

Factors That Motivate Undergraduate Students: An Analysis at a University in Mexico

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The objective of this research was to analyze (or characterize) what motivational factors are involved in the continuity of the academic development of students in the Graduate School of Jojutla. The study is quantitative, descriptive, and transversal. The population is composed of 346 students who entered college in 2014. A sample of 52 students out of this population was selected, from the majors of Business Management, Accounting, Law, Environmental Sciences, Psychology, and Computer Science. The data collection instrument was developed by Esquivel and Arjona (2003), which measured the dimensions of security, affiliation or affection, self-fulfillment, achievement, power, recognition, and knowledge. The results showed that 72.7% of new students place a very high value on the knowledge dimension: learning new things, improve study skills, do research, better overall job training, and interest in learning. However, in other dimensions, such as affiliation or affection, the percentage given by students is 9.1%. While the study consists of a small sample, the results provide important information on motivation as a factor that must be considered and evaluated throughout the academic record of the student in order to prevent dropouts and increase terminal efficiency.

Keywords: motivation, students, upper level

Introduction

Motivation has been a little studied variable in the Mexican educational context, although the country historical statistics show a significant increase in enrollment of students in higher education, since the second half of the 20th century (Núñez & Reséndiz, 2000). In this regard, the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP by its acronym in Spanish) states that from 1990 to date, there has been an increase in students at this level of over 46%, equivalent to almost double the enrollment attended in 1970 (Esquivel & Rojas, 2005).

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With respect to Morelos state where this study is developed, the National Association of Colleges and Schools of Higher Education (ANUIES by its acronym in Spanish) reported that requests to enter higher education in the 2012-2013 cycle were 23,430 applicants, being the municipalities of Cuernavaca (15,004), Cuautla (2,446), and Jiutepec (1,510) which recorded a higher number of interested students.

One of the factors noted in the increase of incoming requests was the interest of the applicants in improving their level of preparation (Esquivel & Rojas, 2005). This last factor is what concerns us in this study: the motivations of new students to continue their university studies. Motivation has been explained as a biopsychosocial process that determines human behavior and makes the difference between the aims of each person (Dweck, 1986; Abarca, 1995; Acosta, 1998). Motivation is defined by these studies as an internal state that activates, directs, and maintains behavior (Acosta, 1998).

Review of Literature

Usually, one of the most accepted definitions of motivation is: an internal state that activates, directs, and maintains behavior (Acosta, 1998). Because it is an issue with so many connotations, it is complex to include it in a single definition. In fact, there are a lot of theories (humanist, behavioral, and cognitive) that attempt to explain and give a definition of this term based on varying degrees in biological, behavioral, cognitive, or social components. Nonetheless, all of them tend to answer the question: why people behave the way they do?

According to Santrock (2002), there are three perspectives on motivation: behavioral, humanistic, and cognitive. The behavioral emphasizes the task of rewards on motivation, the humanistic aims at the capabilities of human beings to develop, while in the cognitive the power of thought prevails. The present investigation is based on humanistic and cognitive perspectives.

The humanistic theory has been called “third force psychology” because it was developed in the 1940s as a reaction against the two dominant forces: behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis; since humanistic psychologists like Maslow and Rogers considered that none of the previous ones properly explained how individuals behave (Valhondo, 1995).

On one hand, humanist theorists emphasize choice, personal freedom, self-determination, and the desire for personal development, named as self-fulfillment by Maslow. Both Maslow and Murray consider need as an important element. On the other hand, cognitive theorists believe that thinking processes control behavior and focus on the way how people process information, and they believe in motivation as something caused by the personal search of meaning, of achievement (Sánchez, 1999).

Next, motivation theories taken into account in this study are presented in a synthesized way.

The Needs Theory of H. Murray

Murray proposed a refined list of human reasons that explain human behavior, highlighting the achievement motive considered as the tendency to strive in order to achieve something difficult, to overcome obstacles independently (Huertas, 2008).

The Needs Theory of Maslow (1988)

The hierarchy of human needs is classified as deficiency needs and being needs. The first are four: physiological needs, security needs, affiliation needs, and self-esteem needs. The second are the needs of intellectual achievements and self-fulfillment (Woolfolk, Walkup, & Hughes, 2008). In theory, as each need is fully satisfied, the next need becomes dominant, that is to say that a sufficiently satisfied need no longer

motivates an individual, so if you want to motivate him or her, it would be needed to focus on meeting needs of a higher level (Coulter & Robbins, 1997).

