

ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF KAREN REFUGEE STUDENTS

Hsar Doe Doh Moo Htoo¹

Abstract: Because there is so little research on individual factors in refugee education, the current study investigated the relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement of Karen refugee students from Burma studying at two post-secondary schools on the Thailand-Burma border. This study used the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) to assess refugee students' motivation in relation to their grade point average (GPA), which was obtained from the schools' registrars. The sample size for this study was 192 participants (57.8% female). Pearson product-moment correlations and regression analysis were used to assess the relationship between extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, amotivation and academic performance. The findings from this study indicated that: 1) in the current sample, there was no significant correlation between intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation as measured by the AMS and academic achievement as represented by GPA; and 2) there was a statistically significant negative correlation between academic amotivation and academic achievement. The results are discussed in light of previous findings. In particular, the current finding builds on the possibility that models emphasizing the role of autonomy in motivation may have less validity in marginalized populations. Further research on factors influencing academic achievement in refugee education is urgently required.

Keywords: Self-Determination Theory, Academic Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Amotivation, Academic Achievement, Refugee, Thailand-Burma Border

Introduction

The issue of forced migration has become a critical global concern over the last three decades as a result of numerous events that displace populations, including wars, famines, and political conflicts and struggles. This is especially true in developing countries, where factors such as rapid population growth, economic crises, ethnic conflicts, and environmental deterioration or natural disaster have caused an increasing number of incidences of large-scale relocations or forced migrations (Vernez, 1991).

Over the last 30 years, Burma (also known as Myanmar) has encountered a series of forced migration crises as a result of various causes; for instance, civil war, interethnic tensions, human right violations, and political and economic instability. The International Organization for Migration's report estimated that up to 10 percent (roughly 6 million people) of Burma's entire population

has migrated internationally even though the accurate statistics are hard to obtain (IOM, 2008).

Recent estimates suggested that 686,800 refugees and asylum seekers from Burma reside in its neighboring countries (Bangladesh, India, and Thailand) making refugees from Burma the largest refugee population in Southeast Asia (Oh, Rattanasamakkee, Sukhikhachornphrai, & Ochalumthan, 2010). An international humanitarian organization that supports refugees from Burma with food, shelter, and other necessities, reported that there were over 140,000 refugees currently taking refuge in ten camps on Thai border and specifically mentions that 78.6% of them are from the Karen ethnic group (TBBC, 2012).

Barron (2004) noted that refugee camps are not natural places to live in; residents in refugee camps lack the basic freedoms that allow others to study, work and travel. Furthermore, refugees have lost everything in their homelands and carry sad and painful memories. But, despite these privations, Barron observed that having lived in refugee camps for twenty years, refugees from Burma have been able to manage themselves and community and live with dignity and hope. They have maintained their communities and taken care of each other, and have set up and managed their own education and healthcare services.

There can be no doubt that education in refugee camps is essential. The report of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) underlines that education in refugee camps (and other locations containing displaced people), can be both saving and the life-sustaining. The INEE report states that education can save lives by protecting vulnerable people against exploitation and harm, while it sustains life by offering structure, stability, and hope for the future during a time of crisis, especially for children and adolescents. Additionally, education in emergencies also helps to alleviate the pain of bad experiences, build skills, and support conflict resolution and peace building (INEE, 2010).

Education is a vital element of a sustainable society and is usually one of the highest priorities of many communities. This is not less true for people living as refugees. The refugee communities living on the Thai border consider education very valuable and an essential component of camp life. They see it as critical for their children's futures. Like students around the world, Karen refugee students on the Thai border and their families, want and have the ability to succeed in school and excel academically. These refugee students are determined to turn their negative experiences into positive ones by studying hard and excelling in their studies in order to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

It is well established that a variety of internal and external factors influence student academic achievement. Internal factors include personal interest, motivation,

