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A Qualitative Study in Basic Needs Satisfaction and Self-Directed Learning among Children

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Abstract. The core concept in Maslow's writings seems to be that human inner self is much more trustable than supposed before. Human beings tend to actualize their talents. The precondition for this actualization is that their basic needs be relatively gratified. This premise implies that when the most basic needs are satisfied, individuals are most able to guide their learning. Elaborating Maslow's theory indicates the role of basic needs satisfaction in promoting self-directed learning. Therefore, this study particularly aims to investigate the quality of basic needs satisfaction, self-directed learning, and the probable relation between self-directed learning and basic needs satisfaction among children. This study has run a qualitative within children of age 9-11 of Tehran city. A total of 13 children, their parents, and their educators were interviewed. Findings indicated lack of safety among subjects which may either reflects the context or the ambiguity of definition of this need as it has been assessed in other researches as well. Esteem is the most representative among basic needs. Children possess the core concept of self-directed learners; however the education system not only does not support them but also ruins their capability. The findings also indicated that basic needs satisfaction is substantially correlated to self-directed learning. In addition, esteem is the most correlated need to self-directed learning. Although, before the child reaches the esteem stage self-directed learning may not emerge, the precondition to reach esteem stage is strongly evidenced to be the satisfaction of lower needs such as physiological, love, and belonging needs. In other words pre potency of these needs to esteem was confirmed in this study. The implication of this study would be the importance of giving the freedom to choose, trust the ability of children to guide their learning process, priority of approaches like self-directed learning as a more effective alternative, and the importance and vitality of children's basic needs fulfillment without any precondition.

Keywords: self-directed learning, basic needs satisfaction, children, freedom

1. Introduction

The power of Maslow's theory in instruction mainly comes from its accurate description of human motivation (Marshall, 2002). Motivation is the major component in learning, modern education, and instruction. The hierarchy of basic needs seems to be the most powerful instrument to describe human motivation. Researches imply that basic needs satisfaction may be correlated with self-directed learning (SDL). This study intended to find the relation between basic needs satisfaction (BNS) and SDL; something has not been done yet.

Maslow's ideas always make sense (Lyon, 1971). Maslow's theory is widely accepted (Roming & Cleland, 1972; Huitt, 2001) because it makes sense for people and because his ideas recall our intuitions.

Maslow's theory is brilliant, however when it is tried to examine them in quantitative way or make them over-objective, many important things will be lost so that it may look like it is not possible to explain the reality. One of the reasons would be that basic needs in Maslow's theory suffering vogue (Goebel & Brown, 1981).

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Thus, this study decided to run a qualitative study rather than quantitative to explore the specifications and quality of BNS. Therefore, the specific objectives are as follow:

- To investigate the quality of BNS and SDL among young children of Tehran city.
- To examine the relationship between BNS and SDL among young children of Tehran city.

2. Background

Reviewing the literatures provides evidence for close relationship between SDL and BNS. It is necessary to keep in mind that the primary assumption of this study is that satisfaction of basic needs will increase self-directedness in learners. That is, if environment grants the learner satisfaction of his or her basic needs, learner will be more self-directed.

The most direct evidence for this hypothesis is the relation between SDL and life satisfaction. Long (1993) reviewed concerned dissertations from 1966-1991 and found that "six of seven dissertations directly or indirectly related to self-directed learning (SDL) identified a positive relationship between SDL and life satisfaction" (from abstract). Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) reported some researches that suggest "strong support for a link between life satisfaction and self-directedness", though it is conducted among older adults. Also they reported a study involving 35 adults between the ages of 21 and 55 from Leeb that "the people who demonstrate positive health behaviors can be described as highly self-directed" (p. 159).

3. Method

13 subjects were interviewed to make the outcomes sufficient for achieving the goal of case study. The sample was not chosen randomly, still it was tried to diversify the subjects as most as possible by choosing from both genders, different families in terms of economy, education, and ages, different schools in terms of locations which reflect their environment, and different school performance.

The themes that have been investigated for BNS were:

- Family climate; how supportive the family are
- Openness of the family to child's independence
- Subjects' desires, wishes, interests
- Subjects' leisure activities

4. Findings

Three interviews were supposed to be performed for every subject. Most of them were performed so that when some subject's parent was interviewed, the interviewer had no idea whose subject is being interviewed. This was for avoiding bias in questions. It is common that when you have gotten a perspective from someone, it may bias the questions from one's parents or educator and vice versa.

