Full Length Research Paper

A phenomenological study on lack of motivation

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The aim of this research is to point out the underlying reasons about the lack of motivation at academic activities concerning Attribution Theory. Attribution Theory trys to understand how the people answer 'why' question and how they do casual explanations. This research is a qualitative based research. It is used the phenomenological design. The subject, one undergraduate student, for the study was selected via critical case study method. The data was gathered with the use of one-on-one interviews. The data analysis is done by the four stages. The first stage, the verbal interview conversation is decoded and the despose in writing is read from begining to end. At the second stage, the static themes and literals are determined. For the third stage, the analysis is shown at the chart. And at the last stage, the main experience is put forward. The results of the data analysis revealed that the main reasons for the lack of motivation for undergraduate students were weakness of willpower, lack of ambition and purpose, a feeling of pessimizim for the future, reluctance of faculty members, and lack of motivating activities.

Key words: Attribution theory, fenomenology, critical case study, motivation.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important needs of students in performing their academic duties and activities is the level of motivation. In the event of excessive or insufficient motivation, it becomes difficult for individuals to actualize their personal needs and self-fulfillment. Every educational stage, from primary school to university, is full of student images, who are less interested in school and classes. This problem partly stems from lack of understanding what really motivates students. No doubt, motivation has been studied for some time at the organizational and individual; however, there are limited studies that study motivation at the university level. In this respect, this study aims to fill the gap in motivation literature in higher education institutions.

Motivation

The root of motivation comes from the Latin verb "movere" (to move) and means action and determining

the direction of an activity. In this sense motivation is a complex concept that involves individuals' thoughts, beliefs, desires, needs, and fears in the process of an activity. The Turkish translation of motivation can be listed as, "güdü/güdülenme, saik, harekete geçirici". Motivation includes effort, decisiveness and other physical activities that drive actions, along with cognitive activities that require planning, organizing, evaluation, monitoring, and problem solving (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996: 4-5).

The word motivation is a complex process which sets in motion and determines the direction of movement and includes thoughts, beliefs, desires, needs and fears of an individual in short, to execute a job. As the definition implies, while motivation requires a physical activity which causes effort, determination and other actions, it also involves a mental activity which requires planning, organizing, assessment, monitoring and problem solving that are cognitive activities. Student performs these activities in proportion to his motivation (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996: 4-5).

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Motivation means "impetus, incentive, activator" in literature (Bentley, 2000; Luthans, 1992). Since motiva-tion can be understood according to what stimulates a behavior and what sustains it, it is hard to define and explain it. Since it is a psychological phenomenon, it has many definitions. According to Balçık (2004: 135), moti-vation is "a person's willingly spending effort for the desired result or to reach a goal, which satisfies his/her needs". According to Yüksel (2004: 80), on the other hand "it is an energy, which directs and determines human behavior." As it can be understood from these definitions, motivation consists of needs and expecta-tions, behavior, purposes and feedback (Şimşek et al., 1998: 97).

Mitchell (cited in Genç, 2004: 233) describes motivation through its four general characteristics:

1. Motivation is a personal phenomenon. Therefore, every human is different and emphasizing these differen-ces lies in the foundation of all motivation theories.
2. Motivation can be considered as an intention. It is presumed that motivation is controlled by the workers and behaviors are determined by motivation.
3. Motivation is multifaceted. What makes people more active and the motivation factors of humans, which change in time, need to be known at this point.
4. Motivation is not a behavior or a performance. Motiva-tion is about forces, which affect persons form inside and outside.

Motivation is a state of getting stronger, it directs persons to perform certain activities and energizing them and it has physical, cognitive amd emotional dimensions. In this context, it is one of the sources of power, which deter-mines the direction, force and determination of student behaviors. If motivation arises from such variables as interest, curiosity, need etc. "inner motivation" is in ques-tion, if it prompts to do something due to such reasons as winning a prize or place in a competition, avoiding punishment etc., "outer motivation" is in question (Senemoğlu, 2000). Students come to class with a ceratin level of motivation and expectation. In this respect, student motivation is an important element that affects all classroom activities. It is significant for both learning new behaviors and previously learned behaviors' becoming effective in individual's performance (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996: 21). When considered from this point of view, one can see that motivation has two functions. One of them is to direct behavior, the other is to enable be-havior to be active in a more lively and energetic manner (Gleitman, 1999).