The Three Needs Theory of D. McClelland and W. Atkinson

McClelland and Atkinson basically focus their theory on three needs: achievement, power, and affiliation. The first is the desire to do something better, to solve problems, or to have dominion in complex tasks. The power needs have to do with the desire to control others and to influence their behavior. Finally, affiliation needs relate to the desire to establish and maintain good relations with others (Schermerhorn, Hunt, Osborn, & de Billy, 2002).

Methods and Techniques

Subjects

The population was composed of 346 students who entered the university in the year 2014. Of this population, a sample of 52 students was selected (women $n = 33$; men $n = 19$; mean age $21 \pm SD$ years), in their first semester from the majors of Business, Accounting, Law, Environmental Sciences, Psychology, and Computer Science. The selection was based on a probability sampling (see Table 1).

Table 1

Population Distribution in Relation to the Major and Number of Students

Major	Number of students
Business	7
Accounting	7
Law (Group "A")	7
Law (Group "C")	7
Law (Group "U")	7
Environmental Sciences	4
Psychology (Group "A")	5
Psychology (Group "B")	5
Computer Sciences	3
Total	52

Notes. This table shows the population distribution in relation to the major and class size. Source: own elaboration.

Analysis Instrument

The data collection was carried out from the survey, *Motivation Towards a Post Grad in Newly Admitted Students to a Post Grad in Education* (Esquivel & Arjona, 2002). The questionnaire consists of 32 items with alternative responses of Likert scale. Each item is associated with a motivational dimension where the factors influencing students to continue their education are explored. The dimensions involved were: security, affiliation or affection, self-fulfillment, achievement, power, recognition, and knowledge.

We use the following theoretical definitions to make sure to accomplish a consistent identification of different motivational factors: (1) the needs theory of Maslow; (2) the needs theory of H. Murray; and (3) the achievement motivation theory of D. McClelland and W. Atkinson.

Instrument measurements were validated by comparing the results of different users ($n = 6$) obtaining a Cronbach's alpha reliability index of 0.85.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 21. The normality of the variables was corroborated with Shapiro-Wilk test. For intraspecific analysis, related samples tests were applied and for interspecific analysis, independent samples were used.

Analysis of Results

Next, the results for each one of the dimensions involved in this research are shown.

Security

With regard to the security dimension, the results showed that 43.9% of new students give a very high value on aspects such as getting a job after finishing their professional studies, maintaining employment, and feeling confident by having a university preparation, followed by 33.9% placing a high value, 13.4% a regular value, 4.9% low value, and 3.9% no value to these aspects (see Figure 1).

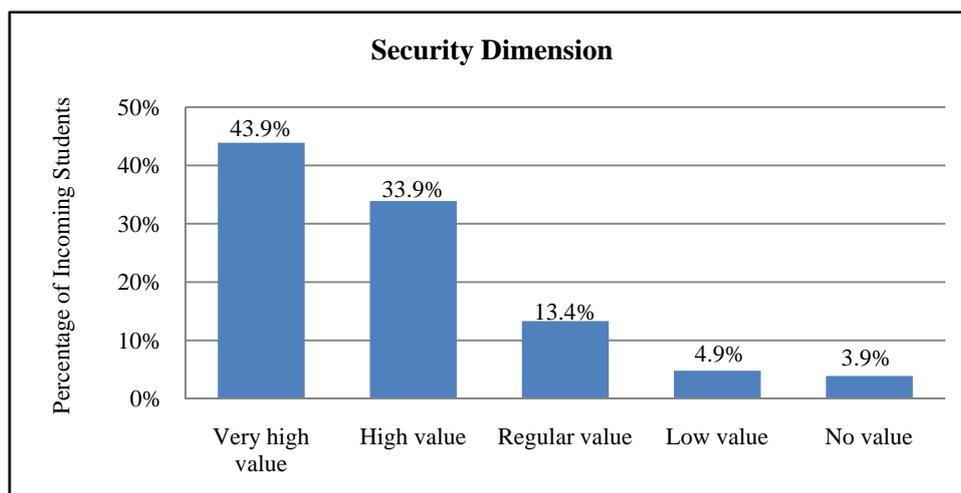


Figure 1. Security dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to security dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Affiliation/Affection

Regarding affiliation/affection dimension, the results show that 9.1% of new students give a very high value on aspects like meeting other people, being appreciated by peers and family, meet colleagues, and make new friends, followed by 26.7% placing a high value, 29.1% a regular value, 20.6% low value, and 14.5% no value to these aspects (see Figure 2).

