

The Effect of a simple Reward Model on the academic Achievement of Syrian Dental Students

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ABSTRACT

Reward systems in teaching are important keys which aim at enhancing students' academic achievements. Studying the effects of rewards, as extrinsic motivators, on college students is somehow underestimated in the literature. The aim of the current study was to investigate the effect of a simple tangible reward on the academic achievement of Syrian dental students. A total of 139 dental students, assigned to four classes, were enrolled in the study. After completion of a first exam, all students who got full marks (i.e. 20 marks) were awarded a "Certificate of Achievement". Four weeks later, a second exam related to the same course took place, and the same process of certification for students with full marks was performed. Records of students' marks of both first and second exams were collected and statistically analyzed. The results showed no statistically significant differences between groups (i.e. classes) neither for first exam nor for second exam marks. The mean of marks for the first and second exams were (10.62 ± 4.88) and (14.63 ± 4.07) respectively. The difference of means' records for all students between first and second exams was statistically significant. It was concluded that a tangible reward in the form of "certificate" had a positive effect on the dental students' academic achievements. Enhancement of students' motivation through reward systems should come under focus in higher educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Poor student achievement is often attributed to a lack of motivation, and rewards are usually given in an attempt to increase the vital student motivation. High student achievement comes from students who are motivated from inside. Therefore, besides giving rewards, teachers need to consistently teach students to become intrinsically motivated (Baranek 1996).

In the 1970's, Edward Deci (Deci 1971, 1972b, 1972a) defined the different kinds of motivation as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is the act of completing an activity for the pleasure of doing the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is the act of completing an activity in order to receive some type of reward from another source. As a result of these definitions, researchers began to question the effects of different kinds of motivation, and school became a widely used testing ground.

In research conducted during the last years, it has been found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have different effects on education. The presence of intrinsic motivation produces many behaviors that result in school success like sustained interest in tasks, risk taking, and the conquering of new challenges (Amabile and Gitomer 1984; Adelman and Taylor 1990; Spulding 1992). External motivators are things given to the students by others like grades, candy, free time, and other things. Students who are motivated by extrinsic factors complete activities in order to receive an external reward (Scott Jr 1976). As a result, they do not work out events on their own, but work only to receive a reward. However, a reward that is received after successful completion of a task without previous expectancy could have a positive effect on future related tasks.

Many theorists (Dweck, 1986; Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998; McKeachie, 1961; Pintrich, 2000) have proposed that college students have multiple goals in learning; e.g., satisfying one's need for achievement, enhancing one's self-confidence, obtaining recognition and approval, avoiding flunking-out, obtaining knowledge and skills necessary for a job, confirming that one has studied appropriately, showing that one excels in comparison with other students, avoiding criticism from parents or negative reactions from peers, etc. Thus, it seems likely that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, rather than being at opposite ends of a single

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