



Understanding Academic Motivation of High Achieving Students with Hearing Impairment in Higher Education: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: *This study explored the factors that motivate students with hearing impairment (HI) to excel academically at the university level. The study incorporated a qualitative research design. Purposive sampling was used to select ten students with HI from a private university in Lahore. All the participants were engaged in face-to-face in-depth interviews with the help of a sign language interpreter to gather the information. The findings of the study showed almost all the participants of the study were externally motivated, aiming at achieving contingent rewards. They seemed more interested in receiving external rewards (external regulation), or the influence from their families or universities have made them internalized the significance of their academic pursuits (introjected regulation), or they had chosen to identify with the value of education provided to them by family, teachers or others (identified regulation). Intrinsic motivation leads to creativity and high-quality learning; universities must spark intrinsic motivation among their students, and students with HI are no exception to that.*

Key Words: Motivation, Hearing Impairment, Academic Achievement, Case Study

Introduction

University education is rather climacteric for students with HI. It enables them to socialize with confidence, acquire the proper knowledge and skills, leading them to ultimate financial independence and improved quality of life. With the sensitivity to students' unique needs comes their acceptance; thus, the students with special needs are provided with better opportunities to accomplish their educational goals (Forlin, 2013).

In the wake of closing the education gap for students with disabilities, governments across the globe are promoting an inclusive education system (Tahira, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020). It is an educational approach that allows students to study and learn together regardless of their differences (Sapon-Shevin, 2003; Iqbal & Muhammad, 2020). Therefore, students with HI are being provided with equal opportunities to study in regular institutes and universities. However, universities must make several arrangements, such as hiring sign language interpreters and training the faculty for using sign language to enrol and accommodate students with HI (Rajpoot, Muhammad, & Anis, 2021).

Under the umbrella of hearing impairment comes all individuals suffering from any type of hearing loss, whether slight or profound. Deafness is a severe loss of hearing that hinders the learning of language through hearing. On the other hand, hard

hearing loss requires hearing aids to recognize the speech (Moore, 2007). Minimal hearing loss can be defined as the deficiency in hearing that creates classroom issues for students and is characterized by a level of hearing loss between 16 and 25 dB (Kaderavek & Pakulski, 2002).

Motivation involves biological, social, emotional, and cognitive factors that generate behaviors required to act. It can be extrinsic; a person is motivated by an external award or people. In contrast, the motivation from within is known as intrinsic motivation (Dev, 1997). Much of the academic performance of the students is dependent on the type of motivation they have. Students with intrinsic motivation have performed academically better than those with extrinsic motivation (Amrai, Motlagh, Zalani, & Parhon, 2011; Kusurkar, Ten Cate, Vos, Westers, & Croiset, 2013). But the question remains the same, what makes the very fabric of intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation cannot be cultivated in a matter of days. It's a lifelong process that takes into consideration teachers and their teaching styles. The more democratic a teacher is, the more intrinsically motivated a student will be (Flink, Boggiano, & Barrett, 1990; Vallerand & Fortier, 1991). Also, support from parents has its say in how intrinsically motivated their child will be. Vallerand and Fortier (1991) concluded that

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students are most likely to perform well and feel intrinsically motivated when their parents are supportive and are positively involved in their academic activities.

Since the students studying in the same classroom differently perform because they have different motivation levels, some of the students with hearing disabilities enrolled in regular universities have shown outstanding semester results compared to their class fellows. Though there is an extensive body of literature on challenges and learning styles of students with HI, there is a gap in literature exploring the types of motivation among students with HI. Therefore, this study aims to study the types of motivation among high achievers with hearing disabilities studying in regular universities.

Literature Review

Motivation is the reason behind what people do and why they do it. Students if feel motivated have shown phenomenal academic results. Motivation has different categories and levels where students characterize and regulate themselves while doing activities. Students set their goals and achieve them out of their own will and without being excited by a reward or praise from someone are said to have been intrinsically motivated individuals. While some achieve excellence in their pursuits by being motivated by a peer, teacher, parent, or some reward are said to have been extrinsically motivated. In both cases, students have shown outstanding academic performances (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Variability in factors of interpersonal motivation about social context regulate internal motivation as

rewards, feedback, and competence enhance their internal identification when they do a certain task with interest and after completion get a feeling of satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

The impact of motivation on student's academic performance with HI shows a positive influence (Kusurkar et al., 2013). The academic performance here is understood as students' good grades and higher marks.

