

An Examination of High School Social Science Students' Levels Motivation towards Learning Geography

Tahsin Yıldırım¹

¹ Faculty of Education, Aksaray University, Turkey

Correspondence: Tahsin Yıldırım, Faculty of Education, Aksaray University, Aksaray, Turkey. E-mail: yildirimtahsin33@gmail.com

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Abstract

This aim of this research was to examine the levels of motivation among high school social science students towards learning geography. The study group consisted of 397 students from different classes at Aksaray Ahmet Cevdet Paşa High School in the College of Social Science. The research was carried out with a scanning model, with data obtained using the Scale for Motivation Towards Learning Geography. In the analysis of the data, the t-test and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used. As a result of the research, the levels of motivation among social science students towards learning geography were found to be moderate. From the analysis of the aforementioned scale's subfactors, those related to the interest of students and information acquisition were found to be 'undecided', while the subfactors related to self-confidence and performance were found to be 'in agreement'. It was determined that the level of motivation towards learning geography reported in the findings, with regard to the gender variable, showed a significant difference among male students. In addition, it was indicated that the motivation levels of male students were higher for the subfactors of interest and self-confidence than those of female students. In terms of the subfactors of information acquisition and performance, no significant changes were found in the motivation levels among both male and female students. Analyses based on class level demonstrated that the average scores of the students differ in this context, but that this difference was found to be statistically significant for 11th grade students for the subfactor of self-confidence.

Keywords: motivation, geography, geography education, motivation towards learning geography, high school students in social science

1. Introduction

Education, which is a multidimensional process, continues throughout life. While guiding and directing our learning activities in educational institutions are expressed as teaching, permanent behavior change is expressed as learning, which represents the last stage of teaching (Demirel, 2009). It can be said that students do not have similar attitudes to every subject they are taught in the learning environment. It has been noted that some students who do not care about their lessons prefer to escape from the learning environment rather than produce solutions to the problems they encounter. One of the most important reasons behind the emergence of this difference among students is motivation. The concept of motivation or the act of motivation can be defined in terms of a person's direction towards certain behaviors and what prompts a person to continue these behaviors (Akbaba, 2006). Put another way, motivation is the power that provides guidance and energy in order to achieve a specific goal. Motivation represents an extremely important function in the emergence of behavior and learning (Yüksel, 2011).

Learning motivation is connected to a goal to be achieved, which shows itself as the result of effort and persistence, as well as initiates and sustains students' learning activities (Hu, 2008). In other words, it can be defined as a process in which the student can establish a psychological connection with other learners, participate in the learning process and develop their behavior; it can also lead to a continuous learning activity (Kaya, 2013). It is stated that learning cannot be processed without motivation, such that an unmotivated student cannot be successful. The continuity of motivation is an important factor when starting a process of learning (Girmus, 2011).

In some cases, teaching may involve students who are not motivated to learn, even if they apply a lot of effort

(Yüksel, 2011). Motivation towards learning involves two dimensions: internal and external motivation. The desire to be competent, interested, productive and focused on results is effective in the emergence of internal motivation. It is internal motivation that is more effective when learning. Those students who are internally motivated think that learning is about studying, which leads to success at the end of a great deal of hard work, such that it is not a waste of effort. For example, a student who is interested in geography will try to learn about this subject by focusing their own initiative and industry, without any constraint, on the acquisition of new knowledge, with internal motivation representing the desire to be successful. External motivation comes from external influences, such as reward, expectation of appreciation, punishment, oppression and praise. An example of external motivation is when students work hard during geography lessons in order to obtain higher grades or to be appreciated (Gülşen, 2015; Ergün, 2014; Yüksel, 2011).

In particular, teachers' behaviors and teaching methods applied in the classroom environment and throughout the course in question positively or negatively affect students' motivation, although factors affecting motivation in learning environments do vary (Frymier, 1993). When the relationship between motivation and learning is examined, it can be said that teachers have an important role to motivate the students towards learning (Loima & Vibulphol, 2016). During lessons, teachers need to make every topic interesting to their students, if the desire to learn throughout life is to be nurtured, by introducing practical exercises and using different techniques. Meanwhile, students need to understand what they are learning and learn how to apply knowledge in order to reach their goals and encourage them to develop self-confidence (Özbay, 2003). It has been reported that the interest among students to learn has a big effect on motivation and influences their desire to learn and complete their courses of study in a positive way (Ainley, 2006). It is also necessary for students to experience motivational teaching practices in accordance with their cognitive levels in the classroom, while increasing their pursuit of achievement (Kubanyiova, 2006). It is asserted that any course will contribute to the success and learning desire of students if it considers their preferred learning styles in the course planning stages (Sezer, 2006). It is critical for teachers to give importance to their teaching model and encouragement of their students. From this point of view, teachers can help their students develop positive motivational beliefs by organizing the teaching schedule with their cognitive levels, current expectations, future goals and skills. It is stated that both short- and long-term achievements have emerged due to these positive learning approaches in the classroom environment (Mensah, 2015).

