

Motivation to Read: Comparing Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Motivation with Students' Self-Reported Motivation: A Pilot Study

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Abstract: This study investigated: a) the extent that teachers' perception of students' reading motivation differ from students' self-reported motivation; b) the extent that teacher perceptions of students' reading motivation vary across student reading achievement levels; and c) the relationship between students' self-reported measures of reading motivation and their reading achievement. Participants of this study included 22 Spanish speaking elementary students and 6 teachers from a low-income area in downtown Los Angeles. Results agree with previous findings in that teachers' perceptions and students' perceptions of motivation do differ; that teachers' perceptions of students' motivation are related to students' achievement level; and finally, higher achievers and lower achievers do have different motivation orientations.

Introduction

While cognitive factors are normally emphasized in learning and academic achievement, research has long acknowledged the role of motivation in mediating student outcomes. Typically defining motivation as 'a state of mind that initiates, directs, and sustains a certain activity', educational psychologists have sought ways to enhance motivation in the belief that student performance may be improved (Baker, Afflerback, & Reinking, 1996; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999; Guthrie & Knowles, 2001; Taylor & Adelman, 1999;). Recent studies on literacy development show that reading motivation is a crucial factor for successful reading comprehension and literacy development (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield, 1994) and thus, deserves a more specific, in-depth investigation. Teachers have also recognized the importance of reading motivation, considering motivating students as one of their primary responsibilities and concerns (O'Flahavan, Gambrell, Guthrie, Stahl, & Alvermann, 1992). A number of factors have been found to influence students' reading motivation including self-efficacy or self concept as a reader, outcome expectation, goals, value beliefs regarding reading, and interests in topics. By assessing these factors, teachers can be informed about how students acquire motivation to read and how they can help students to become active and engaged readers. Given these instructional implications of motivation, it is imperative for teachers to have the tools to assess students' reading motivation.

Several instruments have been developed to measure students' reading motivation, most of them relying on students' self-reported perceptions (e.g., Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996; McKenna & Kear, 1990). In actual classroom settings, however, teachers' perception has also been used as a major source for assessing students' motivation for reading. Nevertheless, so far very few studies have been conducted on teachers' perception or beliefs of students' motivation for reading (e.g., Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1999), let alone how precisely teachers' perception reflects students' actual levels of reading motivation. Furthermore, there is very little empirical research on teachers' perception of minority students' reading motivation and its impact on minority student reading performance (Rueda, MacGillivray, Monzo, & Arzubiaga, 2001). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between teachers' perceptions about minority students' levels of reading motivation and minority students' self-reported measure of reading motivation. It is expected that by providing educators with such knowledge, the present study will help practitioners in the field of education to access and correctly interpret minority students' motivational behaviors and make necessary adjustments in teaching methods as well as in curriculum.

The primary questions of this pilot study include:

1. To what extent does teachers' perception of minority students' reading motivation differ from students' self-reported motivation?
2. To what extent do teacher perceptions of students' reading motivation vary across reading achievement levels?
3. How are students' self-reported measures of reading motivation related to reading achievement?

Teacher Perception and Belief

According to Jussim (1989), teachers' perceptions are formed based on teachers' teaching experiences, their relationship with students, students' previous achievement, and students' personality traits and behaviors, and the impact of teacher perception on students has been demonstrated in much education research. For example, several studies found that teacher perception has the power to influence students' perception of their own ability and to create the effect of self-fulfilling prophecies (Smith, Jussim, & Eccles, 1999; Madon, Smith, Jussim, Russell, Eccles, Palumbo, & Walkiewicz, 2001). Carr and Kurtz (1991) revealed that teachers developed a holistic perspective of student achievement based upon students' metacognitive and motivational characteristics: high achievers were perceived as highly motivated and vice versa. In another teacher perception study, Carr and Kurtz-Costes (1994) also showed that teacher perception was biased by students' abilities: high ability students were perceived more favorably on all measurements. More importantly and rather alarmingly, teachers' perception of students' motivation to read has reciprocal effects on their teaching practices (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). That is, teachers deliberately make instructional decisions to increase students' motivational levels based on their own perception of students' motivation for reading, which raises an important question: what if a teacher's perception does not match with students' self-perceived and reported reading motivation, rather reflecting their own perception of students' other behaviors or achievement? It also emphasizes the importance of accurate teacher perception of students' motivation since it directs teachers' instructional practices and behaviors in the classroom.

