling program for increasing his achievement motivation within specific intervals and this program was executed in the educational counseling room of his school. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of this study, both the diagnostic and the remedial, revealed that the students suffers from low-level motivation towards achievement and performance, and in need for a clear self-concept. Moreover, the study showed that the implemented counseling program was effective in motivating the student and increasing his academic achievement.

Key words: Counseling Program, Academic Achievement, Student with learning difficulties

1-Preface:

Looking for the incentive forces that reveal and direct the learner's behavior is a very important issue for the process of learning and teaching. Thus, motivation is an essential condition on which depends the accomplishment of the educational goals within all the learning aspects, either in gaining knowledge and information (the cognitive aspect), or in forming attitudes and values (the affective aspect), or in shaping the skills that follow the practice and training factors (the motor aspect).

The term of motivation reefers to a group of interior and exterior conditions that stimulate the individual for achieving his needs and restoring balance when lost. Incentives have 3 basic functions in behavior: awakening, activating and directing it as well as sustaining it until needs are satisfied and balance is restored. This term also indicates an interior physiological-psychological case that stimulates the individual towards doing a certain behavior in a certain direction for achieving a certain goal, and when this goal is not accomplished, the individual feels stressed and confused until it is done (Abu-Hamama & Abd Al-Raheem & Al-Shohoumi, 2006).

McClelland (1985) states that the achievement motivation is a virtual origination which means the feeling that is connected to the evaluative performance where there is competition for Excellency, and that this feeling reflects 2 basic components: desire for success and fear from failure while the individual is doing his best and struggling for success, getting the best and excelling others.

Atkinson asserts that the tendency towards success is a learned issue that varies between individuals as well as for the individual in different situations. Also, this incentive is affected with 3 basic factors when the individual carries out a certain mission, and these factors are associated with the tendency towards success, the success possibilities that are related to the mission's difficulty and the value that motivates for success (Petri & Govern, 2004).

Ball (1977) adds that achievement motivation increases the individuals' ability to discipline themselves towards solving the problem, as well as enabling them to set out perfect plans to follow urgently so as to find solutions.

People with high motivation towards achievement usually enjoy the capacity to set out logic and reasonable future conceptions while thinking about the problems they are facing, and these are usually not complicated and achievable (Abu-Hamama & Abd Al-Raheem & Al-Shohoumi, 2006).

The 2 researchers see that high achievement motivation stands behind the deep thinking and cognitive processes, and that individuals exert all their energy for thinking and achievement when they are interiorly motivated. In this case, most individuals consider the problem their personal challenge, and the solution restores their cognitive balance and satisfies their interior needs, which will consequently improves and raises up their academic achievement which is originally a particular level of performance or proficiency in school work or proficiency in a particular skill or knowledge.

The incentive for achievement contributes to getting high performance levels for students without an exterior observation, and this is clear from the positive relationship between the achievement motivation, hard work and

good performance regardless the learners' intellectual abilities. Thus, the achievement motivation –as measured now- is a good way for predicting the academic achievement that is related to success or failure in future (Alawneh, 2004).

Motivation for learning is a distinguished case of general motivation which indicates an interior condition for the learner that drives him to be attentive to and engaged with the teaching process as well as persisting until learning takes place. Though, the mission of ensuring motivation for learning and increasing achievement is not only the responsibility of the school, but it is also a mission that the school and home shares as well as the other society institutions. Thus, achievement and performance motivation is closely connected to the social raising practices since the studies' results showed that the mothers of the children with high achievement motivation asserted the importance of independency for the child at home, whereas the mothers of the children who have low motivation didn't encourage their kids' independency (Qatami & Adass, 2002).

Individuals who have high level of achievement motivation work harder than others and achieve more successes in different situations of their life, and when comparing them with others who have low level of motivation but the same intellectual ability, it is noted that first group gets better marks in the speed test of doing mathematical and oral tasks, and problem solving. They also get higher marks in school and university, and achieve a notable progress in community. High-achievement motivated people are realistic in exploiting chances unlike those who have low motivation towards achievement who accept the simple reality or hope for one that is beyond their own ability for achievement (Santrock, 2003).

