Predictors of Emotional Well-being and Academic Motivation in Junior Schoolchildren

Marina V. Grigoryeva, Rail M. Shamionov*

*Saratov State University, Astrachanskaya ul., 83, Saratov, 410012, Russia

Abstract

Academic motivation and emotional well-being in junior schoolchildren are important factors for their academic adaptation. The purpose of the present investigation is to study substantial predictors of emotional well-being and academic motivation in junior schoolchildren. 266 people took part in the investigation (among them: 136 primary school children, 10 teachers, 120 parents). Research results: academic motivation is formed under direct influence of parents' attitude to school and school teacher, as well as verbal intellect. Emotional well-being in junior schoolchildren is conditioned by a set of positive and negative predictors, with good socio-psychological adaptation and relatively low speed of nervous processes being the most influential ones.

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1. Introduction

Psychological analysis of inextricably interconnected emotional well-being and academic motivation in junior schoolchildren is a critical task for modern childhood psychology. Viewing the problem from this angle is not accidental, as it proceeds from a well-known provision regarding the fundamental connection between emotions and motives.

Various events is a child’s school life condition his/her emotional well-being or ill-being. L.S. Vygotsky [1] pointed out that emotional effect of an event acts as a ground for building numerous emotional connections.
In this respect, not only emotions linked to academic activity, but a number of other emotionally significant events as well, are on the whole significant for a child’s well-being. At the same time, the latter turns out to be the most significant factor in his/her activity (including academic activity). Scientists that carry out research on childhood psychology [2], [3], [4] pointed out that major personal new formations in junior schoolchildren, which are formed within the framework of academic activity, serve as a foundation for successful academic adaptation of a child at further stages of his/her education.

Studies that have been carried out over the last decades determined the significance of the factor of “parent-child relations” for children’s academic motivation and achievements [5], as well as attitude to a teacher, style of a teacher’s pedagogic communication [6], and relations within a child’s peer group. A number of studies, which have been carried out by Russian psychologists, are dedicated to singling out internal factors of academic motivation [7], [8], [9], [10], [11]. There are several large-scale investigations that are dedicated to overall study of motivation and emotional well-being under conditions of experimental learning [12], [13]. Over the recent time, new scientific findings touch upon conditions for academic motivation development through project-based activity [13], and educational environment organization [14], [15].

Nevertheless, we still have to solve problems linked to predication of emotional well-being and motivation of a child in non-orthographic environment of various determinants. Due to the fact that junior schoolchildren’s major activity is the academic activity, and their academic motives are being formed within it, it is important to understand how emotional balance and motivation are correlated, what conditions both of them to a greater degree, i.e. external factors (attitude of teachers, parents), internal psychic formations (verbal intellect), or psycho-physiological peculiarities (properties of the nervous system) of a child. That is why, it is important to analyze various characteristics as possible predictors of these phenomena.

The purpose of the study is to investigate substantial predictors of emotional well-being and academic motivation in junior schoolchildren.

2. Methodology of Research

2.1. General background of research

The paradigm of the study: This study is conducted on the basis of methodology for systematic and structured approach in psychology. In accordance with the purpose and basic approach, the study is carried out with correlation and comparison survey method.

2.2. Participants

The study was carried out at the beginning of the second academic school year. Primary school students aged 7-8 from city schools took part in the study. The size of the sample was 266 people. Among them were 136 second grade students, 10 teachers, and 120 parents. The sample was formed by means of stratified selection method.

2.3. Instruments

Verbal intellect of primary school children was detected through Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children in the adaptation of Yu.I. Filimonenko and V.I. Timofeev [16]. Wechsler’s test consists of six verbal and five nonverbal subtests. The standard norms are separately determined for every subtest; therefore, it is possible to use verbal subtests as an individual diagnostic instrument. The verbal part includes subtests, which determine general knowledge, understanding, operative memory and attention, ability to find similarity, and vocabulary.
Children’s emotional well-being and socio-psychological adaptation were defined using the method of standardized observation. The criteria of emotional well-being are: lack of manifestation of negative emotions, despondency, emotional instability, negative influence of emotions of academic activity results. The criteria of socio-psychological adaptation are: rapport, high or medium social status among classmates, friendliness, lack of aggression aimed at people around. Parents’ attitude to school (negative, neutral, positive) was identified with the help of questionnaires.

The scales that were used in the process of standardized observation also served the purpose of obtaining expert evaluations of students’ adaptation successfulness. In this case parents and teachers evaluated results of schoolchildren’s adaptation at school according to criteria of the scales mentioned above. Theoretical validity of criteria and scales for standardized observation and expert evaluation was proved [17].

Qualitative evaluations of academic motivation were obtained using N.G. Luskanova’s method [18], which includes 10 questions with three optional answers to each question. In order to differentiate between children according to their level of school motivation, the author developed a point-based rating system, which works as follows. The child’s answer, which is indicative of his/her positive attitude to school and his/her preference of academic situations is evaluated with 3 points; neutral answer (I do not know, there can be different situations, etc.) are evaluated with 1 point; the answer, which allows to identify negative attitude of a schoolchild to a certain academic situation, is evaluated with 0 points.

In order to define peculiarities of schoolchildren’s behavior, which are connected with their nervous system’s flexibility, we used the following scales: “psychomotor speed”, “intellectual speed”, “communicative speed”, and V.M. Rusalov’s questionnaire of individual formal dynamic properties [19].

2.4. Data analysis

The statistical analysis has been conducted by SPSS 17.0. The results are processed with the Student t-criteria and the Pearson correlation analysis.