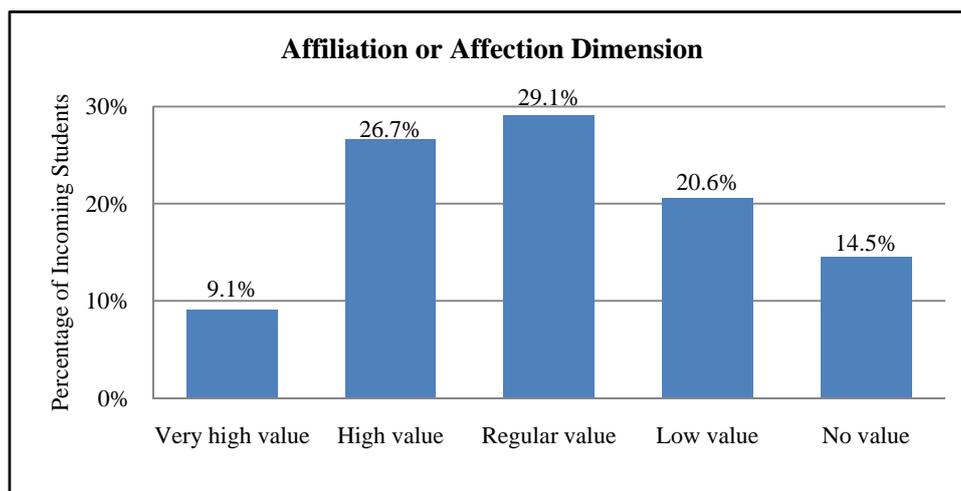


Figure 2. Affiliation/affection dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to affiliation/affection dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Recognition

In recognition dimension, the results revealed that 30.9% of new students give a very high value to areas such as: recognition of professional training, improvement of self-esteem, and professional prestige increase, followed by 28.1% placing a high value, 19.2% a regular value, 12.5% a low value, and 9.3% no value to these aspects (see Figure 3).

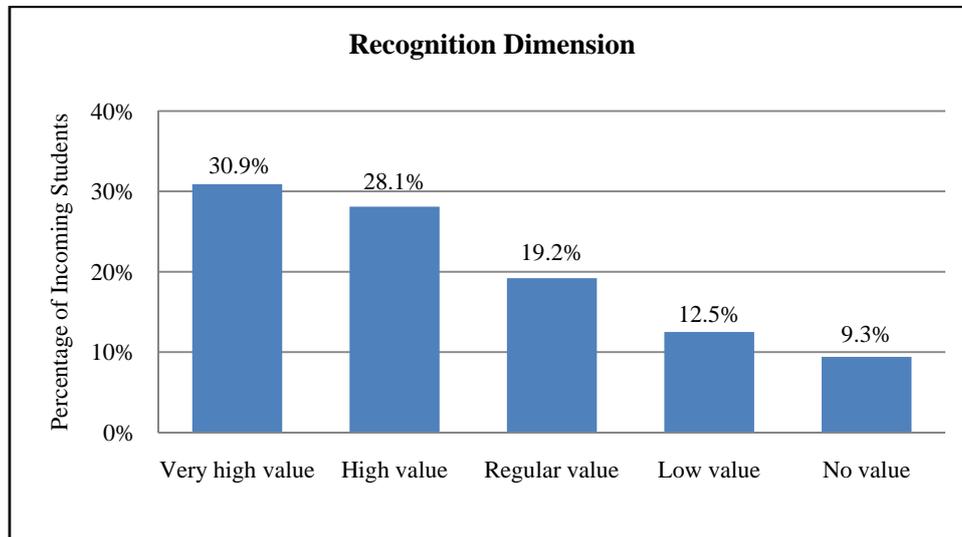


Figure 3. Recognition dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to recognition dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Achievement

Regarding the achievement dimension, the results showed that 50.5% of new students give a very high value on aspects such as obtaining a degree, being more successful at work, overcoming new professional challenges, and promoting at work, followed by 36.4% placing a high value, 9.8% a regular value, 1.5% a low value, and 1.8% no value to these aspects (see Figure 4).

