

A Psychological Analysis of Persian Language and Literature Students' Attitude and Motivation towards their Major and Career Prospects

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ABSTRACT

One of the important goals of higher education is to train future specialists to meet the needs of society. Students' deliberate and conscious choice of university major can be effective in achieving this goal. Also, students' positive attitude towards their major and career prospects can enhance their motivation. The goal of this mixed-methods (quantitative-qualitative) study is to examine Persian language and literature students' various forms of motivation and their attitudes towards their university major and career prospects. For this purpose, 200 Persian language and literature students at three educational levels (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral) answered a questionnaire of attitudes towards the major and career prospects, together with three qualitative questions, that examined their views on benefits and obstacles in the field of Persian language and literature and analyzed their satisfaction with teachers' teaching styles. The results of the study in light of the dual continuum model of motivation showed that students' attitudes toward their major and future prospects are generally average. There was, however, a significant difference in different educational levels in terms of students' attitudes. In other words, undergraduate students expressed positive attitudes, compared to doctoral students. This appears to bring about passive motivation among students and hamper their academic progress. Necessary measures should be implemented to change students' attitudes as their motivation may turn into active or passive demotivation. To overcome these challenges, some amendments should be introduced: introducing more practical courses, implementing novel and effective teaching methods, running specialized entrepreneurship workshops and enhancing students' research skills.

Keywords: attitude, motivation, career prospects, Persian language and literature

Introduction

A fundamental role of the higher education system—one of the basic pillars of Iran's national system—is the training and development of efficient human resources to work effectively in any sector needed by the society so as to achieve such goals as generating knowledge, meeting the needs of society, training future specialists and

solving social challenges and problems in any case (Sharifzadeh, 2011). To achieve these goals, one needs to select an academic major consciously and, of course, with motivation. More importantly, positive attitudes toward the academic major and its career prospects can prepare the ground for the emergence of this motivation (Gholami et al., 2016). As a matter of fact, a positive attitude toward the major and its career prospects gives rise to academic satisfaction and success. If students happen to believe that they do not achieve satisfactory learning outcomes in their major, their desire and motivation for effective learning will decrease. This, in turn, negatively affects their future responsibility and productivity.

Therefore, given the association between the type of attitude toward the academic major and the motivation to progress, it seems possible to take a step further and establish a relationship between different attitudes and different forms of motivation according to the dual continuum model of motivation proposed by Pishghadam et al. (2019). This model offers a more comprehensive view of motivation on the basis of the concept of immersion—a psychological and physical state of engagement with a task—to address the active and passive aspects of motivation. Based on this, view, four forms of motivation are put forward: active motivation, passive motivation, active demotivation and passive demotivation. Therefore, if students' attitude toward their major becomes negative, their motivation to learn the course materials will be active demotivation and passive demotivation, leading to the emergence of learning that takes place mechanically and without students' mental engagement. Indeed, mental and physical activities toward learning simply halt. Notwithstanding this, it seems that students' positive attitude toward their major promotes their motivation to learn. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to pay due attention to the attitude and motivation of students of different educational levels toward their major and career prospects. In the meantime, this is obviously important to examine the attitude of Persian language and literature students toward their university majors and future job opportunities. This is because there is a strong relationship between the Persian language and Persian literature, which has enriched the rich culture of the Iranian people, and today, the preservation of the Persian language and literature is fundamental to maintaining Iranian national identity (Zolfaghari, 2010). Therefore, effective measures should be taken to the teaching and promotion of Persian to preserve Iran's culture and civilization and prevent the society from collapsing (Zarrinkoob, 1985). All in all, how to train human resources needed to preserve and expand this precious gem deems significant. Given the discussion on the importance of students' attitude and motivation toward their university major and career prospects, this paper answers the following questions:

- Do students of Persian language and literature express a positive attitude toward their university major and career prospects?
- Are there any significant differences in the attitude of Persian language and literature students of different levels (bachelor's, master's and doctoral) toward their major and career prospects?
- What type of motivation do students manifest based on their attitude?

Research Method

This mixed-methods study is applied. The research population includes all students of Persian language and literature at different levels of study at universities in Iran. It is noteworthy to mention that students of all subdivisions of this major are included. The sample size consisted of 200 students who responded to an online questionnaire and were randomly chosen for the study. The respondents (147 female and 53 male students) were in the age range of 18 to 57 with a mean age of 26.88 years. It should be noted that the sample included 108 bachelor's students, 57 master's students and 35 doctoral students of all subdivisions of this major at various Iranian universities.

The instrument of the study is the students' attitude questionnaire toward their major and career prospects, which has been designed based on the model of Jamali and Ghalenoei (2013). In addition to the multiple-choice questions, there are three qualitative questions, that examine students' views on benefits and obstacles in the field of Persian language and literature and analyze their satisfaction with teachers' teaching styles.

To understand how the level of study affects students' attitudes, Levene's Test and One-way ANOVA were used for the data analysis. The qualitative data were categorized according to common themes based on their similarities and differences. Lastly, the data were analyzed in light of the dual continuum model of motivation to determine students' motivation type.