The research conducted in different areas reveal that motivation and motivational activities have positive effects on learning (Batdı & Semerci, 2016; Noland & Richards, 2014; Göğüş & Yetke, 2014; Singh, Kleeman, & Van-Bergen, 2013; Moos & Honkomp, 2011; Aydın, 2009; Dörnyei, 2000). When the importance of motivation towards learning is taken into consideration, with a view to achieving success in the teaching of geography, it is necessary to determine the levels of motivation among students towards learning this subject and to act in this regard.

It is inevitable that, when students lose their interest in geography courses, the subject will be difficult to understand and become boring for them. Put another way, it cannot be said that a student who is insufficiently motivated enough is ready to learn, nor can they be expected to be successful. In order to overcome these problems, it is necessary for the student to be active in the learning process and be motivated to participate in the class (Aydın, 2010b).

The fact that students are motivated to learn is very important if geography teaching is to be effective. When the literature was examined, no study could be found on the motivation levels of high school social science students towards learning geography. Therefore, it is thought that the results obtained from this study will help to increase such students' motivation levels when learning about geography, organize teaching programs and classrooms, and contribute to the teaching of geography courses.

The aim of this study is to examine the motivation levels of social science students when learning about geography from different perspectives. In the process, the following questions are addressed:

- 1) What is the level of motivation among students when learning about geography?
- 2) What is the level of motivation among students in terms of interest, self-confidence, information acquisition and performance?
- 3) Is there a meaningful difference between students' gender and their motivation to learn about geography?
- 4) Is there a meaningful difference between students' class levels and their motivation to learn about geography?

2. Method

2.1 Research Model

This research is conducted as a scanning model. This kind of model aims to depict its own function without any intervention in the past or in the current situation (Karasar, 2011).

2.2 Study Group

After the necessary permissions were obtained, the study was carried out at Aksaray Ahmet Cevdet Paşa High School. The study group consisted of 397 students from the social science department, which is different from other departments because geography lessons involve more hours of teaching and are compulsory for all students. It is the case that the majority of the students not only has a preference for social sciences, but can also expect to be placed in social science-oriented programs after their graduation from university. This situation determines the level of motivation among students towards learning geography. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study group according to gender and class level.

Table 1. The distribution of the study group according to gender and class level

	Gender		Class level	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Female	250	62.97		
Male	147	37.03		
Class 9			120	30.23
Class 10			114	28.71
Class 11			101	25.44
Class 12			62	15.62
Total	397	100	397	100

2.3 Data Collection Tool

The research data were collected with the use of the Scale for Motivation Towards Learning Geography. The elements of the scale, which involves a type of five-point Likert scale with 22 items, are divided into four subfactors, developed by Kaya (2013), as follows:

- First factor (F1): 1-2-3-4-5-6 for interest
- Second factor (F2): 7-8-9-10-11 for self-confidence
- Third factor (F3): 12-13-14-15-16-17-18 for information acquisition
- Fourth factor (F4): 19-20-21-22 for performance

The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was found to be: .812, .811, .818 and .710, respectively. As a result of the reliability and validity analysis for this research, the Cronbach's alpha value of the scale is calculated as: .837, .910, .818 and .900, respectively. The lowest score that can be taken from the scale is 22 and the highest score is 110. Table 2 demonstrates the scores for the subscales of the scale.

