The Perceived Effects of Home Environment on University Students' Study Motivation

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Abstract

Despite the large contribution of the family to the academic performance of students, studies that have examined the influence of home environment on students' motivation to study have been limited. Thus, this qualitative research aimed to describe the perceived contribution of physical and social home environment to university students' motivation to study. The respondents comprised 30 purposively selected college students, aged 18 to 24 years old, from a state university in the Philippines. One-on-one interviews were utilized to gather qualitative data from the respondents. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data. Results showed that the most influential aspect of physical home environment that motivated students to study was good interior ambiance which included comfortable room temperature, privacy, quiet study area, adequate study space, and good spatial organization. On the contrary, the characteristics of physical home environment that demotivated students from studying included uncomfortable and disorganized study space, noise, distracting facilities such as television and Internet, and the lack of personal study space. In terms of social home environment, care and assistance; affective communication; freedom; and respect from parents and siblings were among the factors that motivated students to study. In contrast, academic pressure from parents; social comparison; parents' lack of sensitivity; and family conflicts were aspects that lead to the lack of motivation to study. Finally, household tasks and rules were found to have both positive and negative perceived effects on study motivation.

Keywords: College Students, Motivation, Social Home Environment, Physical Home Environment

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Introduction

In a highly competitive society, academic performance is considered as one defining aspect of employability and plays a central role in a college student's success. Several factors influence academic performance, with motivation as one crucial aspect (Muola, 2010; Ndirika & Njoku, 2012; Orhan-Özen, 2017). Student motivation has been linked to several variables such classroom management, teaching methods, parental communication, and certain student characteristics (Yilmaz, Şahin, & Turgut, 2017). The environment where a student functions, including school and home environments, also influences study motivation (Rao & Reddy, 2016). Obeidat & Al-Share (2012) emphasized the importance of effectively designing classroom environments, since the classroom is a space where students perform various learning activities. However, equally important is the home environment that should provide a space that is conducive to studying. Students spend much of their study time at home and to be functional, the home should be a place that promotes motivation and engages learning.

Muola (2010) defined the home environment as "all the objects, forces and conditions in the home which influence the child physically, intellectually and emotionally" (p. 214). The home provides a strong impact on children's development and academic performance (Obeta, 2014). For instance, a study by Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (1998) revealed that children who were provided with a home environment that is conducive to learning opportunities were more academically and intrinsically motivated. The influence of home environment to motivation encompasses both physical and social home environments. The physical conditions and design of learning environments have an impact on student performance (Gifford, Steg & Reser, 2011); and influence motivation, focus, and performance (Scott-Webber, Abraham & Marini, 2000). On the other hand, social aspects of students' home environment such as family support also contribute to academic motivation (Urdan, Solek & Schoenfelder, 2007). Since the family is an important source of strength and affection (Joshi & Acharya, 2013), motivational actions such as parental encouragement (Lawrence & Barathi, 2016) and support (Shahzad, Abdullah, Fatima, Riaz & Mehmood, 2010); as well as sibling support (Alfaro and Umaña-Taylor, 2010) have positive influences on students' academic performance and motivation. Conversely, family conflicts and poor family relationships such as lack of guidance from parents can lead to poor motivation (Wanjiku, 2010).

Despite the importance of the home environment to study motivation, there is a paucity of studies that examine the influence of home and family situations to college students' motivation to study. Most studies that examine the effect of environment to motivation or academic performance focus on grade school or high school students as units of analysis (Akomolaf & Adesua, 2016; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1998; Rao & Reddy, 2016). In addition, many studies on work environment focus on corporate settings (El-Zeiny, 2012; Kamarulzaman, Saleh, Hashim, Hashim, & Abdul-Ghani, 2011), while only a few studies explore how characteristics in the home environment contribute to accomplishing school-related tasks. Hence, this qualitative study aimed to investigate the perceived contribution of physical and social home environment to university students' motivation to study. Specifically, the study described the aspects of physical and social home environment that either enhance or inhibit study motivation. For this study, physical home environment referred to

facilities and interior environment available for studying at home. On the other hand, social home environment pertained to the support that students receive from their parents and siblings, accomplishment of household chores, and household rules.