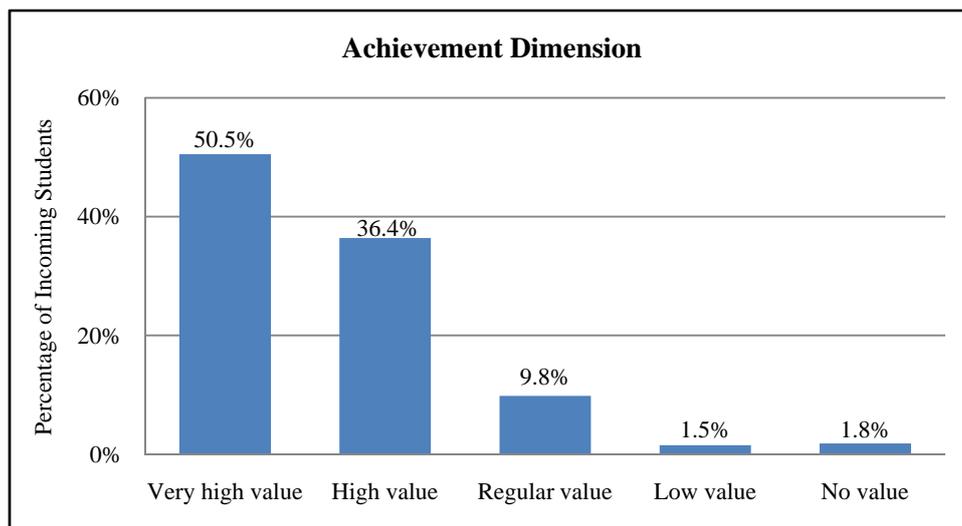


Figure 4. Achievement dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to achievement dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Power

With regard to the power dimension, the results indicated that 30.5% of new students give a very high value on aspects such as obtaining a position of representation at work, being a leader of opinion, occupying a leading position at work, and influencing college mates, followed by 28.2% placing a high value, 28.2% a regular value, 8.1% a low value, and 5.0% no value to these aspects (see Figure 5).

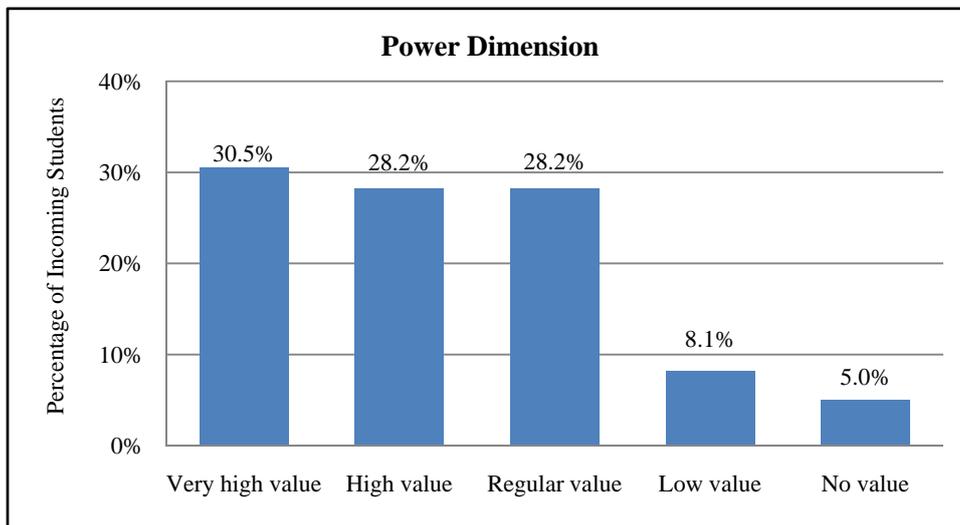


Figure 5. Power dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to power dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Knowledge

As for the knowledge dimension, the results show that 72.7% of new students give a very high value on aspects like learning new things, improving study techniques, doing research, getting a better job training, interest in knowing, and understanding or studying at the university so that they will get a better quality of life, followed by 16.4% placing a high value, 8.2% a regular value, 2.7% a low value, and 0.0% no value to these aspects (see Figure 6).