There are two types of motivation- intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and as Deci and Ryan (2000) describe it, both have a very profound impact on shaping the personalities of an individual. Both types of motivation are opposite; however, Self-Determination Theory poses another distinction to the two; autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation involves identifying the value of an activity (extrinsic motivation) and aligning it with his very sense of self (internal source) based on their need for competence. In controlled motivation, a person acts out of fear of punishment or desire for external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The current study conceptualizes the self-determination theory (SDT) as its basic framework of study because it explains that students with disabilities often feel challenged in terms of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT, however, explains that skill sets such as; self-awareness, decision making, goal-setting, goal-attainment, communication and relationship, critical and self-reflection abilities can help boost the self-determination of a student with disabilities.

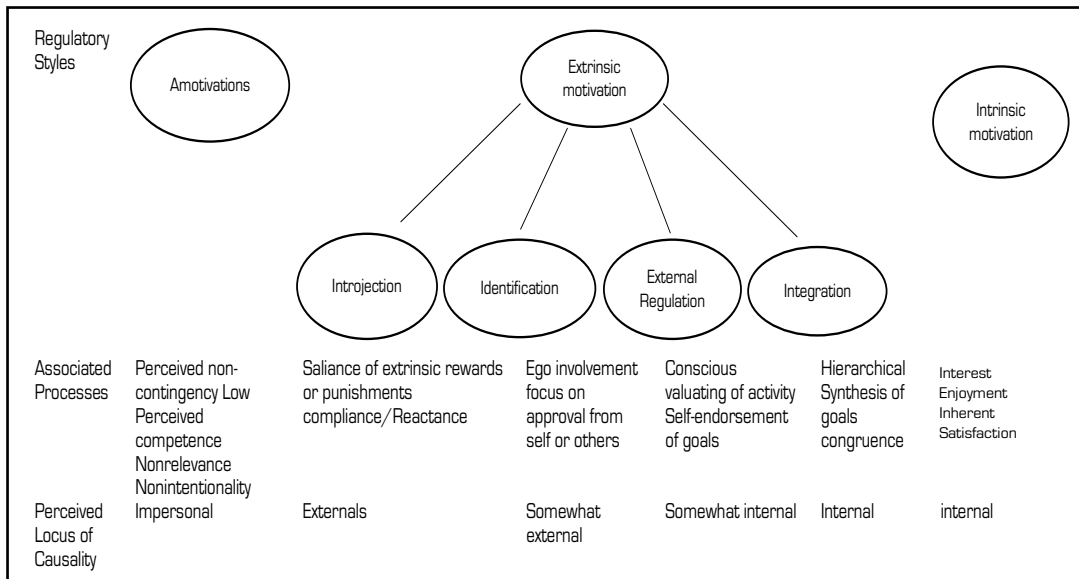


Figure 1: Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Self-determination theory defines motivation as a continuum that ranges from non-self-determination to self-determination. At the extreme left is the Amotivation. Amotivation is a state of absolute apathy where an individual refuses to engage in any activity, has no desire to speak, and struggles to meet any of their desires. A motivated people often fall victim to self-pity and are likely to indulge in overthinking scenarios that contribute to their failure. Factors that demotivate a person include financial issues, non-supportive family or peer circle, apathetic teachers, low quality of education, and challenging market competition. In the middle, we have four types of extrinsic motivation.

Next to amotivation comes the external regulations, which are considered the least autonomous type of extrinsic motivation. Motivation is external and driven by compliance or praise, appreciation, or fear of punishment.

Introjected regulation is also termed as extrinsic motivation in which motivation is external but is driven by self-control and efforts to protect self-respect and ego and seeks external validity. Integration perceived locus of causality is internal, and associated processes are linked with hierarchical enjoyment of goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Identified regulations are termed as rather semi-intrinsic and are considered the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. It involves awarding the conscious value to behavior so that it becomes crucial for the person (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Integration involves identifying, evaluating, and assimilating a behavior that a person thinks is important to him (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Integrated regulations are extrinsic but are drawn from internal sources that lead a person to self-awareness. A person with integrated regulation is most likely to have explored all the external motivations and concludes that these are not contradictory to his belief system. A person having integrated regulation will not do something for sheer joy and pleasure but his satisfaction.

The right side of the continuum shows that an individual is highly intrinsically motivated and is considered self-motivated and self-determined. An individual is driven by pleasure and enjoyment or inherent behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Internal motivation pushes individuals to go the extra mile

for their self-development. They are curious and prefer to learn new things without any ulterior motives. Nonetheless, not all intrinsically motivated students regulate themselves on curiosity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Besides, some intrinsically motivated students are allured by tangible rewards, while others are inclined to a specific area because it lies within their field of interest (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Since both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is a powerful determinant of human behavior, and both drives an individual to meet three of their essential needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

This research study aims to understand the factors that motivate students with hearing impairment to excel academically at the university level.