Motivation is affected by the variables "teacher roles, class organization, interaction and class atmosphere" in a learning environment (Lumsden, 1999: 35). It is a factor, which helps building the psychological link between student and behavior to be gained. In the case of starting education without building this link, it has been observed that the activities were not efficient. While an individual having been motivated allows him to learn easily and comfortably (Kaya, 2001: 85), it also makes it possible for teachers and students to enjoy learning activity more by allowing class management problems to decrease (Öncü, 2001: 118-119).

Lack of motivation is the case, where desire that leads person to behave is not at the optimum level. Some of the reasons for the lack of motivation can be listed as the absence of sufficient grounds to overcome the difficulties students face, not having a purpose, and difficulty determining priorities. According to Selçuk and Güner (2000), lack of motivation affects the academic success of students. As a result of decreased motivation, students become less attentive to various activities, receive lower grades and display ignorant behaviors against academic subjects. Thus, the individual lives in anxiety and stops trying (Selçuk and Güner, 2000). Such conditions are strong signals that the students are facing lowered self confidence issues.

Universities aim at providing knowledge and skills for individuals in their profession which includes a long period of his/her life and generate knowledge develop frontier of science. They also aim at developing intellec-tual ability (Dağ et al., 2011: 306). An individual's attainment of knowledge, skill, attitude, understanding, value and behaviors that is required by his/her profession depends on individual's expectations and willingness. Thus, Vroom (1964 cited in Onaran, 1981), asserts that motivation or the power to act is a result of multiplication of the level of willingness and expectations. Koçel (1989: 316) also underlines that high willingness levels lead to more efforts. If one has positive perceptions regarding the academic results in the university years, meaning that causal loads, this is an important factor in increasing his/her motivation or the power to act, level of willingness and expectations.

Attribution theory

Humans assess phenomena and such by attributing them according to realities, perception, attitude, values, thou-ghts and behaviors in his/her own life. Human's need to perceive and understand himself/herself and its surroundings leads him/her to use the attributing process (Duman, 2004). Human being is a creature, which tends to understand his/her or others'behavior and the reasons of such behaviors. Attribution theory is defined as deter-mining the reasons of human behavior, and obtaining information regarding basic characteristics and manners of humans. In other words, it is the cognitive process of being able to decide who or what the reason for social situations is (Yılmaz, 2005). Attributing in attributing theory is the inference an observer makes about the inner state of an actor or himself/herself by evaluating open behavior (Okumuş, 2006).

Research demonstrates that students attribute this case to one of four reasons. These four reasons are *effort*, *talent*, *difficulty level of the task and luck*. Some researches explain that attribution has three more characteristics and define them as follows: *Place of attribution, determination* and *controllability*. Place of attribution points out the source of reason for attribution, this is to say, being inner or outer according to individual. Talent and effort are inner attributions, because they are under the individual's control. Difficulty of task and luck are outer attributions, because they are out of individual's control (Galbraith, 2002; Canakay, 2007: 44-45).

Attribution theory examines how an individual's way of explaining his/her own failure affects motives. An individual's making inner or outer attribution is related to his/her self esteem. Students explaining their failure through stable or variable factors affect their expectations for the future. Success or failure not being under an individual's control is related to anger, shame and being proud. The individual who brags is proud of his/her success in controllable situations but if he/she becomes unsuccessful in a situation out of his control, he feels guilt and shame (Erden and Akman, 1997).