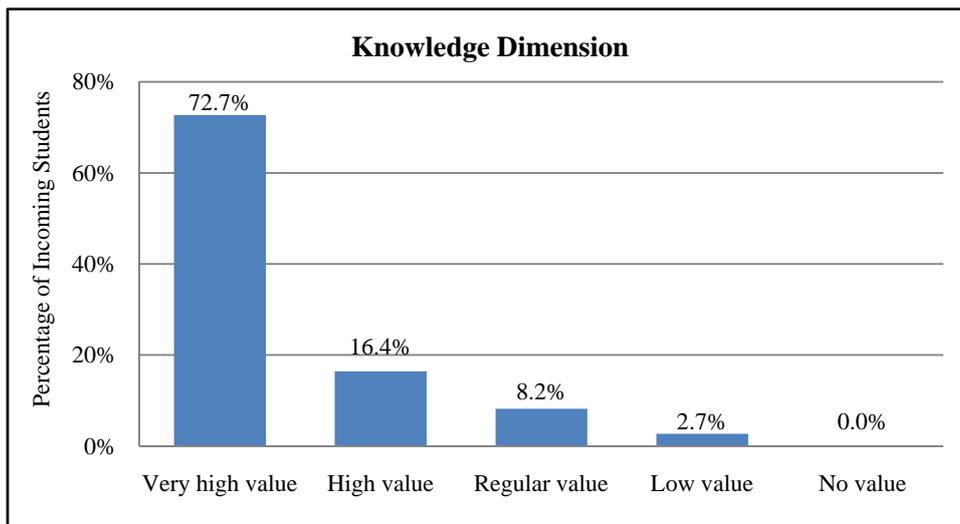


Figure 6. Knowledge dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to knowledge dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Self-fulfillment

Regarding the self-fulfillment dimension, the results show that 58.6% of new students give a very high value on: personal growth aspects, be satisfied with what they do, a sense of self-fulfillment, and feeling self-sufficient, followed by 30.5% placing a high value, 6.8% a regular value, 3.6% a low value, and 0.5% no value to these aspects (see Figure 7).

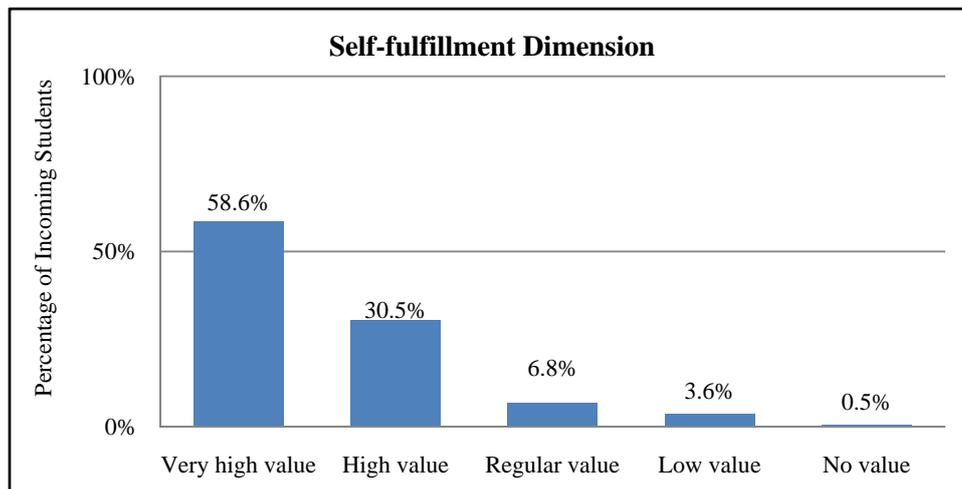


Figure 7. Self-fulfillment dimension (Percentage of values that new students give to self-fulfillment dimension). Source: own elaboration.

Conclusions

According to the results, it is concluded that the new students of the Graduate School of Jojutla attach importance to things like getting a job once they have completed their professional studies; security and confidence that give them the fact that having a university degree is an aspect that stands out and that is a great motivator. For students involved in this research, it is not relevant to continue their university studies to meet new colleagues or being appreciated by peers once immersed in the professional field. Recognition as a motivator is a significant but not the most influential aspect. Achievement motivation is important as students gave value to aspects like having an academic degree, promotion at work, and being successful. Only a third of the students place a high value on motivations that are related to gain power such as being opinion leaders or getting leadership roles.

However, the main reasons that show the new students of the Graduate School of Jojutla are, according to the theory of Maslow, needs to be, because in relation to the percentage of values that gave students each dimension of knowledge and self-realization are positioned in the first and second places, with 72.7% and 58.6% respectively. Reasons as intellectual achievement needs, knowing more, understanding, and becoming what you want to be, realization and personal achievements are the reasons expressed for motivating students to continue their university studies. These results agree with the study, *Reasons for New Students to Study a Postgraduate Education*, of Esquivel and Rojas (2005), which stated that the main motives of the new students are: knowledge and self-realization. There is also an agreement in the results obtained by Esquivel and Arjona (2003) on students from programs of specialization and teaching in 2001 and 2002 school years, who also found as the first motivation the one of knowledge.

Finally, this work is a starting point for further research which intends to pursue the subject.

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