Authoritative Approach and Student Empowerment Among University Students

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Abstract

This study examines the role of instructors’ authoritative attitudes on learner empowerment among university students. Study sample comprised of 322 university students attending a faculty of education in Turkey. Their ages ranged from 17-25 years (mean age: 20.34 years). Multiple regression analysis results suggested that authoritative attitudes of the instructors positively predicted all three dimensions of learner empowerment. More specifically, instructors’ authoritative attitudes accounted for the largest variance in meaningfulness (48.8%), followed by impact (21.4 %) and competence (13.2%). These results suggested that instructors’ authoritative approaches to the classroom management have impact on learner empowerment.

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Keywords: Learner empowerment; authoritative attitudes of instructors; higher education

1. Introduction

Instructor behaviors and individual characteristics of students are among the essential ingredients of an effective teaching-learning environment. On the part of instructors, they have the responsibility for both maximizing learning and sustaining order in classroom events (Burroughs, 2007). This underlies that, for an effective teaching, instructors should consider and effectively manage the interplay between the academic and social dimensions of classrooms (Walker, 2009). The teachers’ approach in classroom management has a crucial role in creating an effective teaching-learning process (Snowman & Biehler, 2003). Previous research suggested that prosocial techniques in classroom management are likely to increase student perceptions of the teacher immediacy which in turn results in greater affective learning (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey & Richmond, 1986). More specifically,

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teachers’ authoritative approach in classroom management is perceived as a more effective approach than permissive and authoritarian approaches (McCaslin & Good, 1992).

Authoritative approach to classroom management draws on the Baumrind’s (1971) parenting styles, including both control and nurturance. Teachers with authoritarian approach creates a classroom in which students can regulate their own behavior by explaining the rationale for classroom rules and adjusting these as students make progress toward governing themselves appropriately (Smowman & Biehler, 2003). Authoritative teachers employ positive instructional practices within a highly controlling and nurturing context (Walker, 2009). Thus, in such environment, students have the opportunity to see and internalize the rationales underlying classrooms and comply with the rules on their own initiative (McCaslin & Good, 1992). Previous research has provided some evidences on the relationship between authoritative approach and positive academic and behavioral outcomes among elementary school students (Baker, Clark, Crowl & Carlson, 2009), and adolescents (Kuntsche, Gmel & Rehm, 2006). However, relatively few empirical studies exist on the relationships between authoritative approaches and student outcomes in higher education classrooms. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the role of authoritative approach in learner empowerment in a higher education setting in Turkey.

Learner empowerment, as a motivation based construct, refers to learners’ finding a task meaningful, feeling competent to perform a task, and having the feeling of their efforts have an impact on the scheme of things in their class (Frymier, Shulman & Houser, 1996). Previous findings showed that instructors’ use of power in the classroom (Schrodt et al., 2008), attendance policy and assessment choice (Brooks & Young, 2011), and teacher immediacy (Houser & Frymier, 2009) were among the instructor behaviors which were associated with learner empowerment. These findings suggest that instructor behaviors have influence on learner empowerment. Therefore, in this study it was hypothesized that authoritative attitudes of instructors as an instructor behavior would significantly predict impact, meaningfulness, and competence dimensions of learner empowerment.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The study sample included 322 (222 females, 100 males) university students who were attending different programs within the faculty of education of a public university in Turkey. Participants ranged in age from 17-25 years (mean age: 20.34 years, $SD = 1.52$).

2.2. Measures

**Authoritative attitudes of teachers.** Authoritative approaches of teachers were measured using Duman and Koc’s (2004) Teacher Democratic Attitudes Scale (TDAS). The TDAS consists of 28 Likert items measuring students’ perceptions of their instructor’s authoritative attitudes and behaviors. Responses were solicited using 5-point scale that ranged from (1) Never to (5) Always. In their development of the TDAS, Duman and Koc (2004) provided evidence for construct validity for the scale, confirming the one-factor structure of the scale. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of the scale in the original study and the current study were .96 and .97, respectively.

