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Investigation of Impact of Educational Attitudes of Students and Teachers on Academic Achievement of Third Grade Middle School Students in Zanjan

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of educational attitudes of students and teachers on academic progress (success) of third grade middle school students in Zanjan. The population consisted of all (male - female) teachers (N=7314) and (male - female) students (N=776) in third grade middle school in academic year 2004- 2005. Using multi-stage cluster sampling method, 400 students and 300 teachers were selected as sample. The research tool for evaluating the students was Nikkhoo's educational attitudes questionnaire with 15 questions. Also, the research tool for teachers was Minnesota's standard questionnaire with 35 questions. The index of students' academic success was the final exam mean in 2004-2005. The causal-comparative method was used as research method. The data were analyzed using descriptive (frequency, percentage, and median) and analytical (Mann-Whitney U) statistics. The findings showed that:

The positive academic attitudes of male students impact on their academic success. This hypothesis was confirmed at less than one percent error ($P < 1\%$) and with over 99% confidence.

The academic attitudes of female students impact on their academic success. This hypothesis was confirmed at less than five percent error ($P < 5\%$) and with over 95% confidence.

The positive academic attitudes of teachers impact on students' academic success. This hypothesis was confirmed at less than one percent error ($P < 1\%$) and with over 99% confidence.

Therefore, the results showed that the academic attitudes of male and female students and teachers impact on students' academic achievement.

Introduction

The education of human being has been considered from the beginning, but its importance is increasingly apparent in recent centuries. Currently, education is the key to community development and the success and prosperity of nations depends on the quality of their education system. In this system, students and teachers constantly interact and communicate. One can somewhat predict the future of any country by looking at the student and teacher situation. If the student and teacher attitudes towards the education will be

weak, the students will have problems in their academic success. The Waller's view of teaching as organized leadership (quoted by Getzels, translated by Karimi, 1996) is as follows: From the second half of the twentieth century, the recognition has become more involved in evaluation of human behavior, especially learning. The psychologists have increasingly believed that human learning is not something constant. In other words, it was previously thought that non-changeable factors such as intelligence and talent are inherent; they are essential for any learning and the learning ability depends on the intelligence and talent of individuals. Also today, however, not only the talent and intelligence are considered as the most important factors determining the quantity and quality of human learning, but also some other factors have been identified as important and influential such as interest, motivation, attitude, and etc.

Considering the above and research subject, this question may arise: what are the adolescents and middle school students' perceptions and feelings toward school? This is a condition in which adolescents have gone through elementary school and start middle school. This means that they have an experience of being in school for a period of five years. Therefore, their attitude to school is affected by their elementary school experience. Their attitude is somewhat balanced in middle school. On the other hand, puberty period can create problems for their academic achievement.

Despite what was said, there is always and everywhere a great variation in the level of students learning in a class. If we want all students to learn a particular task to a certain criterion of mastery, there will be significant differences in help level to each of them and the time each of the students spend to reach the mastery level. Furthermore, it is observed that while the ability and talent of students are equal, some of the learning assignments are learned by just a few of the students and some other fails (Bloom 1.1982, p. 40).

Carroll (1963) defined the motivation to learn a task as the persistence of student during the learning. He defines persistence as the effort that students do eagerly to complete the needed work (Bloom, 1982, p. 87).

Meanwhile, the teacher's role in the academic success of students is very important. Makendelos (quoted by Khair, 1988) stated that parents make up the stage, but the play is performed with peers and teachers.

It can be concluded that the behaviors associated with students different attitudes lead to creation of different characters and dynamics in the classroom. If attitudes are predictors of behaviors, in that case, knowing the attitude of the students may enable the prediction of their future behaviors. On the other hand, if the attitudes affect behavior, then, offering appropriate assignments in class should made appropriate changes in student attitudes.

The fate of nearly a third of the population (about 19 million students) depends on the performance of teachers- the main agents of implementing education programs. Teachers play a key role in the process of education. According to famous contemporary psychologist, Piaget, the most beautiful reform and restructuring plan of the educational system will fail if sufficient and high quality teachers will not be available (Safi, 1997).

The teachers' attitudes play an important role in the educational success of students. If it will generally believed that the bests make the best, the role and influence of teachers on development will be more apparent.

According to the Japanese, the competency of education system is measured by the competency of teachers (Journal of education, 2003). Also, Centra and Potter (1980) stated that everyone knows some teachers are better than others, but it is hard to identify the

characteristics of superior teachers. In fact, no one can have superior characteristics (Quoted by Kaplan, 2000, p. 646).

Considering the role of teacher in teaching process, therefore, the recognition of teacher attitudes is important. In this regard, whether teachers who care and those who do not care the education create a difference in students' academic success?

Before the students' attitudes, first the mental characteristics and physical changes of middle school students will be considered. However, these factors cause the attitudes of this age group vary from elementary and high school students' attitudes. During early adolescence, rapid physical, cognitive, and social changes occur. Early Adolescence is a transitional period in which special needs arise for children. These needs will be met in middle school environment differently from elementary school environment. These years are very important and vital. The increased risk-taking of adolescents in many fields such as delinquency, sex, and drug use require special environment to meet the needs of students at this period. The middle school is different from high school. The students go from one class to another class. Each lesson has a separate teacher and every teacher has different conditions. The majority of children adapt themselves with the changes arise from going to middle school and high school environment. However, a few of them face with problems. Girls are somewhat more likely to suffer from these problems, because they – at the same time- are under different pressures. For many girls, the middle school coincides with many growth changes, particularly physical changes (Kaplan, 2000, p. 845).