¹ M.S.Candidate in Counselling Psychology, Graduate School of Psychology, Assumption University, Thailand
hsardoedoh101@gmail.com

determination, and passion that drive students to do better in their studies. External factors include school environment, teacher competence and training, support from teachers and parents, and learning resources. Rannard and Barron (2007) noted that overcrowded classrooms, poor quality teaching, insufficient learning facilities, and a chronic shortage of books and equipment all make teaching and learning more difficult which then can negatively affect student’s motivation and drive in the pursuit of education. Thus, classroom and school environment can either support or reduce student’s academic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hardre et al., 2006). Furthermore, empirical studies regarding academic achievement have demonstrated that motivation is an important contributor to a student’s academic success (Fortier, Vallerand, & Guay, 1995; Ayub, 2010).

Objectives

This research study aimed to investigate the relationship between academic motivation, in a framework based on self-determination theory, (including intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, amotivation), and academic achievement (GPAs) among Karen refugee students from Burma studying on the Thailand-Burma border. The primary purpose was to investigate the relationship between the types of academic motivation and the academic achievement of Karen refugee students. Based on published research available for review with non-refugee samples, the following hypotheses were developed for this previously unstudied and untested relationship:

H1: There will be a significant positive correlation between academic intrinsic motivation and academic achievement.

H2: There will be a significant positive correlation between academic extrinsic motivation and academic achievement.

H3: There will be a significant negative correlation between academic amotivation and academic achievement.

Literature Review

Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory provided a crucial theoretical basis for understanding student motivation. The theory postulates that self-determination reflects the fundamental human capacity to organize and direct behavior toward certain goals and outcomes. According to self-determination theory, there are three facets of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its inner satisfactions, extrinsic motivation is a construct that

is concerned with an activity which is performed because of some separable outcome, and amotivation occurs when an individual is neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated in any assigned activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

One central element in self-determination theory is the need for autonomy. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) said that student autonomy refers to the degree of choice that students have about tasks to perform and it is a need of a student to feel control of their behaviors in any activity. Self-Determination Theory builds on the concept of autonomy, seeing students as self-directed, self-guided agents.

According to Vallerand and Bissonette (1992), when using measures based on Ryan and Deci’s theory (2000), both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational styles significantly predicted students’ behaviors in educational settings, and more specifically in academic achievement. Moreover, the results of the correlational study carried out by Ayud (2010) showed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and academic performance were positively correlated. Afzal, Ali, Khan, and Hamid (2010) found that there was a positive relationship between student’s motivation and academic performance. The same study (Afzal, Ali, Khan, and Hamid, 2010) further showed that Pakistani students who were motivated perform better and students who perform better become more motivated, which indicated that the motivation-achievement relationship is reciprocal and bidirectional.

Despite the increasing frequency of displacement and migration, and despite the fact that education plays a vital role in the lives of refugee communities, there has been very little research into individual factors associated with academic achievement of refugee students. Even though donor governments and organizations are giving large sums of money to support education systems in refugee camps, no research exists about the relationship between the individual motivation of refugee students and their academic achievement.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the researcher used the correlational research design. According to Kumar (2005), the main emphasis in this kind of study is to establish the existence of an association between two or more aspects of a situation. By utilizing this research study, the researcher attempts to examine the previously-not-studied relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement among refugee students from Burma studying at two post-secondary schools on Thai-Burma border in Tak province.

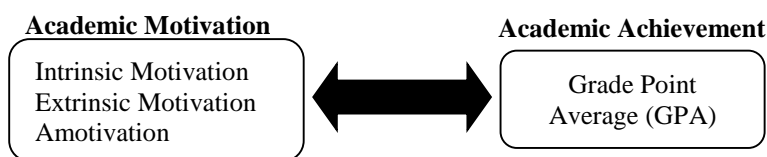


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Method

Research Design

In this study, the researcher used a correlational research design. According to Kumar (2005), the main emphasis in this kind of study is to establish the existence of an association between two or more aspects of a situation. By utilizing this research study, the researcher attempts to examine the previously-not-studied relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement among refugee students from Burma studying at two post-secondary schools on Thai-Burma border in Tak province. The sampling method utilized in this study was a purposive sampling technique, which is a type of non-random sampling technique and the schools' principals at the two schools purposively selected classes that participated in this study.