Theoretical Framework

The study utilized Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Family Systems Theory as bases for examining the perceived influence of home environment to university students' academic motivation. Maslow's theory depicts that individuals are motivated by several levels or hierarchy of needs (Gordon & Browne, 2010). These needs are interconnected with one another and forms a hierarchy in which the most basic needs such as physiological and safety needs should be met first before higher level needs (i.e. intellectual achievement and self-actualization) can be achieved (Woolfolk, 2009). At the bottom part of the hierarchy are basic physiological needs such as air, food, shelter, sleep, and clothing that are necessary for survival. Right above physiological needs are safety and security needs (e.g. the need to be protected from harm and danger) that can only be satisfied once the physiological needs are achieved. Next in the hierarchy are love and belongingness needs which come from family members, friends, and other people around an individual. The fourth level in the hierarchy is the need for self-esteem and respect, which pertains to an individual's need for confidence, recognition, self-worth, achievement, independence, as well as respect from other people. The highest level in the hierarchy is self-actualization or self-fulfillment, which can be achieved once all lower level needs are acquired (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017; Gordon & Browne, 2010; Woolfolk, 2009). Maslow's hierarchy can be used to examine how a student's varying needs in his or her physical and social home environment can influence study motivation. Specifically, when physiological, security, and love or belonging needs are met; this could facilitate the motivation to acquire higher levels of needs such as knowledge and learning.

While Maslow's theory was used to examine study motivation in relation to other human needs, the family systems theory was utilized to explain academic motivation in the context of family interactions and interrelationships. "A system is an integrated set of parts that function together for some end purpose or result (Goldsmith, 1996, p. 27)." The family systems theory gives importance to the interactions of individuals within the family (Watson, 2012) and views the family "as the primary relationship context in which individual character traits and ensuing patterns of behavior are learned and reinforced (Johnson & Ray, 2016, p. 782)." Several principles of the family systems theory were used as foundation of the current study including wholeness, family rules, and family boundaries. Wholeness refers to the family being understood as one whole entity. All families are interdependent and are tied together by their relationships and functions within the system (Roberts, 1994). On the other hand, family rules control the interactions between family members, define the bond and distance between them, and determine how families utilize resources and regulate authority and power among its members (Burr, Day, & Bahr as cited in Roberts, 1994). Lastly, family boundaries refer to limits and barriers between family members (whether physical or emotional) that control the amount of connection or interaction that occurs. Under this principle are three family subsystems – spousal, parental, and sibling (Roberts, 1994). Boundaries may also be visible (i.e. walls and gates) or invisible such as house rules (Goldsmith, 1996). In the current study, students were

viewed and understood as individuals who are part of a family system. The family systems theory was utilized in understanding how certain aspects the students' social home environment (i.e. parent and sibling support, household tasks, and household rules) affect their motivation to study. It was assumed that the type of interactions and interrelationships, as well as the boundaries and barriers that are present in the family would all contribute to the quality of the students' home environment, which would consequently influence their study motivation.

Methodology

This study has a qualitative research design, which utilized one-on-one interviews to gather data about the perceived contribution of physical and social home environment to university students' motivation to study. The respondents of the study comprised 30 college students from a state university in the Philippines. To ensure maximum variation of data, respondents were not limited to any age group and year level; and were selected from various degree programs. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 24 years old. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to gather rich and substantial data, using the following criteria: first, the students must be living in a permanent or fixed residence (i.e. not a dormer) and second, the respondents must be living with their parents and siblings. The interviews were conducted individually with an estimated time of thirty minutes and were documented using a phone recorder. Before the start of each interview, a consent form was handed and explained to the respondents. This document contained important information about the research, including the researcher's name, contact information, the title of the study and its objectives, procedure and length of time needed for the interview, a statement on the extent of confidentiality and voluntary participation, and consent to record the interview. Students who agreed to participate were requested to sign the informed consent form and were subsequently interviewed. At the end of each interview, a simple token of appreciation was given to the students. The qualitative data that emerged from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