In the literature the concept of attribution is defined as an explanation about an event. Many social psychologists have differentiated between, *causal attribution* and *responsibility attribution*. *Causal attribution* is related to formation of an event and usually includes focus, stability, control, and generality dimensions. However; *responsibility attribution* is a concept related to individuals' responsiveness/accountability and includes of causal attributions. *Guilt attribution* concept is considered as a different dimension. *Guilt attribution* refers to attributers' ability to hold another person responsible for a specific action but not to blame (Curun, 2006).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is modeled using qualitative inquiry tradition. Phenomenological design was used during the data collection analysis processes. Phenomenological design has been used in the data gathering and interpreting processes. Phenomenological design focuses on phenomena, which the individual is aware of but does not have in depth and detailed understanding of it and tries to define the interpretations, experiences, orientations, feelings and judgements (Yıldırım and Simsek, 2005). This study tries to describe in depth "the lack of motivation" phenomena and "causative attributions of the university student, who are directly affected by this phenomena. The main reason to select Phenomenological design was the idea that while lack of motivation can be identified with the use of the teacher candidates' descriptive comments. This research is based on the question, "What is/are the sources of lack of motivation of the university student in academic activities?"

Best sources of data for phenomenological research are individuals or groups, who have experienced the phenomenon the research focuses on, and can provide detailed information regarding this phenomenon (Yıldırım and Simsek, 2005). Phenomenological studies examine human experiences through detailed descriptions of subjects. This type of study is concerned with understanding their life experiences. This makes philosophy both as a method of research as well as a tradition that follows the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Schuler, Sartre, and Merlau Ponty. As a methodological procedure it focuses on a small number of individuals extensively and long periods of time. This engagement leads to development of patterns and relationships with meaning. Since the starting point in phenomenology is personal experiences, people who have experienced or still experiencing these experiences comprise the sampling of the research (Bas and Akturan, 2008). This study was conducted in January and February in 2009 to 2010 education-years with a 4th year elementary education student (teacher candidate) at a public university in Ankara. The participants of the study was proposely selected among 4th year students, because it is assumed that the teacher candidates would have a much better understanding of their motivational levels and can respond questions in a more objective and detailed manner. Critical case study methodology was used to determine the study participant.

Data collecting process

Data gathering process is carried out in three stages in phenomenological research. At the first stage, in-depth one-on-one interview is carried out using semi-structured interview protocol and the data is recorded and transcribed. At the second stage, individuals should be asked to write their experiences in detail to attribute meanings related to the phenomenon. And at the last stage should involve participant observation technique to document individuals' behaviors related to the phenomenon (Sanders, 1982: 356 cited in Baş and Akturan, 2008: 90-91).

The data was gathered through the verbal responses of the participant to interview questions and journals that were kept by the participant. Furthermore, the observation of the participant in the learning environment was used as another data source. Thus, as noted previously, the study was completed in three stages. First, 40 min interview sessions were held at the university library at a time that was convenient for both the participant and the researcher. Second, the participant was asked to write his experiences and feelings about lack of motivation. And the last, the video recordings of the participant in learning environment was analyzed to make observations. The following questions were asked to the participant of the study:

(i) What are the things that motivate you?
(ii) What do you do to motivate yourself?
(iii) How do you describe your motivational state at academic activity?
(iv) What do you think about (lack of motivation you have experienced at academic activities) the reasons of this state?

Validity and Reliability

The principle of researcher being flexible is an important advantage for validity. Researcher may resort to new strategies during the research if necessary, he may add new questions, he may conduct new interviews not planned before, he may use different methods of data collecting in order to confirm the information he/she has obtained. Reliability involves the accuracy of research methods and techniques and crediblity of research results (Yıldırım and Simsek, 2005). In this study, an in-depth review of literature was carried out to provide theoretical validity on motivation. For face validity, views of three educational psychologists were taken. Moreover written records were read to the participant, asked if there were any parts they would like to add or take out and their approvals were received regarding the accuracy of the records.

Analysis of the data

There are four stages in the analysis of the data in pheno-menological research. In the *definition* stage the phenomenon is defined. This definition is made by the use of the interview data and the data gatherded from the participant's writing. At the *identification* stage, the themes and constants are identified. The bases for constructing themes are not the frequencies or occurence but the importance of the meaning. The following stage involves, defining the *noetic and noematic relationships*. *Noetic and noematic* relationship are subjective reflections of the themes. This relationship represents individuals' recognition of the reality of the studied phenomenon.