3. Results and discussion.

The model that explains 43% of dispersion was chosen to describe academic motivation predictors for junior schoolchildren: AM = 10,2 + 2,59PA + 0,15IQ, where AM is academic motivation, PA – parents’ attitude to school, IQ – measure of verbal intellect (table 1).

Table 1. Predictors of Academic Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Non-standardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Const.)</td>
<td>10,178</td>
<td>1,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellect</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ attitude</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>.548</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see that parents’ attitude to school is one of the significant predictors of academic motivation in junior schoolchildren. It proves the leading role of social motives in the structure of academic motivation in junior schoolchildren. Parents determine directionality of children’s academic activity, stimulate their academic achievements, adjust their attitude to academic process and results. Generally positive attitude to school and school teachers, which is demonstrated by parents, conditions the power of academic motivation in children. Interest to content of learning starts to prevail within the structure of children’s academic motives. Negative
attitude to school, that some parents demonstrate, promotes the development of motives of avoiding trouble, and general decrease of interest in the content of learning and school subjects in children.

The second predictor of academic motivation in junior schoolchildren is verbal intellect. General knowledge, understanding, ability to define differences and similarities, understanding and ability to define definition of words, level of concentration, and operative memory collectively influence academic motivation.

It is obvious that the ease with which intellectual activities are performed on a verbal material and their successful completion promote formation of positive attitude to academic process. Knowledge and quick understanding influence the desire to learn in the future. They form cognitive foundation and act as tools for gaining new knowledge. Ability to determine differences and similarities promotes structuring of the already existing and new knowledge, as well as easiness in building association and logical connections between concepts. Good level of concentration and operative memory act as conditions for learning new material. Unitedly all these factors contribute to positive experience of success and easy acquisition of school subjects’ content, which, in its turn, stimulates cognitive interest and further development of cognitive motivation.

Predictors of emotional well-being in junior schoolchildren are more versatile psychological phenomena, than academic motivation. In order to describe predictors of emotional well-being in junior schoolchildren, we have chosen the regression model, which explains 53% of dispersion. This is how the model looks:

\[ EWB = 2.83 + 0.69SPA + 0.15TE + 0.04PE - 0.47SNP - 0.06PA - 0.01IQ, \]


Table 2. Predictors of emotional well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Non-standardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Const.)</td>
<td>2.965</td>
<td>4.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous system’s flexibility</td>
<td>-0.529</td>
<td>-1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt.Teacher</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-psychological adapt.</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be seen from the regression model (table 2), the strongest positive predictor of subjective well-being in junior schoolchildren is socio-psychological adaptation of a schoolchild in the school’s new social environment. Adaptation to social environment in class, active inclusion into it, positive attitude to classmates and school teacher, high social status among classmates contribute to establishment of positive emotional academic background, allow to experience well-being, social recognition, commonality with peers, and emotional well-being on the whole.

General emotional well-being is influenced by teachers’ and parents’ evaluation of general school adaptation process in children. Moreover, teachers’ evaluations are stronger predictors than parents’ evaluations. The more positively adults evaluate results of a child’s adaptation to school, the more his/her emotional being manifests itself. It demonstrates the interconnection between inner emotions of a junior schoolchild and his/her evaluation by the immediate adults. This prediction defines raised requirements for the adult participants of educational process in terms of adequacy and impartiality of their evaluations to verbalization and demonstration of their evaluations.

The strongest negative predictor of subjective well-being in junior schoolchildren is the speed of nervous processes. The higher the speed, the lower is the child’s emotional well-being. It is obviously connected with flexibility of emotions, more rapid “launching” of both positive and negative emotions in the course of academic
process, easy emergence of any type of emotions, including those unconnected with cognition and academic process. This process consequently interferes with studies; it is linked to bad discipline, interference with educational process in the course of the lesson, teachers’ negative reactions and negative emotions that a child experiences him/herself.

Negative prediction of a child’s emotional well-being as far as the level of his/her verbal intellect is concerned, can be explained by difficulty, which is caused by a combination of high level of intellect and experiencing well-being. It is obvious, that intellectuality contributes to more intensive mental work, relatively high level of aspirations and self-evaluation, increased level of alertness, when self-evaluation and aspirations are not supported; it is linked to general negative emotional background, which accompanies students’ academic process.

4. Conclusions

Due to the fact that major activity of junior schoolchildren is academic activity, one of the major factors of their emotional well-being is academic successfulness and academic adaptation of a child. These characteristics are on the one hand largely determined by academic motivation and social adaptation of a child, and on the other hand by parents’ attitude to school.

As we can see from the two regression models, parents’ attitude to school in the course of their children’s academic process is rather contradictory. On the one hand, parents’ positive attitude to school positively influences their children’s academic motivation (first regression model). On the other hand, parents’ attitude to school is inversely related to emotional well-being of their children. Parents’ positive attitude to school and school teacher is linked to acceptance of the requirements that the school offers to their child’s studies, his/her behavior. These requirements primarily deal with the cognitive sphere, achievement of certain results in the course of the cognitive process, as well as behavioral manifestations and randomness. Parents’ support of school requirements hinders emotional support of a child, makes him/her cope with emotions independently, which does not contribute to a child’s emotional well-being.

Therefore, emotional well-being of a junior schoolchild is conditioned by a larger number of predictors, than academic motivation. Academic motivation is formed under direct influence of parents’ attitude to school, school teachers, and verbal intellect. Emotional well-being of junior schoolchildren is conditioned by a set of positive and negative predictors, among which the most influential ones are good socio-psychological adaptation and low speed of nervous processes.

5. References