There are differences between the high and low achievement motivation people since the related researches' results revealed that those of high motivation are usually more successful at school and get promotions as well as prosperities in administering their business more than those of low motivation. Moreover, the highly- motivated people tend to choose missions that are medium in difficulty and challenging. They also avoid missions that are very difficult, may be because of high possibility of failure. Other features that characterize the highly motivated individuals are their strong desire for getting feedback concerning their performance, and hence they prefer missions and duties whose rewards are based upon the individual achievement, and they don't prefer duties whose rewards are equal (Alawneh, 2004).

2-Procedural Definitions:

Achievement motivation: it is defined as the degree the student gets when passing the achievement motivation test implemented in this study.

The high degree in this scale (88-140) indicates a high level of achievement motivation, whereas the low degree (35-87) indicates a low level of motivation, and the median is considered the point that divides the 2 levels.

Students of learning difficulties: the students who are seen as having a clear divergence between their actual abilities and their realistic achievement (Mercer, 1997). In this study, the student is defined as the one who is suffering from learning difficulties in normal schools in accordance to the classification principles followed in these schools, such as using the exams prepared by Princess Tharwat College that are related to the students' classification as having learning difficulties.

Academic achievement: it is defined as the average of marks the student gets after completing the studying courses, and in this case it is measured with the semester accumulative average.

Counseling program: it is defined as a group of organized procedures that rely upon theoretical assumptions derived from the motivation theories which directed the process of implementing the counseling techniques and activities presented to the student.

3-The importance of the study:

Motivation for achievement plays a serious significant role in raising the individual's performance and productivity level in different aspects and activities. That's what McClelland asserted when he noted that the level of any society's achievement motivation is the outcome of the way by which children are brought up in society. Thus, the importance of achievement motivation is clear not only for the individual and his academic achievement, but also for the society where he lives.

Based on that importance of motivation for achievement and its role in life, and in light of the lack in procedural studies –within the limits of researchers' knowledge- that discussed the issue of programs that develop the motivation towards achievement as a case study, this study came up to introduce a real case study where practical procedures are evident so as to get rid of the impact of low achievement motivation on academic achievement.

4-The problem & questions of the study:

Through the researcher's experience in educational counseling, and the cases where he interferes to assist some students, increase their motivation and improve their academic achievement, the researcher's perception of the

study problem was generated. This problem can be identified as there is a decrease in the students' motivation towards achievement. What reinforces that perception is the teachers' notes who were always complaining about that deficiency which was one of the most important reasons behind their suffering as well as their students'.

The researchers see that although there are many Arabic and Foreign studies which dealt with the features of students who suffer from learning difficulties, still there is scarcity in preparing and developing counseling programs that improve the achievement motivation of the students with learning difficulties within the Arabic environment in general, and the Jordanian environment in particular.

The first vision formed by the researchers is that there must be aspects and reasons that stand behind the decrease in motivation, some related to the learner, some related to the teacher, and the others are related to the parents. If we can unravel and define them, we can control them and reduce their impact. Thus, this study tries to answer the following 2 questions:

1. what are the aspects of the achievement motivation decrease for the student of learning difficulties who was selected as the case study?
2. what is the impact of the suggested counseling program in increasing motivation towards achievement and raising the academic performance for the student of learning difficulties?

5-Method & Procedures:

In the following paragraphs there is a description for the case study, the study tools and the procedures of gathering and analyzing data:

The sample of the study:

The sample of this study was restricted to one student who was chosen at the beginning of the 2nd semester of the year 2005/2006 when he was a 10th grade student at Al-Hashemieh Secondary school/Ajloun Educational Directorate. He was transferred to the counselor of the school because of his low academic achievement in most studying courses.

The tools of the study:

It included the following tools:

1. the scale of achievement motivation for Al-Reemawi: it is a scale that is featured with high validity and stability indicators since it enjoys the validity of structure and criterion. Its stability coefficient was (0.84). It is also characterized with its modernity, and its 35 items' inclusion. It contains virtual situations where a situation is needed to be chosen that fits the individual's case out of 4 expected situations by marking the proper section in the answer sheet with an (×). The method that was used in estimating the degrees of this test is the gradual degrees method where the phrases (A,B,C,D) were given the degrees (4,3,2,1) in order, so the marks' range on the achievement motivation test was from (35) to (140) points (Al-Reemawi, 2000).
2. the test of problem solving capacity: it is a test developed by the researcher, composed of (30) items, distributed as the following: (15) items for the sporting domain, (15) items for the social domain, and it enjoys high levels of stability and validity which were calculated and asserted using more than one method (Shawashreh, 2004).
3. the test of thinking pace: it is a test developed by the researcher also, and it measures the pace of cognitive processing during a specific time unit of 15 minutes. Its validity of structure and referees' was ensured, and its stability coefficient was (0.82) (Shawashreh, 1994).
4. formative achievement tests in different study courses for following the case progress and assessing the targeted student's response for the counseling program.
5. the educational counseling program: it was designed and established depending upon the principles of different motivation theories for the aim of stimulating the targeted student's motivation towards achievement which will consequently reflects on increasing his academic achievement. It included 3 dimensions:

First: the counseling techniques and the activities directed towards the student himself.