Teacher Bias and Minority Students

Just as a person's perception of others is often affected by their ethnic group membership, gender, and social class, teacher perceptions of students are often influenced by students' gender, race, color of skin, language ability, attractiveness, and socio-economic status (George, 1983; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Plata, Masten, & Trusty, 1999). For instance, in a study investigating the nomination of Anglo and Hispanic students to gifted programs, Plata, Masten, and Trusty (1999) found that teacher nominations were strongly related to ethnicity, and that Hispanic students were much less likely to be nominated. Similarly, teacher ratings of students are also impacted by students' race and ethnicity. A study of teachers' ratings of 87 Anglo-American and 63 Hispanic fifth-grade students by Masten, Plata, Wenglar, & Thedford (1999) showed that teachers rated their students based on the students' ethnic status and acculturation levels. Anglo-American students were rated higher on motivation as well as on characteristics relating to learning, creativity, and leadership. Highly acculturated Hispanic students received higher ratings than did low acculturated Hispanics.

Minority Students' Motivation

It is said that the way people engage in activities is culturally defined, and motivation and the way it is demonstrated is also influenced by culture as well as individual characteristics (Rueda & Dembo, 1995). Accordingly, motivation is a multifaceted construct, and difficult to identify, particularly in reference to culturally diverse students. Given the role that cultural differences play in motivation, a question arises as to how teachers, especially those coming from ethnic and socioeconomic background different from students', can effectively determine students' motivation to read. Previous studies show that many middle class teachers do not have enough knowledge for working with language minority students and thus, often misinterpret students' attitude and motivation (Huss-Keeler, 1997; Masten, Plata, Wenglar & Thedford, 1999). For instance, Huss-Keeler (1997) found that teachers' unfamiliarity with students' culture and language could cause communication difficulty which in effect results in the wrong impression that the students care less about their study. Eventually, these teachers became unwilling to reach out struggling minority students. Given that teachers also set their expectation of students based on their perception and teacher expectancy creates self-fulfilling prophecies in students, it is imperative for teachers to understand culturally diverse students' behaviors and needs, and then make unbiased judgment about students.

Data Collection

The data was collected as part of a larger project supported by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). 22 Latino students (9 female and 13 male) and their teachers (5 female and 1 male) participated. Among the students, 10 of them were in the first grade and 12 were in the second grade at an inner-city elementary school located in a metropolitan city in Southern California. The students predominantly were speaking Spanish with limited English language proficiency even though all of them were born in the United States except for one student who was born in Mexico. The participants were also from low-income families whose parents were

immigrants, working in garment factories. The ethnic backgrounds of the participating teachers were mixed (4 Latino and 2 White), which makes this pilot study different from other teacher perception studies.

To measure teachers' perception of students' reading motivation, *'The Teacher Perception Questionnaire on Student Motivation to Read (3rd Edition)'* was adopted from Sweet et al's study (1998). The instrument consisted of 24 items (4 point Likert Scale), asking how teachers perceive individual students in 6 different motivational constructs for reading: 1) Activity, 2) Autonomy, 3) Social, 4) Topic, 5) Individual, and 6) Writing. Examples of the questionnaire from each construct include: "enjoys reading about a favorite activity"; "prefers finding his/her own books to read"; "talks about his/her feelings related to a book or story"; "has no specialized reading interest"; "is a voracious reading"; and "wants to write about what he/she reads". The teachers were also asked to answer to a question about in what ways that s/he considered the child to be successful, and finally were asked to give the student a grade ranging from A to D/F based on the student's current reading level. For students' self-reported measure, Gambrell et al's (1996) *'Motivation to Read Profile (MRP)'* was used. The instrument includes a 20-item reading survey and a conversational interview. The reading survey measures motivation to read in two subscales: self-concept as a reader (measuring students' perceived competence in reading) and value of reading (placed on reading tasks and activities by students), whereas the conversational interview aims to get more personal and qualitative perspectives of students' motivation for reading. Due to the students' limited English proficiency, the students were read the questions both in English and Spanish by the field researchers, and answered in the language which they felt most comfortable with.

Results and Discussion

To address the research questions presented above, the data from both *'The Teacher Perception Questionnaire on Student Motivation to Read'* and *'Motivation to Read Profile'* were analyzed. A series of statistical analyses were conducted to examine differences between teachers' perception of student reading motivation and students' self-reported motivation. Each student's scores from the teachers' perception measure and the student's self-reported measures were compared. A Pearson correlation was carried out to examine the relationship between teachers' and students' perceptions. Means and standard deviations were then calculated on the teachers' perception measure (M = 68.34, SD = 10.26) and the students' self-reported measure (M = 62.36, SD = 8.37), $r = -.161$, $p = .484$, which is not significant. Therefore, it may be concluded that teachers' perceptions of students' motivation level are not related to students' own perceptions.