Example: Let us assume that the participant has said something like "My boss always asks my opinion. This makes me feel significant." Boss asking the individual's opininon is an objective statement related to behavior and comprises "noema". On the other hand, an individual feeling significant is a subjective statement and comprises "noesis".

The last stage which constitute the theorizing stage of principles (cores), is the stage that explains the underlying menings of the experiences—the essence of the experience (phenomenon). The the underlying meanings or the essence can be defined as the "thing that makes the experience an experience" (Downing, 2007: 48; Baş and Akturan, 2008: 92-95).

FINDINGS

The phenomenon explored in this study is "lack of moti-vation". The results were explained under; identification, determination, and identification and determination of noema and noetic relationships.

Definition

At the definition stage—first stage of Phenomenological research—the situations and evets that motivates the participant are identified along with the activities the participant does to motivate him. According to this the things that motivate the participant are listed as: to be appreciated, to be rewarded, not to be embarrassed in the family, and graduate within four years.

The participant responded to "*What do you do to motivate yourself?" in the following manner:

"… In short nothing... "Nothing. I ask myself what will happen if I do it this way; I question the purpose of the job I am doing but I cannot find an answer and postpone it. I even make up excuses sometimes. I say to myself, "even if the philosophers have not been able to find the meaning of life, how am I going to find it with my IQ." I also have a negativing problem. I always find things to be unhappy, even when I am happy. During my first years in university, I thought I was having a depression and went to doctor. It did not help but I now realize that this has become a part of myself…"

Participant responded to, *how do you describe your motivational state at academic activity?* In the following

manner:

"…I am not consistent. Reading the same thing in course books is not good for motivation. We always see the same content in classes. Every class becomes boring after a while. Although the lecturers are different, we always listen to the same things. What we write on the exam paper is regarded more important than our homework. Besides, my motivation does not affect my grades."

The Participant responded to *what do you think about lack of motivation you have experienced at academic activities?* in the following manner:

"I think the greatest reason is the weakness of my willpower. My not being ambitious, not having a purpose to change or overcome some things. Even if everything is perfect, the future is unclear. I have no dreams for the future. Normally, my future should be more important, but it is to the contrary… For example, activities I do in classes are not motivating. I get my homework from either books or the internet and copy-paste them. I get more harm than good, actually. It is a waste of time. If I leave that time for socialization, I might develop mey self expression…There is also this: How motivated the lecturers come to the class is unknown. The drama class, for example. Every group was writing a drama and playing it at the drama class last semester. Three people died at the end of a drama written by one of the groups. I think it is nonsense to do drama like this even at primary schools. The lecturer did not even interfere or criticize. He was stating that he had to complete the class hour at every opportunity anyway."

Determining

At this stage, constants or themes in the participant's definition have been determined. Instead of frequency of the themes, their significance has been stressed. From the answer of the participant to the question, "*What are the things that motivate you?*", it is understood that motivation is dependent on outer dynamics (to be appreciated, to be rewarded, not to be embarrassed in the family, and graduate within four years). His answer to the question, "*What do you do to motivate yourself?*" demonstrates that the participant is aware of lack of motivation and is making an effort to change this (questioning the meaning of what he is doing, looking for a purpose, postponing, making excuses, negativing). The participant stated that motivation was not balanced and consistent (inconsistent); he stated that causes of low motivation were receiving the same content in different classes and homework not being reflected on overall grade. In his response to *What do you think about lack of motivation you have experienced at academic activities*

the participant, listed the resons for his lack of motivation as; weak willpower, lack of purpose, pessimism towards the future, ignorant faculty members, and activities not being motivating and considering them as a waste of time.

Determining noetic and noematic relations

Special structure is called noetic structure or simply noesis. Noesises; are forms of single conscience forms such as perceiving, believing and liking. There are differences between these conscience styles. The individual orients at a certain styles to each conscience form. The characteristic thing to orient to that object is the certain style at the orientation to that object. Objective structure is noematic structure and is simply called noema. When saying "conscience of something", Noema is the one defined as "something". In this respect, most of the responses the participant provided to interview questions were subjective statements.