Second: meetings of the parents (father & mother).

Third: meetings of the members of teaching and administration faculty as well as the educational counselor at the school.

6-The case summary

The targeted student was born in the 5th of May, 1991, and he is now 15 years old. His family consists of 9 members, the father, the mother, and 7 children. He is the 6th child. The father works as a farmer after being retired from army, and his educational level is the 3rd preparatory -9th currently-, whereas the mother is illiterate, working as a housewife besides her work with her husband in farming. His brothers didn't complete their

secondary education, one of them works at army, 3 of them finished their compulsory education having no work, one sister is married and having no work, and the youngest brother is still at school.

The student's father says: " My son went to school when he was 7 years old, and since then I haven't visited his school" so as to enquire about him, and what concerns him is that his son gets older and joins army, mentioning that he is not interested whether he finishes his academic education or not because he will not be able to send him to university as a result of their worse economic conditions..

The targeted student is a low achiever, being diagnosed by his school teachers as a mentally-retarded person depending upon the scale of academic achievement and the weakness he suffers from in Arabic language, mathematics and other subjects although he didn't pass any psychological or intelligence tests before.

7-The Personal Characteristics:

Growth history: the father says that his son was normally born, and he didn't suffer from any health disorders. His health was always perfect like his brothers and sisters. When he was a baby, he started walking normally, and his teeth grew normally. Also, his acquisition of the language was very ordinary.

Physical skills: after meeting the teacher of physical education, it was noted that the targeted student enjoys a high physical fitness, and advanced sporting skills. Thus, he was chosen by the teacher as a basic player for the football team. He loves sport very much, so he is always moving and rarely stays in a place. For that, his teachers are always upset from his because of his too much motion.

Mental features: for the purposes of this study, the targeted student was exposed to the thinking pace and problem-solving capacity tests, and the results showed that he enjoys a thinking pace that exceeds the general average of his peers a little bit. Whereas the application results indicated that he was less able than his peers in the ability of solving mathematical problems, and he was equal to them in the ability of solving social problems. After having frequent meetings with him, it was noted that he depends upon the domain since he is always influenced by the side factors during talking, and that he suffers from distraction. He is also hasty and reckless, having a very low mental concept of self saying: " My teacher, I don't understand, and it is impossible for me to learn. I can only draw and play football".

Emotional & Social features: after meeting the student's colleagues, it was noted that he was socially popular and beloved since he was always laughing and has good relations with his friends specially those who share with him sports although he sometimes differs with them.

Motivation for achievement & professional ambitions: the targeted students was exposed to Al-Reemawi's scale of achievement motivation, and he got (48%). The student's motivation is very low for succeeding in academic duties, and he is not ambitious for completing his education, getting no reinforcement or support for success. His ultimate hope is to finish the 10th grade so as to join army. He always ascribe his success or failure to misfortune, difficult missions and lack o capacities.

Teachers' expectations: they are very negative regarding the targeted student's abilities, and they always say to him: "you only succeed in silly things, sport and drawing", except the physical education teacher and the teacher of art who see him as a big player and a talented artist. They always encourage him.

The Family's sources of tension:

The family belongs to the low-social class, suffering from severe poverty.

8-Discussion of the case & Diagnosis procedures:

After reviewing the previous case, it is noted that the student suffers from low achievement motivation because his parents didn't encourage him and he is influenced by the family's educational history. Also, because of their simple ambitions like completing the 10th grade and joining the army. Moreover, his teachers' frequent blaming as well as their negative expectations regarding his capacities, the negative disgrace for him, his low performance and his reckless behavior lead to the decrease in his self concept. The student's performance on the tests conducted by the researchers indicated that there was a clear decrease in the motivation towards achievement, as clarified in table (1), whereas the student's capacities in thinking pace and problem solving were close to his peers' averages. Also, the researcher's gathered data showed that the student's academic performance was low in different subjects.