The interviews were recorded with permission of interviewee. After the interviews completed, they were listened first and in second round they were written down. The results revealed that to high extend the triangulating of data from subjects were vital, that is, a clear conclusion was not possible without that. The aspects that had been censored by pupil or parents were revealed by educators and the misunderstandings of educators were covered by parents and subjects and so on.

Table 1 provides demography of subjects including name, sex, stand, school, having brother/sister, Academic status, and their bold traits.

Table 1 Demography of Subjects

Name	Sex	Stand	School	Brother/ Sister	Academic Status	Features
KN	F	5	Noora	1 Elder sister	Mediocre	Warm Heart, Creative, Social- Skill Master
MM	M	5	Velayat	1 Elder brother	Good	Smiley, Non-Aggressive, Accepted by Peers, kind

ZP	F	3	Noora	2 Elder sister /Brother	Mediocre	Creative, Intelligent
MT	M	3	Velayat	1 Elder Sister	Moderate	Nervous, Frank, Easy-Cry
AS	M	3	Velayat	1 Younger Brother	Moderate up	Recluse, Shy, Anxious, Quiet
ZG	F	4	Noora	-	Good	Active, Sky High Dream,
MR	M	3	Mizan	1 Elder Sister	Excellent	Confident, Beloved, Accepted by Peers, Independent
AZA	M	4	Velayat	1Younger Sister	Good	Calm, intelligent, Confident,
MC	M	4	Velayat	2Younger Brothers	Moderate	Relatively Intelligent, patient, Independent, Humble
RK	M	3	Mizan	1Younger Brother	Moderate	Happy, Calm, Nature Lover
SAN	F	5	Ejtemaie	-	Moderate	Unhappy, Low Confidence
PI	M	3	Mizan	1Elder Sister	Lower than Average	Animal lover, Happy, Emotional
MD	M	3	Mizan	1Young Sister	Weak	Anxious, Complainant, Defensive

Note. F: Female, M: Male

After briefing and combining the three folders of every subject, they were looked into for finding the most concerning details.

To interpret, the most related and bold themes were selected and then the status of subjects regarding those themes specified. Figure 1 presents the results. Second column of this figure shows the selected themes. First column assign a code to every themes for further referring. From third column onward, the statues of every subject determined with three levels: up, medium, and low.

Code		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		KN	MM	ZP	MT	AS	ZG	MR	AZA	MC	RK	SAN	PI	MD
1	Esteem	U	U	L	L	L	U	M	M	U	U	L	U	L
2	Importance Feeling	U	U	M	L	L	U	U	N	M	U	L	U	L
3	Father's Job	N	U	U	U	N	U	U	N	N	U	L	U	U
4	Confidence	M	M	L	U	L	U	U	M	U	U	L	U	L
5	Low-Level P Needs	U	U	U	U	M	U	U	U	U	U	M	U	U
6	High-Level P Needs	U	L	N	U	L	M	L	N	U	U	M	U	L
7	Toy Demand	N	N	U	L	L	L	U	N	L	L	N	N	U
8	Leisure Demand	N	L	L	L	L	M	L	U	N	M	L	M	N
9	Safety	U	U	L	U	L	M	L	M	U	U	M	U	L
10	Social Safety	M	M	L	M	U	U	L	U	U	U	L	M	L
11	Parent-Lost Phobia	L	N	U	L	M	M	U	N	N	L	N	N	L
12	Love Needs	U	U	L	U	L	U	U	L	U	U	M	U	L
13	Pet Keeping	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	U	N	L	N	L	U
14	Belonging Needs	U	U	L	L	M	M	U	N	U	U	L	U	L
15	Social Acceptance	N	U	L	M	U	M	U	L	U	M	L	U	L
16	Future Oriented	U	L	U	L	L	U	M	U	U	U	L	U	M
17	Job-wish	U	L	M	L	L	U	M	U	U	U	L	U	L
18	SDL Status	U	L	L	L	L	U	L	L	M	U	L	U	L