**Learner empowerment.** Learner empowerment were measured using a Turkish adaptation of Frymier et al.’s (1996) Learner Empowerment Scale (LES). The original LES is comprised of 35-items that assess student’s feelings of empowerment across dimensions of impact, meaningfulness and competence using a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (‘Never’) to 5 (‘Very often’). Principal component analysis conducted by Cakir and Erdogan (2014) to test the reliability and validity of the Turkish version of the LES yielded a 3-factor structure similar to the original version; however, after several items were excluded due to either low corrected item-total correlations or low factor loadings, the Turkish version comprises 23 items which was validated using confirmatory factor analysis. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients for impact, meaningfulness and competence ranged from were .89, .92, and .90, respectively.
2.3. Data collection procedures

Data was collected during regular class time, using a self-reporting questionnaire containing several scales, and participation in the study was voluntary. In order to include a variety of teachers and different courses in the study, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires with reference to the teacher they had immediately prior to the class in which the questionnaire was distributed (e.g. Finn & Schrodt, 2012; Frymier et al., 1996).

3. Results

Prior to the main analysis, data was examined in terms of the assumptions for hierarchical regression analysis, and the main assumptions were evidenced. Table 1 shows the intercorrelations among study variables. Results indicated that all correlations between predictor and dependent variables were statistically significant, with correlations ranging from .36 to .70.

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<th>Variables</th>
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<td>1. Impact</td>
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<td>2. Meaningfulness</td>
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<td>3. Competence</td>
<td>.58*</td>
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<td>4. Authoritative attitudes</td>
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<td>17.00</td>
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<td>16.66</td>
<td>105.85</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>9.16</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>26.19</td>
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Note: *p<.01.

Three separate multiple regression analyses were employed to examine whether authoritative attitudes of instructors significantly predict impact, meaningfulness, and competence dimensions of learner empowerment. All three regressions were significant [Impact: F (1, 320) = 87.047, p<.001, \( R^2_{adj} = .211 \); Meaningfulness: F (1, 320) = 304.72, p<.001, \( R^2_{adj} = .486 \); and Competence: F (1, 320) = 48.86, p<.001, \( R^2_{adj} = .130 \)]. Beta weights are displayed in Table 2. Overall, results revealed that authoritative attitudes of the instructors accounted for relatively larger variance in meaningfulness dimension of learner empowerment.

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<td>Meaningfulness</td>
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<td>Competence</td>
<td>Authoritative attitudes</td>
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Note: *p<.01.

4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the role of instructors’ authoritative attitudes on impact, meaningfulness, and competence dimensions of learner empowerment. The findings of the study confirmed the hypothesis that authoritative attitudes of instructors were predictive for all three dimensions of learner empowerment. More specifically, instructors’ authoritative attitudes accounted a large variance in meaningfulness (48.8%), which was followed by impact (21.4%) and competence (13.2%). These results gave further evidence for the assertion that “the
best student outcomes were associated with an authoritative teaching style” (Walker, 2009, p. 127). Further, authoritative attitudes of instructors accounted for the largest variance in meaningfulness, which gave further support for the previous findings on the relatively larger effect of teacher behavior and student-teacher interaction on meaningfulness dimension of learner empowerment (Weber, 2003).

Collectively, these results suggest that when students perceive their instructors as using positive instructional practices within a controlling and nurturing context, their feeling of empowerment as a learner can be enhanced. Although the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between instructor behaviors and learner empowerment, there are certain limitations of the study to be mentioned. One of the limitations of the study is related to the correlational nature of the study design. The correlational study design makes it impossible to establish directional relationships among the study variables. The second limitation of the study is related to the use of non-random sampling. The study included university student who attend faculty of education, which may not be representative of students from other faculties. Finally, as this study focused on only authoritative attitudes of instructors, it is difficult to see the relative influence of other instructor attitudes on learner empowerment. Therefore, it can be recommended that all instructors’ attitudes (i.e. authoritarian, neglectful attitudes) can be included in future studies in order to compare the influence of different attitudes on learner empowerment. Despite these limitations, findings of this study highlighted the importance of instructors’ behaviors as an important agent in empowering students in higher education. In order to examine whether these findings can be generalized to students from different faculties, future studies with more diverse and larger samples are needed.

References