Through observing the targeted student, it was revealed that he can't be patient or attentive for a long period. He is also very affective to environmental distractions. Plus, he sometimes suffers from forgetfulness, but the formalism memory, where information is not exaggerated, is easily remembered by him and he can practice his hobby of drawing through it. It is also noted that the student has no trouble in the process of motor-visual collaboration since he can perform accurate sporting movements, and he also has normal social features with others.

Table (1)
The Student's Results for the initial diagnosis tests

Test	mark	Classification of mark
Motivation for Achievement	41%	Low
Thinking pace	67%	Medium
Solving sporting problems	32%	Low
Solving social problems	51%	Medium
General ability of problem solving	42%	Medium
Academic achievement (measured by the term's average)	53%	Low

Classification Criterion & the Final Diagnosis for the case:

1. weakness in academic achievement.
2. distraction in attention.
3. being negative and inactive inside the classroom (academically).
4. feeling stressed and confused in teaching situations.
5. medium cognitive capabilities.
6. low academic self-concept.

Based on these measures, the student found to be suffering from low achievement motivation and low self-concept.

The Remedial Goals:

- assisting the targeted student in modifying his view of himself.
- assisting the targeted student in overcoming the trouble of low achievement motivation.
- assisting the targeted student in increasing his academic performance.

Methods & Strategies:

- exploiting skills and hobbies in the remedial plan.
- reinforcing hobbies and activities to raise the level of self-concept.
- persuasion and reasonable confrontation to refute the wrong beliefs and realizations regarding the self reality.
- emotional comprehension and unconditional acceptance.
- Training the targeted student on self-assertion so as to face weakness.

Following-up the Case:

The First Session:

Work plan: building up the counseling relationship between the targeted case and the counselor on the basis of respect and unconditional acceptance, and then the identification of each one's role.

The Session's Content:

The meeting was held in the presence of the father, the mother and the targeted student. Then, the counselor introduced himself and his role regarding working with the case, and he told the parents what is required from them. Next, he clarified the student's responsibilities and receiving of consultations. The main focus of the session was to build up a professional relationship based upon each party's responsibilities and duties, as well as the acceptance, agreement and complete privacy.

The Session's Results:

- building up a professional relationship.
- clarifying each party's role.
- understanding the case's trouble and feelings.
- appointing the next session's time after presenting a complete summary of the present session and what has been agreed upon.

The Second Session:

Work plan: presenting an explanation for the problem through the information available for the counselor.

The Session's Content:

The counselor discussed the case through the data made available for him from the father, mother and the targeted student himself, and it was revealed that the case suffers from the trouble of low achievement

motivation represented by lack of desire for studying or learning or attending classes, and that leads to low achievement as well as lack of interest in completing study, decrease in self-concept and a state of forgetfulness.

The Session's Results:

- the problem of low self-concept.
- weakness in motivation towards learning.
- decrease in the educational level in some school subjects.
- agreeing on the next session and the communication between the counselor and the school to pass information about the case study, and then the session ended up by presenting a summary of what happened during it.

The Third Session:

Work plan:

- Completion o information from the school (the counselor).
- Conducting the test of achievement motivation.
- Conducting the test of problem-solving capability.
- Conducting the test of thinking pace.
- Getting the student's academic achievement record (performance).
- Meeting some teachers to discuss their expectations from the case.

The Session's Content:

- the counselor discussed the data he gathered from all resources and which revealed that the targeted case suffers from weakness in achievement motivation, low achievement in the subjects of Religion, Arabic language, Mathematics, and English language, in addition to medium capacities in thinking pace and problem solving.
- Conducting the needed tests (achievement motivation, pace of thinking, ability of problem-solving).
- The 2 researchers discussed their expectations from the case in a mutual session, and they asserted the importance of modifying the negative expectations of the student's abilities, the importance of reinforcing the student, and showing interest in him.

The Session's Results:

- ensuring the validity of data the researcher got from the counselor and the parents.
- Identifying the aspects of low motivation.
- Identifying the work style (work team) between the researchers, the parents, the case study, the counselor and the teachers, as well as each one's role.

The Fourth Session:

Work plan:

- Identifying the conditions that have led to decrease in motivation.
- Identifying the targeted case's irrational ideas.
- Explaining the case's problem to the educational counselor.