1. Emergent Themes on the Contribution of Physical Home Environment to Study Motivation

Three emergent themes were identified with respect to the contribution of physical home environment to study motivation; including good interior ambiance, availability of study facilities and equipment, and availability of food and drinks. Among these themes, good interior ambiance was the most common motivating factor that was identified. Good interior ambiance is related to the following subthemes: comfortable room temperature, quiet study space, privacy and personal space, adequate study space, comfortable study space, and good spatial organization. According to the students, they were motivated to study when the room temperature is just right – neither too hot nor too cold. A warm room temperature makes them uneasy, while a room temperature that is too cold makes them sleepy. The quietness of the study area also plays an essential role in the students' motivation to study, as described by one student –*"The silence in my study area makes me feel that I should be studying (Student 22)."* Aside from room temperature and silence, the availability of privacy and personal space is also an important motivating factor. The respondents stated that

they are motivated to study when they are alone in the room and if they have their own personal space and privacy. One student shared – *"The fact that I have my own table and I have my own space motivates me* (Student 23)*."* Aside from having a personal study space, a comfortable and spacious study space adds to students' study motivation.

Next to interior ambiance, the availability of study facilities and equipment is another physical home environment factor that motivates students to study. Study facilities and equipment include their own study table, strong Internet connection, comfortable chair, good lighting fixtures, shelves for study materials, and own laptop. These facilities provide comfort when studying hence, can stimulate the desire to study. On the other hand, the absence of these facilities and equipment lead to discomfort which could decrease the drive to study. This was evident in the words of one student, as shown below.

When there is bright lighting in my room, I am motivated to study. One time when my mother asked me to try using a lamp instead of the lights in my room to save resources, I got really sleepy. I like it more when the whole room is lighted (Student 8).

Another motivating aspect in the students' physical home environment is the availability of study needs, especially food and drinks. According to one student – *"When I am at home, I am motivated (to study) when there is food* (Student 12)*."* However, study facilities and equipment do not always enhance study motivation, especially when their use is not regulated. For example, having internet connection at home is a double-edged sword. It enhances motivation because it is necessary in finishing schoolwork, but at the same time can also be distracting, if its use is unregulated. The effect of the students' physical home environment to study motivation can be examined using Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Since physical space, food, and beverage are physiological needs, students must first meet these basic needs before they strive to attain higher levels of need such as intellectual achievement. Without a comfortable study space, adequate study facilities, as well as proper nourishment; students would find it difficult to acquire higher levels of needs such as focus and motivation in studying.

2. Emergent Themes on the Influence of Social Home Environment to Study Motivation

Analysis of qualitative data on the contribution of parental support to study motivation resulted to seven emergent themes – care and assistance, affective communication, freedom, rewards and affirmation, desire to pay back, parental pressure, and social comparison. The care and assistance that children receive from their parents emerged to be the most motivating factor for them. Care and assistance include parental presence, consideration, and the provision food and other needs while studying. On the other hand, affective communication is felt by children when parents communicate with them in a warm and encouraging manner, provide them with sound advice and constant reminders, ask them how they were feeling, remind them to rest, and listen to their stories and point-of-view. The importance of affective communication in enhancing study motivation is shown in the words of one student –

"They give me sound advice especially when I am having a hard time. They tell me, 'You can do it (Student 27)*!"*

Another aspect of parental support that encourages study motivation is the freedom that students receive from their parents. Freedom is felt by the students when parents do not exert much academic pressure on them, and when they are given the chance to decide for themselves. Freedom as a motivating factor can be linked to one of the psychological needs stated in Deci and Ryan's (as cited in Passer and Smith, 2008) self-determination theory which is autonomy. Autonomy pertains to the need to attain self-regulation, freedom, control and independence, which when acquired can lead to fulfillment and self-determination. In the case of the university students in this study, the freedom given by parents could lead to the sense of being in control, which then contributes to academic motivation. Next to freedom, rewards and affirmation also influence study motivation in a positive way. Rewards and affirmation come in the form of verbal praises and material rewards, as well as the students' desire for their parents to be proud of them. The influence of these external rewards to academic motivation may be explained by Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory (as cited in Seifert & Sutton, 2009) wherein he looked at reinforcements such as rewards, as stimuli that increases the likelihood of behavior. Rewards and verbal praises given by parents when their children perform well in school serve as stimuli that increases the likelihood of studying.