Some of the students learn the material with interest and enthusiasm. However, some other students consider the learning of material as an obligation or duty. This group learns the material with less interest and eagerness. Finally, some other deal with the task with obvious discomfort. The learning for these individuals is associated with fear and frustration (Bloom, 1982).

The individuals are different in dealing with the subject of learning. These differences appear in their interests, attitudes, and self-view. When students perform a learning task with obvious enthusiasm and interest, the learning will be easier. In the same condition and compared to students who do not have obvious enthusiasm and interest, these students learn the homework more quickly and with higher achievement levels (Bloom, 1982). Also according to previous research, the high motivated students who have positive attitude toward school are more successful in education compared with children who are not interested in learning and school.

According to this description as the background, the study of students and teachers attitudes show its importance. Therefore, the present study was conducted on (girls-boys) middle schools in Zanjan. However, according to officials in Education Department of Zanjan and the report of Ministry of Education, the condition of Education in Zanjan has not appropriate rank in terms of educational achievements (National Report on the evaluation and analysis of the performance of Education, 2003).

Also given that most of the research in this field is conducted in other countries, its generalization to Iran's population may not be appropriate. The conducted research in Iran has studied a special lesson and has not considered all factors associated with attitudes towards education. Therefore, it is hoped that by investigating the attitudes of teachers and students, a major step be taken in the process of education until students reach to their real position.

Materials and Methods

The population consisted of all teachers (N=766) and all students (N=7314, Male=3776, Female=3538) in third-grade middle public schools in academic year 2004-2005. The multi-stage and stratified random sampling method was used to select the sample and increase the accuracy of the measurement as follows. In this study, two questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers, were used. The teachers' questionnaire (Minnesota attitude questionnaire) contained 35 questions which asked teachers to determine their real attitude toward education as: completely agree, agree, no idea, disagree, and completely disagree in each question. The used research design in this study was causal-comparative method. The statistical model in this study was Mann-Whitney Test which was used to compare the positive and negative attitudes (toward education) of students and positive and negative attitudes (toward graduation) of teachers in middle school. The tables and charts were used for descriptive analysis of data and displaying and summarizing the data. The median and distribution percentage were used to calculate the descriptive data. The SPSS software was used for inferential analysis of data (comparative-causal analysis), calculating Mann-Whitney formula, and confirmation of hypotheses.

Findings

First hypothesis: The positive academic attitudes of male students impact on their academic achievements.

Table 1: Number of subjects in the groups, test scores, and significant levels

Number of students	Score of Mann-Whitney u test	Table U at 1%	Table U at 5%
N=16 N=20	80	87	107

Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the following results were obtained:

The obtained score from the test equals to 80. This is smaller than both 1% and 5% levels of one range tests which are equal to 87 and 107, respectively. The 1% and 5% levels show a significant difference. Therefore, the result indicates that positive educational attitude impacts on academic achievement. According to results, therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed and null hypothesis is rejected.

Second hypothesis: The positive academic attitudes of female students impact on their academic achievements.

Table 2: Number of subjects in the groups, test scores, and significant levels

Number of students	Score of Mann-Whitney u test	Table U at 1%	Table U at 5%
N=15 N=20	99	80	100

Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the following results were obtained:

The obtained score from the test equals to 99. This is higher than 1% level of one range test and smaller than 5% levels of one range test. The 5% levels show a significant difference. Therefore, the result indicates that positive educational attitude impacts on academic achievement.

According to results, therefore, the second hypothesis is confirmed at 5% level and null hypothesis is rejected.

Third hypothesis: The positive academic attitudes of teachers impact on students' academic achievements.

Table 3: Number of subjects in the groups, test scores, and significant levels

Number of students	Score of Mann-Whitney u test	Table U at 1%	Table U at 5%
N=15 N=18	53	70	88

Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the following results were obtained:

The obtained score from the test equals to 53. This is smaller than both 1% and 5% levels of one range tests which are equal to 70 and 88, respectively. The 1% and 5% levels show a significant difference. Therefore, the result indicates teachers' educational attitude impacts on students' academic achievement. According to results, therefore, the third hypothesis is confirmed and null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that the positive educational attitude of teachers and students impact on students' academic achievement (success). So, it can be said that the students who had a positive attitude towards school obtained better grades than students who had negative attitudes toward school and education. The result of a research conducted in 1983 by experts in the office of general education in the field of teachers, students, and education authorities' attitudes is consistent with the findings of this study.

Also the findings of this study are consistent with the results of these studies: Sani (1991) research on educational attitude of teachers and educational performance of students, Saki (1994) research on success and failure factors of students' educational success and its relation with the academic success of students, Fathi (1995) research on educational attitude of students and their academic achievement, Rezayi (1996) research on the interaction between students and teachers and its relationship with academic achievement, Bromandian (1996) research on educational attitudes of students and their academic success, Rahmani (2001) research on attitude toward mathematics and success in this lesson, and Ghoftar (2003) research on teacher attitudes to science class and students' academic success.

All the above studies concluded that there is direct and significant relationship between the teachers and students educational attitudes and students' academic success (academic achievement). Therefore, the numerous studies that have been conducted in this field in Iran are consistent with the present study. Therefore, positive attitude of teachers and students will enhance students' academic progress and success.

A significant and positive relationship was obtained in the research of Roz Shine (1984) about the teacher attitudes and student academic achievement. Flanders (1988) found a positive and significant relationship in a study conducted on teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and interactions and students' academic success. Reed (1995) showed that the interaction between teachers and students impacts on the positive attitude of teachers and students and students' academic achievements. In a study on the attitudes of students and their academic success, Elizabeth et al (2000) found a positive and significant correlation. Another paper by

Raiden (2000) showed that there is a high correlation between teacher attitudes and academic success. However, all of these studies are consistent with this research.

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