Participants

201 students participated in the study and completed the survey questionnaires. However, nine sets of survey questionnaires (4.5% of the surveys collected) were discarded because they were not filled out completely by the respondents. So, the total number of participants that completed all survey questionnaires and were included in the analyses was 192 participants, of whom 111(57.8%) were females and 81 (42.2%) were males.

Students' ages ranged from 16 to 27, with the mean age of 20.09. In this sample, 47.9% ($n=92$) were students of the Pu Taw Memorial Junior College and 52.1% ($n=100$) were students of the Kaw Lah Junior College. In terms of their academic status, 35.9% ($n=69$) of the participants were freshmen, 34.9% ($n=67$) were sophomores, 22.4% ($n=43$) were juniors, and 6.8% ($n=13$) were seniors. According to their refugee status, 60.4% ($n=116$) of the participants were reported as peoples without UNHCR registration or new arrivals, 26% ($n=50$) were peoples with UNHCR registration and 13.5% ($n=26$) were peoples awaiting the approval of the Royal Thai Government to obtain UNHCR registration.

Instruments

The primary research instrument was the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) that assessed the participants' academic motivation. The AMS is based on self-determination theory and includes three subscales for extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation and amotivation. The AMS has 28 items that use on a 7-point Likert scale ranges from one (1=does not correspond at all) to seven (7= corresponds exactly) (Vallerand et al., 1992).

Because it represents their overall class performance, grade point average (GPA) is a widely accepted measure of student academic achievement. To measure the participants' academic achievement, the participants' GPAs were obtained from the respective schools' registrars.

Procedure

Data collection consisted of the following procedural steps:

- The researcher obtained institutional clearance from the Graduate School of Psychology and from

the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity, the organization which manages education in the camps. Principals of two refugee schools agreed to support the project and selected classes to participate.

- The researcher recruited three teachers from each school (also refugees themselves) to assist him in group facilitation of data collection from research participants. The researcher and assistants conducted four group facilitation sessions in each school; 25 students participated in each session to complete the survey items. An informed consent form was part of the research protocol and participants received an explanation of the study's purpose, risks and benefits.
- The researcher obtained participants' GPA data from the schools' registrars.
- After the completion of the data collection process and collection of all questionnaires, the researcher inspected the questionnaires for missing data. In the case where there were missing data, that survey was excluded. Only those with completed information were treated as valid questionnaires and subsequently subjected to statistical analysis.

Findings

Reliability of the Subscales of AMS

The internal consistency of the items of the three different subscales of the AMS was determined by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Coetzee states that an acceptable range of reliability coefficients for most instruments is between .70 and .90 (Coetzee, 2011; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Table 1 shows that the academic extrinsic motivation and academic intrinsic motivation obtained acceptable values of alpha-coefficients, ranging from .71 to .73. However, amotivation obtained Cronbach's alpha-coefficient of .51, which is considered weak.

Table 1: Reliability of the Subscales of Academic Motivation Scale

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N. of Items
Academic Intrinsic Motivation	.735	12
Academic Extrinsic Motivation	.710	12
Academic Amotivation	.514	4

Main Findings

To investigate the relationship between independent and dependent variables in this study, the Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to evaluate whether or not the hypothesized bivariate relationships existed between the variables. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient varies between -1 (negative

correlation) through 0 (no correlation) to + 1 (positive correlation), and the Pearson r values were used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between the variable (De Vos et al., 2005; Coetzee, 2011). Table 2 shows the bivariate correlations between the three subscales of academic motivation and GPA.