Methods and Materials

This study is qualitative in nature and uses a case study approach. This design best suits the study because “it provides enough details and in such a sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects” (Seidman, 2019, p. 54). The researcher, later on, deduced the meaning by comparing and contrasting the participants’ stories (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

Research Sites, Sampling, and Participants

The study purposefully inducted 14 students with HI into the research design, using criterion sampling technique from the Department of Special Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, all representing the phenomenon of interest (Campbell et al., 2020; Denieffe, 2020). The participation inclusion criteria are as follows:

1. All the participants of the study had a hearing impairment.
2. All of them are enrolled in the Department of Special Education, University of Management and Technology, Lahore
3. All participants of the study have been selected based on their merit. i.e., all received either dean award (awarded to those with a CGPA of 3.5 and above) or Rector’s Merit Award (awarded to those with a total CGPA 4).

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants

S. No	Gender	Age	Degree Program	Semester	Degree of HL	SGPA/CGPA	Awards
1	Female	23	MA	3rd	Profound	3.68	N/A
2	Male	22	MA	4th	Profound	3.95	Dean
3	Male	23	MA	4th	Moderate	3.95	Dean
4	Male	24	BS	8th	Profound	3.64	Dean
5	Male	25	BS	8th	Profound	3.89	2 Dean
6	Male	25	BS	8th	Profound	3.48	Dean
7	Male	30	MA	4th	Profound	3.93	2 Dean
8	Male	21	BS	5th	Profound	3.68	N/A
9	Male	29	MA	4th	Profound	3.80	Rector + Dean
10	Male	29	MA	4th	Profound	3.80	Dean

Data Collection Methods

A semi-structured, open-ended interview guide was used to collect data from 10 participants of the study. All the participants of the study asked similar questions and were probed whenever required.

Procedure of Interview

The first author (SB) conducted all the interviews in person with the students with HI enrolled in UMT. A formal consent of the participants was sought through email. To build a rapport with the interviewees before the interview, the researcher made informal calls to the participants to provide a brief introduction and explained the procedures of the interviews [Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Seidman, 2006]. The first author visited the site, met the participants personally, and conducted the interviews on the agreed date and time [Kvale, 1996; Roulston, 2014]. Since the researcher herself is not a sign language expert, she brought two qualified sign-language interpreters on-site to conduct the interviews [Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004]. All interviews were conducted at the campus library. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants/sign language expert. The interpreter interpreted verbal questions from the researcher into the sign language for the participants, and vice versa; hence, the verbal questions were recorded for later use [Brinkmann, 2013; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018].

Data Analysis Methods

Content Analysis was used to analyze the data [Schreier, 2012, 2014]. This method was used inductively, and categories and concepts were derived from the data [Kynäs, 2020]. After conducting the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim. The analysis started with reading and re-reading the transcribed data files, which was essential for

familiarizing interview data [Saldaña, 2011, 2013]. Significant quotations of students with HI were highlighted for providing evidentiary support in the final reporting of themes [Saldaña, 2011]. A sentence constituted the unit of analysis in this study; therefore, open coding was done on each sentence of each transcript. Preliminary codes [Saldaña, 2013] derived from the interview guide, the study's conceptual framework, and previous studies were used for open coding [Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020]. Coding helped create more manageable units to expedite the analysis process and stimulated the reflection on the data's essences [Saldaña & Omasta, 2017]. After open-coding, sub-categories were generated based on similarities, differences, and frequencies of occurrences in data [Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014]. Significant quotations of students with HI identified from the interview transcripts were used to describe each theme in the findings section to provide a detailed description of each theme.

Findings

The significant findings of this study were primarily informed by the research aim. The summary of findings related to dimensions of motivation explored in this study is provided below.

Motivation

The significant findings of the study were based on the three major types of motivation. Students' motivation was explored in terms of avoidance of tedious tasks and teachers' teaching styles as the reason for their low grades regardless of the self-efficacy levels of students with HI.