The desire to pay back to parents also emerged as an external reinforcer that influences the students' motivation to study. The students appreciate the care and hardships that their parents went through to send them to school. The desire to give back to their parents to show their gratitude, and to help their families financially, serve as motivators for them to study hard. The desire to give back to one's family is a common Filipino value that Filipino children hold. This is exemplified is the words of one student below.

There's this sense of responsibility that, since they brought you up in this world you have to someday pay them back, so all of the things that I'm doing right now are not really for myself but for my parents, so that I can help them since I'm already graduating (Student 26).

As described, good parental support and parent-child relationship reinforces students' motivation to study. On the contrary, emergent themes also showed that certain aspects of parental support could lead to demotivation. One of which is parental pressure that includes the fear of not meeting parents' expectations, pressure to receive high grades, and pressure to graduate right away. In a similar way, social comparison also influences study motivation in a negative manner. The students shared that they feel demotivated when their parents compare them with their siblings and other people. Maslow's hierarchy of needs may be used to explain why parental pressure and social comparison lead to study demotivation. It is possible that parental pressure and social comparison could lead to feelings of insecurity on the part of the students; and without security, the second level of need in Maslow's hierarchy, the drive to move on to higher levels of needs (i.e. intellectual curiosity) could be hampered. Other aspects of parental support that influence study motivation in a negative manner include parental insensitivity and conflicts with parents.

In the same way that positive aspects of parental support enhance study motivation, the support that students receive from their siblings also influence academic motivation. Emergent themes of sibling support that motivate the students to study include affective communication, care and assistance, respect, siblings as source of inspiration, and desire to support siblings in the future. Affective communication with siblings was found to be the most influential aspect that motivates students to study. This includes receiving encouraging words and sound advice from siblings, willingness to listen to each other, as well as positive sibling bonding. The care and assistance that students receive from their siblings also encourage them to study. This includes assistance in school requirements & household chores, companionship, provision of food, and financial help. One student shared how the assistance from a sibling enhanced his/her study motivation – *"Sometimes, when I am the one tasked to wash the dishes, my sibling volunteers to do it so that I can do my assignments* (Student 6).*"*

Another aspect of sibling relationship that motivates students to study is respect from siblings. Sibling respect pertains to respecting each other's personal space, study time, and responsibilities at home. In addition to sibling respect, the accomplishments of siblings also emerged as a source of inspiration that leads to study motivation. Several students shared that they feel motivated to study because they want to emulate their siblings who have finished their education and were already working. Finally, the desire to support their siblings in the future also reinforces the students' motivation to study. This result is related to the students' desire to give back to their parents, which reflects the Filipino value called "debt of gratitude." According to one student – *"Since my brother is only in Grade 9, he has many years to go until college and one way of pushing myself to be successful is the fact that eventually, I need to be able to fund his studies* (Student 26).*"*

There are also aspects of sibling relationship that demotivate students from studying such as time-intensive distractions, lack of sensitivity, and sibling conflicts. Distractions usually occur whenever siblings create noise, give out commands, or when siblings simply want to spend time with each other instead of studying. On the other hand, lack of sensitivity occurs whenever siblings are not considerate of each other's study needs; while sibling conflicts usually comprise bickering and petty fights.

The family systems theory is useful in explaining the emergent themes of parental and sibling support that affect students' academic motivation. Applying the theory – the students, their siblings, and their parents can be considered as subsystems within the whole family system. Whatever transpires within one subsystem, and between subsystems could influence the behavior of family members. As evident in the emergent themes, the interaction of the students with family members, particularly their parents and siblings, can lead to either academic motivation or demotivation depending on the quality of the said interaction and relationship. When parents and siblings communicate in affective and loving ways, and when they show care and respect to the students; the students benefit from these positive forms of interactions that leads to increased study motivation. In addition, the feeling of unity with the family as shown in the students' desire to give back to their parents and support their siblings in the future serves as a driving force to finish their studies. On the other hand, interactions that are characterized by parental or sibling insensitivity,

interpersonal conflicts, and lack of trust and freedom have an undesirable effect on that students' study motivation. These negative interactions and relationships can form emotional and social barriers that prevent students from functioning effectively.