Table 2. The scores for the subfactors of the Scale for Motivation Towards Learning Geography (Kaya, 2013)

Factor	Numbers of items	I do not totally agree	I do not agree	I am indecisive	I agree	I totally agree
Factor 1	6	6-10.8	10.9-15.6	15.7-20.4	20.5-25.2	25.3-30
Factor 2	5	5-9	9.1-13	13.1-17	17.1-21	21.1-25
Factor 3	7	7-12.6	12.7-18.2	18.3-23.8	23.9-29.4	29.5-35
Factor 4	4	4-7.2	7.3-10.4	10.5-13.6	13.7-16.8	16.9-20

2.4 Analysis of Data

In the analysis of the data, the t-test and one-way ANOVA were used for unbound groups. The research data were interpreted by taking into account the arithmetic average, percentage, frequency and level of significance. The level of significance in the evaluation of statistics (p .05) was acceptable.

3. Findings and Interpretation

The analysis of the results and interpretations of the obtained data in line with the aim of this study are given in this section.

Table 3. The descriptive statistics of the scores for learning geography: scale and subfactors

Scale/subfactors	N	Min. score	Max. score	\bar{X}	Ss
Total	397	22	106	70.47	15.38
F1: interest	397	6	30	17.23	5.03
F2: confidence	397	5	25	17.18	4.74
F3: information acquisition	397	7	35	20.33	5.60
F4: performance	397	4	20	15.72	4.32

When Table 3 is examined, it can be seen that the average score from the motivation scale for high school students in social sciences who are learning geography is $\bar{X}=70.47$. It can be said that the motivation among students towards learning geography is moderate when considering that the lowest score from the scale is 22 and the highest score is 110. As a result of the analysis, according to the scale's subfactors of the scale, it can be seen that the average scores of the students are approximately as follows: F1: $\bar{X}=17.23$, F2: $\bar{X}=17.18$, F3: $\bar{X}=20.33$ and F4: $\bar{X}=15.72$. According to Table 2, which shows the scores and the scale's subscales, the factors of information acquisition and interest are stated as 'indecisive', while the factors of confidence and performance are confirmed by 'I agree' responses from the high school social science students. These results demonstrate that the level of motivation in terms of self-confidence and performance is higher than for other subfactors among these students.

Table 4. The results of the analysis based on the Scale for Motivation Towards Learning Geography according to gender

Gender	N	\bar{X}	Ss	t	p
Female	250	69.12	14.32	2.287	.023*
Male	147	72.76	16.84		

* $p<.05$

When Table 4 is examined, it can be seen that the average score for the level of motivation among girls in respect of learning geography is $\bar{X}=69.12$, while for male students it is $\bar{X}=72.76$. The level of motivation among students towards learning geography is different between gender ($t=2.287$; $p<.05$). Accordingly, it can be said that male students' level of motivation towards learning geography is statistically higher than for female students.

Table 5. The results of analysis based on the motivation subfactors in respect of learning geography according to gender

Subfactors	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Ss	t	p
F1: interests	Girl	250	16.60	4.66	3.313	.001*
	Boy	147	18.31	5.46		
F2: confidence	Girl	250	16.60	4.36	3.196	.002*
	Boy	147	18.16	5.20		
F3: information acquisition	Girl	250	20.02	5.40	1.402	.162
	Boy	147	20.84	5.91		
F4: performance	Girl	250	15.89	4.07	1.001	.318
	Boy	147	15.44	4.71		

* $p<.05$

According to Table 5, the subfactors of the subscale for F1 ($t=3.313$; $p<.05$) and F2 ($t=3.196$; $p<.05$) involve

statistically significant differences between male and female students. For the subfactors for F3 ($t=1.402$; $p>.05$) and F4 ($t=1.001$; $p>.05$), there is no statically important difference between male and female students.

This finding can be interpreted in a way that the level of motivation in respect of male students' interests and self-confidence is higher than that for female students, while the level of motivation in respect of information acquisition and performance involves no meaningful difference based on gender.

Table 6. The results of analysis for the motivation scale and subfactor scores according to the class level for learning geography

Scale/subfactors	Class	N	\bar{X}	Ss
Total	Class 9	120	68.22	15.17
	Class 10	114	69.80	13.68
	Class 11	101	73.53	15.28
	Class 12	62	71.04	18.21
F1: interest	Class 9	120	16.49	5.16
	Class 10	114	17.06	4.65
	Class 11	101	18.20	5.11
F2: confidence	Class 12	62	17.40	5.19
	Class 9	120	16.18	4.93
	Class 10	114	16.49	4.46
F3: information acquisition	Class 11	101	18.78	3.78
	Class 12	62	17.77	5.56
	Class 9	120	19.65	5.58
F4: performance	Class 10	114	19.97	4.99
	Class 11	101	21.33	5.55
	Class 12	62	20.66	6.56
	Class 9	120	15.90	4.39
	Class 10	114	16.28	3.87
	Class 11	101	15.20	4.35
	Class 12	62	15.20	4.83