Most of the students with HI described that they never felt bored while doing the task. Few students with HI report that if sometimes they feel bored, they usually seek help from their class fellows. For example, a student with HI stated,

I like to complete the task. I never leave the task. If I feel bored, then I get help from my friends. In group work, I can do work with the help of group fellows, so I try to complete the assignment at any cost. But doing a critical analysis of an article is a tedious task for me. I get help from the internet and use google and YouTube and complete my assignment. (Student 8)

Most students with HI appreciated their teachers' effort to explain concepts to those with HI. Discussing the effective teaching styles, almost all of the students agreed that student-centred classrooms with hands-on experiences prove to be most beneficial for students with HI. For example, a student with HI stated,

All my teachers play their part in supporting students with HI, but teachers with engaging teaching styles are the best as they push students with HI to go beyond the limits. I like one of my teachers the most as she asks questions individually, which helps me stay attentive and ultimately leads to clearer concepts. (Student 4)

Contrary to that, a few students believed that low grades of students with HI were the consequence of poor teaching styles as such students are dependent on their teachers for their studies. For example, a student with HI stated,

Students with HI have certain limitations. For example, covering almost all the content during the last few classes adds to our troubles. Students like us can't cover everything quickly, so we score poor grades, no matter how hard we try and how sincere we are in our studies. (Student 10)

Most students with HI had high ambitions to achieve and perform well. They believed that they could do anything and get any achievement with the help of Allah Almighty only if they tried with all their might and will. For example, a student with HI stated,

I can soar high up in the sky and can fly against all the winds. I am ambitious and a firm believer that I can achieve anything I set my mind up to with Almighty's will with dedication and hard work. (Student 5)

Most of the students think that university education is overwhelming at first. Both the teachers and students require time to adjust to each other. Novice teachers especially struggle to accommodate such students in their classes. For example, a student with HI stated,

I was lost. I often felt exhausted. Everything was so rapid to have a firm hold. Teachers were tough on us, and they didn't have the slightest idea of the challenges we faced. The entire semester was freaking absurd, and I thought I would fail the semester. But alongside all the fears, I kept working

hard and tried very hard to make it at par. It got crazy when I came to know that I had made it among the top-scoring students. (Student 10)

Competition for students with HI was an evolutionary period. Students with HI felt very energetic while competing with other deaf students and then with normal students, but soon, the focus shifted from the rat race to the development of skills and knowledge. For example, a student with HI stated,

Initially, it took an inordinate amount of time to realize that I am instead in competition to none but to myself. However, being acknowledged for the efforts I make to evolve is altogether a different experience, and it feels good to be appreciated in front of the whole class. And nothing makes it more rewarding than my entire class celebrating each other and their successes. (Student 7)

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation in students with HI was explored in terms of studying hard to get awards, to avoid punishment, to please their parents, and get good grades; blaming others for adverse outcomes, participating in educational activities to maintain an image, getting feedback to enhance motivation. In addition, students with HI were asked questions related to meeting deadlines to avoid guilt, feeling pride in academic success, studying hard to maintain self-esteem, performing better than others, studying hard to get awards, praise and job, getting ready to learn with extraneous incentives, achieving valuable life goals, completing the academic task to achieve life goals, examining performance after exams, changing way towards exams after self-examination etc.

External Regulation

Almost all participants were ambitious to perform well in their courses and get a degree with good scores and grades. "Well, the motivation behind all the hard work I do is rather measurable in terms of grades, awards, and rewards. I take pride in scoring well at exams and feel more accomplished" (Student 1). However, all the participants feared the disappointment of their parents and families more than the fear of failure and punishment. For example, a student with HI stated,

The expectation that my parents and teachers have always worked as the motivational force. I love it when they take pride in my achievements. It's their disappointment that prevents me from distractions and not the fear of punishment. (Student 6)

Students with HI believed that in-class participation had been phenomenal and participated

in-class activities to get good grades and marks. Since most of the students did not feel threatened and challenged anymore in the university environment and had been supported by their class fellows, they no longer found it challenging to participate in-class activities such as debates, group work, and discussions. Most of the students with HI participated in getting good grades and marks. For example, a student with HI stated,

Not at all. Participation in class activities is no more a daunting task for me. Studying in an inclusive set-up has been a game-changer for me. I work with my normally hearing peers, work in groups with them, and enjoy their support even if I outshine the rest of the class. I am thoroughly enjoying my education at university. (Student 4)

However, for their shortcomings, students with unique needs blamed no one but themselves. For example, a student with HI stated,

We cannot blame that we haven't been provided with the support we have asked for, but yes, at times, we are lazy and distracted, procrastinate, and don't do things for no reason. Contrary to that, seldom do teachers set deadlines that may not be practical for students with HI. Still, this can't be used as an excuse. (Student 1)

Introjection

Parents of most of the students with HI were supportive of their children. Students claimed that their parents were very much supportive and encouraged them to do their best. If they could not get good marks, their parents did not criticize and demotivate them; instead, they helped them think otherwise. For example, a student with HI stated,