Findings

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation for the students' attitude questionnaire toward their major and career prospects, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for the questionnaire of Persian language and literature students' attitudes toward their major and career prospects

Scale	Max	Min	M	SD
students' attitude toward their major and career prospects	33	83	59.45	10.25

The mean score of 59.45 on the scale suggests that students' attitude toward major and career prospects is generally average.

To examine the Persian language and literature students' attitudes in terms of their level of study, the data were descriptively analyzed. The analysis of the attitudes indicates a downward move, from lower to higher levels. Simply put, the undergraduate students of Persian language and literature with a mean of 60.94 have a higher attitude, while doctoral students with a mean of 56.43 had a lower attitude toward their major and career prospects. To find significant differences in the attitudes of students at different levels of study (i.e., bachelor's, master's, and doctoral) toward their major and career prospects, One-way ANOVA and Paired Comparison Tests were used. The findings show that there is a significant difference in attitudes of undergraduate students (60.94) and doctoral students (56.43) of Persian language and literature. However, the attitudes of master's students did not significantly differ from those of undergraduate students and doctoral students.

Further, the data concerning the benefits of the Persian language and literature were analyzed and categorized. It appeared that 7% of the respondents believe that this major does not have any benefits, while 93% of the respondents enumerated numerous benefits, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Benefits of Persian language and literature major from students' point of view

Benefits	Percentage
Becoming familiar with the culture and spreading it within society	25
Promoting personal and social interactions	22.5
Encouraging the aesthetic sense, mental peace and spiritual value	20
Building a future career and increasing their teaching skills (attitudes of students of Persian teaching)	12.5
Becoming acquainted with eminent writers and broadening literary knowledge	10.15
Improving public speaking skills	3

In response to the obstacles in the field of Persian language and literature, 3% of the participants believed that there were no obstacles in this field, while 97% enumerated the challenges and obstacles of the field, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Obstacles of Persian language and literature major from students' point of view

Benefits	Percentage
Lack of job opportunities or fringe benefits	43
Society's ill-informed view of this major	30
The mismatch between university courses and society's needs	20
The lack of competent professors	4

Also, to investigate the effect of teaching styles on students' attitudes, their opinion concerning teachers' teaching styles was sought. They were either completely satisfied (20%) or fairly satisfied (58%) and absolutely dissatisfied (22%) with their teachers' teaching styles.

Given the data on students' attitudes toward their major and career prospects and the association between attitude and motivation, it is possible to link the attitude of Persian language and literature students to their motivation. Although a number of effective factors play a role in developing a positive attitude in students concerning their major and future job opportunities, the obstacles cannot be overlooked, making it difficult for students to keep a positive attitude toward their major and career prospects. When it comes to motivation, these positive factors can result in active motivation in students in such a way that they use all their senses to learn course materials and satisfactorily progress in their major. However, when they become cognizant of the obstacles in their major, their active motivation is decreased, leading to passive motivation. In other words, they do not tend to engage their senses in learning even though they keep thinking of the major and their goals since they like their major.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggested that Persian language and literature students' attitude toward their major and future job opportunities is average. Despite this, a positive view of the major and future job opportunities is essential to increase their academic motivation and professional progress and success in the future.

Therefore, students' average attitude appears to lead to passive motivation in learning and academic progress. In fact, students have chosen the academic major of Persian language and literature consciously, and of course, with high motivation and interest and are really interested in continuing their education in the same field. This is because they believe that the field of Persian language and literature has numerous benefits to share with them and can play a significant role in their personal and social life. Notwithstanding this positive side, obstacles and challenges of this field, together with professors' poor and ineffective teaching styles have led students to develop a negative attitude toward the major, and in spite of the considerable interest in pursuing their studies in this field, they are too unmotivated to achieve their goals.

Therefore, achieving goals under such circumstances is basically a mental concern and engagement and does not include physical engagement. In other words, these obstacles directly and indirectly make students' emotion toward course materials remain at an auditory or visual level, and as a result, their maximum senses are not involved in learning; thus, they do not experience positive emotion during their education. Given that students' emotion level affects their motivation, it appears that students of Persian language and literature are not highly motivated to progress in this field.

It is worth noting that if effective measures are not taken to overcome the obstacles in this field, students' attitudes may shift from average to negative because, as the results of the data analysis showed, there is a significant difference between the attitude of Persian language and literature students at different levels of study toward their major and career prospects. Additionally, students of higher levels of education tend to have a more negative attitude toward their major and future job opportunities. The reason can be attributed to the fact that the longer the students stay in this major to pursue academic degrees, the sooner they come to realize the shortcomings and obstacles of the major, which may change their views. Passive motivation is the result of students' average attitude, and of course, the presence of obstacles in the major. If the necessary measures are not taken to improve this situation, students' motivation will turn into active and passive demotivation. In other words, studying for this major becomes a mechanical act for them and they are not mentally concerned with their courses or they simply drop out of college and withdraw from their studies. To overcome these challenges, we are of the view that some amendments should be made:

- More practical courses incompatible with society's needs should be added to the curriculum to promote students' know-how.
- Novel and effective teaching methods should be used.
- Specialized entrepreneurship workshops should be offered, and students should become familiar with the job market.
- Students should become familiar with the principles of research in this field.

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