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation Coefficients (Pearson Product Moment) between the Academic Motivation and GPA (N=192)

Variable	r	p
Academic Intrinsic Motivation	.092	.103
Academic Extrinsic Motivation	.039	.295
Academic Amotivation	-.390	.000

Table 2 shows that, in the current sample, (1) there was no significant positive correlation between academic intrinsic motivation as measured by the AMS and GPA, (2) there was no significant positive correlation between academic extrinsic motivation as measured by the AMS and GPA, and, (3) there was a statistically significant negative correlation between academic amotivation as measured by the AMS and GPA. Thus, the data did not support hypotheses one and two while the data confirmed hypothesis three.

A multiple regression analysis was also conducted to further examine the relationship between the students' GPAs and three hypothesized predictors of academic motivation (i.e. intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation). Table 3 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 3: Regression analysis for three predictor model predicting students' GPA (N=192)

Variable	B	$SE B$	β	t	Sig.
Amotivation	-.260	.044	-.390	-5.835	.000

Notes: $R^2 = .152$ ($p < .001$)

As shown in Table 3, the multiple regression model with three predictors produced $R^2 = .152$, $F = 34.05$, $p < .001$. Together the model accounted for 15% of the variance in GPAs. Of the three predictors entered in the regression analysis, however, only amotivation was a significant predictor. Thus, in this sample, only amotivation showed a significant relationship with GPA while intrinsic and extrinsic motivation did not contribute significantly to the model. As our original analysis showed, academic amotivation had a significant negative weight which indicates that those students with higher scores in amotivation were expected to have lower GPA (Beta = $-.39$, $t = -5.84$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

In the current sample of refugee camp students, there was no significant positive correlation between either academic intrinsic motivation or academic extrinsic

motivation as measured by the AMS and academic achievement as represented by GPA. There was a statistically significant negative correlation between academic amotivation as measured by the AMS and academic achievement. Of the three variables, only amotivation accounted for a significant amount of the variance in academic performance.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 of the current study were developed and based on a range of empirical studies conducted by Areepattanamannil (2006), Vallerand & Bissonnette (1992), Lavender (2005), Ayud (2010), and Afzal, Khan, & Hamid (2010) which indicated that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were positively associated with academic achievement. Thus, the results of the current study were not consistent with several published tests of the Self Determination Theory with non-refugee samples.

However, the results of the current study were consistent with the findings of Davis (2009) which found that there were no statistically significant correlations between motivation and academic achievement in a sample of African American college students. In that study, Davis also found that academic motivation was negatively correlated with GPA. A total of 206 African American undergraduate students completed the Academic Motivation Scale (the same version as the current study). That study also found no significant correlation between the subscale scores of the AMS and participant GPAs. Davis explained her finding by arguing that the majority of literature and past empirical studies were based on the attribution theory (i.e. student's belief about their own behavior) while her study focused on the self-determination theory.

Davis postulated that the reason there was no significant correlation between AMS scores (motivation) and academic achievement in her study because the AMS itself is grounded in a motivational theory which used a one-dimensional approach to explore motivation of African American students in her study. She suggested that the experience of her participants could not be measured with a one-dimensional model. Davis suggested that to understand more about the motivation of African American students required the use of multidimensional approaches and multiple different theories of motivation (i.e. attribution theory, academic self-efficacy theory, etc.) in the same study (Davis, 2009).

Davis further stressed that African American students who participated in her study also reported high levels of social alienation, marginalization, and overt racism within the educational setting. Such experiences, from self-determination theory's perspective of relatedness, would affect academic achievement because relatedness means having safe and satisfying connections with others or a need to feel related to others is one of the significant psychological needs of a personal goal pursuit (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, Davis suggested that when these students were socially isolated or marginalized in the educational setting, it would be harmful to their academic performance, regardless of motivation.

Building on Davis's results and suggestions, the results of the current study may be understood through the possibility of limitations of the governing theory employed in this research study. The primary study instrument, the AMS, is grounded in self-determination theory. Self-Determination Theory has been extensively supported in studies with western and non-western populations. Yet in almost all cases, these were mainstream populations, or members of a majority and free community. It is important to consider the possibility that, as with African American students, elements of self-determination theory might not apply in the context of Karen refugee students from Burma in the camps. Refugees, like those African American students, are a marginalized and politically oppressed group who have experienced violence and degradation across several generations.