In Table 6, it can be seen that the average scores of the motivation scale and subfactors among the high school social science students differ according to class level. The results of the ANOVA, as based on the significance levels of this difference, are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. The results of the ANOVA of the motivation scale and subfactor scores according to class level in respect of learning geography

Scale/subfactors	Source of assumption	Sum of squares	SD	Mean square	F	p	Significant difference
Total	Between groups	1624.254	3	541.418	2.309	.076	-
	Within groups	92146.663	393	234.470			
	Total	93770.917	396				
F1: interest	Between groups	167.099	3	55.700	2.216	.086	-
	Within groups	9880.115	393	25.140			
	Total	10047.214	396				
F2: confidence	Between groups	454.438	3	151.479	7.025	.000*	9-11 10-11
	Within groups	8474.505	393	21.564			
	Total	8928.942	396				
F3: information acquisition	Between groups	179.111	3	59.704	1.915	.127	-
	Within groups	12250.663	393	31.172			
	Total	12429.773	396				
F4: performance	Between groups	82.348	3	27.449	1.473	.221	-
	Within groups	7324.725	393	18.638			

Total	7407.073	396
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When Tables 6 and 7 are examined together, the average scores on the motivation scale among the students learning geography differ according to grade level, but this difference is not statistically significant ($F=2.309$; $p>.05$). There is no significant difference in the subfactors of interest ($F=2.216$; $p>.05$), information acquisition ($F=1.915$; $p>.05$) and performance ($F=1.473$; $p>.05$), while there is a significant difference in the subfactor of confidence ($F=7.025$; $p<.05$). The Bonferroni test determines the significance of this difference between classes. Accordingly, 11th grade students' self-confidence is significantly higher than that of ninth and 10th grade students.

Table 8. The analysis results in respect of the motivation scale for learning geography

Scale/subfactors	N	\bar{X}	Ss
Interest			
1. The subject of geography is interesting to me	397	3.27	1.18
2. Any kind of document related to geography is interesting to me	397	2.79	1.04
3. I would like to know about prominent geographers	397	2.95	1.16
4. I would like to take part in activities about geography	397	2.90	1.18
5. I prefer books on geography when I choose a book	397	2.22	1.02
6. Geography is interesting to me because it relates to current events	397	3.10	1.18
Confidence			
7. I believe that I will get a high score in my geography lesson	397	3.47	1.20
8. I am confident when I talk about geography	397	3.33	1.05
9. I am sure I will understand whether the subject of geography is easy or not	397	3.27	1.08
10. I believe that I will be successful in my geography examination	397	3.56	1.09
11. I trust myself when I participate in my geography lesson	397	3.54	1.08
Information acquisition			
12. I would like to learn about developments in geography	397	3.31	1.11
13. I would like my teacher to give a more detailed explanation during the geography lesson	397	3.06	1.23
14. I would like to investigate the causes and consequences of current geographical events	397	3.09	1.14
15. I would like to have access to many sources related to geography	397	3.04	1.09
16. I want to exchange information about my knowledge of geography with my friends	397	3.00	1.12
17. I want to receive homework in order to learn more about geography	397	2.22	1.10
18. I also want to learn about geography subjects that are not taught in school	397	2.61	1.26
Performance			
19. I would like to get the highest grade in my geography examination	397	4.08	1.20
20. I want to be able to answer every question about geography	397	4.02	1.18
21. I want to be the best in all kinds of activities related to geography	397	3.67	1.28
22. I would like to answer every question about geography that no one knows the answer to	397	3.96	1.25

When Table 8 is examined, it can be seen that the following statements received the lowest score: 'I prefer books on geography when I choose books' and 'I want to receive homework in order to learn more about geography' ($\bar{X}=2.22$). The following statements received the highest score: 'I would like to get the highest grade in my geography examination' ($\bar{X}=4.08$) and 'I want to be able to answer every question about geography' ($\bar{X}=4.02$). The latter finding also indicates that these high school social science students are focused on performance so as to answer questions about geography and receive high grades in their examinations. However, it can also be assumed that this reflects a genuine interest in geography as a subject and learning more in geography lessons. When the results are examined in a general way, it can be seen low scores concern the subfactors of interest and information acquisition, while high scores concern self-confidence and performance.

4. Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

As a result of this research, which aims to determine the level of motivation level among high school social science students towards learning geography, it can be seen that the level of motivation is moderate. The analysis based on the scale and subscales reveals that the students present an average score in the categories of interest and information acquisition, which indicates indecisiveness, while the categories of self-confidence and performance can be regarded as being decisive. In the study conducted by Alim (2008), attitudes among

secondary school students towards geography courses were at a moderate level, as they found geography lessons boring. I believe that students will be successful in geography lessons if attention is paid to the findings of Aydın's (2010a) study on the motivation of secondary students in geography lessons, particularly in relation to improving results as a result of greater self-confidence and performance. Meanwhile, the study conducted by Dikmenli and Çiftçi (2016) finds the level of motivation towards learning geography at the intermediate level when the lesson is compared to another lesson, as students do not give any particular importance to geography lessons. To this extent, it can be argued that students do not understand the importance of geography. If this is the case, geography lessons should not be about memorizing information in order to gain high marks. For this reason, it is necessary to help students to understand the importance of geography by geography this subject in an effective way.

When the results of the research are examined, it can be seen that there is a big difference in the motivation levels among high school social science students between genders: the average score of the motivation level in geography for female students is $\bar{X}=69.12$, while for male students it is $\bar{X}=72.76$. In other words, male students' level of motivation towards learning geography is higher than that of female students. The information presented here has similarities with the results of research studies on the attitudes of high school students, as observed during a geography lesson (Özgen & Bindak, 2009; Zaman & Coşkun, 2007). As is known, there is a positive effect on one's motivation and a positive attitude towards the lesson. As a result of the scale subfactors, it has been determined that male students have higher motivation levels in respect of interest and self-confidence, but there is no difference between genders in terms of information acquisition and performance.

Regarding the analysis of the motivation scores for learning geography, it has been stated that the scores of the students are different from the scores of the scale and subfactors. It can be concluded that these differences, which are based on scores, are statistically significant for those in the ninth, 10th and 11th grades in terms of self-confidence. In other words, the motivation level for learning geography is different according to the class level. This finding has been proven by the research conducted by Aydın (2010a), whose study showed a difference according to the class level. The findings of the study conducted by Aydın and Coşkun (2011) confirm that one's success and motivation differ according to the class level. The findings of another research study are similar to those of Ünlü's (2011) study, which indicated that the level of motivation based on geographical skills increased among high school students. In light of these results, it can be interpreted that there is a limited number of geography-related subjects in secondary schools, which in turn undermines the importance of geography courses.

As a result of the analysis of the scale, the following statements received the lowest average score: 'I prefer books on geography when I choose books' and 'I want to receive homework in order to learn more about geography'. On the other hand, these statements received the highest average score: 'I want to get the highest score in my geography examination' and 'I want to be able to answer every question about geography'.

Why is it important to geography learn? According to Kocalar and Demirkaya (2014), the perceptions of high school students "are similar to the finding that half of the students in social sciences do not like geography". It may be a contradiction that students are required to have high marks in their examination, solve questions in textbooks, obtain information and cultivate an interest in geography. However, it can be argued that the approach taken by students in this regard reflects the importance placed on examinations in the current system. Aydın (2010b) has stated that, for the majority of the students who, despite showing effort and individual progress in lectures, are ignored, evaluation by examination is a concern. This study has revealed that the level of motivation towards geography lessons may in fact have a negative influence on students. As such, teachers should organize activities, which include active participation and evaluation, in order to increase the interest of their students. Furthermore, in order to increase the motivation of the students in geography lessons, learning by practicing and experiencing should be used instead of transferring knowledge based on memorization. As a matter of fact, Aydın (2012) revealed that most of the high school social sciences students did not realize in their daily life that they learned in geography lessons.

According to the results obtained from this research, the level of motivation among high school social science students is moderate towards learning geography. To this extent, it is suggested that geography courses should be designed in order to increase the interest and motivation of students, for example, by basing lessons on the subject's relevance to everyday life and principles. The necessary equipment and materials should be used on geography courses, along with the creation of multidimensional laboratories and classes for social science students. In addition, geography curricula, teacher competences, and teaching methods and techniques should all be considered when seeking to identify the factors affecting the motivation of students in social sciences towards learning geography.

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