Theorizing essences (Quintessences)

At this stage, phenomena underlying experience, in other words, essence or quintessence of experience is exhibited. İn short, unchanging meaning regarding experience is attempted to be detected. It does not necessarily mean that only one quintessence related to experience is detected every time. Since these quintessences are building stones of experience, relationships between these are important. Experience gains a meaning by handling every building stone through a totalitarian approach (Baş and Akturan, 2008).

Altohugh it was realized that the participant's motivation depended on outer dynamics, (to be appreciated, to be rewarded, not to be embarrassed in the family, and graduate within four years), the participant associates lack of motivation largely with reasons stemming from himself. His example explanation, "*I think the greatest reason is the weakness of my willpower. My not being ambitious, not having a purpose of changing or overcoming some thing.*" proves that his lack of motivation comes from inside.

Conclusion

Motivation is the force that leads human behaviour to the aimed direction and activates it for a certain purpose. An individual's motivation consists of many phases from satisfying his/her personal needs to realizing himself/herself. The individual makes use of certain inner/outer processes to find meanings to certain events and behaviour he/she comes across during the daily life. The individual makes inferences for both his/her or others'

behaviour (Hogg and Vaughan, 2007: 104). The inference made by the individual by looking at the individual's open behaviour is called attribution (Dönmez, 1989: 95; Cüceloğlu, 2000: 515).

Motivation can be caused through several reasons. Family, circle of friends, social teachings can be the reason of this will. In case of the participant, these sources are to be appreciated, to be rewarded, not to be embarrassed in the family, and graduate within four years. The family affects the motivation level of the individual consciously or unconsciously. This exercise of influence can be positive as well as negative. The researchers think that the family focuses on what the participant can not do instead of what he can do; therefore, the participant feels a lack of appreciation and support (deriving from the statement "get rid of my family's nagging"). For as much as, being appreciated is a significant tool of motivation with a focus on the psychological side. Being appreciated and rewarded are important tools to lead the individual to make things more willingly and eagerly. At a research made by Nelson (1996 cited in Ölçer, 2005: 6) on 1500 workers, "being appreciated and rewarded" has taken place among the top as an important tool of motivation at the list made by the managers. On the other hand, at a research made by Robert Half, "partial rewarding and appreciation" has come up as the primary reason of workers to quit their jobs. Similarly, researchers at this study too think that the participant will be motivated and develop a positive attitute coming accross satisfying situations. It can be said that one of the factors affecting the motivation of the participant is his school life. The participants responded to the question "*What are the things that motivate you?*" as "*finishing university in four years*" with anxiety and stress (observed from his facial expression and the way his hands are). The researchers think that the participant is going through the stress of finishing university in delay.

Looking at the responses of the participant in general, it is seen that he is aware of lack of motivation and he is making an effort to change this (questioning the meaning of what he is doing, looking for a purpose, postponing, making excuses, negativing). The participant expressed that his motivation is not balanced and consistent (is inconsistent) and stated his reason of decrease in motivation as having the same content in different lessons and the performance of homeworks does not affect the grade. The participant summarized the reasons of lack of motivation under the themes of weak willpower, lack of purpose, pessimism towards the future, activities not being motivating and considering them as a waste of time

Searching for meaning in the essence is the most fundamental motivation source of the human being. The human feels a deep emptiness and unreason when he/she can not realize his/her "meaning" demand. However this feeling of emptiness is not necessarily a feeling that is bad and should be avoided; it sometimes is a window

opening to the mysterious sides of life. From this perspective, it can be seen that looking for a meaning can be positive (Aktaş, 2008: 8). The participant is aware that assigning meaning to knowledge, life and experience is necessary in order to act according to what he has learned and will learn. The participants expressions "*My not being ambitious, not having a purpose to change or overcome some things. Even if everything is perfect, the future is unclear. I have no dreams for the future. Normally the future should have the primary importance but it is the exact opposite*" describes that he sees future pessimisticly and hopelessly. Hope on the other hand, characterizing the optimistic approach to the future, is one of the most important motivation factors of the process of gaining meaning.

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