There may be some problem in applying the concept of autonomy to these populations. Marginalized and oppressed populations have less autonomy than people who are free from persecution. This is particularly true for students living in an environment as controlled and restricted as a refugee camp. They are far less likely to see themselves as free agents, making independent, self-guided choices.

The opposite of autonomous, self-guided motivation is controlled motivation. With regard to the current study, the researcher believes that controlled motivation may be a key factor that affected the students' academic achievement in this study. Not only do students live in a refugee camp environment, but in Karen refugee education, traditional teaching methods are still practiced. Teachers are regarded as the authoritative figures who control the learning environment and make decisions about which activities to use and assignments to give. This is not consistent with the assumptions of self-determination theory. This exact scenario (the authoritarian teacher) is applied in these two post-secondary schools where the current research study was conducted. In this setting learning materials, classroom exercises, assignments and teaching methods are still not framed from student autonomy perspectives. We must consider the possibility that autonomy, a central component of self-determination theory and the survey instrument, does not operate for Karen students in the same way as students in the other studies.

Furthermore, it is critical to note that in the refugee camps, teachers are not adequately trained or qualified in instructional methodologies and classroom management (Banki & Lang, 2007). The researcher believes that as long as traditional, authoritarian approaches are being used, the teachers are poorly trained and students are not given opportunities to make decisions and choices in the learning process, it will only sustain students' amotivation and minimize their motivation in academic success.

In contrast, the sample showed a statistically significant negative correlation between academic amotivation and academic achievement. According to self-determination theory, amotivated students do not

view their behaviors as connected with specific outcomes (Cokley, 2003; Davis, 2009). Ryan and Deci (2009) elaborated that students who are amotivated are generally uncertain about the decision to attend or remain in college, and according to Ryan and Deci, these students are simply going through the motions with no sense of intending to do what they are doing. Davis further stresses that students who are amotivated may take a nonchalant attitude about academic performance, study habits, and class attendance which would likely lead to lower GPAs (2009).

Results of the current study showed that amotivation and academic achievement of Karen refugee students at the two post-secondary schools are negatively correlated. Thus, the higher the amotivation is among these students, the weaker their academic achievement is like to be, as explained by Ryan and Deci (2009). Therefore, the researcher suggests that if students in the two post-secondary schools are not motivated at all in their studies, they are likely to perform poorly academically and obtain poor GPAs as a result.

The current study does have several limitations that must be noted. First, there may be been variation introduced by the data collection procedure. The researcher used local teachers to assist in group facilitation of the research participants. It is possible that the local teachers were not able to help participants understand and respond to the survey items properly due to a tremendous lack of qualified teachers in the schools. Therefore it is possible that the students' level of understanding was not sufficient and affected their responses. Second, there may be some errors in the GPA data. Grades are recorded by and the data were obtained from the school registrar at each school. It is possible that students' grades were either (a) not properly recorded or (b) not accurately transferred to the researcher because there is a very high turnover in the position of school registrars. Many of the people performing the job have no experience as a registrar.

Thus, the failure to support hypotheses one and two and replicate a large body of existing research may reflect an important issue in applying self-determination theory in an educational setting with marginalized populations. At the same time, more research needs to be conducted to replicate the current study findings.

The findings of this study raise thought provoking questions. Why is it that there was no relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with achievement but amotivation was significantly related to performance? This finding may be consistent with the suggestion that the autonomy component in self-determination theory cannot be applied completely to marginalized populations. Amotivation is described in terms of helplessness and powerlessness; it is implied that amotivated students lack autonomy. This would also be consistent with our finding above. The active elements of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, grounded in concepts of autonomous self-determination may not apply in this population while the concept of helpless and lack of

autonomy does relate to performance. If so, self-determination theory may need to be revised to reflect this variation across populations.

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