3. Emergent Themes on the Influence of Household Tasks to Study Motivation

Emergent themes on the perceived effect of household tasks to study motivation depicted both positive and negative influences. Primarily, students perceive household tasks as a cause of distraction and exhaustion, which hampers their study motivation. The students shared that they lose their momentum and focus in studying whenever they do household tasks. The students added that household tasks tire them, leaving them will little energy for studying, as shown in the words of the student below.

It affects when you have a lot of chores to do, sometimes you can't say no to your family, and once you can't say no you have to do all those chores and you'll get tired and when you have to study already, you'll get demotivated because you want to sleep (Student 4).

While accomplishing household tasks have negative effects on students' academic motivation, it can also have positive effects for some of them. Some respondents mentioned that household tasks help them set the mood before studying and could serve as a study break. Household chores allow them to clean and organize their things, bedroom, and study area which contributes to enhanced motivation when studying. Some students shared that their chores at home refresh their mind before they start to work again. According to one student - "*I do the household tasks to refresh my brain so I am motivated when I go back to study* (Student 22).*"*

4. Emergent Themes on the Influence of Household Rules to Study Motivation

Similar with household tasks, household rules have both positive and negative perceived effects on students' study motivation. Some student perceive that household rules lead to better study motivation because these rules teach them proper time management and focus. According to these students, household rules along with the constant reminders by their parents, help them to minimize the use of gadgets and social media, and enable them to manage their time properly. Consequently, proper time management and regulated social media use contribute to study motivation. On the other hand, the influence of household rules on study motivation is adverse for some students. A few students shared that household rules make them feel uneasy, and accordingly leads to demotivation. According to one respondent, rules at home such as games and social media regulation cause him to be anxious of his actions, which results to decreased motivation in studying. The thoughts of one student on how household rules can be limiting is shown below.

It feels limiting though I understand that we need rules to help us manage our time. However, knowing that they always try to limit or regulate our activities, knowing that they do that 100% of the time to the point that I need to be attentive with what I do, feels limiting (Student 9).

Majority of students perform their household chores before studying thus, causing them to be physically tired. However, if household tasks are scheduled in a more

strategic manner, say during study breaks of after studying, these could lead to less negative influences on study motivation. Considering the responses of the students, household rules can lead to an increase or decrease in study motivation depending on how these are implemented at home. When household rules are reasonable, students see these rules as helpful and enabling. On the contrary, when rules are overbearing, the students lose their sense of freedom, which gets in the way of studying. The undesirable influence of stringent rules on study motivation may be explained by one of the basic phycological needs, in Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory which is autonomy. The self-determination theory proposes that people who attain self-regulation, freedom, and control over their own actions, alongside competence and relatedness can reach fulfillment and self-determination (Legault, 2017; Passer & Smith, 2008). The self-determination theory also "describes the critical impact of the social and cultural context in either facilitating or thwarting people's basic psychological needs, perceived sense of self-direction, performance, and well-being (Legault, 2017, p. 1)." Therefore, household rules can either increase or impede study motivation, depending on how these are carried out at home.

Conclusion

The physical and social home environment of the university students have varied influences on their study motivation. A physical home space that provides a comfortable, quiet, and private study area; coupled with proper study facilities and needs create a motivating study environment for students. Similarly, a social home environment where positive interaction and affection are present, rewards and verbal affirmation are appropriately given, and household tasks and rules are reasonably implemented, also provide a stimulating study atmosphere. The provision of an adequate physical home environment enables the student to achieve their basic needs for comfort and sustenance, thereby allowing them to move on attaining higher level needs such as intellectual stimulation. On the other hand, a desirable social home environment facilitates positive interrelationships and interactions among family members that leads to an effective family system that stimulates study motivation. When combined, a stimulating physical home environment and a positive social home environment brings about a family system wherein the necessary components and subsystems work together to create a motivating study environment.

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