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of percentage scores of teachers' perception and students' own perception of reading motivation

	No. of students	Mean	SD	r
Teachers' score	21	68.34	10.26	-.161
Students' score	21	62.36	8.37	

The second question addressed whether students' achievement levels have any effect on teachers' perception of students' reading motivation. Due to the fact that teachers' ratings were not independent, that is, in some cases, the same teacher would rate more than one student, a non-parametric analysis, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test, was conducted (Table 2). A main effect for achievement level was observed (Z-ratio is -2.925, sig. = .003). In other words, the students with higher achievement levels were perceived by their teachers to be more motivated than those who had lower achievement levels. Results show that students of different achievement level do vary in their motivation orientation when an ANOVA was performed with the six motivation constructs and students' achievement level. That is to say, higher achieving students have considerably different motivation level in the subscales of individual, social, writing and topic.

Table 2 Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for Effect of achievement level on teachers' perception on students reading motivation

	Number	Mean Rank	Z	Sig.
Teachers' perception < achievement level	17	12.74	-2.925	.003
Teachers' perception > achievement level	5	7.3		
Teachers' perception = achievement level	0			
Total	22			

On the contrary, no main effect of achievement level was observed in the students' self-reported measures of reading motivation (Table 3). The results of an one-way ANOVA indicate that high achieving students' self-concept and value of reading are not significantly different from those of low achieving students, $F(3, 16) = 1.363$, $p = .290$; $F(3, 16) = 1.461$, $p = .260$, respectively, nor are they higher on reading motivation as a whole $F(3, 16) = 1.434$, $p = .268$. This means that "A" students are not necessarily higher in self-concept or value of reading. In fact, the results show that "F" students have a higher mean score of value of reading than "A" students. Therefore, it can be concluded that reading proficiency, as informed by report-card grades, has no effect on reading motivation perceived by students themselves.

Table 3 Analysis of Variance for Effect of achievement level on students' own perception of reading motivation

Report card reading Grades (1)	Self-concept			Task value		
	Mean	SD	F value	mean	SD	F value
1	30.000	9.0000	1.363	36.333	1.1547	1.461
2	22.000	-		30.000		
3	25.000	5.6569		28.500	6.63640	
4	28.333	3.8079		34.333	2.7386	
5	32.333	5.3541		33.500	5.4681	

Conclusion

Several conclusions may be drawn from this study regarding teachers' perception of students reading motivation. First of all, teachers' perception of students reading motivation is found to be different than students' self-reported motivation. This finding is noteworthy since teachers employ techniques and activities according to their perceptions of their students (Nolen & Nicholls, 1994). Inaccurate perceptions are unlikely to inform teachers of the right practices in enhancing students' motivation and achievement. Secondly, teachers' perception of students reading motivation is influenced by students' achievement level. This has been found to be true by several previous studies (e.g. Sweet et al, 1998). The expectation that teachers perceive higher achievers are different in their motivation orientation than lower achievers is confirmed. It was mentioned earlier that the teacher sample of this study is different from other studies in that it has a mixed ethnic background. The fact that these teachers' perception of their students' reading motivation level are different than those of the students' own suggest that misperception or misinterpretation of students' behavior may not arise solely from cultural differences. Rather, students' achievement level may play a more significant role in teachers' perceptions than ethnic differences. Findings of this study show that even teachers from the same ethnic background perceive differently. However, the sample is too small to test this. Future study is needed.

Another finding is that higher achievers and lower achievers are not significantly different in their self-concept as a reader. Rather interestingly, lower achievers perceive a higher value of reading than higher achievers. This finding is crucial for educators because it means that low achievers are not necessarily unmotivated, nor do they perceive themselves as lacking the ability to read. Hence, other factors such as teaching methods must also be considered in identifying reasons for unsatisfactory performance. This study is informative in the above mentioned areas of interest. However, it is also limited by the small number of participants. Moreover, during the course of study, it was found that there is no motivation measurement which could be used to measure both teachers'

perception as well as students', and hence two different questionnaires were employed. For future studies, it is suggested that a larger sample of participants be recruited and a uniform instrument for both teachers and students be used.

Endnotes

- (1) Report card grade levels are translated into numerals for statistical analysis. For example, an F in the teacher's original grading is translated into a 1, D = 2, C = 3, B = 4 and final A = 5.

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