The Session's Content:

- Discussing the circumstances that have led to decrease in motivation.
- Calling the parents to discuss these conditions that lead to this case.
- Training the student on some effective studying strategies, and refuting the irrational ideas.
- Transforming the exterior justifications related to luck and difficult duties and the interior justifications related to abilities into justifications that are related to the exerted efforts.
- Agreement with the counselor to introduce material and symbolic rewards when there is any advancement for a whole month in which the counselor is able to have a report about the case study, his progress in academic achievement, and classroom discussion as well as his participation in extracurricular activities at school.

The Session's Results:

- the family became acquainted with the student's psychological conditions, and the proper reinforcement method.
- Refuting some of the student's irrational ideas or views.
- Training the student on some right studying and memorizing methods.
- Explaining the problem and the remedial plan for the counselor so as to follow-up the case at school and prepare a report.
- At the end, it was agreed on the next session and a summary of this session was presented.

The Fifth Session:

Work plan:

- Continuing the 4th session work and observing progress.
- Discussing the report presented by the counselor.

The Session's Content:

- Continuing the presentation of reinforcement for the progress, and showing interest.
- Identifying the student's style at school and his progress in academic achievement through the counselor's reports and teachers' views.
- Presenting symbolic and material rewards for the student so as to support his progress.
- Advancement in motivation towards achievement through participating in discussions, doing homework, and the regular attendance at school.

The Session's Results:

- Clear progress in the student's achievement motivation.
- The student's integration with his colleagues in the morning assembly and some other activities.
- Improvement in the student's level through participating in discussions, doing homework, and the regular attendance at school.
- At the end, it was agreed on the next session and a summary of this session was presented.

The Sixth Session:

Work plan:

- Following-up the case with the parents, the teachers and the counselor.
- Training the case study on how to express his feelings and talk with others.
- Following-up the advancement in the student's achievement motivation and academic self-concept.

The Session's Content:

- Continuing reinforcement for the student, and training on positive self expression.
- Conducting the final assessment tests.
- Presenting the proper support and reinforcement, and an appreciation certificate was granted for the student's progress after one week.
- Discussing the counselor's report with the parents and giving them some instructions to enhance the student's self-concept.

The Session's Results:

- A clear progress in the student's motivation.
- A continuous progress in the student's academic level through participation in discussions, doing tasks, and the regular participation in cultural activities.
- Advancement in the level of self-concept through the positive talk and the modification of some wrong realizations.

The Study Findings & Recommendations:

First: Results related to the 1st question which was:

What are the aspects of the achievement motivation decrease for the student of learning difficulties who was selected as the case study?

The results of the initial diagnosis tests conducted on the case study revealed that the student suffers from low achievement motivation represented by several aspects like his negative image of his cognitive self, not participating in school curricular or extracurricular activities, hating classes, lack of desire for completing school study, and feeling stressed during instructional situations, which consequently and negatively affected his school performance which is represented by the low marks he got in different school subjects.

First: Results related to the 2nd question which was:

What is the impact of the suggested counseling program in increasing motivation towards achievement and raising the academic performance for the student of learning difficulties?

The results of the study revealed that there is a notable improvement on the student's motivation towards achievement, as well as some progress in the level of thinking pace and ability to solve social problems. These are additional indicators for the progress of achievement motivation, since studies indicated that there is a significant connection between them, and these results are clarified in table (2):

Table (2)
The Student's Results for the final diagnosis tests

Test	mark	Classification of mark
Motivation for Achievement	85%	High
Thinking pace	73%	Medium
Solving sporting problems	36%	Low
Solving social problems	59%	Medium
General ability of problem solving	47%	Medium
Academic achievement (measured by the term's average)	67%	Acceptable

9-Final Recommendations:

- For Parents: it is necessary to encourage the student and take notice of his study as well as offering him a chance and hope for completing university study. Also, they should be interested in his good performance abilities and special talents such as art, and sport so as to develop them.
- For Teachers: it is necessary to use different teaching methods, reduce classroom distracters, provide students with specific strategies to help them learn, attract their attention and reinforce them. Also, they should use proper remembering aids that could help teachers encode, store and recall data, and reveal positive expectations from students but away from irony or ridicule.
- For the student himself: regular attendance of the motivation stimulating sessions with the counselor, and participation with distinguished colleagues in cultural activities, as well as expanding the student's social relations outside the school.

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