I might feel guilty underperforming sometimes, but parents have been a great support all this time. They always help me learn the importance of trying hard and making attempts after attempts until I achieve my target. (Student 7)

All the participants were very firm believers in maintaining their self-image despite all the challenges they faced. They liked to showcase their abilities in the best possible way and therefore tried to participate in all the class activities. For example, a student with HI stated,

Yes, I like to maintain my self-image. Therefore, active participation in-class activities is the key. I ensure my presence in all activities and help others wherever I can. Since I am not completely deaf and can listen to some extent, I usually act as the team leader of the students with HI. However, I feel happy when any group members surpass me and never feel jealous of anyone. (Student 3)

Also, students with HI felt motivated when they received feedback from their parents, teachers, and both. However, most students reported that they tend to ignore the negative feedback as it often demotivates them. For example, a student with HI stated, "Praise always motivates me and matters to me a lot. I avoid criticism because it goes pretty hard on me and I feel withdrawn from the task at hand" (Student 1). Deadlines are found to be pretty effective in motivating students with HI. Since they were conscious about their image, they usually tried to meet deadlines regardless of everything. For example, a student with HI stated,

Avoiding guilt is one thing and getting good marks is another. Both of them equally motivate me to follow deadlines. Following deadlines helps me keep things on track and earn my teacher's praise that is important for me. (Student 3)

Identification

Students with HI stated that they did not perform in-class activities because it helped them maintain their self-image but because such activities enhanced their knowledge and gave them the confidence needed to survive the tough market competitions. Getting teachers' praise and parents' acknowledgement worked as food for their self-esteem; however, awards, certificates, and good grades were added to their CVs, enabling them to land lucrative job positions. "Understanding the concept matters a lot. Concepts, however, can't be portrayed on CV; awards, shields, medals, and certificates do and help you in landing yourself into a good job position" (Student 9). However, students found it challenging to remain focused without awards and did feel motivated to work hard if a reward was not attached.

Integration

As most typical students would do, students with HI set goals and tried their best to achieve their targets. They usually evaluated themselves after attempting an exam and did self-reflection to improve their weak areas. For example, a student with HI stated,

Grades matter and work as a motivation to perform better, achieve better. Getting good or poor grades is a part of life, and one should not go too harsh on oneself for that. I usually don't get demotivated when I score low because I can always try again and try harder. (Student 1)

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation in students with HI was explored in terms of internal motivational factors such as trying arduous tasks even it may be difficult, working

hard with or without praise and awards, preferring course material arousing curiosity, enjoying learning activities, feeling after solving difficult tasks, and feeling to perform well in exams.

The findings show that all of the students were extrinsically motivated, and none of them was intrinsically motivated to complete their tasks. They neither found the course content exciting that rekindled their curiosity nor were they self-motivated and habitual in setting easy and attainable targets to earn them a sense of achievement and the praise and acknowledgement of people around them. For example, a student with HI stated,

I'm not too fond of lengthy and tedious tasks. I don't classify myself as an intrinsically motivated person, but I am a keen learner. If the content is interesting enough, or the facilitator is apt at engaging students, I usually push even if I find the task difficult. (Student 2)

Conclusion

The findings showed that the study students were extrinsically motivated to pursue education to achieve contingent goals (external regulation), or they had internalized the significance of academic pursuits because of influences present in their family or university environment (introjected or regulation), or they had chosen to identify with the value of education provided to them by family, teachers or others (identified regulation). Hence, they did not have an internal locus of control, were not driven to accomplish, did not seek intellectual stimulation, and

were not internally enthusiastic about learning new things. Therefore, it seemed all students with HI interviewed in this study were extrinsically motivated to pursue education to achieve contingent goals.

As evident from the literature review, intrinsic motivation promotes higher-order thinking skills in students, ultimately leading to high-quality learning and creativity in students; universities should harbor intrinsic motivation enrich practices among students in general and students with HI in particular.

It is recommended for the policymakers that such policies and education courses should be introduced that support teacher in understanding students' individual differences. Also, teachers should ensure that practical and interactive approaches in class and students with HI should be evenly distributed in each group to help them mingle with regular students and feel connected to the larger community. For producing internally motivated students, the parents' role has been crucial. Parents are needed to be in direct liaison with teachers and university management and should work in compliance with teachers' instructions in order to develop intrinsic motivation among students with HI. In addition, the study only sought to understand the academic motivation types of students with hearing impairment. Further research studies may be conducted to broaden our understanding of students with HI. Similarly, the motivation of students with other disabilities can be studied in the context of schools, colleges, universities, or all three of them.

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