19	Learning Ways	N	M	L	L	L	U	L	M	U	U	L	U	L
20	Sources of Information	N	M	U	L	L	U	L	M	U	U	L	U	L
21	Learning Love	U	U	U	M	M	U	U	U	U	U		U	M
22	Goal-Oriented	U	L	L	L	L	U	M	U	U	U	L	U	L
23	Informal Learning Activities	U	L	U	L	L	U	L	L	L	U	L	U	L
24	Learning Orientation	N	L	L	L	L	U	L	L	U	U	L	U	L
25	Feel about School	L	L	M	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	M	L
26	Self-Actualization	U	L	L	L	L	U	L	L	M	U	L	U	L
27	Intelligence	U	M	U	M	M	U	M	U	U	M	M	M	M
28	Normal Growth	M	M	L	M	L	U	L	U	M	U	L	U	L
29	Academic Achievement	M	U	L	M	U	U	U	U	M	M	M	M	L

Note: U: Up, M: Medium, and L: Low, N: Not Specified

Fig 1: This figure provides the most common themes that found in interviews details and the status of cases regarding these themes also specified.

5. Conclusion

The finding is in agreement with Oishi, Diener, Lucas, and Suh's (1999) finding. They stated "satisfaction with higher needs, such as love and esteem needs, tended to be stronger predictors of life satisfaction in wealthy nations" (p. 988). It was mentioned before that this study also suggests that esteem is the most salient need among children of Tehran city. These authors explained that "When individuals' lower needs are met, on the other hand, their life satisfaction is better predicted from satisfaction with higher needs such as love and esteem needs" (Oishi, Diener, Lucas & Suh, 1999, p. 988). They also believe that in poorer nations life satisfaction tends to be more associated with safety. Their findings are in consistent with Maslow's theory.

Qualitative data present that E is the more salient need and associated with life satisfaction. Thus, findings of this study also confirm Maslow's theory.

Education system of Iran is totally competitive based. The teachers, parents, and principals are trying together to make children more competitive, to make environment competitive, and to find creative approaches to motivate children with utmost contest situations. The only known and accepted motivation to learn and achieve academically is competition.

This competitive environment is a source for threatening safety. Qualitative data of this study shows that schools are the source of many problems amongst threatening the safety of kids. Schools not only do not provide a safe climate for kids who are lacking safety before go to school but also threat the safety fulfilled kids. Some cases of this study that were self-confidence, it was found that they are struggling in school to sustain their safety, that is, most of their power was applied to overcome the threats that school make continuously for them.

Interviews revealed that subjects lacking belonging need. Schools apparently were not successful to fulfil the kid's need for belongingness. The over-competitive climate prevents from friendship and group-working. Researches confirm that schools undermine the student's experiences of belongingness (Osterman, 2000).

5.1. Quality of SDL

The interviews explored some other aspects of SDL among Subjects. The conclusions are as follow:

- Cases are keen to learn
- Informal learning is performed with their utmost interest if any
- Schools give no room for SDL

- The current system of education does not possess the capacity to let subjects to actualize their ability to learn based on their intrinsic motivation
- Subjects mostly believe to school as a compulsory part of life; some make the school a tool to their goal, some struggle with that to keep their desires, and some are the victims of school pressure.

5.2. Relation Issues of SDL and BNS

- Qualitative data insist that SDL among the cases that lacking S, P, and LB seriously does not exist. Those who acquire confidence and their esteem is not threatened participate in informal learning situation, learn for the sake of learning, learn for long term goals, and pursue their own ways of learning. These conclusions may imply that SDL is highly correlated to BNS, however this correlation is not linear rather it is more complicated. When individual is in the stage of P, LB, and S needs – preliminary or for transient moment – SDL is quite low. When these needs are relatively satisfied, the SDL readiness begins to grow. In esteem needs stage SDL curve will reach to inflexion point. Then, in later stage it grows rapidly.
- Safety is not correlated with SDL.
- Esteem has the strongest correlation with SDL compare to other needs. This result is consistent with Gibbons (n. d.) where states that students with low self-esteem will not be easy to be self directed.

5.3. Generality of the Results

Tehran is the capital city. Families are wealthy. The status of families in term of wealth is comparable with wealthy countries. Therefore, the results could be generalized to regions and countries with the same status. In contrast, the results are not extendable to rural regions of Iran.

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